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# *Stories from the inside*

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**A narrative analysis  
investigating the professional lives of  
three New Zealand  
secondary school heads of English departments**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the  
degree of Doctor of Education  
at  
The University of Waikato  
by

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**2002**

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## Abstract

**T**his research is a narrative analysis based on an investigation into the professional lives of heads of English departments (HODs) in three New Zealand secondary schools. The main data collection methods of interviews and observations used in this study, fall within an interpretive paradigm.

The research breaks through prevailing silences about the realities of three HODs' professional lives. I propose that while these HODs play a pivotal role in secondary schools, their ability to engage in not only effective curriculum and pedagogical leadership but also effective classroom teaching, is seriously constrained. These constraints have occurred partly as a result of the accumulating effects of over a decade of continual educational reforms in New Zealand, partly because there have been few changes to staffing ratios to accommodate intensified workloads, and partly because secondary schools' basic timetable structures have not been able to change sufficiently to reflect other changes. Because consequences of the reforms on the work of these HODs have been largely ignored, I also contend that effective teaching and learning, which is the core focus of schools, is compromised.

Emotions and relationships, coupled with the effects of time constraints and complexity, are highlighted as major concerns and significant hindrances to the three HODs' work. In order to demonstrate the impact of such effects, a fictionalised short story 'from the inside' makes the personal political, exposing some of the human costs to HODs' professional lives.

This fictional story is 'from the inside' for at least two important reasons: the data from participants plus my own prior knowledge and experiences as an HOD. The effect of this on the research is also discussed.

Essentially, the circumstances in which the three participant English HODs work, may be symptomatic of an educational crisis that requires urgent attention, particularly in relation to the amount of time available for HODs to carry out their leadership roles. This research may be one step towards promoting that attention.

### Keywords

Head of department; middle management; educational leadership; secondary schools;  
narrative methodology

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support of my research participants. It is therefore with extreme gratitude and humility, that I acknowledge their importance.

The support and tolerance of Ross and Sophie, my family, who put up with me during this process, is no small thing. They share the success of this thesis by just being there.

Others who supported the process by reading and commenting on various drafts of the thesis (which is no small thing) are also gratefully acknowledged.

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# Chapter One: Introduction and Background

## Introduction

I should have known better. It's 8.00am and a winter Monday morning in June and although I thought I had the day organised, it's already fallen apart. Mondays during term-time were full-on for me because I taught all five periods – there was little room for under-preparation. As usual I had worked on school stuff in the weekend, this time dreaming up not only some new ways of approaching the current work with my Year 10 class, but also putting the finishing touches to a new literature topic with the Year 13 Bursary English class. I was really looking forward to starting this topic because I had spent about three months gradually putting it together. I was also feeling smug about having thought through not only some of the issues for the departmental meeting this afternoon, but also some possibilities to discuss with Jack, the Assistant Head of Department (HOD) about initiating a project for the junior classes. That was, I had thought, lunchtime's main task....

By 8.15 am, the Deputy Principal, who was in charge of finding relievers<sup>1</sup> for those who called in sick, told me that one departmental member was away and really too ill to prepare work for classes. He expected that before the end of the staffing briefing and before period one began, I would be able to have sorted out some work the reliever could begin the morning classes with. And while I was trying to work out how to sort out that problem, the Principal strode up to me, beaming. He thought he had found a person to fill a maternity leave vacancy in the department. While that was good news, he had made an appointment later in the day for us to interview the candidate. The problem was, the appointment coincided with my Year 13 class in period four. My heart fell. That meant lunchtime was going to be consumed, not with plans for eating lunch or discussing the departmental meeting with Jack, but with organising a fill-in lesson for my Year 13 class (I would have to postpone the introduction of the new topic), making sure the other reliever had enough work for the sick staff member's classes, and finding time to read, or at least skim, the applicant's CV.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Relievers' is the term used in New Zealand for supply or substitute teachers



Ah yes. And the department meeting. Well, that entire job today would have to be Jack's. He was perfectly capable of taking over; in fact he usually ran the meetings, but it was going to be my turn tonight. No doubt that news would put his day into chaos, but it couldn't be helped. All I had to do was find him and give him the good news. And I was going to do that ...when, exactly?....

I had been the Head of the English Department (HOD) in a large urban secondary school from the start of 1994 to the middle of 1998. The kind of day described above, while somewhat condensed, composite and fictional, is an attempt to evoke some idea of the complications I could be faced with on any given day. As shown, one or two relatively minor interruptions could throw into disarray carefully prepared plans. This vignette of experience highlights some of the complexities and overload my job as a head of a subject department in New Zealand entailed.

My teaching workload of five classes was the same as those with no HOD-or-equivalent responsibilities. I was also in charge of a tutor group<sup>2</sup> as were most other HODs, did a weekly lunchtime duty in the library, and was expected to participate in extra-curricular activities. I was HOD of a teaching staff of about 12. The work was intense, constant, changeable and often overwhelming. By the end of my tenure I was suffering from burnout and, like others immersed in such a predicament, did not recognise it. At the same time, I was completing a Diploma in Educational Leadership at the University of Waikato, and learning new things about education and leadership that I could not see in much evidence at my school. I began to dissent about particular practices and plans, but my arguments appeared to be misunderstood.

The words efficiency, flexibility and accountability tripped off the tongue constantly during the transition years beginning in October 1989, when educational administration changes in New Zealand started and which gradually affected teachers' jobs in schools. The job of HOD itself was tied to relatively static timetables that showed that HODs were teaching almost all the time. While greater accountability began to be devolved to HODs, the traditionally static structure of the school day seemed to affect the HODs' ability to be as efficient,

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<sup>2</sup> This was a pastoral care and administrative role with a cohort of students during a timetabled session each day for at least 15 minutes

flexible and creative in a pedagogic and leadership sense as they seemed to want. This was certainly so during my own tenure as HOD.

It was not long before I became unhappy about not being able to cope with the demands of the job and this shook my feelings of self-worth as an educator and a leader. My teaching ability and feelings of responsibility about making sure that students who took the subject would not get a raw deal, were compromised by the enormity of the workload. At the same time, as the only female HOD in an all boys' school, I not only keenly felt my gender difference, but I also felt unable to share my sense of unease with other HODs for fear they would see me as a 'just a woman' who couldn't 'hack the pace'. While that may have been an irrational feeling on my part, it was nonetheless within a school climate in which, as far as I experienced it, division and discontent were constant undercurrents, and in which difference (especially female difference) was not especially celebrated, understood or acknowledged. Despite the care and friendship of wonderful people at the school, I felt professionally isolated.

Once I left the school, I was better able to reflect on the experience, which had begun I felt, with such great promise. When I first became HOD, I felt sure that I could do the job; by the time I left, I was bereft of such confidence. I needed to find out if this experience was 'just me', 'just my school', a combination of both, or whether others felt the same and why. A conversation in 1999 with an HOD from a different school who had talked about being 'sucked dry' by the expectations of her job, helped clarify the focus of this research. This study therefore seeks to identify key characteristics of other HODs' professional lives and the extent to which they resonated with my own using an interpretive qualitative approach.

In order to set the scene, what follows is a description of wider social, educational and political contexts of change, plus a description of HOD roles in a New Zealand context, focusing particularly on English heads of department.

## **Background**

Heads of departments in New Zealand secondary schools should not be confused with the role of middle managers in New Zealand primary schools

(who are, for instance, most often assistant principals or syndicate leaders, whose role is often horizontal and across a range of staff). An HOD in a secondary school has the responsibility of leading a department consisting of a range of staff who teach a specific or related subject (for example, English is usually allied with Drama and Media or Film Studies classes, and sometimes ESOL – English for speakers of other languages) that is offered vertically, that is from usually, Year 9 (entry level) to Year 13 (exit level).

Before 1989, when changes to educational administration and policy direction were instigated, the former Department of Education had the responsibility for keeping curriculum, inspection and assessment at the centre while the administration of schools was principally the responsibility of regional Education Boards. A Department of Education Inspectorate had several functions: support, professional development, networking and inspection of schools. After 1989, the Department of Education and its associated bodies was replaced with a Ministry of Education (policy and curriculum), the Education Review Office (ERO); review and compliance) and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA); credentialing and assessment). Curriculum development was undertaken via contestable funding contracts let from the Ministry of Education and schools became responsible for their own administration and the spending of their bulk funded operations grants (Robertson, 1998).

Accountability, efficiency and flexibility became increasingly part of the language of the day across the social spectrum. This meant that many people had more intensified workloads in a range of occupations within both public and private sectors as they were required to do more with less. It was no different in the education sectors. Responsibilities that had been the role of the now defunct Boards of Education (for example, administration of budgets, resources and truancy) were now each school's responsibility. What had not been sufficiently increased to accommodate the extra work devolved to schools, were the operating grant bulk funding and staffing ratio formulae to cope with the changes. This was a responsibility of central government.

In this new era of compliance, schools in general and heads of department and their staff in particular, were now required to create mission statements, departmental policies and manuals to fulfil external requirements

that appeared to be focused on accountability. This work often took the place of curriculum development and experimentation with assessment and pedagogical practice. When I became an HOD, this was certainly the case. Creating mission statements and policies had little effect on teaching and learning practice, however, given the amount of time spent on them. ERO reviews at the time increased the need for documentation, as compliance became an imperative in schools.

As the administrative changes in schools began to be embedded, national curriculum statements under the umbrella of The National Curriculum Framework began to be both developed and implemented. The year I became an HOD coincided with the implementation of the English curriculum. Alongside curriculum changes, assessment and qualifications changes to the senior secondary school began to be developed, culminating in the beginnings of the implementation of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) in 2002. This has not been a simple process. Qualifications changes have been hotly contested and the evolution from totally exam-oriented systems to internally assessed Unit Standards and then to NCEA, created considerable tension in schools and across subjects (Locke, 1999). However, while these changes and points of view have been vying for position in education, teachers have been in the classroom as usual. Change, like other tasks that needed to be done away from the classroom, was what we did in our 'spare' time. Because of the time-poor nature of teaching in general and HOD roles in particular, this caused considerable stress and tension, for me as an individual, and for me as an HOD as I struggled to manage myriad tasks and relationships.

On the one hand an HOD must manage resources (budgets, books and equipment, including teaching spaces) and on the other must provide pedagogical and professional leadership that looks ahead and also maintains the status quo. Pedagogical and professional leadership encompasses teaching and learning practices plus assessment, evaluation, appraisal, professional development and the emotional care of those who work within the orbit of the subject department. An HOD also has to have working relationships with the Principal, support staff (for example, library, main office, caretaker) and pastoral care teams. An HOD in a New Zealand secondary school at the present time is also likely to teach full-time, or close to it. This means that an HOD may have the

equivalent of, perhaps, five or six hours spread over five days that are not designated as teaching times.

HODs in secondary schools have major responsibilities centred on the core business of schools – teaching and learning. There seemed to be widespread consistent lack of appreciation in New Zealand secondary schools of the time HODs needed to fulfil these important tasks because much of their day is taken up with teaching duties. International research supports this apparent lack of appreciation (Adey, 2000; Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989, 1990). Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989, 1990) for instance, were mindful of the problems HODs faced in Britain in fulfilling their roles while they taught for most of the day – and this was over a decade ago. From my own experience I knew that HODs often ended up dealing with administrative and management matters that diverted attention from leadership, curriculum, and pedagogy. Certainly in my case, the latter three elements were key reasons I had taken on the responsibility of HOD in the first place, yet I felt that they had become marginalized as more and more ‘urgent’ administrative tasks came my way. With five classes (each of them involved four teaching hours a week) and the marking load that went with so many classes, it was incredibly difficult to get through everything. I found that the administrative and management tasks were ones I could complete and ‘tick off’ and the more important but long-term and time-consuming professional leadership roles that centred on people and pedagogy moved further and further away from my grasp. To some extent, this occurred because of the realities of what self-management meant for many schools and teachers after 1989 (Codd, 1999).

Another way of looking at the situation was to think of the role of an HOD as one which could be likened to the hod<sup>3</sup> carrier of old – a person who had to move bricks and mortar from one place to another so that building work could carry on smoothly. The metaphor is an attempt to show that while others concentrated on cementing the bricks into walls (teaching and learning, within the context of a school’s and national requirements), the hod carrier made sure that everyone had the right bricks when they needed them (for instance,

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<sup>3</sup> hod: “a v-shaped open trough on a pole used for carrying bricks, mortar etc” Concise Oxford Dictionary. (1990). Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 560 (I am indebted to Jane Painter, a retired HOD for this analogy).

managing resources, including people and materials). On one level then, an HOD in a secondary school supports those who direct the 'building' programme (principal and SMT), as well as those who do the work of building the walls and populating the finished edifice (teachers and students).

As an HOD, I had struggled to meet the needs of both the students I taught and the needs of staff in the department, plus curriculum and assessment change imperatives as well as school policy directives. Not only had I felt ill-equipped to manage the HOD workload given my teaching commitments, but I also felt ill-equipped to understand what being an effective HOD meant within this particular school's environment.

There was little formal on-going educational support or preparation for this pivotal role (Wright, S. 2000) and so, at my own expense I enrolled in the Diploma of Educational Leadership at The University of Waikato. While I often felt incompetent or guilty that I wasn't doing more to keep up with things at school, I also felt bombarded by the extent of the complexity and scope of the job. What defeated me most was the highly people-centred nature of the job. I needed to be mindful of and be supportive of, people's feelings, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, yet I was often too exhausted to do this. I was also aware of myself as both female and as an HOD; potentially conflicting roles in a school dominated by hegemonic views of acceptable masculinity (Wright, N. 2000). Of course, I couldn't see that then. I was an HOD during a period of immense educational change and knew little of how to effectively deal with it. It all seemed too big. To some extent, the university study helped open my eyes to some of the forces at work by making available relevant research literature, and it gave me some confidence because the academic study was an external source of comfort and support.

C. Wright Mills' (1959) perspective for instance, that people are likely to experience the relationship between the personal and the social as both a "series of traps" (p.3) or "issues" (p.8) over which there was little personal control, began to make sense. Mills also believed that overall, people felt that there were also "troubles" (p.8) which were within the realm of a person's "wilful activity" (p. 8)) and could be managed but only on a personal and individual level. During my tenure as HOD, while most staff members in the department were wonderful to work with and were happy to explore alternatives and try new things, one

particular staff member made life difficult for me as HOD on a number of levels, particularly the emotional. The antipathy this person showed towards me caused great stress and frustration, and while that was experienced on the personal level, in some ways, the staff member directed his fear of the new and different at me. It is only now that I can recognise this; in effect, the wider changes that were about to take place in the field were being inserted into the personal. My own experiences are therefore reflected in both the development and focus of this thesis. In the telling of a story about HODs, some of my own story is interwoven with that of participants'.

Another factor that also contributed to the development of the particular focus for my research relates to size. English is a subject most secondary school students take until the end of Year 12. This makes many English departments quite large and some are, in fact, larger than many New Zealand primary schools.

In this study, my prior knowledge of what the professional life of HODs may be like, naturally affected how I approached the formation of the research. It placed me as both insider and outsider as I sought to know more about whether or not others experienced the messiness, complexity, paradoxical and emotionally laden nature of the job as I understood it to be. My experience of the job, as already intimated, suggested that what it actually *felt* like had been ignored in relevant academic writing. I began to see that what is kept silent remains unexplored and unchanged. I therefore wanted to find a space where I could capture the flavours of the role as it is lived by others.

HODs are, after all, an important link between theory and practice, expectation, mandate and implementation, and policy and procedure in secondary schools. HODs bridge the gap between a school's 'top corridor' senior management (SMT) group and what goes on in classrooms, yet they are often squeezed and made breathless by the demands of both. As noted, HODs in New Zealand secondary schools are responsible for leadership, maintenance and development of a subject and its curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and reporting, plus the staff within the department. They also must teach what is in some schools a full complement of classes and are usually expected to participate in extra curricular activities, be a spokesperson for the subject with the wider school community, represent the department on a variety of school-based

committees and maintain links with professional associations to remain abreast of pedagogical and curriculum developments. These are big expectations and big responsibilities.

Once upon a time, I had been told that being an HOD was the best job in a school; as I write it is a job that schools are finding harder and harder to fill. For instance, there has been a steady upward trend in the number of re-advertisements for HOD positions in the *New Zealand Education Gazette*, the formal channel for publishing such jobs in New Zealand. In professional circles, it is public knowledge that at least one local Associate Principal has discouraged people from applying for HOD jobs because the job is now too big for anyone to reasonably enjoy and feel successful doing. This is a serious situation. The core business of schools – teaching and learning – is at stake if what HODs experience has become so untenable that other people are put off aspiring to the position.

My intention is to force ajar a door to promote further investigations of this very important layer of secondary schools' organisation in New Zealand by focusing on the personal, the emotional and the situated through the medium of narrative. Through the study I attempt to uncover some of what is both rewarding and difficult about the role according to those who live it. Finding out about what the job meant at a personal level became important as this research project evolved and led to the use of an interpretive narrative framework as a means of expressing findings and evoking aspects of the complexity of the role. How the thesis developed from the symbiosis of connecting anecdotes and stories between participants and me is contained in the methodology and methods sections. This also includes an explanation of the rationale for choosing the specific vehicle of the short story form for representing the complexity of those experiences. The effects of the size of the secondary English teaching community in New Zealand and, more locally, in the Waikato, are also explained in relation to specific issues and the narrative shape of the thesis.

The research questions that guide this project are:

What are the professional lives of HODs like?

What are some key barriers affecting their ability to be effective HODs?

What are some key motivations for these HODs?

How can I effectively represent their professional lives?



The report is organised in the following way: Chapter Two is a literature review exploring research and theories about heads of departments' roles. Gaps and key ideas that informed the research focus are identified at the same time. This section also describes a shift in perception about the nature of the HOD job over the last ten years especially in New Zealand and what that may mean for how the job is understood. Chapter Three outlines specific relevant methodological principles while Chapter Four details methods, research and analysis processes pertinent to this study. Chapter Five contains the interpretive short story designed to capture the spirit and complexity of HODs' experiences as a means of describing findings. To some extent, the story attempts to marry the personal with the social, echoing assertions Mills (1959) made, when he argued that novelists often did this in powerful ways. Essentially, the events and situations described in the fictional story of Chapter Five, are compilations from the inside; presenting and evoking the professional lives of the participants. Chapter Six discusses the findings, identifies some implications of both the methodology and the findings and concludes with some recommendations for further research and better support for HODs, including a review of their workloads.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This review considers two specific themes that relate to an HOD's job in the light of what I believe is most often absent from the literature. Firstly, its complexity. This is in relation to school context, role expectations, shifts in the perceptions and priorities about the job of HOD, and time. The second theme, relationships, includes a consideration of an HOD's relationships with colleagues and students, plus ways in which emotions and gender figure. The purpose of the chapter is to highlight not only the relative absence of attention to school context in investigations into secondary school middle management/leadership, but also ways in which the complexity of the job of HOD can affect a post-holder's ability to be satisfied with what can be accomplished. This takes the work into the realm of the emotional and personal, and highlights a key gap in research literature. This relates to the absence of a serious engagement with the effects of relationships on the work of HODs and emphasises the highly personal nature of what is often a highly political and public position.

### Complexity

#### *School context*

Broadly, there is still a long way to go before research maps the field centred on HODs (Turner, 1996). There is, however, some research information that concerns itself with both the role of an HOD and what can contribute to an effective secondary school subject department, particularly as it relates to Britain (Blandford, 1997; Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Harris, 1998; Harris, Jamieson & Russ, 1995). While such researchers admit that context is important, nevertheless they tend to discuss ideas and issues about the role of HOD as if they did not in the first instance, belong to real people working within real places. A problem with findings from these researchers therefore, is that they are often decontextualised; they are distilled and removed from the complex social

and educational situations and people in which they were initially embedded. Proudfoot and Baker (1995) understood this particular issue, suggesting that if social or cultural aspects of schools or the impact of everyday life are ignored, then research discussing school effectiveness is incomplete. Any examination of the lives of HODs therefore, would also be incomplete without due consideration of the effects of school setting, cultural norms, departmental organisation, staff composition, school populations or personal circumstances.

Take for instance, comments from The Final Report from the Science and Innovation Advisory Council, *New Zealanders: Innovators to the World* (Science and Innovation Advisory Council, 2001). It stated that, "much of the pressure on teachers arises from the inadequate administrative support they receive. Most teachers do not have their own workspace, desk or telephone with voice mail. Many do not have their own computer" (p. 42). While this is seen as a workspace issue it is nevertheless an example of an assessment of the structural and school situations that can complicate teachers' lives as they struggle to share such workspaces and resources. For HODs, it is possible that the absence of a designated office or computer terminal or telephone can negatively add to the kind of complexity they are faced with.

Silencing the realities of individual schools' contexts on those who work within them has made it easier for some researchers, particularly in Britain, to focus on ideals (Blandford, 1997; Dean, 1985; Harris, Jamieson & Russ, 1995). Such researchers resort to distilling lists of criteria that they argue characterise effective departments or departmental leaders, particularly within the school improvement or school effectiveness field. Such criteria do not, in the end, say much about time-bound or place-bound implications that may affect attempts at implementation. Some of these lists of criteria for success that seek to describe the work of British secondary department heads (Ribbins, 1985) therefore avoid what Byrne (1998) argued are central to investigations of social worlds. In his analysis of complexity theory, Byrne (1998) indicated that "outcomes are not determined by single causes but by multiple causes...[and that] the combined effect is not necessarily the sum of the separate effects" (p.20). In other words, reasons and causes for how things are, do not combine or work the same each time in each place nor do they operate in an "additive fashion" (p.20) because people do not

conform to others' ideals about how things should be or how they should work. Mills (1959) saw this kind of complexity as a relationship between individuals and society. It is a relationship between what a person believes, feels and does and wider social forces which impact on, and often form those beliefs and actions. Researchers who propose that criteria which are supposed to indicate qualities of an effective HOD seem to imply therefore, that the *opposite* is possible; that there is little or no connection between individuals and specific social contexts.

O'Neill [online] (2000a) on the other hand, suggested that situated complexity was a way of describing an intimate connection between school context and HODs' jobs in secondary schools. His research, in which he investigated a cross-section of HODs, is one of the few examples focused on New Zealand HODs' experiences. Overall, the tendency to exclude emotions and situatedness involving HODs' roles in a large proportion of academic writing, may exist partly because of the difficulty of expressing complex ideas and relationships within the confines of traditional formats that tend to rely on formal styles of expression that eschew the personal and the local. It is possible then, that the straightjacket of traditional academic writing has done a disservice to the desire of researchers who may wish to explore more fully the professional lives of HODs.

Exploring local context to sketch people's authentic experiences is therefore important. This highlights Casey's (1993) observation that "living persons do not conform to [the kinds of] abstract definitions" (p.14) implied in the kinds of lists of tasks for HODs or descriptions of ideal departments or schools often extracted from research (Harris, 1998; Harris, Jamieson & Russ, 1995; Harris & Young, 2000). Brown (1991) for instance, suggested that, "it makes no sense to imagine that one can sever pedagogical experience ... from its highly complex and interwoven context" (p.54). Both meaning and experience therefore, are highly contextual (Ernst, Miletta & Reilly, 1998), reflecting Ayers' (1998) contention that most problems are not technical ones but centre on issues related to specific people embedded in specific situations. Four years earlier, Aronowitz and Giroux (1994) had pointed out that ignoring educational context led to a tendency in some countries, to the "sterile logic of flow charts [and] a growing

separation between teachers and administrators" (p.37), reinforcing what is described as a technicist and managerial view of teaching and learning. The growth of this tendency in New Zealand and possible implications of it, has been ably described by Codd (1990; 1999). Ramifications for individuals as they try to manage their lives without considering or understanding the impact of the wider social, political and economic contexts on their lives, are intimated by Mills (1959).

Context and situation therefore, help understand the deeply personal nature of HODs' professional lives. Clandinin and Connelly (1995a) have suggested that such contexts are both intellectual and moral. They argued that considerable tensions occur because some policy or procedural requirements are often presented to teachers and HODs as unproblematic, value-free and easily implemented according to someone else's plan or rules, echoing Codd's (1990, 1999) concerns about the rise of managerialism in education as noted earlier. Humes [online] (2000) went as far as suggesting that teachers and principals are "permitted to ask 'How?' questions but not 'Why?' questions" (p.38) and Adey (2000) observed that expectations of this nature imply that HODs have roles similar to line managers rather than leaders. However, when teachers and HODs anticipate some possible negative effects of implementing external requirements that take little account of local contexts it is intellectual and moral considerations as well as feelings that are more likely to predominate. And when teachers ask questions and debate issues about changes, they can be seen as obstructive and resistant (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). As a result, these tensions can cause anxiety, distress, or even anger (Court, 1996) especially if teachers' concerns are not heard or if their ways of working are not valued. Relationships among people, places and things are, as Clandinin and Connelly (1995a) believed, "dilemma-laden" (p.5). As relationships are a core focus of this study, they will be considered in a subsequent section of this chapter. A particular school's context and culture are also probably implicated in how well HODs are able to perform their duties and responsibilities. In the meantime, ideas about the growth of complexity in the role of an HOD follow.

### *Role expectations, shifting priorities and perceptions*

This section discusses some implications of the structural position of an HOD in a secondary school in terms of role expectations. Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1990) described a head of department as a 'piggy in the middle'; someone caught between pressures from above and below. Adey (2000) made connections with the role of a line manager in industry, while Fitzgerald (2000) suggested that an HOD in New Zealand is in the frequently forgotten tier of secondary school organisation.

The hod metaphor, alluded to in the introductory chapter, extends Earley and Fletcher-Campbell's (1990) use of the term 'piggy in the middle' as a way of describing an HOD's lot, because it suggests the potential for overload. Overall, complexity may exist through and because of, school structures (such as timetables and internal hierarchies), regulatory practices (such as policies, appraisal, assessment and reporting mechanisms), emotions, time, and trying to work with competing demands and competing relationships. To ignore the complexity of the situations HODs find themselves in is to ignore and silence the intensely people-focused, multi-layered nature of the role, which in turn, may create conflicting demands and anxiety in HODs (O'Neill [online], 2000a). These ideas added to my own experiences to form a focus of this research.

While specific aspects of complexity as they relate to relationships are dealt with in a subsequent section of this chapter, I now turn to a consideration of some discourses that have developed around how the role of HOD and perceptions of it have shifted and added to the complexity of the role. And while Orner's (1998) observation that "stories told about schooling can be read as living testimonies" (p. 279) is applicable to a study focusing on the complexities of HODs' professional lives, the notion of narrative is broached in the subsequent methodology chapter.

While the school subject has traditionally been the "major reference point" (Goodson, 1988, p. 153) in the work of secondary schools, this appears to have shifted because of the effects of administrative changes in education in New Zealand since 1989 (Cardno, 1995). When educational reforms began to dismantle existing structures for the provision of state education in New Zealand and replace them with site-based management practices, responsibility for

educational provision was ostensibly devolved to schools themselves (Robertson, 1998). One result is that in some secondary schools, at least anecdotally, teaching appears to have become subsumed by organisational and managerial demands, relegating curriculum from the centre of schools' concerns to the periphery. This research hopes to identify some realities of this shift.

In the case of Britain, Bennett (1995) clearly identified the importance of decentralisation in viewing the work of HODs because they are often responsible for implementing externally imposed demands in a particular subject area. Consequently, HODs are no longer mainly expert subject practitioners leading a group of professionals involved in teaching and learning as Marland (1971) described decades earlier. Instead, it is now more common for HODs to be seen as middle managers juggling a range of demands. Along with that is an assumption that HODs will know how to cope with these demands almost straightaway (Wright, S. 2000). HODs themselves on the other hand, may feel that external demands are peripheral to, or in conflict with, their own perceptions of what the job is about (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Glover, Miller, Gambling, Gough & Johnson, 1999). Many HODs therefore struggle to reconcile the expected management focus with the curriculum and assessment needs of staff and students. As Ribbins (1986) perceptively observed, "The structure of officially designated roles is one thing, but the reality in practice is another" (p. 126).

As noted in some overseas research, there appears to be the expectation that an HOD's main role is to implement senior management (SMT) policy rather than enhance learning and curriculum delivery (Adey, 2000; Blandford, 1997; Ribbins, 1985). Adey's (2000) term 'line manager' describes the positioning of an HOD within a managerial rather than leadership framework. These differing perceptions, beliefs and roles about being an HOD sometimes collide, creating difficulties and tensions that may be hard to reconcile, especially when there is little opportunity during an HOD's day for reflection and discussion. Ball's (1987) ideas about the micro-politics of schools and the political nature of such a person's role demonstrate at least part of this problem. Compromises are inevitable and these may affect HODs' ability to be effective classroom teachers, yet this is often where their expertise, hearts and minds are centred (Wright, S.

2000). To some extent, it is an example of the intersection of the social and the personal (Mills, 1959) as wider policy upheavals and social change have an impact at a local level.

The role of an HOD is essentially a people-centred one and has been described as such for a long time (Marland, 1971). An interesting contrast is reported in the *British Times Educational Supplement Update* (1998, March 20). Both Chris Woodhead, chief inspector at the time, and Mike Tomlinson of OFSTED are reported as saying that British department heads in secondary schools had traditionally seen their role as one of “managing resources rather than people” (p.2). They suggested that only in the past few years has there been a departmental emphasis on the relationship between a subject and teaching and learning. This view contradicts both international and local research communities’ findings and appears to ignore what educational reforms over the last twenty years have done to perceptions of who department heads are, and what their roles now consist of (Ball, 1987; Brown, Rutherford & Ralph, 1997; Bullock, James & Jamieson, 1995; Campbell & Neill, 1994; Cardno, 1995; Carson, 1992; Carter, 1997; Gunter, 2001; O’Neill, 2000a). Research findings reflect educational changes in New Zealand since the late 1980s, about the time when secondary heads of department began being described as middle managers (Fitzgerald, 2000). This labelling was cemented by the revised nomenclature in the *New Zealand Education Gazette* advertisements from the mid to late 1990s.

To illustrate this, O’Neill (2000b) tracked the development of subject heads in New Zealand and noted that beginning in the 1980s, a values shift occurred: perceptions about the role of an HOD moved from that of a leading professional to that of manager. That same change can be tracked in the language used in the *New Zealand Education Gazette*, which advertises teaching jobs in our schools. Before there was a change to the way the role of HOD was named, the emphasis in the advertisements for HODs changed. No longer was the focus on the subject or the curriculum. Instead, some of the most commonly used words in advertisements now emphasised management functions or such personal qualities as an HOD being energetic, creative, or experienced.

A search of various issues of the *New Zealand Education Gazette* (Ministry of Education, 2 October, 1989; 30 September, 1996; 18 October, 1999; 9 October,



2000; 8 October, 2001), the main repository for education policy information dissemination to schools and advertisements for jobs in the compulsory education sector, revealed these shifts. In the earlier issues (for example, October 2, 1989; 30 September, 1996), the term “Positions of Responsibility” (PR) was still used to identify vacancies that related to subject department and pastoral leadership. Advertisements for jobs in 1989 were simply stated by using a label to identify the subject area (for example: ‘PR3 English’). This had been common practice for decades in this publication. Some changes are noticeable by 1996, however, especially in the amount of information that is provided about the school and the kinds of qualities expected of an HOD. By the time the *New Zealand Education Gazette* of 18 October 1999 was released, positions like HODs’ jobs were advertised as “Y7-15 Middle Management” (p. 72). From expressing vacancies in terms of basic subject specifications (2 October, 1989; 30 September, 1996), advertisements began to appear like this:

...English/social studies manager 3MU...Very strong management skills and ability to teach English or social sciences. Successful applicant will oversee the implementation of English and social sciences within the school. State specialist subjects. Very important management position (Ministry of Education, 18 October, 1999, p. 72).

The above example suggests a strong focus on management, and an implied hierarchy in some of the language that it uses (“oversee”). It also hints at what Codd (1990; 1999) described happening in New Zealand schools as a result of the school reforms begun in 1989 where he tracked a growing emphasis in schools on management and its operation, rather than educational leadership, curriculum and learning. While these more fleshed-out advertisement descriptions in the *New Zealand Education Gazette* indicate how specific schools position the job of HOD – which can be helpful to aspirants - the language can also signal how the job is perceived within the school.

Foucault’s (1972, 1977; 1980) notions are pertinent here. He argued that power can be wielded through such things as ownership, perceptions (and ways in which discourses operate), and access to knowledge. He proposed that mechanisms of power are also mechanisms for regulation and stratification in

schools. He also considered the effects of the 'gaze', particularly via its effects in a panopticon prison situation (Foucault, 1977), but which can be applied to the situation under investigation here. The gaze is a term referring to mechanisms of self-regulation whereby people begin to see themselves partly in relation to the expectations or regulations imposed by others. The ability to name the job is one such mechanism. Changes in labels or names for things often accompany changes in policy, perceptions, approaches or views about what counts in schools both at a local and national level. Foucault's (1972) explanation of discourse, and the role of the "repressive presence" (p. 25) of what is not said, is also implicated here. The shifts in language indicated earlier may undermine how HODs might perceive themselves to be. As Grogan (1999) asserted, "we learn it [that is, practices and beliefs] through the language that is used to describe how we should think and what we should be like as participants in social situations..."(p.201). The language used within many advertisements for HODs' jobs suggests that a number of schools now privilege administrative and structural functions in the job of HOD and downplay its central focus on teaching and learning and its vital link between policy and practice. Blandford's work (1997, 2001) summarises distinctions between leadership, management and administration as contrasts between a focus on vision, mission and values (leadership), a concern for planning, organising and implementing (management), and system maintenance (administration). These distinctions appear to categorise HODs as those who must implement the ideas, values and goals of others, yet HODs in New Zealand must also advocate change and lead it; surely contradictory in those terms. Gunter (2001) in particular takes issue with perspectives that simplify complex and problematic roles. Instead, she argues for a more thorough understanding of messiness and complexity via the roles of agency, identity and structure; forces which shape educational practice and the production of educational leadership knowledge. Her view is that professional biographies will help this process of understanding what educational leadership is really like for those who live it.

As noted earlier, ways in which HOD jobs are advertised signal both the national and local policy frameworks within which HODs work. Internationally, heads of department had traditionally been seen as subject experts whose main

duty was to develop the teaching and learning of a subject (Adey, 2000; Marland, 1971), while recent writing within the research community suggests that those who have been HODs for at least ten years still see themselves in subject expertise terms while more recent appointments focus more on managerial and administrative tasks and see themselves as managers (Glover, Gleeson, Gough & Johnson, 1998). West-Burnham (1997) identified what is at stake when he said:

One of the reasons why schools can be such demanding places to work in (for children and adults) is that people have to live in a state of permanent tension between the superficial simplicity of management and the deep complexity of learning and leading (p.234).

An HOD therefore, is a critical pivot point as an intermediary who is close to the core business of a school, that of teaching and learning (Cardno, 1995). At the same time an HOD is also expected to be an administrator serving the needs of a school hierarchy and externally imposed national demands. It sometimes seems as if the HOD is viewed from above as having an uncomplicated job with time in which to work. This contrasts with the reality of an HOD having a complex and highly people-centred job, often done while having to teach almost full time. This apparent dissonance between expectations and the reality for many HODs is important to explore. A decade ago, Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1990) attempted to do this by alerting us to key problems for HODs who worked in British schools.

What is imposed on the school from outside might also be occasions when power relationships and regulatory forces are noticeable and potentially in conflict with what an HOD has to do, and this was also important to consider when working with participants. A funnel metaphor, mooted by Clandinin and Connelly (1995), helps picture the impact of regulations, perceptions and expectations on teachers' lives. This metaphor is especially apt in relation to the professional lives of HODs. This is returned to later in this report. What HODs can reasonably expect to achieve may be dependent on what the school perceives an HOD's core functions to be, even if the structural provisions like time allocations contradict and conflict with that assumption. Tensions between

expectation and reality may also cause some frustration or feelings of guilt for HODs and this too, is worthy of exploration.

Time, a theme noted in literature reporting on investigations into HODs' work, is now the focus.

### *Time*

While Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989) identified time as a critical constraint in their exploration of British HODs' professional lives, they tended to overlook its effects. Because their study "focus[ed] on examples of effective department and faculty practice as identified by others" (p.1), they needed to downplay the critical effect of time; otherwise, it seems, they would not have been able to complete their project according to their brief. The purpose of their research had another consequence. It effectively removed individual people from both the position and school context, ostensibly deleting the effects of the messiness and complexity of HODs' situations. To be fair, Earley and Fletcher-Campbell did identify tensions that arose because of a school's SMT expectations of HODs and Faculty Heads. However, the authors spent little time exploring the personal and professional costs of those tensions on individual HODs. While Earley and Fletcher-Campbell's work is widely cited because of their contribution to a wider understanding of middle leaders in secondary schools, it is disappointing that the human experience of the HOD as a "pivotal" (p.32) role in a school is reduced to observations like:

The reality of life as it is actually lived is rarely reflected in the job descriptions of heads of department and faculty and formal analyses give no indication of the piecemeal fashion in which much middle management activity is undertaken (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989, p.32).

Eileen Piggot-Irvine, a New Zealand researcher whose professional development programmes centre on work with teachers and HODs, commented in the New Zealand Educational Administration Society's (NZEAS) (2001, December) newsletter *Leading Lights* that, "middle management overload is...one of the hottest issues in schools" (p.1). Her solution was to suggest, "intensive lobbying

for the middle management role in schools to be given the time it is due" (p.1). This is a position she iterates in another publication, where she noted that:

Middle managers should not be expected to teach almost a full-time load, and to manage at the same time. Their counterparts in every other non-education sector organisation I work in would never be expected to carry such a load and manage the complexities associated with multiple staff at the same time (Piggot-Irvine, 2002, p. 23)

Time is identified as not only critical to effective departmental leadership, but also as a source of role strain and anxiety for HODs. When Blandford (1997) discussed time, she suggested that HODs could prioritise tasks in order to cope with very little of it; an unhelpful piece of advice for those who have too many requirements to fulfil. Gitlin and Margonis (1995) suggested of teachers that, "...without changes in their workload, additional decision-making responsibility would only further intensify [teachers'] work" (p.398). So, when responsibilities are formally delegated to HODs through job descriptions for instance, their work is likely to be considerably intensified unless appropriate compensatory time is also provided. These researchers also suggested that teachers' work is intensified through the addition of responsibilities without compensatory time allowances, leading to their claim that:

... a prerequisite for engagement and significant school change is an increase in the amount of time teachers have to study their own teaching and...develop appropriate practices (p. 388).

This comment, while centred on practices in the American context, nevertheless has echoes in New Zealand that relate to amount of time provided for teachers to learn new practices and theories and complete required tasks. Much earlier, Handy and Aitken (1986) went as far as observing that, "secondary schools [in Britain]... are trying to run large and complex organisations in their spare time" (p.38). For HODs, their professional lives may become much more complicated by having two large jobs to juggle simultaneously: their teaching, and their leadership responsibilities.

O'Neill (2000b) observed that the willingness of HODs in New Zealand to take on extra responsibilities (for example representations on various committees in the school) was often at a personal cost. Even without additional tasks, he noted that HODs were often "running to stand still" (p.16), affecting their ability to plan ahead and consider developmental work pertinent to the department and students taking the relevant subject. Earley and Fletcher-Campbell's (1989) book title *Time to manage?* identified the central role of time in the professional lives of HODs in Britain, yet little seems to have changed to mitigate its effects in the several years that have elapsed since their book was published. The question mark they used in their book title is pointed. Earley and Fletcher-Campbell suggested that HODs are still, "first and foremost –at least in terms of time allocation – still *teachers* [authors' italics]" (1989, p.40). In the case of New Zealand secondary school HODs at the present time, that scenario is certainly true. Fitzgerald (2000) argued that even though this is still the case, HODs' roles in New Zealand schools have greatly expanded.

Some secondary schools in New Zealand are having trouble filling HOD positions and need to re-advertise such positions sometimes more than once. This is now being reported in media accounts (Stirling, 2001, December 15). Perhaps some of those problems can be traced back to Earley and Fletcher-Campbell's (1989) assertion about the lack of time heads of department have to carry out their roles. HODs in New Zealand, for instance, at the time of writing often have little more than 4-5 hours a week of non-student contact time to manage both their classroom teacher and HOD responsibilities. Sometimes, as has already been noted, this non-contact allocation is no greater than those who have no such added responsibilities. What is important to remember however is that HODs must work with and through people who, like them, are in front of classes most of the time. This complicates everyone's ability to work together in not only developing work, but also satisfactorily completing it. And if an HOD is to mentor beginning teachers, this can also be difficult.

Hargreaves (1994), in his investigation of primary principals and teachers in Ontario, Canada observed that:

time is a fundamental dimension through which teachers' work is constructed and interpreted by themselves, their

colleagues and those who administer and supervise them. Time for the teacher is not just an objective, oppressive constraint but also a subjectively defined horizon of possibility and limitation (p. 95).

For HODs in secondary schools in New Zealand, the “horizon of possibility and limitation” is that much closer and narrower and less easy to navigate because they have extra layers of responsibility, without necessarily any more time within which to discharge their duties. Their ability to use time well therefore becomes crucial, even when the discretionary time they can do this in is limited.

Hargreaves (1994) described differences between monochronic and polychronic time frames. A monochronic time frame is considered to relate to one thing at a time, linear, focused on completion and control, and related to professions and business operations, while polychronic time frames are described as multitasking, focused on relationships and context, often considered domestic and more closely related to small organisations. Hargreaves (1994) also suggests that time frames have an apparently gendered nature and this has some implications for primary school teachers, the focus of his study. Hargreaves (1994) also used distinctions between the two time frames to argue that educational change required from the top down is likely to falter because its expectations will be monochronic while many teachers necessarily operate in polychronic ways, especially, he noted, in the very female-oriented and child-centred realm of a primary school. It would appear too, that polychronic ways of working exist more naturally where one person has to do a variety of sometimes-simultaneous tasks. In teaching, that is certainly the case, and more than likely true for HODs too. Exploring how HODs managed their available time and the impact of this critical factor on their practices was therefore likely to be important in this study. Hargreaves (1994) suggested too, that time is used as a control mechanism, and that it becomes more ‘male’ in its operation the older students are, so that by the time the secondary school is reached, time is much more stratified, ordered, predictable and compartmentalised, with people’s behaviours fitting into and mirroring that framework. Hargreaves reasoned that organisations which focus activities on monochronic time, can become rigid and lose sight of their purpose. At the same time, such organisations can “bulldoze

changes and impose timelines which are insensitive to the peculiarities of circumstance and context, and to the interpersonal relationships which comprise them" (p.103). These notions have relevance when we look at the role of HODs. There appears to be a persistent assumption in New Zealand because of the way current staffing levels operate to create teachers' timetables, that curriculum development and the care of staff requires little specific allocation of time. It is mechanisms like this that can create both considerable role strain and emotional tension for HODs, especially when the imposed expectations may interfere with or disrupt classroom and pedagogical needs.

Hargreaves (1994) noted that earlier theorists had suggested that time allocations allowing teachers to congregate rather than exist separately in classrooms were really important for mitigating the effects of teacher isolation and developing collegial behaviour. Jayne (2001, July 4) reported research into the need for informal time in the workplace, since that was often the time in which important networking and decisions were made. It is interesting to note that the prevailing situation in the way a secondary school day is organised in New Zealand has changed little to accommodate such suggestions despite evidence about its benefits. In my experience, meeting times for teachers are still traditionally slotted into pockets of time before school, during lunch breaks and after school. Designating other times for departmental meetings is seldom provided for except perhaps, an annual departmental development day normally planned by the HOD. This supports Handy and Aitken's (1986) argument that schools appear to expect teachers' 'spare time' to be used for such purposes.

If HOD responsibilities are compared with the British 'good departments criteria' (Makins, 1998, March 20), we can begin to see what is at stake. The British criteria include a number of expectations like:

strong but consultative leadership; regular and well managed departmental meetings where all staff can contribute to planning and policy making; systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching and observation of lessons, as well as debate about good practice and departmental development planning guided by and contributing to whole-school priorities; a comprehensive departmental handbook carrying forward school aims and policies, including suitable schemes



of work for pupils of all ages and abilities; and, identifying training and resource needs (p. 2).

Other responsibilities expected of HODs focused on staff “deployment and effective organisation of classes” as well as professional development and the “systematic monitoring” (p.2) of student progress.

These criteria appear to not only assume that HODs have time in which to carry out these roles, but they also seem rather prescriptive when the New Zealand’s Teacher Registration Board’s (1997)<sup>4</sup> criteria are considered. These New Zealand criteria included an ability on the part of the leader to “demonstrate flexibility and adaptability” and focus on teaching and learning while leading and supporting other teachers in a climate of “ethical behaviour and responsibility”. Other expectations included “recognising and supporting diversity among groups and individuals, encouraging others and participating in professional development” and managing resources effectively (from: *Handbook: The Registration of Teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand plus, A Satisfactory Teacher and Renewing a Practising Certificate* (both September, 1997). The New Zealand criteria seem to have a broader purpose than the British ones, with a stated aim of focusing on leadership and professional development. The downside is that they seem to assume that HODs and other leaders have the time to meet these requirements.

In Britain, the prevalent language in the stated criteria appears to mirror that of management and training, which can be described as essentially technicist in nature. It also implies an element of surveillance that belies a collegial and supportive environment, with the use of phrases like ‘systematic monitoring’, ‘optimum deployment of staff’, ‘target setting’ and ‘comprehensive departmental handbook’. Foucault (1972) considered the power of language when he focused on ideas about discourse and silence. This is especially pertinent where the language used “is therefore no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say; and this ‘not-said’ is a hollow that undermines from within all that is said” (p.25). The differences in the language and labels between the two sets of criteria (British; New Zealand) suggest not only cultural and political differences

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<sup>4</sup> Subsequently superseded by the Teaching Council’s criteria: see <http://www.trb.govt.nz/home.htm>

but also imply different expectations. However, while the New Zealand criteria appear to be milder and more collaborative and participatory in nature, they are not in harmony with the language used in many advertisements for HOD positions in New Zealand. There is therefore, a tension here.

Even with differences between the two sets of criteria, and given the large number of tasks, snatched time, which is grabbed from any available moment, appears to be a strategy HODs use to get tasks done (Hargreaves, 1994). This implies that leadership and management tasks are often *on top of* what is expected of HODs in their role as classroom teachers. Investigating the extent to which snatched time operates for New Zealand HODs is another factor to add to the mix in the research.

Throughout this section on structure, the idea of relationships and their importance was raised on a number of occasions. It is now time to focus on this.

## **Relationships**

### *Change and the status quo*

“Running to stand still” (O’Neill, 2000b, p.16) is a phrase which exemplifies the enormity of the role of HODs and the way HODs’ lives can be consumed by school. While West-Burnham and Bowring-Carr (1999) suggested that management is “essentially a static activity concerned with maintenance, not innovation or improvement” (p. 253), leadership and working with people is not. The status quo can represent both personal histories (knowledge, experiences, attitudes) and investments of energy, dedication and commitment. Some proposals for change however, whether externally or internally promoted, can challenge that investment. If HODs are to balance the contradiction of change and stability, there needs to be a greater recognition of the critical impact of change on people and ways in which HODs and others can go about their jobs. This is especially necessary when an HOD’s proposal for change may be resisted by staff who have an interest in maintaining the status quo. This resistance can, in some cases, be attributed to a difficulty at the personal level in separating

either teachers from their practices, or separating individuals from who they are as teachers.

Sometimes the status quo can represent comfort, identity and familiarity. On such occasions, the teacher and the individual can be reflections or mirror images of each other. To explain this further, Felman (1987) described the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's position on the relationship between teachers and students, and teaching and learning. She suggested that Lacan viewed the relationship as reciprocal, intimate and often a mirror image, when she explained that:

The position of the teacher is itself the position of the one who learns, of the one who teaches nothing other than the way he learns. The subject of teaching is interminably – a student; the subject of learning is interminably – a learning (p.88).

In other words, a teacher is always a learner and a student can be a teacher too, for as Felman suggests, "learning has no term" (p.88). It can also be interpreted to suggest the idea of an unbroken circle where teaching and learning and student and teacher can be indistinguishable in the essence of the relationship since teaching and learning can be reciprocal. If this is true, then treating educational change as value-free and a technical exercise that is neither time-bound, people-bound, nor developmental but understood instead to have a finite end, is a denial of both the realities people face and the personal investment people make in their careers. This is possibly because the status quo can also "represent issues of self-image, coping and survival strategies, personal models of success and effectiveness, and a complex sense of self" (West-Burnham & Bowring-Carr, 1999, p. 252).

Take for example, the British research which has briefly noted the dilemmas people face when trying to function as HODs while also managing their classroom duties (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Marland, 1971). However, such research is relatively silent on the human cost of that tension except in broad terms that are often equated with notions of school effectiveness or improvement (Blandford, 1997; Harris, Jamieson & Russ, 1995; Harris & Hopkins, 2000). Therefore, any assumption that HODs are 'only' middle managers belies one of the central roles of an HOD, which is that of working with

the hearts and minds of people intimately engaged in teaching and learning. This is especially pertinent to keep in mind as HODs in New Zealand secondary schools come to terms with the implications of organising their departments and classroom practice to meet the implementation requirements of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). This implementation began in 2002 with Year 11 and progresses over three years to Year 13.

This is an example of how change can affect relationships that may already be delicately poised, given the complex nature of a schools' organisation. Some of the research centred on principals in primary schools is relevant to this idea. Primary school principals are described as having dual roles, that of instructional leader and organisational leader (Vandenberghe, 1998). Vandenberghe suggests that "changing classroom practices for teachers is a demanding task" (p. 373), partly because "changes in teaching practices must be complemented by changes at the school level" (p. 373). The same can be said of roles HODs must undertake. Matching organisational learning (that is, at the department level) with instructional learning (that is, at the classroom level) is a time-laden and people-laden task.

Elmore (1996) argued that what was needed for positive change was:

encouragement and support, access to special knowledge, time to focus on the requirements of a new task, time to observe others doing it – [it] all suggests a way in which the environment of incentives in the organisation comes to reflect the requirements of learning (p. 25).

What Elmore suggests is an ideal. HODs are unlikely to be able to provide the required level of support if most of their school day is spent in the classroom and the incentives that exist seem to be intangible ones. Elmore's ideas also presuppose that principals are aware of what change means on a personal level and will support it with necessary resources.

So, whether maintaining the status quo or facilitating change is required, there is a huge potential for tension, complexity and emotions, especially when there is very little discretionary or allocated time within which those activities can effectively take place. Lack of time can easily exacerbate issues because people do not often have the time, space or energy to carefully think through

how to respond. A department head is often caught in the crossfire in such situations because, as West-Burnham and Bowring-Carr (1999) argued, change (which is often expected of HODs) requires leadership. It is difficult it would seem, for HODs to engage in necessary leadership and change processes when they are also engaged in almost fulltime teaching. Examining what transpires because of the impact of this tension is overdue. The part that emotions plays in that equation is considered next.

### *Emotions*

As has been noted, there is likely to be an extent to which HODs' personal and professional selves mirror or reflect each other (Felman, 1987; Gallop, 1985). Felman suggested that "teaching is not a purely cognitive, informative experience, but is also an emotional, erotic experience" (1987, p. 86) because it cannot be separated from people's experiences and knowledge as private individuals. This point of view may help shed light not only on the kinds of dilemmas HODs face as they work with pedagogical, moral, ethical, emotional and private challenges, but also on the ways they make sense of them within the boundaries of their lives. In a sense, this returns to Foucault's (1977; 1980) notions of subjectivity in terms of the extent to which HODs can see themselves as others see them – a reference to the effects of both 'the gaze' and discourse. HODs need to be able to balance and accommodate those perspectives beside their own about the multiple roles they negotiate and navigate in a school, for they work within multiple discourses which can affect how they operate. This research study is mindful of this.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) noticed that there is often a discrepancy between teachers' identities as they work in classrooms, and their formal role expectations. On the one hand, teachers need to be caring, supportive and empathetic; on the other, they also have to be coolly professional. Hargreaves (1998) too, considered the expectation that teachers be caring and nurturing. At the same time, he noted, this is "ignored or marginalised...in the official politics of educational reform and administration" (p.318). Hochschild (1983), in investigating roles of cabin crew of an American airline, went as far as suggesting that organisations can manipulate staff and define and limit what are acceptable

emotions to display. This can have repercussions in terms of how staff feel about having to manage what is officially appropriate to express. Hochschild's description of management's expectation that flight crew smile and appear happy to customers on each flight is a case in point, especially when management also disapproved of cabin crew staff expressing annoyance or anger.

Teachers too, have to manage what they express. For HODs this can often be more intense since they are a pivot point for others who may see them as having to be fair, firm and wise, even if they might feel panic and fear instead. The latter emotions may be ones that an HOD would keep hidden because they are seen to be unworthy of the role of HOD. Such assumptions inform this research.

These ideas also mirror views about leadership and women that Blackmore (1998) described as she explored how female principals handled their roles. Participants in her study admitted that expressing emotions other than approved ones (such as caring, sympathy, passion for the school/job) were likely to undermine them as leaders and position them instead as women who could not cope, or as women who got too emotional. These women took to crying in the toilets or waiting until they got home to express their anger or frustration. If this is true of women at the principal level, it is likely that it is true of women at the HOD level too. Hargreaves (1998) also intimated that a caring orientation is more likely to relate more to ways that women work than men, and this connection may possibly further marginalise emotions, especially when put beside the monochronic and masculine use of time by secondary school administrators as argued earlier. This tension may also exacerbate the ability of some staff to function effectively in school contexts if emotions are not sufficiently acknowledged or addressed. It is possible that anger, for instance, may be constructed as appropriate for men rather than women to display, but by the same token crying may not be seen as appropriate for either (Court, 1989; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998).

Pertinently, Thomas (1990) suggested, that:

...people's actions are socially constrained, although not socially determined; people make decisions which are based

on an awareness of the potentialities and limitations of certain courses of action. The choices made by men and women are limited, amongst other things, by social expectations of masculine and feminine behaviour; this is not to say, however, that people passively accept their socially allocated roles (p. 2).

This notion regarding the socially constructed nature of masculine and feminine behaviour is relevant in terms of ways people see themselves and how they think others may see them, particularly in a professional capacity. As teachers, people become aware of what is acceptable or not and will guard their expressions of emotions as Court (1989) indicated. This is not to say, however, that these self-imposed constraints are not without problems. It is possible that HODs in this study will describe instances where they had to keep their emotions in check, or they felt they needed to change their behaviours to suit, as they saw it, their HOD status.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) described the emotional price that teachers pay in terms of their integrity and identity as both teachers and individuals if they are expected to completely follow a school's policies. They suggested that teachers "understand schools as a landscape of interacting stories that bear directly on teacher identity and, by association, on teacher satisfaction with their work" (p.100). This personal identity and sense of satisfaction can be at odds with managerial and administrative expectations, especially if those expectations have a technician and monochronic slant, directly affecting a person's emotional well-being. Blandford's (1997, 2001) work tends to fit into this category.

Boler (1999) pointed out that emotions are a "primary site of social control" (p. xii). She explained that while emotions are an ever-present feature of educational environments, they are seen as something to be controlled. Teachers are permitted to have passion (for their subject or profession, but seldom for a student or other member of staff), and to be caring (for their students and other staff, but to be selfless of themselves). They are to suppress other emotions like fear, jealousy, pain or joy. In a sense, it is related to the notion of separating home and work, as if a person can compartmentalise various parts of themselves. Boler (1999) disputed some of the rhetoric about emotional intelligence as she

identified three dominant discourses which effectively silence both women and the effects of cultural difference and maintain the underlying model of self that exists in traditional scientific research paradigms. These discourses privilege mastery of emotions “through biological potential for logical choice” (p. 74-75). Boler (1999) also observed that:

... it has been patently obvious that what defines the discourses of emotion most predominantly are silences... Within educational institutions, unacceptable/emotional behaviour is defined by what it is not: namely the prototype of the rational, curious, engaged, ‘balanced’, well-behaved white male student (p.140).

Emotions of leadership may be implicated in ways HODs not only feel about themselves in the role, but also how they go about their work. Hargreaves (1997) discussed a link between the role and the person when he described teaching as deeply personal and later suggested that, “teaching and leading... are profoundly emotional forms of work” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 316). He also believed that there has been a tendency to consider emotions as mainly “matters of personal and moral choice, commitment and responsibility” (p. 317), and this is echoed by Boler’s (1999) assertions. Understanding emotions as something that are “developed in families, cultures and work situations...” (Hargreaves, 1998, p.317) where some emotions are valued more than others, is highly significant and can have a profound influence on the extent to which emotions are policed, yet Sachs and Blackmore (1998) observed that emotional dimensions of school life and leadership are “one of the great silences” (p. 269). And this may be because there have not traditionally been appropriate ways to adequately account for them in the literature.

Hargreaves (1998) identified seven aspects of emotion in a teacher’s work. These same aspects are likely to be located in and represented in HODs’ work. Hargreaves (1998) also suggested that teaching is an emotional practice; that it involves emotional understanding and labour; that moral purposes are inseparable from teachers’ emotions and that emotions are deeply related to ideas about oneself and relationships with others. He argued too, that experiences of power and powerlessness affect emotions and that culture and



context can affect the 'what' and 'how' of emotions. Boler's (1999) work reinforces those concepts and Goodson (1988) suggested that while teaching is intensely personal, this factor is often ignored or trivialised. Hochschild (1983) put it more bluntly when she asserted that emotional labour:

...requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others... This kind of labor calls for a co-ordination of mind and feeling, and sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality (p.7).

She also suggested that while most jobs now expect a capacity for dealing with people rather than things, it is women rather than men who are "more accomplished managers of feeling, ... know more about its personal costs... [and] have the job... of creating the emotional tone of social encounters" (p.11, 13). There is therefore, an established link to issues of gender, which is not especially well developed in research into HODs' roles.

### *Gender*

In one New Zealand example that links emotions with gender, Court (1996) explored the expression of anger by women in positions of responsibility in New Zealand schools. She found that the acceptability of this was predicated on gender assumptions. Concepts of gender, however, do not appear to be considered as problematic in some of the research into the role of HODs. For instance, neither Blandford (1997), nor Marland (1971), nor Harris, Jamieson and Russ (1995), nor Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989) explored gender as a factor, although Hargreaves (1998) suggested that both the caring ethic in teaching and ways in which time is organised and perceived may be gendered. Gender also does not feature explicitly in the work of Connelly and Clandinin, yet as Connell, Dowsett, Kessler and Ashenden (1981) and Kenway and Willis (1998) have asserted, it is an important factor in schooling.

Dillabough (1999) considered gender to be highly relevant in positioning men and women in teaching, because it affects relationships in not only classrooms, but also between colleagues in terms of delegated responsibilities.

Hall (1997) went further by combining power, culture and gender as powerful tools with which to examine women's performance as principals. Blackmore (1998) positioned gender as central to her examination of women principals in Australia. Hall's (1997), Blackmore's (1998) and Dillabough's (1999) views are relevant complements to an analysis of HODs' negotiations of constraints and the regulation of their professional lives in terms of gender.

Fontana and Frey (1994) also saw gender as inextricably linked to power and knowledge relationships between participants and a researcher. They suggested that:

...gender filters knowledge; that is, the sex of the interviewer and of the respondent does make a difference, as the interview takes place within the cultural boundaries of a paternalistic social system in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones (p. 369).

Gender, then, is seldom a neutral factor, whether in the professional lives of the HODs, or in the relationship between participants and researcher. Gender is implicated in relationships among HODs, between HODs and SMT staff, as well as HODs and their departmental colleagues, other teaching staff and ancillary support staff. Gender relations and its operation within a school is likely to be an important factor to consider in a thesis centred on using participant HODs.

Gender is also important because English is a subject which is taught by a great many women in New Zealand secondary schools. The number of women English department heads is growing, yet there are also many males in that role. It is still quite common for English departments even in co-educational schools to be primarily staffed with women but led by male HODs. And during 2001, there was at least one girls' secondary school in the country with a male English HOD and at least two boys' secondary schools in New Zealand whose English department head was female. In the latter schools, the gender balance of staff may be reversed, with a greater number of male than female English teachers in the department. Such dynamics may be very important in looking at how HODs work. Both men and women are participants in this research and so gender questions and assumptions are explored. On another level too, power relations come into play. As Middleton (1993) observed, "It is important to bear in mind

that...the kinds of stories that we tell - are brought into being within particular power relations..." (p. 68) and these will exist between a researcher and participants, as well as participants and their school contexts (Bishop, 1996). Gender is therefore implicated in not only HODs' stories, but also in how they are revealed.

Essentially, exploring ways in which HODs negotiated their own and others' emotions has not been evident in research to date and nor has there much evidence of how gender may be implicated. This study is positioned to consider both gender and emotions.

### *Specific relationships*

This factor focuses on ways in which the very people-centred nature of an HOD's job can increase its complexity. Formal and informal relationships can be significant because they may develop as areas of self-interest to be defended against the influence of others. For HODs, this can affect their work in a number of ways. Firstly, the formal organisation of the subject department is one relationship that binds people together. Within that department there may be groupings that may work with or against the department as a whole. Bailey (1986) suggested that people like HODs, "must often work as politicians; taking heed of, trying to use and sometimes to change the dispositions of power and influence...to support...educational purposes" (p.25). While his observation is likely to be fairly accurate as a description of what Ball (1982) would call the micropolitics of a school as it plays out across subject domains, Bailey (1986) nevertheless appears to either ignore a fundamental requirement or take it for granted; HODs need time and opportunity to be persuasive and talk with people. This is difficult if most of their working day is with students rather than staff, making it a dilemma of not only relationships, but also of structure, time, organisation and recognition.

Another relationship factor is identified by Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989). They observed that HODs' effectiveness was compromised if any staff in the department had responsibilities that lay outside of it. These people often have divided loyalties and could be difficult to communicate with because they were stretched in some ways and squeezed by others. For instance, if the principal

teaches a specific class, it will be difficult for him or her to be present at most departmental meetings or planning opportunities since these meetings may conflict with other tasks and appointments that person has. In some cases, this complicating factor of divided loyalties and communication problems can be not only a source of conflict and disunity, but also a source of frustration for both the HOD and the other staff members. There are also issues related to the extent to which an HOD can realistically lead the principal in curriculum and pedagogical matters. The impact of this on an HOD's ability to function well is not widely known.

Communication is important in relationships as Bennett (1995) noted. Ball (1987) suggested that the relationship between an HOD and principal was very important because the head will expect loyalty, efficiency and a focus on whole school policy in return for support. However, an HOD has three other major relationships with whom lines of communication must be kept open. The first is with colleagues in the department plus the department's specific policy interests including lobbying for resources, new initiatives, and timetable preferences. These concerns also serve to make the HOD's role political by needing to present a united departmental front. Secondly, an HOD has wider relationships with other colleagues in a school, including other HODs who have both shared problems and competing interests, as well as support staff like the caretaker or those in the office, or library. This links relationships closely with complexity and dilemmas and implicates the importance of the time needed to carry out such communications. The third relationship is with students. This relationship is often underestimated, even though an HOD spends most of the day with students and must serve their needs and be an effective professional role model through those practices. What this looks like in practice and what it means for an HOD negotiating such complexity, has not been effectively demonstrated in current literature.

HODs also need to nurture their beginning teachers. The support such teachers receive can be pivotal in them continuing a career as teachers. Beginning teachers may start their teaching careers with a great deal of self-doubt, especially if they are confronted with classes containing unruly or unco-operative students who can seriously test anyone's resolve and skills. HODs not only need

to bolster beginning teachers' self-confidence, but also need to help develop the kind of teacher-expertise that Ohde and Murphy (1993) discussed when they compared novice with expert practice in relation to problem-solving. If HODs spend most of their school day teaching, their ability to offer specific advice and guidance to novices is severely limited. Adding to the range of options and strategies a new teacher may acquire, so that they have choices to apply to specific situations, may take longer than necessary because of this lack of mentoring time. This range of options and strategies could be likened to a quiver of arrows. The more arrows there are, the more options an owner of a bow has for hitting a target and getting it right. This quiver and arrow metaphor is extended in a later chapter.

Overall, HODs first and foremost work closely with people rather than things. Marland (1971) for instance, observed that, "people are the first call on a department head's time" (p. 26). He was at pains to point out how necessary it is for an HOD to be accessible to other members of a department in break times, effectively cutting out opportunities for an HOD to have rest and respite in a school day. This fullness in an HOD's day and its effects may be significant in this research and in future studies.

Finally, Marland (1971) also identified a two-way responsibility of the HOD: to think of the school as a whole, and think of the teachers in the department as individuals within a single unit (Ball, 1987; Bennett, 1995). These requirements are potentially conflicting, leading Marland to observe that a principal's job can be the art of the possible, while an HOD's may be the art of the impossible. He also said that the work:

of the larger school depends above all on the grasp of their roles by the heads of department, their ability to create an appropriate departmental environment for the teachers, and their skill in encouraging an atmosphere in which ideas are drawn out, fostered and developed...All the trivia of school life will affect every decision the head of department makes (Marland, 1971, pp.4 & 6).

## Research questions

This report establishes that there are gaps in the literature on HODs which principally relate to context and relationships. Therefore, the key focus in this research will be to examine the questions noted at the end of Chapter One:

What are the professional lives of English HODs like?

What are some key barriers affecting their ability to be effective HODs?

What are some key motivations for these HODs?

How can I effectively represent their professional lives?

In order to represent HODs' professional lives by telling stories of experience in a fictionalised way, it is possible such a method will more fully acknowledge the key roles they have in schools and demonstrate what their daily professional lives consist of. This is what a specific chapter in this research report attempts. As Thomas (1995) observed, teachers' narratives:

offer the possibility of an alternative set of stories about teaching and the education system. They are redressive with disclosures from the classroom and staffroom as counterweights to those deriving from positions of power and policy making (pp. 15-16).

It is possible, then, that these same voices and the stories in this report will provide compelling details much harder to resist and ignore because the teachers, their situations and their emotions will remain in an attempt to redress the balance by using forms more usually associated with short story writers and novelists. What has been reported about research into middle management in secondary schools is generally focused on what constitutes effective departments or department heads. Little centres on what the daily life of HODs means to the people experiencing it, or how relationships, school context, gender, complexity and tensions affect how the role is lived. As Griffiths (1997) observed:

A real school isn't full of genderless, raceless or classless persons living *either private or public lives* [author's italics]. It is full of people trying to negotiate the relationship between

them in a situation where the two persistently overlap...  
(p.195).

## Conclusion

Given the focus of the research literature and its gaps and omissions, an investigation of HODs needs to consider some of the realities of HODs' lives: the conflicts and dilemmas, gender, relationships and the emotions of leadership. Codd (1999), for instance, explained that a product of the economic rationalism that accompanied New Zealand's educational reforms from 1989 was the development of a culture of distrust in schools where "people are valued only for what they produce....[This culture] values efficiency, effectiveness and control; it devalues interpersonal trust" (p.47). In such a climate, it is no wonder that heads of department are sometimes seen as middle managers who are the neck of a funnel, helping to channel policies and procedures downward to a point at which they are inserted in practices at the classroom level (Bennett, 1995). A problem with this view about HODs however, is that most HODs are also classroom practitioners, who may find it difficult to reconcile top-down expectations with their devotion to students and learning (Glover *et al.*, 1998). It is important that effects of such complexity and dilemmas are described because of Marland's (1971) contention that HODs are responsible for the creating spaces in which a subject "can flourish" (p. 3) and in which students' needs can best be met.

HODs principally work with people in specific contexts, where both formal and informal relationships develop (Bailey, 1986). Negotiating tensions, pleasures, emotions, complexities and conundrums are part of what happens when these groupings of people connect. The highly people-centred nature of the work of HODs therefore requires a qualitative methodological framework to underpin this research undertaking. Narrative enquiry and narrative products were also important in finding a way to represent emotions, complexity and relationships as revealed by the participant HODs. The next chapter discusses those methodological concerns.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter presents appropriate principles, processes, and issues underpinning this thesis. Methodological approaches are outlined and the centrality of narrative to this project is also explained in some detail. An explanation of the historical development of qualitative research begins this chapter.

### A short history of qualitative research

In order to understand the role of qualitative research in general, and narrative in particular in this thesis, it is important to firstly consider the background to qualitative research. This section therefore broadly outlines the development of this research field, emerging from its early dependence on scientific paradigms to forging its own place in social science research. It then leads to the place of narrative for this research project.

The 'standard' view of research has traditionally related to scientific endeavours and has been most usually allied with the term positivism. Positivism focused attention on predictability, causality (in terms of how something behaves), and the development of general laws that explained the known world. Within the positivist realm, two sources of knowledge appear to matter: logical reasoning and empirical experience (*The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, [online] 2001). A positivist scientist aimed for tight control over methods, data and findings in order to identify measurable entities. Numbers, tables, means and standard deviations as well as other mathematical formulae have been hallmarks of this kind of research reporting. How much and how often were also important measures. Richardson (1997) suggested that such science was given to "the belief that its words were objective, precise, unambiguous, noncontextual, nonmetaphoric" (p. 16). To some extent, it appears that the idea that 'what-you-see-is-what-you-get' offered a way of seeing the world as tidy, orderly, quantifiable and relative. In terms of this research project, which involves investigating HODs in different environments and with different



ways of looking at their experiences, this kind of approach was likely to be unhelpful, since the social world seemed to be excluded. House's (1991) views helped confirm this.

House (1991) argued that when ideas about how to chart the physical world were applied to the social world, this tidy way of operating was likely to become unstuck, opening the gates to both criticisms of the basis upon which such traditional research rested, and other ways of approaching research and the representation of ideas from it. He also observed that researchers who criticised the old order interpreted positivism as "confusing the real world with our sense impressions of it, ... by pretending that what we cannot observe doesn't exist or doesn't make any difference" (p. 3). In other words, he suggested that traditional scientists saw the world as "actually equal to what we observe" (p. 3), effectively ignoring human qualities like emotions, beliefs, attitudes and values and the part they play in social life. To some extent then, this positivist research paradigm also understood language as being the face of fact; that words meant what someone said they meant with no metaphorical or ambiguity overload, a view qualitative researchers like Richardson (1997) have strenuously objected to. Therefore, in a project designed to look at how a small group of HODs worked and intersected with others and interpreted their own professional lives, this methodological approach would be limiting. I had to look elsewhere.

When the accepted traditional research principles and methods applied to the physical world were applied to humans and conceptions of the social world, it was soon clear that the two worlds would not be instantly compatible, partly for the following reasons. As human subjects, we are intentional, social and inter-dependent, more responsive to our environments and less predictable than physical objects tend to be (House, 1991). What is applied in one social context, for instance, is less likely to be replicated the same way in another, defying one of the bases traditional research operated under, that of the laboratory-controlled environment. Researchers who focused their attention on human subjects in social settings were essentially denied the "decisive test situations" (House, 1991, p. 7) that physical science experiments used to gauge the veracity of fundamental hypotheses. What had suited experiments in the physical world but were found wanting in the social world, needed re-examination. This re-examination of how

to conduct research for social purposes occurred because the realm of the human is not sealed and stable; it is open, changeable and evolutionary. While experiments in closed systems can be replicated with certainty in similar systems, those rules of engagement seldom apply to humans, for people tend to be neither compliant nor passive because our own views and practices influence our behaviour and attitudes in recursive ways.

A postpositivist paradigm developed as experiments with more fitting ways to represent the social world began to take shape. The term 'postpositivist' was used to denote the ferment over what was considered appropriate within the bounds of human science, as Kuhn (1970) demonstrated. Ignoring a sense of human agency would not do in this particular research project, since understanding particular people (HODs) in particular social situations (in schools) was central to this work, so this newer development looked more promising for my research endeavour.

Educational leadership and change researchers like Fullan (1982; 1993) for instance, were able to describe ways in which teachers undergoing change developed their own processes and made their own meanings in order to understand what was required. This replaced the acceptance of someone else's view of how a project should be implemented, defying what still often exists as a rather technicist view of education and educational change. Findings such as Fullan's made it that much more difficult for researchers to continue to apply traditional scientific processes to investigations into human organisation, particularly as it related to educational settings. As Lather (1992), a poststructuralist, pointed out, educational inquiry was soon not only a "much contested cultural space... [but also became] increasingly construed as a value-constituted and value-constituting enterprise" (p. 5).

Another criticism of traditional scientific research was the way in which scientists seemed to believe in the power of dispassionate objectivity, distance and purity; that not only could they as researchers remain outside of and separate from the data, but that they could also ensure the 'facts' they came up with would be untainted by personal bias or contamination of the scene. This goal of precision sometimes implied the idea that researchers were privileged as expert for they sought to apply their findings to universal situations. At the same

time, many quantitative methods failed to acknowledge or heed the meanings people made of their own circumstances and experiences. Richardson (1997) identified this "single, unambiguous voice" as "a major pretension of science" (p. 15). And certainly the work of Fullan (1982), Goodson (1991) and Hargreaves (1994) showed the inappropriateness of such a position when applied to education, especially when their work demonstrated the active nature of teachers in coping with change and meaning-making processes. Codd (1999) pointed out how unhelpful the single unambiguous voice has been in educational reforms in New Zealand where notions of accountability and a culture of distrust have developed in some institutions. The single unambiguous voice idea, it can be argued, disenfranchised some teachers by ignoring their sense of ownership, identity and agency.

One of my concerns about the literature on HODs is the seeming disenfranchisement of HODs' own voices and experiences as researchers' voices were foregrounded in research texts. My discomfort with this sort of situation was not in isolation. Among others, Richardson (1997) had become concerned about the privileging of the voice of the researcher or 'expert'. There was the growing sense that what traditional researchers who sought out universal truths did, was constitute that which did not readily fit, as 'Other'. Because of the positivist and postpositivist faith in the universal, as if the human world could replicate the certainties of the physical world, researchers who ascribed to that view tended to aim for 'best fit' so that results could conform to what was known. In the growing multiplicity of those who clamoured to be heard, this identification of 'best fit', 'normal' and, 'Other' was disputed. A number of researchers, particularly feminists, took issue with ideas based on postpositivist certainties for they saw them as issues of power, privilege and subjectivity (Fine, 1998; Lather, 1992; Oakley, 1981). These researchers had identified gender as a basic organising principle that shaped how people lived and so gender could no longer be ignored so readily. Thus with this rupture, and others over time that sought to reclaim race and class for instance, new paradigms that fitted within the qualitative arena evolved, such as the interpretive paradigm and these looked at the social world through different lenses (Bishop, 1996).

### *The interpretive paradigm*

The interpretive paradigm, which developed from concerns such as those outlined earlier, contains a wide variety of research lenses. This paradigm basically suggests that people are actors in their own lives, operating with free will and independently. While fundamental differences are discernible between different kinds of interpretive research (for example, hermeneutics, phenomenology and constructivism), a focus on people's own meaning-making is central to them all. Hermeneutics grounds the meaning of texts in the intentions and histories of their authors and/or in their relevance for readers (Mallery, Hurwitz, & Duffy, [online], 1987). Phenomenology on the other hand, considered the idea that people's consciousness and meaning-making cannot be separated from their social existence (Centre for Advanced Research in Phenomenology [online], 2000) on people's abilities to create meaning for themselves. Constructivism instead emphasises not only the processes by which people create and develop their ideas, but also the impact of culture (Hein [online], 1996).

It can be argued that each of these particular theoretical positions adds a particular flavour to ways in which the interpretive paradigm can be understood. And, as ideas about knowledge creation zeroed in on human agency, the notion of subjectivity (which generally relates to the idea that an individual's reactions and statements are always predicated on prior knowledge, their mental state and their experience – see *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, [online] 2001) became pivotal to such research endeavours. Through interpretive lenses, various theories, ideas, points of view and perspectives about how people operate as social beings opened up myriad ways of interpretation. This interpretive lens seemed to be much more in tune with my research project.

The interpretive paradigm also had some gaps however, and critics began to find them. One notable criticism was that such investigations tended to continue to generalise from the particular (Markula, Grant & Denison, 2001). Critics also felt that interpretive theorists assumed that people were free to exercise their will and create their own meanings, a position asserted by Grumet (1991). Those who argued against this mode instead saw people as being bound by social, political, economic and cultural forces at work. These forces in turn,

would affect what and how people think and behave. Power relations, then, became a central field of inquiry, leading to the development of the critical paradigm in which a number of theoretical traditions have been subsumed by the overall idea that people are ideologically bound by discourses that surround them and of which they are part (Sparkes, 1992).

In an educational sense, echoes of the traditional view where the social world could fit ideas about the physical world appeared to occur when educational administration in New Zealand was overhauled from 1989. The assumptions that this process would cause no disruptions to teaching and learning, hark back to viewing change processes as objective, external and clean, instead of more like Fullan's (1993) descriptions of messy, recursive, disruptive and deeply personal processes. The hearts and minds of teachers were ignored in favour of a technicist and managerial view of the teaching world, as has been mentioned earlier (Codd, 1990, 1999).

Broadly speaking then, qualitative research practices developed in response to the growing unease with traditional views of what constituted research and the place of the researcher within it. While positivists sought to predict the world, interpretive theorists sought to understand it, while critical theorists targeted emancipation as a goal.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994), in defining qualitative research as that which used a range of methods involving "an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p. 2), implied that context was an important factor while making sense of, or interpreting meanings people make of the phenomena they experienced. Context "is not the scene of the quantitative researcher, [but it] is vital for qualitative ones" (email from J. Dickison, 7/11/95, cited in Middleton, 1996). And, as Richardson (1997) put it when she discussed the role of narrative in qualitative endeavours, "the narrative mode is contextually embedded and looks for particular connections between particular events" (p. 109). Context, then, is centrally important in qualitative research, especially if a basic premise is to advocate that as humans, we create knowledge "through a subjective meaning-making process" (Markula, *et al.*, 2001, p. 251).

Mills (1959) identified the relationship between people and environments as critical to understanding the social world, while Foucault (1977) later

identified ways in which the external social world influenced the body of an individual, highlighting Mill's (1959) assumptions about the sociological imagination and how it operated on a personal level. Researchers too, began to be more mindful of their own complicity in their undertakings and sought to make those elements more explicit (Richardson, 1997). Context, in terms of how HODs experience their professional lives in their schools, is certainly important in this study and so it appeared that I was getting even closer to finding a way of representing the professional lives that the HODs described, as well as dealing with my own positions in the research.

These ideas suggest a need to also outline another ontological (that is, the exploration of questions about the nature of knowledge) framework to this research, that is, the role language plays and how it can be implicated in this research.

### *The role of language in narrative research projects*

One way of exploring the role of language is to consider how written texts were once viewed. Knowledge and meaning was believed to reside in a text, immune to any influences and external to human life (Dahlin & Regmi, 2000). The Bible for instance, is a case in point. In some quarters, it appears to have been treated by some groups as if it contained absolute truth and knowledge. Some 20<sup>th</sup> Century religious groups seem to have applied this view, sometimes in very narrow ways that have been devastating for some adherents; the Jonestown Massacre in Guyana, or Waco in Texas may be extreme examples of this. In one sense, interpreting texts like the Bible as absolute 'truth' suggests that there is an ordered, set and finite world beyond the scope of people, in which human fates are ordained and pre-set.

These scenarios suggest a belief that the written word in such texts is inviolate. Within such a framework, there appears to be little examination of whether or not the elements surrounding the writing of the text may have any impact, either on how it is read or what shaped the text in the first place. At the same time, consideration of writers' (of texts like the Bible) attitudes and beliefs and the social contexts relevant to the time of writing tended to be omitted from

questions and understandings about knowledge and truth (Dahlin & Regmi, 2000). While this generally describes a Western idea about knowledge, traditional Eastern Confucian cultures understood knowledge as something to be conserved, reproduced and handed down (Dahlin & Regmi, 2000). While both orientations seem to privilege knowledge as fixed and separate from and external to people's experiences, they also appear to reify knowledge as if it could be autonomous and a complete representation of meaning, constituting a particular world view. And, because such views of knowledge seemed to imply that knowledge was fixed, then it follows that language, the means by which knowledge is usually transmitted, was seen as a durable entity operating neutrally and objectively.

This had a continuing effect. From about the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, there was a separation of the literary and the scientific, which Richardson (1997) explained thus:

rhetoric, fiction, and subjectivity were located in 'literature' a new historical construction, aesthetically pleasing but scientifically ridiculed. Literature was denied truth value because it 'invented' reality rather than observing it (p. 15).

What was also problematic for scientists of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was the uncomfortable realisation that in literature, language was metaphoric and multivocal and readers could take their own meanings from it. Science, on the other hand, was deliberately written in plain styles so that Reason could prevail and prevent the triggering of emotions (Richardson, 1997). This separation of the poetic from the scientific intensified to the point where, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, social science research was expected to "cleanse itself of everyday language" (Richardson, 1997, p. 16). As noted earlier, this led to the rise of positivist research paradigms in which objectivity was hugely important. What scientists who subscribed to that paradigm missed in Richardson's (1997) view, was that regardless of the admonition to cleanse language, scientific texts were often riddled with the very stuff they sought to expunge – that is, literary and rhetorical devices. At the same time, the efforts to expunge everyday language resulted in texts that were virtually unreadable by those outside the scientific community, again privileging both access and particular kinds of knowledge.

Once those practices could be acknowledged, Richardson believed, “we no longer need to give up our humanity for the illusion of objective knowledge” (1997, p. 16). When language became suspect, so too did some research practices (leading to the development of the interpretive paradigm) and forms of academic writing. This development was important to this research; objectivity of the kind required by positivist approaches was likely to be difficult and writing a readable text for an audience wider than a research community was something I was striving to do. Working within the positivist paradigm for this project could therefore be counter-productive.

Richardson’s (1997) views summarise what became particularly noticeable during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially in its latter stages; that is, the questioning of beliefs and assumptions about the inviolability of language and knowledge. As researchers investigated and tried various ways of researching and reporting on their studies, poststructuralism, growing from investigations into literary and film criticism, considered the role of language, the positioning of audiences and the role of an audience/reader in creating meaning from a text (Ellsworth, 1997). Put simply, language came to be understood as a vehicle for expressing versions of an experience rather than defining the experience itself. Language could now be understood differently: that it separated us from experience. The actions of readers/audiences were also examined in terms of their ability to create knowledge. This meant that any evocation of an experience via language could only ever partially represent it. No longer was there a single answer or expert opinion; the notion of partial knowledge at last became widely accepted as more appropriate to understanding human endeavour (Ellsworth, 1997).

Language therefore came to be seen as slippery and inconstant, unable to prevent others making meanings different from that which a writer intended (Ellsworth, 1997). This shift of language from a central position of being about knowledge *per se*, to a position which acknowledged the malleable and shifting features of itself, related to emerging views about the nature of power and the ability of individuals to construct meanings in their lives. At the same time, there was the belief that this meaning-making occurred even as external forces operated to moderate their meanings and beliefs (Denzin, 1997; Ellsworth, 1997;



Richardson, 1997). Understanding that language no longer fixed and made immutable knowing and believing, had an impact on the ways research was conducted and ways its products began to be considered. Alternative forms of writing research reports became more acceptable, although the notion of what constituted validity then came into question.

Poststructuralists, who linked ideas about power, social context and subjectivity, put language at the hub of their interest. This view was succinctly summarised by Richardson (1997) as the “central postmodern realisation: [that] all knowledge is constructed” (p. 26). In part, when we consider the changes to the words used to label the role of HOD in the *New Zealand Education Gazette* over the last ten years, we can see this principle in action as perceptions about the role changed along with its naming. Language could no longer be viewed as a neutral entity in many research endeavours.

Along with the acknowledgement of subjectivity and the idea that all knowledge was constructed, came a growing acceptability of the first person active rather than the third person passive in research reports. This identification of language as intimately implicated with ideas about knowledge and subjectivity, began a search by researchers who explored ways of representing experiences that more fully accommodated wider concerns about power, knowledge, subjectivity and the role of the researcher (Richardson, 2001b). At the same time, the role of narrative was reviewed in the light of reconsiderations of realist novels and investigative journalism (Denzin, 1997; Gerard, 1996). No longer was narrative purely the preserve of literature; researchers like Richardson (1997) instead asserted that “narrative is quintessential to the understanding and communication of the sociological” (p. 27), regardless of the form of the final text.

With these developments, an epistemological change occurred which opened the door to Denzin’s (1997) and Lincoln and Denzin’s (1998) discussions of the Fifth Moment – the twin crises of representation and legitimation. Both of these are referred to in more detail in the next chapter, as they affect the processes used to analyse data and develop this report, but a short introduction to both is relevant here. Briefly, the crisis of representation refers to the admission by qualitative researchers that they could no longer directly capture

lived experience, so that a “direct link between experience and text [became] problematic” (Denzin, 1997, p. 3). This crisis also implied a number of questions about who subjects are, their access to their own experiences and their authenticity and accuracy, plus questions about the relative quality of representations of experiences. As Richardson (1997) put it, the crisis in representation reflected “uncertainty about what constitutes adequate depiction of social reality” (p. 13) and this implicates the role of language in constructing knowledge. Denzin’s (1997; 1999a) descriptions of the five moments in the development of qualitative research and narrative in particular, highlighted how researchers began to examine their own complicity in the research process and how they were to construct their findings.

Delamont, Coffey and Atkinson (2000) however, take issue with Denzin’s (1997) Five Moments model, suggesting that it is limiting and skewed by not only a focus on mainly American research, but also a too neat packaging of the groupings and historical periods. They suggest that newer forms of research co-exist with, rather than supplant, older, traditional forms. To be fair to Denzin (1997), he also notes that there can be a simultaneous co-existence of various forms and practices, but Delamont *et al.*, (2000) warn of the myth-making potential of such descriptions. They also proposed that many of the tensions described in the five moments are recurrent and probably existed even in positivist/traditional era. They therefore suggest that the five moments argument stresses discontinuities and disjunctures rather than continuities, since realist and traditional forms still exist and flourish. This emphasis on moments, they contend, could unduly mask that co-existence.

Notwithstanding that caution, what Denzin (1997) described is still a useful way of mapping the territory that implicates processes of research and language and opens research up to narrative forms. I began to see great possibilities for my own research: I could use first person, I could position myself and I could use more creative and evocative language than had been usual in research reports. I now needed to find a form in which to represent the findings from the research. And this form needed to have validity.

Denzin (1997) suggested that some researchers created greater distances between them and postpositivist views about textual authority and validity. By

“unmasking ... validity-as-authority” (Lincoln & Denzin, 1998, p. 415) the heart of the matter is exposed – that “values and politics” are at the core of research endeavours, not “objective epistemology” (p. 415). Such an understanding Lincoln and Denzin (1998) noted, led poststructural social science projects to a different commitment centred on understanding “how power and ideology operate through systems of discourse” (Lincoln & Denzin, 1998, p.415) and intersect with race, class and gender to shape and be shaped by, political situations and conditions. These considerations also affected how I approached not only the research process, but also the forms I settled on to represent participants’ experiences as truthfully as I could. These concerns had been anticipated, for a “serious rethinking of terms like validity, generalisability and reliability” (Denzin, 1997, p. 3) had already occurred, and this had been called the crisis of legitimation. In other words, ideas about a text’s authority were called into question, particularly as they related to research projects involving race, ethnicity, gender and culture and those labelled as essentially colonising projects. The dual crises of representation and legitimation led researchers like Bishop (1996) to apply this understanding to kura kaupapa Maaori research practices in New Zealand, highlighting cultural and ethnic/racial multiplicity as he researched his own heritage. In this process, he sought information from his extended family, but his relatives were not about to divulge family history until Bishop established his credentials and allowed them to collaborate over the processes and products of his research.

As ideas about language and views of what constitutes knowledge and legitimacy converged, researchers also began experimenting with different textual forms to represent research participants’ experiences. Thus there developed a multiplicity of texts and experiments that encompassed performances, art works and poetry as well as more sedate and conventional forms of writing (Denzin, 1997; Richardson, 1997). Denzin also suggested that, “the qualitative research act can no longer be viewed from within a neutral or objective positivist perspective. Class, race, gender, and ethnicity shape the process of inquiry, thereby making research a multicultural process” (1997, p. 19), and this is shown both in the wide varieties of research projects that now exist, and the kinds of ways that such research is made accessible to others

(Bruce, 2001; Kamler, 2001). Thus for some researchers, the ability to evoke an experience was what mattered (Bruce, 2001; Denison, 1996; Richardson, 1997).

Aiming for verisimilitude rather than a universal truth signalled the importance of narrative as a tool of qualitative researchers. The first person ("I") began to be more common in research reports, as were experiments with more artistic and organic forms of analysis. These were felt to more closely represent experience than traditional texts. Richardson (1994; 1996; 1997; 1999; 2001b) for instance, critiqued the realist sense that language captures reality, lending more credence to the epistemological shifts in understanding how knowledge is made and its origins. Lincoln and Denzin (1998) suggested that there is "no such thing as unadulterated truth" (p. 412) and that the positions, beliefs and attitudes of an author inevitably creep into a text. Lincoln and Denzin (1998) also noted that it is a "false assumption" to believe it "possible to write a text that does not bear traces of its author" (p. 413) and this view is consistently supported by Richardson's (1994; 1996; 1997; 2001a; 2001b) work. These were important considerations as I searched for ways of expressing the experiences of the participant HODs, while knowing that I was unlikely to be able to exclude myself. Again, precedence helped.

In terms of further considering the role of language, a view that emerged over the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century suggested that knowledge is created by individuals and that social mores, principles and ideas are constructed through the intersections of individuals and their understandings via language (Ellsworth, 1997; Heylighen, [online] 1993). Language came to be seen as capable of, paradoxically, both defining ideas, perceptions and meanings and also increasing the chances of ambiguity and slipperiness. Through this perspective about language, meaning came to be understood as resting with how readers or viewers interpreted texts based on their own prior knowledge and understandings, rather than with any predetermined meaning of a text (Ellsworth, 1997). In some ways, this positioning of the reader or viewer as the creator of meaning could be interpreted as privileging and centralising individuals rather than groups. Also to some extent, this interpretation eschews relationships between a person and specific contexts or social structures which may impinge in a variety of ways on an individual's self-view and sense of

control over thoughts and actions (Mills, 1959). Mills (1959) warned that too much of a focus on individuals prevents a consideration of their position in a wider sphere, leading to isolation where:

...troubles have been taken too much on their own level...[and] the structural conditions under which they might be realised have been neither worked out nor confronted... (p. 129).

While this idea implicates notions of power, authority and subjectivity, it might also suggest that we are continually subject to, and agents of, a variety of discourses which both position us and within which we position ourselves. What is important is to acknowledge such duality and use it to advantage, rather than consider it a deficiency. In this research project, using three participants to explore the lives of HODs was therefore one way of counteracting a focus on a single individual, since collective experiences could better demonstrate the wider forces at work.

Lincoln and Denzin (1998) also suggested that verisimilitude as a concept grew in importance as a counterbalance to traditional views of validity. By that, they meant the ability of a text to “reproduce (simulate) and map the real” (p. 416). In other words, a text’s verisimilitude rested on its ability to adhere to certain textual rules of form plus its ability to evoke truth. Verisimilitude therefore refers to a “text’s relationship to reality” (p. 416). As Denzin (1997) and Lincoln and Denzin (1998) noted, verisimilitude can be challenged and truth does not necessarily follow even when verisimilitude is established. What is needed, they suggested, is plurality – a multitude of voices and experiences – which may then lead to a deeper understanding of social situations and conditions, including educational ones. One way of considering this, for instance, is to apply it to educational settings. These places are characterised by people (both adults and students) being brought together in one place because of a focus on teaching and learning in particular, and social cohesion in general. At work are social rules and cultural rituals peculiar to each institution within a broader framework of social, economic and political expectations about its purpose. These are therefore,

sites ripe for investigations that centre on the social world and my project zeroes in on specific examples of experience within such institutions.

Some researchers consider the relationship between a researcher and participants. They assume that intersubjectivity exists between the two during both the collection of data and the process of creating interpretations (Olesen, 1994). Many feminist researchers, but not exclusively, are bothered by issues that encompass voice and authority, which returns to ideas about power and knowledge and focuses on mechanisms through which participants' meanings and ideas are both heard and represented (Lather, 1991, 1992; Oakley, 1981; Richardson, 1994, 1997). Researchers operating within qualitative parameters were therefore concerned with representing the world from the point of view of interacting individuals, including the researcher. Because this project not only focuses on representing what participants say about their professional lives as HODs but also representing my own professional life as an HOD, it also implicates my own prior knowledge and experiences and therefore fits within a qualitative paradigm in general and a narrative one in particular.

Narrative analysis grew out of the focus on language, representation, legitimation, and relationships between the researcher and the researched, and this appealed for my particular project. It is supported by observations such as those by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), who suggested that the qualitative field not only encompassed a range of methods that involved "an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (p. 2), but that context was also implicated as an important factor. Issues surrounding the relationship between researcher and participants could not be ignored. This specific point is picked up in more detail later in this chapter and the next. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) also pointed out that meanings people make of the phenomena they experience is a central focus of research that fits within the parameters of qualitative research, and my work, focusing on what HODs had to say about their own experiences, appeared to fulfil this criteria. The critical paradigm focus on ideology and its workings on both the social and individual body, intensified the focus on the ways in which individuals are affected by social, economic, political and cultural forces. This affected interpretive studies because more localised and personal ways of interpreting the social world developed. This leads us now to a specific focus on

narrative – its relationship to realist fiction and its particular place in this research.

### *Narrative and realist fiction*

Laws and Davies (2000) suggested that some qualitative research is centrally concerned with common narratives – “the way people use the socially available repertoire of storylines to tie elements of their existence together into ‘meaningful’ continuities” (p. 206). Such issues highlight possible contradictions inherent in any subsequent textual forms researchers may use to discuss either processes or findings of research. As a result, a number of researchers have experimented with a multitude of textual forms that include poetry, dance, dramatic readings or artwork, thus blurring boundaries between the labels of ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’, ‘science’ and ‘art’, making it easier for qualitative researchers to experiment with various textual forms, including narrative ones (Bochner & Ellis, 1996; Bruce, 2001; Clough, 1999; Denison, 1996; Richardson, 1997, 2001b).

Richardson (1997) for instance, intimated that narrative is “the primary way through which humans organise their experiences into temporally meaningful episodes” (p. 27), demonstrating how people can be seen to exist in specific contexts and times in a comprehensible and rich way. She also suggested that “narrative is everywhere” (p. 27) and not just in writing. Diverse texts like cinema, dance, comic strips, Maaori carvings, and paintings all tell stories. Significantly, narrative is also a way in which people connect themselves and their stories to others and specific contexts. In other words, “connections between ... events [and people] constitute meaning” (Richardson, 1997, p. 28). This idea of causality is understood as “narrative reasoning” (Richardson, 1997, p. 28), one of two basic ways humans think and understand. Tied to this, for we experience events in temporal spaces, is how we experience time, which is experienced as “extended awareness of the past and the future within the present” (Richardson, 1997, p. 29). E. M. Forster’s concept of the difference between story and plot is relevant here, and Richardson (1997, p. 28) uses it to explain how ‘why’ is addressed, rather than what: the idea that ‘this happened, then this happened and this happened because that did’. It reinforces a relationship between chronology and causality.

Denzin (1997) described ways in which narrative forms began to creep into other forms of writing, blurring genres and messing up what had previously been seen as tidy distinctions between fiction and nonfiction. To make this point, Denzin described shifts in journalism noting how investigative journalists began using composite characters in their texts to protect their sources, evoke situations, social issues and contexts and to make a reader's experience a meaningful and powerful one. It was also common for these journalists to use dialogue that approximated real speech in order to intensify a reader's engagement with the described experience and lend credence to a sense of verisimilitude. Gerard (1996) too, described what he called *creative nonfiction* in explaining investigative journalism that crossed boundaries between objective reporting and authorial intervention. Richardson (2001b) suggested that this practice of using "... evocative forms reveals the rhetoric and underlying labor of the production as well as social science's potential as human endeavour because evocative writing touches us where we live, in our bodies" (p. 11). At the same time, Denzin (1997) demonstrated how contentious this practice was, since it wasn't long before attitudes and beliefs about truth, authority, reality and fact came into conflict in public trials that confronted whether narrative journalistic practices centred on what was truth or fiction. It is possible too, that such public airings of difference tested the notion as to whether there was the possibility of objective and whole truth, territory that traditional scientists had held tightly to.

Novelists too, Denzin (1997) and Richardson (1997) contended, had a long tradition of realist fiction, a tradition that included authors such as Samuel Richardson, Charles Dickens, E. L. Doctorow, Thomas Hardy, Thomas Wolfe and George Eliot. This suggests that a precedent already existed for blurring ideas about what constituted truth, reality and fiction. Dickens for instance, created detailed descriptions of life on the margins of London society, making it difficult for readers to escape the acknowledgement of the lives he evoked, however fictionally presented. The New Zealand writer Janet Frame's late 20<sup>th</sup> century autobiographical trilogy certainly blurred boundaries between fact and fiction for she used fictional tools to evoke and represent her experiences. This trilogy stands in marked contrast to Michael King's (2000) more recent biography of her,



*Wrestling with the Angels*, which follows a more traditional academic and literary style.

The realist fiction movement grew from a desire, according to Richardson (1997), to reclaim some status in relation to scientific writing, because by the close of the eighteenth century, this objective form of writing had “dominated both science and fiction writing” (p. 90). In order to claim some status for itself, literature had taken on the task of trying to make literature part of science, via the path of naturalism. The existence of a realist fiction tradition therefore made it easier for writers in other genres and disciplines to experiment with the same techniques that had made the realist novelists’ works so powerful, such as conflict, dramatic tension, metaphor, descriptive detail, dialogue, and strongly drawn social settings (Denzin, 1997; Richardson, 1997). At the same time, ethnographic writers attempted to set themselves apart from literary writing by using a distant third person narrator, which lent an air of authenticity and authority to their endeavours (Richardson, 1997). To some extent, this use of an omniscient narrator reflected the scientific notion of a dispassionate expert.

As postmodern views of language and experience and subjectivity began to be discussed, the qualitative climate changed. Those who wanted to air postmodern issues, principally about authority, representation or, as Richardson (1997) put it, the “ideology of doubt” (p. 91) now had scope to do so. In other words, what used to hold true, or seem to be real, no longer applied. As Denzin (1997) said, “A text’s verisimilitude is given in its ability to reproduce and deconstruct the reproductions and simulations that structure the real” (p. 13).

This therefore leads directly to a discussion about the place of narrative in this study.

## **Narrative and its place in the thesis**

Richardson (1997) suggested that “how we write raises two metawriting issues: guiding metaphor and narrative voice” (p. 17). The first issue, she contended, centres on the story that gets told and the language used to tell it. The second

issue focuses on narrative voice – who tells the story. Traditional scientific writing, she contends, aimed to keep separate a researcher’s story and participants’. This implied that “the researcher’s voice is the authoritative one, a voice that stands *above* the rest... and by objectifying ourselves out of existence, we void our experiences. We separate our humanity from our work” (Richardson, 1997, pp. 18-19, author’s italics). To me, these were clearly important issues and, as preparation for this doctoral research evolved, it was imperative to consider them.

My initial, tentative idea of individually negotiated stories about each HOD using ideas from Clandinin and Connelly (2000) quickly became untenable in practice and there were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, it was easy to predict that the participant HODs were intensely busy, given that others who declined to take part, cited this as a reason; the literature had also made that probability clear, as well as my own experiences. Participants were therefore unlikely to have room in their lives for painstaking co-operative story development, where they were in charge of deciding the focus and detail as is intimated in Clandinin and Connelly’s (1995a; 1995b; 2000) work.

Secondly, I could predict concerns participants might raise about the sensitive nature of their revelations in the first interview and the probability that they would not want those delicate experiences aired publicly. Thirdly, the HODs were likely to feel vulnerable as a result of their disclosures, which might make them question their role as participants, and question my trustworthiness as a researcher. Lastly, I too, because of my own background as an HOD, would, in all probability, be drawn into sensitive disclosure because the HODs would want to know about my experiences, and I had to be aware of possible effects they might have as these could be woven into subsequent texts. I was therefore committed to finding a way of doing a number things: keeping people and relationships firmly in the story; showing how complexity operated in the HODs’ professional lives; keeping faith with the verisimilitude of the experience of being an HOD; and being sensitive to issues of voice and audience.

In qualitative research terms, ‘narrative’ often focuses on the biographical and personal, revealing real experience. Denzin and Lincoln (1994), as had been noted, suggested that qualitative research used a range of methods implicating

context as an important factor. It also considered issues about the relationship between researcher and participants. This was important for me since a central focus of this research is to consider the relationship between what participants and I have experienced as HODs, and how those experiences fit into a wider context.

In this particular research, I intended working with participants to both explore their experiences as English heads of department in New Zealand secondary schools and to represent these experiences through an on-going collection of data and dialogue about the products developed from it. This was to be done through interpreting HODs' explication and understanding of their own experiences within the specific contexts of their schools, which Grumet (1991) suggested constituted a phenomenological approach because it considered participants' meaning-making about their professional lives. While that may have been partially true, my intention was to broaden specific meaning-making by looking beyond individuals' experiences. This meant developing a narrative that combined experiences rather than isolating and separating them. I wanted a "structure within which the participants and I [could] participate with the meanings of our lives, and in doing so, ... make them visible to others and ourselves" (Freeman, 2000, p. 368). I wanted to avoid what Richardson (1997) suggested was creating "the conditions of [my] own alienation" (p. 19). Clough's (1999) approach, by inventing fictional characters based on real ones, appeared to grapple with similar issues as he described a story of crisis in a fictional British school, while Denison (1996) used individual narrative vignettes to describe particular athletes' experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) observed that, "narrative inquiries are always strongly autobiographical" (p.121), defining narrative inquiry as "both phenomenon and method" (p. 416). They proposed that narrative relates both to the "structured quality of experience [and to] patterns of inquiry" (p.416). Clandinin and Connelly suggested too, that such practices allow a researcher to "understand how teacher knowledge is... embodied in a person, and expressed in practice" (2000, p.124), reflecting both professional and private aspects of experience and an intimate relationship between the two. While they also suggested that this sharing is reciprocal and personal, these researchers were also

separate from individual teachers' experiences even though they assert the common bond of being teachers. In terms of the research for this thesis, both participants and I are teachers and have shared experiences of the HOD role in the same subject discipline. This goes beyond what is often described as reciprocal (Morton, MacGibbon & Harrison, 2000) where researchers and participants may share a *relationship*, without it necessarily being built on shared *experiences*. While Clandinin and Connelly (2000) talked of a metaphorical falling in love with participants because of the mutual trust and the depth of relationship developed during research, the relationships they developed are not necessarily predicated on the depth of the shared knowledge and experience that the participant English HODs and I could claim.

Richardson (2001a) suggested that "people who write are always writing about their lives" (p.34) regardless of how this is dressed up. She believed that writing is always affected by the knowledge and experiences of the writer, and that there is little separation between heart and head because no matter how hard writers seek to "suppress their humanity" (p.34) it continues to erupt in their word choices and topics. So while researchers may claim to write about others, in the end, their writing is also about themselves. This particular idea is certainly pertinent here.

Wallace and Loudon (2000) pointed out in terms of their research with teachers that, "the parts of a ... narrative that apply to a participant should be recognisable to the participant and reflect their own language and construction of reality" (p.11). This claim appears to be central to the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), and relates to the aim of truthfulness within narrative. As Thomson (1997-1998) noted, it isn't enough to be satisfied with snippets of participants' voices interspersed between a researcher's text. O'Neill's (2000a) HOD research used the sandwiching approach Thomson (1997-1998) wrote about, and which, in O'Neill's case, had the effect of overriding the teachers' voices and privileging his own. Thomson (1997-1998) felt there were better alternatives to such practices if she was to consider "research [both] as a literary process and act" (p. 8). I also wished to avoid the kind of writing that would bury participants' voices if I could, while still aiming for verisimilitude.

The idea of verisimilitude stems from a desire to represent the truthfulness of experience, even while recognising that it is partial and open to other ways of seeing and making meaning. Mills (1963) believed that while there were many pathways to determining truth and validity, explaining the model underpinning a particular choice was crucial, especially in relation to social frameworks. He suggested that, "the categories upon which all discourse and inquiry depend are related to social situations, [and] to cultural determinants" (Mills, 1963, p. 458). A narrative focus therefore, has both an historical precedent in its relationship to people and social situations and a concern for representing truth. Clough (1999) suggested that a reader's job is to determine the extent of the truth for him or herself, when he described his own narrative by saying, "this is a story, as true and as untrue as the reader makes it in consciousness" (p. 443).

Academically, 'narrative' is both a process and product of qualitative research. Denzin (1999a) insisted that narrative:

...refuses abstractions and high theory.... This is a return to narrative as a political act, a minimal ethnography with political teeth. It asks how power is exercised in concrete human relationships...[and in] texts that tell stories about how humans experience moral community (p.515).

Therefore, it implicates the personal and interprets ways in which relationships can affect people's abilities to live their lives and conduct their professional selves. These points helped steer the presentation of the findings of this research within a narrative form.

Goodfellow (1998), on the other hand, saw narrative as a written interpretation presenting meanings about experiences, events and accounts as a whole, while honouring the contributions of individuals. She made distinctions between *constructing* and *creating* narratives. The former she suggested implies a structure into which a narrative fits. The latter instead, was reliant upon the researcher "understanding the folk knowledge or *insider* [author's italics] knowledge of the context" (p. 175), allowing greater scope for the use of metaphor and other verbal imagery. Denison (1996) for instance, felt that narrative and its devices would allow him to (re)present his participants' (who were retired athletes) experiences in an evocative way. If Goodfellow's (1998)

distinctions are applied to Denison's writing, he has 'created' narrative rather than 'constructed' it, for Denison (1996) described how he worked "outward from [his] own biography" (p. 351). It is quite possible that this effect will be true for this research too.

Goodfellow (1998) also distinguished between the terms 'narrator' and 'narrativist'. For her, a narrator tells stories, while a narrativist is a constructor or interpreter of stories. While this separates the roles of researcher and participant, it appears to ignore the possibility of a researcher being a participant too, except, perhaps, in possibly superficial ways. It is conceivable that her distinction is intended to identify two discrete parts to processes of research; collecting experiences, and creating new ones out of them. However this distinction could constrain researchers from using the kind of insider knowledge applicable in this thesis – something Elbaz (1991) acknowledged was important, suggesting a link between reciprocity and reflexivity. Given Goodfellow's (1998) distinctions and Elbaz's observations, I would have to put myself in both camps – both narrator and narrativist because of the forms I choose to take for not only retelling the HODs experiences in this thesis, but also because of my insider status.

Elbaz observed that, "story is the very stuff of teaching, the landscape within which we live as teachers and researchers, and within which the work of teachers can be seen as making sense" (Elbaz, 1991, p. 3). Elbaz-Luwisch (1997) went as far as saying that narrative takes up a position on the inside rather than occupying the vantage point of an observer. Richardson (1994) too was concerned that "adherence to the [academic] model [of writing] requires writers to silence their own voices and to view themselves as contaminants" (p. 517) which led to the use of the passive voice as a conventional form in academic writing. It would seem that this 'very stuff of teaching' - that is, stories – is necessarily an embedded process which smudges the edges between roles that some researchers may find discomfiting. In terms of this particular research however, this blurring of lines will be a necessary and celebrated aspect of the developing story.

Academic narrative is therefore different from what I had understood it to mean as a secondary school English teacher. In those terms, narrative has been basically understood to be about exploring the telling and writing of stories.

Broadly speaking, stories were most often thought of as fictional prose, with characters, narrator(s), a plot, theme, setting and style. Frequently, they contain a turning point and they nearly always contain some sort of conflict that illuminates something the author wants known about the human condition. Conflict often highlights something a key protagonist in a story must face, and at the same time accents something about a broader social reality conveyed through the work. Those rather safe-seeming categories are however, no longer safe; what has emerged is a blending of genres as realist novels or the new journalism attest, both of which have niggled at boundaries between fiction and non fiction genres over the years (Denzin, 1997; Gerard, 1996; Jameson, 2000). Academic narrative writing can, however, and does, take on fictional qualities as well as maintain a 'real' edge. Such narratives are often written in the first person ('I') and can also mix in a third person critical or interpretive analysis - although the reverse can be true too where the first person stance is reserved for the analysis and a third person point of view is used for the vignettes of experience (Denison, 1996).

Many academic narratives seek to compare individual experiences with the wider world of social, political, or economic forces, often through the lens of researchers' ideas and explanations. The research itself may be based on a range of methodologies from phenomenology, to life history, to ethnography, or points in between. Sometimes, the ideas that result from the research may be expressed in forms similar to that which Gerard (1996) described as creative nonfiction texts, or they could be fictionalised accounts that evoke common experience. The choice of "I" or a third person may be for a variety of reasons, including relating to the purposes of the research, or a wish to present individual participants' voices, a wish to evoke commonalities, or to protect the identity of participants.

This thesis has evolved into a mix of two forms of writing. It contains a story in the literary sense along with and complemented by a story in a more conventional academic sense, although in places the boundaries are blurred; consider Chapter One for instance. This duality uses parallel plots, multiple narrators and different styles to indicate the two functions, disrupting conventional academic thesis expectations. Pat Thomson's ideas (1997-1998) are pertinent here. She indicated that using a disruptive form "creates a standalone text...[that] presents a story rather than having the story told. It does not present

truth, but aims to re-present truthfulness" (p.10). She went on to explain that "this method draws attention" (p. 10) to the research act and the written constructions that eventuate from it. Both of these ideas refer to the aim of verisimilitude in representation and they provide a precedent for a story within the thesis.

Kamler (2001) suggested that the "act of writing creates a space of representation where the personal is written and rewritten, but not confused with the 'person'" (p. 171). The short story in Chapter Five attempts to manage both 'truthfulness' and a representation of the personal while keeping in mind Minh-Ha's (2000) contention that "...the story is ...said to be a phase of communication, the natural form for revealing life" (p. 301). Denison (1996) for instance, in resisting burying his subjects' voices "beneath layers of analysis" (p. 352), used story as a means of revealing aspects of these athletes' lives. He felt that fiction gave him the room not only to use a variety of techniques but also to avoid closure, indicating that, "interpretation is never finished" (p. 352). Avoiding closure is a technique common to fiction writers. It implies that a life is not bound by the confines of a story, and neither does it preclude the telling of other stories, or the construction of meanings or alternative consequences or endings about the same set of circumstances. Denison concluded that while a narrative is neither an exact record of an experience nor an absolute mirror of a particular social world, nevertheless, it has the potential to establish "its own verisimilitude and [tell] the truth" (1996, p. 358). Such concepts have guided the formation of the short story in this study.

It is possible too that some nonfiction forms could have also been applied for similar reasons; specifically forms used by investigative journalists, where they combine for effect literary devices such as metaphor, allusion, dramatic tension or contrast. Denzin intimated in an interview that the "the new journalism" (Denison, 1998, p.52) has become a dominant form of representation. Gerard (1996), in discussing the new journalism, felt that such creative nonfiction could "...satisf[y] our hunger for the real and our need to make sense, make order out of ... chaos" (p.4) and this idea is echoed in the contention that "knowledge will be redefined in a framework that says a text must connect to the personal experience of the reader" (Denison, 1998, p.53). Bochner and Ellis's



(1996) work suggested that narrative strategies could “transport readers into experiences and make them feel as well as think” (p. 18).

While Gerard (1996) principally discussed his notion of creative nonfiction for journalistic purposes, the ideas resonated both with my desire to make the ‘chaos’ or complexity of HODs’ lives known in a readily accessible form, and also my desire to keep faith with participants’ experiences. Gerard (1996) also noted that a “writer has to take raw data and somehow refine it toward meaning” (p. 17). That idea suggests that he is prepared to grant a writer *carte blanche* in terms of ownership of the shaping of the experiences into a written product. This view is antithetical to both my expected close connection with participants and my duty to acknowledge their critical partnership because they were part of and not separate from, the development of this work.

Issues related to authenticity in using narrative as framework for this inquiry and its analysis had to be considered if verisimilitude was to be achieved. At the same time, ethical issues relating to sensitivity and vulnerability needed accommodation. This could be achieved by blurring the edges of experiences by combining them into a collective narrative story using literary devices to evoke experiences, much the way Rinehart (1998) sought to write stories that were “meant to be evocative, both sensually and intellectually” (p. 61). Brunner’s (1999) observation highlighted what was likely to feature in my co-operation with participants when she said that:

When we ask questions of ourselves or others, we wish to hear the ‘true song’. When we repeat what we have heard from others, we hope to repeat the ‘true song’ (p.177).

In the case of this research, the ‘true song’ is not just about the verbatim accounts contained in the interviews, it is about the creation of a sense of truthfulness or verisimilitude through an evocation of actual experiences that may talk to and resonate with the lives of others who may read the story.

Gerard (1996) observed that, “any story is a complex transaction between writer and reader” (p. 19). In this research, it is important to add participants to the transaction equation, for they would provide most of the raw material via interviews and my observations of their practice, as described in more detail in

the following chapter. Participants would not be unknowing or passive subjects during the accumulation of data. Given the nature of their responsibilities and their professional standing, they were more likely to be inquisitive about my own HOD experiences and would want to know how the thesis was developing and what was being discovered. This meant that there is more than one transaction at work; there is not only one between a writer and a reader, there is also one between the researcher and participants in developing and identifying what gets recorded.

Gerard (1996) also noted that there are three key questions to ask about a story, which I wanted to interpret in relation to my research focus even though he had journalistic creative nonfiction in mind. Firstly he asked, 'who is writing the story?' (that is, raising issues of representation, legitimation and voice); next, 'why am I telling the story?' (this considers for example, issues of authenticity and value – how much does it matter, and to whom?); and lastly, 'who will be reading this?' (which connects to my purpose and answers the second question – that the subject of this research, what HODs' lives are like - really matters as does the form used to represent their lives).

Richardson (1999) discussed ways in which a growing body of research is reported in a variety of forms that come under the umbrella of narrative inquiry. A key factor, regardless of whether the research was presented as poetry, drama, museum displays or narrative stories, was that process and product were deeply entwined. She proposed that developing texts mindful of that relationship is both creative and analytical and conformed to five basic criteria, including the requirement that such texts make a substantive contribution to our understanding of social life. While this thesis focuses on the professional lives of English department heads, the role itself is nonetheless strongly social because it is deeply engaged in human relationships, even when the context within which each HOD works may be highly specific. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) pointed out:

relationship is at the heart of thinking narratively. Relationship is key to what it is that narrative inquirers do. Narrative inquiry is the study of experience, and experience ... is a matter of people in relation contextually and temporally (p. 189).

Another expectation of Richardson's (1999) was that the work needed to have aesthetic merit – in other words, the writing has to satisfy the literary needs of a good and believable story and invite an interpretive response. Denzin (1999a) also believed this was important when he suggested that a work must be well-plotted and compelling, based on believable characters and set in realistic situations.

Thirdly, an element of reflexivity is required in so far as how I might consider issues of ethics, self-awareness and data collection and use, and this is expanded in the next chapter. There, I explain how important it was to predict and manage the sensitivity of participants' disclosures so that the key aspects of those disclosures could be used without jeopardising the anonymity of the HODs.

Richardson's (1999) fourth criterion is an insistence that a narrative work has impact on a personal level so that it moves the reader both intellectually and emotionally. This aspect is deeply related to the third point she raised because it implies that the reader will be moved by the evocation and the recognition of the human condition through the telling of the story. Denzin also noted that, "an ethic of ...narrative demands that writers put their empirical materials in a form that readers can use in their own lives" (Denzin, 1999b, p.568). This, he suggested, strips away coatings from a researcher, leaving them free to "excavate the personal in the name of the political" (p. 568). Altogether, these points constitute issues a researcher must contend with in using narrative inquiry and creating narrative texts. This implicates the position and role of a researcher in inquiry of this nature and this consideration follows.

### *Role of the researcher*

Rhodes (2000) suggested that research can be studied as a form of textual practice through which researchers create images of others and also enter those images so that research becomes a "dialogic process" (p. 511) where researchers are never neutral. He sees researchers as "textual practitioners" (p. 513) who construct text from interviews with others and also reflect on their own practices. What he focused on was the relationship between one researcher and one participant, but did not consider multiple participants. The term 'ghostwriter' suits this view in



his opinion because the narration is first person, yet is not about the writer. It allows a sense of intimacy without it being related to a 'person'. To this end, it echoes Kamler's (2001) contention about revealing the personal rather than the person.

While Rhodes' (2000) notions of the role of the researcher in creating texts from interviews and reflecting on his or her own practices is appropriate here, there is a problem when we consider the dialogic process, predicated as his is on a one-to-one relationship where the researcher may not have a similar background knowledge as the person being interviewed. While it is probable that participants in my research would see me as the 'researcher' they would also know me as someone who had a background similar to theirs as an English HOD. This knowledge about my location was a lever I could use to not only encourage participants to talk about their professional lives, but it also ensured that I could not assume a neutral stance.

Many researchers concern themselves with exploring issues of voice and authority. This focuses on mechanisms through which participants' meanings and ideas are heard and represented (Bishop, 1996; Lather, 1991; Oakley, 1981; Richardson, 1994). Such issues highlight possible contradictions inherent in any subsequent textual forms researchers may use to discuss either research processes or findings. As a result, a number of researchers have experimented with a multitude of textual forms (Rinehart, 1998). Such disruptions to conventional forms of representation have made it easier for even more researchers to experiment with even more textual forms (Denison, 1996) and for me to arrive at narrative inquiry as both a process and a precedent for considering product.

Voice, verisimilitude, the slipperiness of language and meaning, plus narrative forms of representation within an interpretive paradigm have therefore informed the shape of this study.

Chapter Four explains both the methods used to collect the data and how the data was analysed while Chapter Five uses a specific narrative form, that of the short story, to tell the stories that are combinations and confluences of experiences from participants' professional lives.



## Chapter Four: Methods, processes and analysis

This section describes the key methods of the research, the processes involved and the analysis strategies used. It highlights some of the considerations that emerged and were foreshadowed in the methodology chapter as data was reviewed, and explains some key themes as a precursor to the short story and discussion chapters.

### The research group

For the purposes of this research, three heads of English departments agreed to become the core participants, even though at least twelve were originally approached. Proximity to the university was one criterion that affected whether or not people were approached in the first place; this meant some more outlying schools were not initially considered. Of those approached, one school had just appointed an English HOD who felt unable to participate because of her newness in the role, while in another, the HOD was on maternity leave. The most common reason other HODs cited for not participating, was that they felt they already had too much to do.

The participants worked in the following types of co-educational schools. Two schools were based in satellite towns, one of which is largely rural, while the other is from a largely Maaori community, a shorter distance from the university. This latter school has a Decile 1 ranking, while the former is a Decile 4 school. The third participant worked in a large city school serving a wide socio-economic area, with a Decile 4-5 ranking. There were two women and one male participant HODs.

## Methods

In order to maintain an awareness of concerns about the relationship between the personal, social, political and economic forces at work in people's lives (Middleton, 1993; Morton *et al.*, 2000; Olesen, 1994), HODs' professional lives were initially explored using ideas common to the work of Clandinin and Connelly (both separately and together) (1987; 1994; 1995a; 1995b; 1998; 1999; 2000), who tend to investigate what constitutes the personal in a teacher's life. These two researchers have explored this facet of teachers' experiences by collecting a variety of data as a basis for considering the experiences contextually. At the same time, they attempt to be faithful to a person's meaning-making, echoing Jardine's (1991) observation that inquiry that seeks to explain or interpret, gives voice to the "ambiguous nature of life itself" (p.119). Clandinin and Connelly's approaches result in teachers' voices being heard and some of the ambiguities of their experiences made more explicit. At the same time, their research most often focused on teachers' practices and experiences in relation to teachers' in-classroom and out-of-classroom spaces, terms Clandinin and Connelly (1995a, 1995b) use to describe the places teachers most often inhabit in their professional lives.

This research considered similar kinds of spaces in relation to HODs who not only inhabit similar in- and out-of-classroom domains, but also have a variety of responsibilities added to the mix, making their working lives even more complex. This resonates with Clandinin and Connelly's (1995a) concept of a funnel or conduit, through which they described how external demands became inserted into the work of teachers. In some ways, this concept complements Denzin's (1997) discussion of the way in which the "cinematic, surveillance society systematically introduced the voyeur into everyday life" (p. 19), and Foucault's (1977) ideas regarding the panoptic gaze. Clandinin and Connelly (1995a) were concerned with portraying and discussing ways in which social, political and economic forces played out in teachers' professional lives, while Denzin (1997) considered the opening up of the private to public gaze to the point now where we "openly acknowledge our own place in the voyeuristic

looking and gazing project" (p. 19). As this chapter progresses, these points are revisited.

Specific methods used in this research consisted of: a semi-structured interview of about ninety minutes; another shorter, unstructured interview of about forty-five minutes once participants had read an early draft of the story that became Chapter Five; a shadowing and observation day; and subsequent telephone, email and other conversations that varied from formal questions and replies, to more relaxed and serendipitous meetings. In one case, I made a separate visit to a school to observe a department meeting. Lastly, some written documents were used to reinforce the veracity of particular points HODs raised. Methods such as those used here are common; there is nothing startling or new in these terms, although the development of the fictionalised short story and the veracity checks may add an unusual twist. Methods like interviews, shadowing and observation are used for a wide range of research purposes. The methods, outlined individually below, formed a "structure within which the participants and I [could] participate with the meanings of our lives, and in doing so, ... make them visible to others and ourselves" (Freeman, 2000, p. 368).

### *Interviewing*

A cornerstone of the research was an initial semi-structured interview, which was, as is often the case, audio-taped and transcribed. While Cohen and Manion (1994) and Oakley (1981) identify some problems with interviewing in terms of for instance, considering power relations between participants and researchers, it is nevertheless, a common research tool used for a variety of purposes as evidenced by such diverse work as that carried out by Brown and Rutherford (1998), Bullock *et al.*, (1995), Blackmore (1998), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Denison (1996), Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989), Hall (1997), Harris (1998) and Middleton and May (1997).

The first set of interviews for this research were planned to be about ninety minutes, although two of them ended up being much longer, simply because the participants had so much to say about their experiences. Participants had been provided well in advance with a set of open-ended questions that acted as prompts to their ideas, dilemmas, recollections, pleasures, emotions and

concerns as HODs (see Appendix A). This interview schedule was sent to them at the same time as the formal letter seeking their willingness to participate (Appendix B) and this move made the research purposes explicit and gave participants as much information as possible before making their decision. Informed consent was also sought (Appendix C) and later when transcripts were returned, information and forms accompanied them asking participants for their release for use within the thesis (Appendix D).

The main purpose of both the open-ended questions and the semi-structured nature of the interview was to give HODs an opportunity to talk about their professional lives, establish rapport and establish an open process. The questions themselves included a series of prompts designed to open discussion rather than restrict it. This structure was flexible, allowing for probing without intrusion (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Participants were able to move back and forward to reconstruct the past, interpret the present, and predict the future. They were also at liberty to begin anywhere at all, and omit aspects as they saw fit.

An interesting feature of each interview was how little I needed to talk; the HODs were more than willing to share their experiences. My contributions often centred on probing for more information on particular points, affirming ideas, or responding to questions about my own experiences as an HOD. A pertinent point, which may be related to the prior relationships I had with each participant, surfaced early on. Each of them talked about their emotions and relationships with others in the department with very little prompting and comments centred on these two items featured heavily in the interviews. This is significant when put beside Weiss's (1994) example of interviewees not revealing the emotional side of relationships until "the fifth or sixth interview" (p. 57). Those interviews took place at regular fortnightly intervals over five months and were conducted with people who were initially strangers to the researcher. This is an important difference between Weiss's research and my own. Since the participants and I already knew each other, there was less need for us to spend time in developing trust and working through any initial concerns and misgivings that working with strangers might have created.



The format and scope of the interview schedule made it easy for participants to find a starting place for themselves, and they all took advantage of that which helped put them at ease. After the initial interviews, participants revisited their recollections when their transcripts were returned for editing and comment, again a common practice (see Appendix D). Key ideas about their reactions and how these affected choices within the thesis will be dealt with later. Conversations, as well as letters and email (Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) kept the lines of communication open as the year progressed.

The first interviews took place in April when schools had their first break after Term 1. While I had attempted to schedule these earlier, the HODs were unable to find the space or energy to do so. In fact, waiting until the first term had ended, was, in hindsight, sensible. By then, the HODs had time to rest and they consequently felt more at ease and were able to reflect on their practice. In each case, the interviews took place at their homes, where they graciously plied me with coffee and they could operate within their own comfort zones. In a sense then, participants took some control of not only the process, but also what constituted the research itself.

About two months after the first interview and in another break time between terms in July, another interview took place. This interview, also audio-taped, was shorter and more informal and served to develop ideas and gain feedback on an early draft of the short story. Unsolicited, participants also ventured new information. The key reason for the second interview had been to gauge the feedback on the draft story that developed once transcripts had been returned from the first interview. No questions had been prepared prior to the second interview. Instead, participants were asked to describe what they thought of the developing story, the extent to which they could see themselves and their experiences in it, and the extent to which they felt their identities and experiences were being protected. This particular point was pivotal, since many experiences disclosed in the initial interview were sensitive and involved other members of staff. Details about key responses to the draft are dealt with later, but by this stage, participants appeared even more relaxed about disclosing information. It also gave them an opportunity to reflect on what had happened since the first interview. This had a twofold effect; they were able to think through how

particular scenarios had either been resolved or speculate on why they were still continuing, and, they noted how important it was for them to be able to 'sound off' to someone else who had no ties to the school. It appeared to be an important mechanism for the HODs and highlighted a gap in their professional support.

### *Shadowing/observation*

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that it was useful for researchers to take field notes during observations to record "the ongoing bits of nothingness that fill our days" (p.104) to add useful contextual information. The English novelist Fay Weldon's observation echoes this idea when she suggested that having someone to "share experiences... makes the narrative of your own life much richer. If there's not somebody else there to record these things it's almost as if it never happened" (Irvine, 2000, October 14). While individual daily experiences may themselves seem inconsequential, for HODs, they built up into a full picture of anything but 'nothingness'.

I shadowed each HOD for day. I used a flip-up A5 Olympic Office Pad notebook to record observations in the following way: firstly, I noted the time of each new activity in the HOD's day. For the most part, these activities were marked by the school bell, although this was not always so. During specific times like non-contact periods and lunch, I noted the time of each interaction with staff or students. This later helped in counting the number of interactions and gauging the length of time of each. Then, beside the time, I noted the basic topic of conversation, actions the HOD undertook and comments the HOD made to me as the day progressed. I also noted aspects of the HOD's environment; the office (if the HOD had one; only one of them was in this position), the classroom and other physical items of note at the time. I also numbered each page and headed up the first page of each observation with the initial of the name of the person being shadowed, the school, and the date. The person's initial was also put beside each subsequent page number. This was for verification and sourcing purposes during the analysis and writing phases of the research. This shadowing/observation and note-taking process helped develop a strong sense of context and reality for the story that added to the veracity of the findings, particularly in terms of the sheer busy-ness of the day. Details from those

experiences complemented the stories about the classroom and the depiction of the intricate and intensely people-focused nature of an HOD's life. The observations proved to be a rich source of situational data (Appendix E). The attention to detail on the observation notes ensured that the descriptions related to the correct person and could not be mixed up if the pages inadvertently became loose. Using only the initials to designate the identity of the HOD helped maintain their anonymity.

Nespor (2000) on the other hand, argues against anonymity by suggesting that, "anonymisation is an engine of detachment" (p. 555). He qualified this assertion by explaining that, "participants or observers near the events described are unlikely to be misled by pseudonyms or other anonymising practices..." (p. 549). However, had I *not* been able to demonstrate to participants that I was striving to protect their disclosures and their schools - as will be shown later - I would not have been able to use the most significant material.

### *Written records*

Written records that helped consideration of the regulation of these HODs' lives included job descriptions, HODs' timetables, departmental schemes and manuals, and school policies (Brown & Rutherford, 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Harris, 1998). While this material was most useful in comparing some of the expectations of the role with its reality and was a starting point for examining some role strains (Ribbins, 1986) and how they were represented in the story, nevertheless, such material was the least helpful source of data. While some of these details helped contextualise individual HOD's situated complexities (O'Neill, 2000a) and helped flesh out specific aspects of the story especially in relation to working with the principal or others in more senior leadership positions, this was of minor importance. These materials did, however, contribute to processes akin to Bishop's (1996) weaving idea or Richardson's (1994) notion of crystallisation in dealing with the data. These concepts refer to ways in which data can be cross-referenced, or interconnected or synthesised. Bishop (1996) and Richardson (1994) point to different ways of working with data that take account not only of people's lives and their inherent messiness, but

also of cultural difference and situation. Of crystallisation, Richardson (1997) suggests that it is more appropriate for postmodern texts because it:

deconstructs the traditional idea of 'validity' (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves); and crystallisation provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know (p. 92).

In other words, she identifies how texts that evolve out of connections and research on people tell us more in a specific and deep way but keep us unsettled because the resulting ideas can only ever be part of a whole. This crystallisation process may even evoke more questions than answers.

The gathering of data from methods such as those outlined above helped "describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2), which, collectively, formed a rich mine of contextual information. The interconnections, ambiguities and contradictions among participants' experiences lent credence to what O'Neill (2000a) identified as the situated complexity of the lives of HODs in New Zealand, and showed the relevance to this study of Bishop's (1996) and Richardson's (1994) ideas about working with data and participants.

## **Analysis**

This section considers some of the issues inherent in the analysis of this data. While the number of participants in this research may be small, I am mindful of Goethe's idea that "the Particular is always more than a match for the universal; [and] the universal always has to accommodate itself to the Particular"(cited in Weber, [online] 19/09/01). This suggests that in order to understand the world at large, we need to do a better job of understanding the world as it is lived by individuals, for it is they who help make the world what it is. Foucault (1977) for instance, argued that the focus on the personal is part of the progressive development of the "circuits of communication [which] are the supports of an

accumulation and a centralisation of knowledge" (p. 217) because the panoptic gaze, as noted in Chapter Two, is centred on the individual. While this specifically suggests the power over the many by the few, the purpose of this research is to reclaim the position of the few among the many, for what happens in the lives of HODs has not been well documented, especially in New Zealand. This gap has had the effect of silencing and marginalising a group of people central to not only how secondary schools function, but also to how teaching and learning is enacted at the classroom level which is itself, a highly personal and individual act. At the same time, researching individuals' experiences as HODs is a complex and sensitive undertaking that has the potential to be disruptive especially as it may highlight experiences not usually apparent to public gaze. As Neilsen (1998) said of the situation as she saw it in Canada:

The school board and the public, who would ride teachers on an endless track toward an endless goal, typically don't understand these... stories. To understand them is to bear witness to pride and to pain. To listen to stories is to accept complexity, [and] the stubborn particulars... (p.128).

It is important to iterate that real people were involved in this research, and we need to be mindful that people do not conform to largely abstract definitions (Casey, 1993) that may site them as *either* participant *or* as researcher. While my task as researcher has been to 'listen and also reveal" (Fine, 1998, p. 142), I am also participant and writer. The participants and I worked through richly situated field data to accommodate essentially "reductionist and formalistic" processes and constraints that are "part of us all" (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, p.140). As the investigation developed, tensions arose between wanting to honour participants' voices and having to work within the confines of a doctoral thesis. These conundrums existed at what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described as a "reductionist boundary" (p.142) where data and research text requirements meet, and they became more pronounced as I negotiated my way through the interview and observational data, the conversations with participants about what should and could be told, and the struggles between the analysis and thesis writing.

This was coupled with my strong desire to evoke the complexity and often highly charged emotional experiences of HODs, since such experiences are mostly absent in existing research literature which on the whole, tend to exclude a focus on the personal (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989, 1990; Harris *et al.*, 1995). Foremost in this struggle are some following issues: of voice (through a sense of person, both participant and researcher, implicating issues of representation and verisimilitude); narrative form (that is, the structure and readability of both the thesis as a whole and the story as a distinct part of it); audience (acknowledging who I am writing for and about); and signature (the sense of identity or character that is evoked) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.146).

HODs' contributions to the whole thesis have followed what Brown and Moffatt, (1999, p.22) called a "spiralling, recursive and elliptical process". The HODs steered aspects of the thesis by their feedback and advice about what is and is not appropriate. This has led to the thesis containing two distinct writing forms and these have already been hinted at: the academic thesis form and the short story form. Most products of academic writing are, in contrast to many processes, often linear in both structure and chronology to accommodate needs of audiences and particular requirements. The paradox is that the parallel 'plots' of this thesis, while essentially linear in terms of organisation and structure to mirror expectations of doctoral theses, also represent "multiple dimensions [with] complex meanings" (Brown & Moffatt, 1999, p.22) while invoking considerations of both legitimation and representation. In a sense then, I have ended up with a mixed genre (Richardson, 1997) text for this thesis.

Throughout interviews, the shadowing and various less formal occasions when we talked, each HOD sought to know about my experiences as an HOD to compare with their own. They were keen to know about instances of convergence and contrast and the extent to which their experiences resonated with other participants. This wanting to know created some struggles. Firstly, the positioning by participants of me as participant/researcher. Bishop (1996) suggested that there needed to be a personal investment of the self by the researcher in terms of the participants in order to develop a mutual purpose, intent and openness. This personal investment was important and also sticky. I had to be mindful of some ethical issues involving privacy and disclosure. For

instance, I had to be very careful about not revealing either the school or names of people during discussions with not only participants or other HODs but also other English teachers and I had to mask details of some anecdotes which could have identified specific people. During interviews and observations, I was always careful to couch comments in broad terms so that participants would not be able to easily identify one another from what I said.

On the other hand, I was able to talk about my own experiences, and these 'confessions' elicited even more sensitive information from participants during interviews and these revelations helped deepen and extend the content of the short story. A positive side of this was the deepening trust that developed. At the same time, I struggled to balance my own biography and the need to tell my story, with my desire to truthfully represent others' experiences.

I did not want this research to be completely for my benefit: I wanted to give something back to participants. During the second interview that followed sending them a draft of the developing short story, participants asked about the structure of it, prompting me to send them the published short story whose structure resonated with the draft (Finney, 1965). At the same time, I also sent ideas for using that story with classes, which they appreciated.

Also at the second interview, each participant made similar comments about the draft: firstly, that using a third person HOD, who was neither them nor me, allowed them some distance to be able to look more dispassionately at the scenarios in the story that were developing; secondly, the composite collection and blending of stories met with a sense of relief. While participants had been apprehensive about their disclosures in the first interview, they felt more comfortable that these were masked in the draft story. One participant even said "I trust you to do whatever you want with my stuff now" (Participant B, July 2001).

While the research dovetailed an examination of three strands of data; interviews, observations, and documents, a fourth source of data was my own experiences as an HOD. As has already been noted, participants also questioned me about my personal experience as an HOD, and what the research literature identified. This meant that the interviews, while mainly featuring the participants, also included some of what I knew. From these sources, a new text

emerged “from the ‘horse’s mouth’” (De Four-Babb, 2000) to tell a story which wove together HODs’ experiences that retained context, complexity and character.

Crystallisation rather than triangulation had become a central way of converging ideas and findings into the thesis (Richardson, 1994). A story therefore emerged using metaphor and imagery to enrich the telling and make the experience truthful, evocative and hopefully, potent for a reader. The thesis is mindful, therefore, of not only Richardson’s (1994) plea to consider audience, but Elbaz-Luwisch’s (1997) suggestion that from data, “storied accounts [are developed] which render the data meaningful” (p.76).

With Elbaz (1991; Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997), Connelly and Clandinin (1994, 1999), Clandinin and Connelly (1995a, 2000), and Richardson (1994) in mind, this research report has attempted to keep alive not only the voices of participants, but also the voice of the researcher. The texts emerging from the analysis of data are therefore descriptive, interpretive, personal and highly contextualised. Paradoxically, they are also no longer about specific individuals, but blended experiences. However, the richness of the teachers’ experiences has largely been retained and the ‘insider’ aspect is made explicit (Elbaz, 1991), through the short story in Chapter Five.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also suggested that field texts or raw data, such as interviews and conversations, are close to experience while research texts by their nature are more distant because they result from a constant questioning of the data and are also removed in time from the experiences in question. It is at this point that “interpretive and analytical matters come to the fore” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.130). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also warned that the process of developing a research text is by no means linear; instead, it is negotiated and “plotlines are continually revised as consultation takes place over written materials... and ... are [further] composed to develop points of importance in the revised story” (p.132). This, in fact, has occurred throughout the development of this research text and is supported by Brown and Moffat’s (1999) ideas about recursive processes.

To some extent, this also echoed what Goodson (1981) noted in his exploration of the lives of teachers, and which Middleton and May (1997)



demonstrated: that for individuals, life experience is concerned primarily with personal reality and process. In addition, in Middleton and May's (1997) work, teachers' experiences were shown to intersect with and be influenced by wider socio-historical concerns, even when teachers themselves were not fully aware of them at the time. In terms of this research the funnel, a concept Clandinin and Connelly (1995a) evoked regarding external and internal expectations on individual teachers, is a useful metaphor for this complexity and intersection, and is played out in the struggles and contradictions of the story's main protagonist, Liz in Chapter Five.

In terms of analysing data, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explained that the shaping of a narrative into a thesis or another sort of research text relies on "responses to questions of meaning and social significance" (p.131). Ultimately, this helps set apart the relative roles of field and research texts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also suggested that field texts tend to have a recording quality about them, while resultant research texts are more distant products of repeated questioning about meaning and significance, especially in terms of "patterns, narrative threads, tensions and themes" (p.132) which refer to participants' experiences and their social settings; the recursive and spiralling nature referred to earlier. While Clandinin and Connelly (1995a; 1995b) worked on creating stories about specific teachers' experiences as individual vignettes, this research combines the three HODs' experiences into those of a composite HOD within a literary narrative framework. The rationale for this composite form is explained next.

Because of the nature of the HODs' jobs and lives, an individual vignette approach was not feasible; participants were clear about not wanting the intrusion or the sense of vulnerability this could have induced by unmasking themselves in print using "I". Neither did they have energy or time to develop specific and individual stories in negotiation with me. A solution was to use a third person narrative form and, as has already been illustrated, it was both a vehicle in which their collective stories were represented and also a form in which they could not only recognise themselves and their experiences, but also feel protected by the distance a third person narrator could provide. By also

weaving aspects of my own HOD experiences into the fabric of the story, their individual experiences were further masked.

As the data was analysed, the short story was fashioned from snippets of experience, phrases, ideas and fears within the context of a recognisable situation for both teachers and HODs. This was given to participants to comment on before it was developed further, for I needed to check the veracity of experiences and seek to know what else was needed. In order to avoid wrapping up the elements and complexity of the experiences into something which undermined or sanitised the messiness of experience (Miller, 1990), the resulting story uses a multi-layered and recursive chronology instead of a linear one. This attempts to mirror the complex and convoluted nature of much of an HOD's work. And by using third person narration instead of the more usually expected first person point of view in academic narrative, (Bochner, 2000, 2001; Richardson, 1999) it combines some of the qualities of reciprocity and reflexivity initially mentioned in Chapter Three, and explored in more detail next.

### *Reciprocity and reflexivity*

Reciprocity is broadly defined as the give-and-take of a researcher/participant relationship where sharing is part of the process (Oakley, 1981). Lather (1992) also added the notion of praxis, that is, the give-and-take between research and practice. In other words, a researcher does not maintain an aloof distance, attempting to remain objective. Instead, a researcher is committed to standing beside participants and negotiating aspects of the research, including what is revealed. Bishop (1996) discussed this aspect in depth in relation to Maaori research, especially where there is a shared background (for instance, of genealogy), implicating trust as a key component along with the essential element of the research being participatory rather than completely controlled by a researcher.

In terms of reflexivity, this affects not only participants but also researchers. It requires an ability to examine oneself and acknowledge one's self-location (Creaf, 2000) in the process at hand and this is regardless of whether one is a researcher or a participant. It suggests that partners in a research process are likely to be changed by engagement with it, because such a process can put

practices and beliefs and attitudes into sharp relief. Rhodes (2000) suggested that when a researcher writes about others, reflexivity is an issue and that the relationship between the two can be understood as “the quality of an account of social activity where the account is both a description and a component part of the practices it refers to” (p. 514). In other words, it can be seen as an active rather than passive experience in which a researcher cannot be neutral. Miller’s (1990) experience for instance, highlights this. She described using journals with departmental staff in a school as a professional development activity to explore pedagogical practices. She found that as well as engaging in professional dialogue with staff to improve pedagogy, it led to an enhanced reflection of her own practices as a leader and highlighted for her some contradictions and tensions in her professional life. In turn, this involved further reflection as well as action.

To explain relationships between reflexivity and reciprocity, it is useful to return to the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1994). They explained how people generally tell others of their experiences in the form of stories because “...stories are the closest we can come to experience...” (p. 415). These stories emerge from personal and social histories where “people live stories, and in the telling of them reaffirm them, modify them and create new ones” (p.415). This accumulated data is then worked through by the researchers in order to identify significant ideas both in personal and social terms, making transitions from field text to research text where connections between the ‘I’ of the participant and the ‘they’ of the researchers tended to blend aspects of the social and personal. Even with this blurring of distinctions however, Clandinin and Connelly (1995a) still ensured the voice of the researcher was heard separately from teachers’ story vignettes. This may have however, the effect of lessening the power of the teachers’ experiences, given the sometimes privileged position of traditional academic writing compared with more narrative accounts.

Kamler (2001) for instance, pointed out that typical Western cultural traditions value the analytic, logical and impersonal in written argument. This she contends, suggests that the removal of “I” signals “greater objectivity assertions of truth or fact” (p.102), especially when coupled with the passive tense. This puts the personal at a disadvantage. Texts that position the “I” as

central can be marginalized or considered to be less authentic or 'truthful' than depersonalised texts by those who ascribe to similar views. This situation is neatly expressed by Reason (1998) who suggested that there's a:

paradox of writing 'about' research with people [because we cannot do it alone]. In some ways to write (and to read) 'about'... people's experiences in coming to understand their own words is to repossess it as an academic subject that can be studied from the outside (p.263).

As my own work progressed, there was a collapse between "home and field" (Creaf, 2000, p. 448) where 'they' and 'I' became blurred. I then had to re-examine my purpose, for the further I progressed in my thesis, the more I realised that I was also telling my own story. My representational choice for retelling participants' experiences "became inseparable from the politics of my own self-location" (Creaf, 2000, p. 448) as I understood how much their stories mirrored my own even when specific details were different. This should not have been a surprise since I had been disturbed by gaps in the academic literature about HODs, described more fully in Chapter Two. This unease came from my insider knowledge of having been in the role of HOD in a New Zealand secondary school. Therefore, to have ignored my own participation in the story was to lie about my own self-location, and deny my own history. As Gross (1986) intimated, "feminists seem prepared to accept that the knower always occupies a position, spatially, temporally, sexually and politically" (p.200) and I came to realise that this was also true of me in my role of knower as researcher. Gross's view is also echoed in Cant's (1998) suggestion that the status of the researcher is an important issue to be balanced with the authenticity of voice, for "the voices of researchers and participants contribute to making qualitative research authentic, readable and richly descriptive" (p.231).

Bishop (1996) considered connections with participants as he pondered what constituted his experience of the relationship between a researcher and participants, particularly when a common history is implicated, as it was in his case. He suggested that through shared experiences, interviews can become conversations "between interested parties, not strangers or even people who had met for the purpose of the research" (p. 29). This interrelatedness puts

relationships rather than the data centre stage, positioning the researcher beside participants, not in a superior or supposedly wiser location, emphasising the reciprocal nature of the work. At the same time, it provides scope for what Clandinin and Connelly (1994) described as looking both *forward and backward* and *inward and outward*. The former pair, they suggested, considers feelings, hopes and aspirations as well as environmental conditions, which, in the case of this thesis, relates to the contexts in which HODs experience their professional lives. The latter pair (inward and outward) implicates time – the past, present and future plus ways in which a researcher works with participants and represents their experiences. A point of significant divergence here is that the more I worked with my participants, the more I realised that our experiences were linked through an intimate understanding and connection on both an emotional and experiential level.

Reciprocity connected also with the general notion of self-examination in reflexivity; that is, a looking back on oneself. Gallop (1985) also used Lacan's metaphorical mirror to represent the idea of examining or engaging with the self. This idea is pertinent when an examination of this kind consists of two elements, "anticipation and retroaction" (Gallop, 1985, p. 81). These two aspects – the looking forward and the looking back, refer to looking forward at what *might* be, as well as examining what *has been* through the mechanism of hindsight via intellectual reflection. The question of which came first, whether it was either the action or the knowledge, or the analysis of the action or knowledge is moot, since the process is one which often turns in on itself, making distinctions of sequence or order, difficult to pinpoint. It is about the perennial problem of the chicken or the egg and which came first. In terms of this current research, the connection between HODs and me was one in which the telling of stories was both a reciprocal and reflexive act. It was hard to separate a telling from its reflection. This is partly because, for instance, HODs often talked through implications of specific situations at the same time as they laid bare the details of the experience as they saw it.

It was also plain that a fissure began to separate what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) used as their framework and what was developing in this research. What seemed to have been missing in the equation was an examination

of how a narrative product can shape and embody a teacher's experience, retelling and fixing it in forms that may ultimately exclude the emotional and the complex; two aspects important to my research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed how *readers* may fix and freeze a narrative for their own purposes, but do not appear to apply the same assumption to products created by researchers, as if researchers cannot fix or freeze what gets told, and how it gets told; in other words, all stories are partial accounts. Clandinin and Connelly do, however, suggest that narrative forms are always in a state of flux as narrative inquirers continue to question experience, which is a process rather than a product orientation. By following teachers' individual vignettes of experience with their own views about them, Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) practice may have the effect of reducing the power of the story by focusing attention instead on an academic analysis, shifting the locus of both authority and meaning away from the experiences themselves. A narrative has the potential to therefore become more orientated towards a story a researcher wants to tell, rather than a story that evokes significant aspects of participants' experience. Separating out which is which, is part of the problem. Foucault (1980) discussed similar dilemmas when speculating on what an author is. This idea and some of its contradictions became important as I moved outside the imperative of my own story to consider how both reflexivity and reciprocity were important in the analysis of this research and how they implicated aspects of representation and legitimation which were initially touched on in Chapter Three.

### *Representation and legitimation*

While representation and legitimation were first raised as important in the previous chapter, it is now time to consider how they related to this research endeavour. To begin with, looking at how another New Zealander approached representation and legitimation is appropriate. Bishop (1996), for instance, considered these issues as he sought to work with whanau<sup>5</sup>. He speculated that representation is partly about working through who get heard, how they are

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<sup>5</sup> whanau – refers to family in both a narrow 'family unit' sense, and a wider genealogical sense

heard, and what is said to represent people's voices within the confines of the printed word. As a result, he sought to clarify meanings and ownership with participants as he worked through what they allowed him to know. These were useful ideas for me to apply.

By working with participants to check for veracity in terms of what they had said, meant, and allowed me to use, we negotiated the short story's beginnings as a way of representing findings of the research. As well, however, I also needed to celebrate the 'contamination' of the HODs' stories with stories of my own because of my intimacy with English teaching and the role of HOD. While I worked to synthesise HODs' experiences and (re)present those through using narrative conventions, I also reflected my own experiences and knowledge. For instance, the setting of the departmental meeting is evocative of the school in which I was an HOD. As Kamler (2001) pointed out, "the act of writing creates a space of representation where the personal is written and rewritten, but not confused with the 'person'" (p.171). By this she suggested that writing can be a means whereby a new context can arise from combining what a writer already knows with aspects and elements beyond personal experience, just as Emily Perkins indicated about her own writing (Zega, 2001, July 7). As a result, the symbiosis between participants and researcher in this report relocates the experiences in different spaces so that they do not belong to separate individuals but belong to those of us who were involved in the research.

Identifying issues of representation and legitimation within research is not easy because relationships are not cut-and-dried. McClure and Stronach (1993) suggested that the relationship between researchers and participants is a "struggle" (p. 353) because a researcher, somehow, has to subdue some or all of the raw material of a participant's experiences into a tidy, coherent and textual structure to serve the purposes of a researcher, a research text and an audience. On the other hand, a participant might aim for a portrait to accurately reflect their point of view and intent, but it may be deflected or silenced by a researcher. A person's words are often selectively used and woven into a story that leads a reader to an interpretation a participant may not have expected or even intended, but which a researcher uses. In developing our story in this report I am mindful that such selection processes have taken place, which is why returning the draft

story to participants for comment was an important reciprocal, legitimational and representational act. Participants were honest and forthright in their views about the authenticity of the depictions contained within it as they explained in the second interviews. This need to check with participants is important and critical to the notion of verisimilitude.

A writer of the text may also intend to be absent from a resulting research account, but, through selection and slanting processes, is, paradoxically, invisibly present. McClure and Stronach (1993) argued that in such a case, “the appearance of artlessness is a rather artful business” (p. 355) and so writer intrusion needs to be acknowledged and accepted. The writer of a text is no passive agent in a story, but necessarily an active constructor and interpreter, so it is wise to both acknowledge it and seek to make that role explicit. In terms of this research process, there have been issues associated with linking real people to portraits of their experiences. I was careful to mask those links in accordance with participants’ wishes. O’Neill’s (2000a) work attempted to uncover similar concerns as he explored HODs’ experiences in New Zealand, although he, too, did most of the talking in the way he presented their lives.

While these are not an exclusive list of issues that arose, they are key ones. Themes that emerged from the study (time, complexity, relationships and emotions) highlighted gaps in the literature. Both the short story (Chapter Five) and the Discussion (Chapter Six) detail the importance of these themes in this study. The imperative to make explicit aspects of the complex HOD life however, returns us now to discussions about the way narrative, in the form of a short story, is important as a product of this research in order to retain HODs’ voices and stories within the context of a thesis.

### *Using a short story form*

In this part, I focus on the short story as a component of the research. Initially when deciding on what the product of the research would look like, I had carefully considered Clandinin and Connelly’s (1995a) (re)presentation of teachers’ stories as lived experiences, where a story was told in the first person, followed by the researchers’ interpretation, using ‘we’ and third person singular (‘she’ or ‘he’). While Clandinin and Connelly connect with teachers because they



see themselves as teachers too, it was clear that participants' ideas and experiences as HODs would resonate with my own and this was an additional complication because of its specificity.

Fiction writers and their ideas about their writing were helpful. Emily Perkins, the New Zealand novelist and short story writer, said that in her own writing, characters:

often include composite elements of myself and other people. You start with what you do know and go from there. Some of the worlds I know very well and some I don't know at all. It's always a mix (Zega, 2001, July 7, p. 60).

To some extent, what Perkins discussed can be seen as a reflection of Bruner's (1993) ideas cited in Lincoln and Denzin (1998). Bruner discussed how possible it was for authors to work with participants in a variety of ways including fictionalising narratives, using narrators as characters, or even using multiple characters who may "speak in many voices" (p.413). This opened up different possibilities for describing and interpreting participants' experiences.

As relationships with the participants developed and as I sifted through the data, I began developing a narrative that combined not separate journeys or events of the kind that Denzin (1996) illustrated, but linked, relational and emotional stories into a collective fiction story. Using the third person for the main character ('she'/'Liz') allowed me to acknowledge combined as well as individual experiences as I checked the story with participants. Through this strategy, I could also go inside the character's head, and this allowed her to talk about herself using "I". In effect, this sensitised:

us to the potential consequences of all our writing by bringing home... the ethic of representation... [because the story is] about ourselves, our workplaces, disciplines, friends, self, and family (Richardson, 1999, p. 661).

I therefore constructed a short story that transformed shared experiences into a composite form. While the individual experiences of participants remained highly specific, coalescing their key elements into a combined written text made

what had been shared “deeply constitutive of subjectivity [and made] ... it productively useable in ways in which it was not prior to it being written down” (Kamler, 2001, p. 54).

The transformation of the participants’ experiences into a single story began after talking with participants about their reactions to their initial interview transcripts where they had voiced concerns about their feelings of vulnerability, confirming my earlier predictions. Participants’ concerns were based partly on what they had revealed about themselves and colleagues and partly on their feelings of discomfort about the effects of belonging to a relatively small English teaching community with an even smaller head of English community. Unsurprisingly, they did not want me to use anything that might compromise their professional lives, yet their individual stories were critical to this research and its purposes because those stories were about relationships, situations, emotions and passions.

This research study hopes to put back the HODs into discussions about heads of department in secondary schools. Without being able to use some of that more sensitive data, this would have ended up the way other research has; devoid of a clear sense of human beings living complicated professional lives centred on intersecting relationships (Blandford, 1997; Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Harris *et al.*, 1995). Perkins’ comment about her own writing where she wanted to “show a slice of life... the anti-structure nature of events and developments and spirals and backsteps in our own lives” (Zega, 2001, July 7, p.60-61), resonated, since HODs’ experiences were also multiple, layered, interleaved and cluttered. This too, echoed Brown and Moffat’s (1999) ideas about the recursive, spiral and complex dimensions of experience that exist simultaneously in people’s lives. Richardson (1994) predicted such complexity when she concluded that a range of literary devices like flashback, flashforward and interior monologue could be useful in telling good research stories.

Given the need to aim for verisimilitude, it is important for writing to express a fleshed-out and embodied sense of reality. Denzin (1999) saw this as important as a vehicle for articulating a specific cultural or political issue while at the same time offering hope. This operates on the level of an emotional engagement by a reader. Denison’s (1996) work illustrated this point well.

Bochner and Ellis (1999) suggested that there is now a desire by some researchers to move away from the traditional view that facts are of prime importance and instead move into the more ambiguous and complicated area of representing meaning and feeling. Bochner (2000) even went as far as saying that the only way to make any sense of the enormity and complexity of some lived moments is through story. This is because the alternative - that is, systems of ideas - is inadequate because of their tendency to strip away the messiness of experiences and reduce them to flat, impersonal and characterless generalisations. Bochner believed that narrative is "our only means" (p.270) of representing experience in language and that whatever form a narrative takes, it will very much depend on "purposes, forms and practices" (p.270) since it is "impossible to fix a single standard for deciding the good and right" (p.270) ones. Frank (2000) went as far as suggesting that fiction may be a beneficial way of "portraying a complexity of lived experience ...that might not always come across in a theoretical explanation" (p. 483) even if the purpose of a theoretical explanation may be to focus on such complexity and human interaction. Frank argued that fictional forms have the ability to broaden an audience base, may have an immediate effect on an audience's emotions and can more readily portray complex situations. Even some scientists steeped in the positivist and modernist traditions of quantitative research are beginning to see the value of story. Gilmer (2000) is a case in point. She described how she sought to portray personal stories of students learning biochemistry by learning new ways of reporting science education research.

The actual structure of the story (Chapter Five) is reminiscent of Jack Finney's (1965) short story *Contents of the dead man's pockets*. The real-time chronology of his story consists of about ten minutes; about the time it takes for a cigarette to burn down while perched on the rim of an ashtray. At the same time, the story ranges over experiences that led the protagonist, Tom Benecke, to the dangerous predicament he finds himself in, which is on the eleventh storey of his apartment block, outside on a ledge. To create this structure, the author weaves in and out of the protagonist's mind allowing the reader to be privy to reflections on events as Tom tries to deal with the dangerous and vexed 'here and now'. The constant return to the present heightens dramatic tension and reinforces a sense

of the rising panic he faces. The fictionalised short story within this report uses a similar narrative structure, blending the here and now with the past to heighten a reader's understanding of predicaments the protagonist HOD faces. It allows for an accommodation of the forward and backward, and inward and outward of experience mentioned earlier, and aims for verisimilitude in terms of evoking real experience.

In relation to this research and its purposes, forms and practices, the choice of a short story narrative was therefore not a choice at all, but inevitable. It was inevitable for a number of reasons, including my background and profession as an English teacher, and my desire to make texts interesting, accessible and readable. Another reason for believing narrative was inevitable as a form of this research is because of who my participants and audience are: others who are English teachers and leaders of departments peopled with those who may have similar interests but different desires and needs.

What follows next is the short story itself, coalescing the important aspects raised in this chapter which were: the analysis of the data, key themes and issues, verisimilitude and anonymity, and a focus on individual experience, fudged by presenting composite experiences.

## Chapter Five: A short story from the inside

Liz hurriedly grabbed the copies of the agenda and her pile of whiteboard pens and stuffed them in her bag before heading to the meeting. On the way from her classroom where she had returned to pick up the things she'd forgotten, she dodged the splattering raindrops that signalled the end of the balmy weather. She began thinking about tomorrow, starting with her Year 13 class – she could see that most were going to struggle; they seemed to be a group who were 'doing' English at that level with little other than a cursory commitment to it. What Shakespeare play will she choose – which one will hold their interest most? She had to make a wise choice, given that it was a compulsory part of their Bursary exam... And should she also change the language topic? She was bored with teaching Advertising, but this year's class would probably handle that topic better than either Oratory or the New Zealand language ones, given the really hard questions for those in last year's paper.... She was very conscious of the dilemma she faced – how could she make an exam accessible to those who only had a passing acquaintance with literary sophistication and not bore herself, while not ending up with terrible Bursary results that the principal would ask questions about next year? Thank God, she thought to herself, that Bursary was on its way out. She clasped her meeting papers closely to her chest as a stream of students poured out of the nearby classroom, flooding round her as she tried to pass.

"Oops, sorry, miss," said a student she recognised, but couldn't remember the name of, as he nearly collided with her. He took off to her right and, as the bellow from the teacher standing at the classroom doorway insisted that students pull up their socks, he involuntarily bent over and did so. Girls from the class, which had obviously been kept in for a few minutes for some behaviour or homework infraction, staked a claim to some room as boys jostled past them. "Watch it, you wanker!" one irate girl called, as she did her best to wrestle some room for herself while hoisting her schoolbag over her shoulders. Liz smiled to herself, admiring the girl's sassiness.

Liz stood still for a few more seconds before carrying on, to let the students pass, obviously anxious to make up for lost time in getting home. She

quickly glanced upwards at the sky and hoped the rain wouldn't intensify while she waited, and, as the river of students turned to a trickle, she began thinking about her students again. Once she started walking, she thought about Tama in Year 11 – the boy whose parents had just split – how was she going to keep his motivation up when his world was collapsing? Already she could see the debilitating effects of his private agony in his work. No matter how long she'd been teaching or how many different things she'd tried over the years, she still felt defeated by the needs of students in such tender predicaments. She understood all too well her own inadequacies by not being able to help him satisfactorily. Worrying wouldn't help...

Instead, she took a deep breath, mentally shook her head and thought, "that'll have to wait; departmental meeting now," as she entered the library building and headed for the seminar room, shaking water from her jacket's sleeves as she did so. She cursed both the consignment of the English department to the prefabs by the main road, and their distance from the library and the seminar room. None of the buildings were linked by covered walkways and staff and students were constantly dodging bad weather to get equipment and themselves from one place to another.

The seminar room was relatively new, and, because Board of Trustees meetings were held here, had a faint air of formality and unaccustomed tidiness about it, enhanced by the smooth large tables and comfortable chairs as well as the soft green and cream decor. This was no space for students. Liz was grateful that the department could meet here instead of a classroom. There, they would have to sit on the slightly grubby plastic chairs at wobbly desks where countless graffiti artists had gouged messages into the tops; even the newer Formica desktops weren't safe. Yes, there was something decidedly adult and otherworldly about this meeting room... sometimes Liz felt that this room wasn't even for teachers.

Inside, colleagues were already tucking into the bread, crackers and cheese, which she'd intended to buy the night before on her way home but, because she met with the dean about Tama's situation instead, had to put it off. Something had to give. She couldn't attend the meeting with the dean, get to the supermarket to buy the goodies *and* get home in time to take her daughter to her

hockey game. She didn't dare be late for that. It was hard enough fitting in family time as it was, and her teenage daughter was getting grumpier by the day as she made snide comments about the amount of time Liz wasn't spending with her. She also couldn't remember the last time the whole family had a fun night out together. That was ridiculous; she was spending all her waking hours, it seemed to her, on the needs of other people's kids. 'How did it get to be like this?' she thought to herself, feeling vaguely agitated by her predicament but without knowing why...

In the end, she used lunchtime to get the food, then interrupted Sharon's class before she raced off to meet the principal during the last period. She gave Sharon the food to put out, knowing she'd be too late to do it herself. She expected the meeting with the principal during her only non-contact that day to go longer than she'd wanted it to, but she also wanted the food to be ready in the room to welcome the staff. It was important symbolically and she wanted them to feel appreciated for being there after a long day. She also knew that Sharon, whom she knew would get Greta to help, had a knack for displaying food so it looked even more inviting than it really was. Balancing, balancing.

The meeting with the principal was one she had initiated. She needed to explain why she'd asked questions at the HOD meeting the day before that had put him on the spot. There was no other time for it in the day, so the meeting had to be in her only non-contact period, the only 'free' (ha!) time she had. Besides, the principal was already booked with appointments each time that she was free for the rest of the week, and she didn't want this to drag on, nor did she want to have to get relief for a class to meet with him during a teaching period. She felt that it was important to let him know she wasn't trying to challenge him. At the HOD meeting she had been shocked that replacing the boiler and buying new paving stones for the entrance to the school were currently at the top of the draft capital expenditure list. On the other hand, items HODs had signalled as important for their curriculum needs were relegated to a place on the list where she knew the red pen might fall, drawing a line between what would and wouldn't get funded for the next year. When she'd asked about it at the meeting, because she genuinely wanted to know, Liz felt quite exposed. Seldom was Jeff, the principal, questioned about budget priorities by HODs and she was very

aware that as one of only two female HODs she was probably emphasising her 'otherness' from the rest by speaking out. It had made her squirm, but she had carried on anyway. She had to brave it while feeling exposed with all eyes on her.

"God it's bad enough being made to *feel* different," she admonished herself, "without sticking my head above the parapet and making it bloody obvious!" Still, she knew that the questions she asked were valid. She wasn't going to have her department under-resourced just so the grounds of Riverside High School could look better to the public. "Okay, the boiler does need replacing and is getting dangerous, but the paving? Does that need doing just now, when we're going to need to video speeches and performances for assessment, let alone equipment like a television and video player to meet curriculum needs?" Liz thought. She knew she was right, but wanted to smooth the waters with Jeff. It wouldn't be clever for her to get off-side with him because he was generally very supportive. She needed to keep it that way.

She was also careful to explain that she genuinely needed to know his reasoning for his priorities. Liz could tell that even though Jeff didn't say anything specific, he was pleased she'd taken the time to speak to him. She had put him on the spot at the HOD meeting and he'd had a hard job rationalising his boiler and paving stones decision, making him visibly uncomfortable. She had caught him out and that was potentially dangerous for her and her department, even though she had a positive working relationship with Jeff. The meeting had been really important to put him at ease again and keep that relationship effective.

It was times like this, when she had to play politics and take care of people's egos and positions that she wished she could just get back to being an 'ordinary' teacher again. Then she could worry about her classes and her family, full stop. "Serves me right for wanting to be an HOD, to think that I could do this job and make a difference," she thought to herself, mentally kicking herself at the same time. It was much harder than she had thought it was.

On reflection, her former HOD had seemed to be amazingly calm – how did he do it? Perhaps he had a partner who could do all the things she seemed to always be doing... She should never have listened to those at her former school who encouraged her to apply for this HOD role. An ego can get you into a lot of



trouble, she decided, and a job like this can really knock the stuffing out of you. Again, she felt vaguely uneasy, but shook it off. She knew she would put her department's needs and those of her students first and so expected to have work hard. She hadn't realised, however, just *how* hard it was. Was it just her, she wondered? Perhaps she was just too emotional and let things get to her. Did other HODs find it harder, or was it that as a woman she overdid it to prove herself? The male HODs always looked so calm, she thought to herself, so perhaps it was a gender thing, or maybe they had better coping strategies or felt easier about not being able to do everything they had responsibility for... She must find time to ask...oh yes and courage...

Food always made meeting times more convivial, but the effort of providing it was never simple. This time, nipping out to buy the food at lunchtime meant that she'd had to shorten a scheduled lunchtime meeting with two other department heads. They had been trying to work out how they could share the skills of a versatile colleague, Vanessa, who could teach not only English, but Social Studies and German as well. Since the next year's staffing allocations needed to be thought about now, the three of them wanted to have enough time to make a sensible decision they were all happy with, rather than a stop-gap pragmatic decision that might mean Vanessa ended up with a lousy timetable. She was such an incredible teacher, all three of them - the department heads that is - agreed they had to make Vanessa's teaching load manageable. They all knew that teaching in three different areas was overly stressful and could lead to a crazy workload. At least that decision wasn't needed straightway even though she felt guilty about cutting the meeting short. Still, some of the issues were aired and perhaps it wasn't such a bad thing to leave the decision to another time. At least everyone would have had time to think it through, a bit of a luxury at the best of times. They would have to meet again however, so that they and Vanessa were happy with the outcome and could then get onto the business of persuading the timetabling committee and the principal. Still, Liz knew she couldn't get everything done at once – some things just had to wait a bit longer.

Today, her department's comfort took precedence. She wished she could have delegated some of the jobs she had to squeeze in today, but everyone else

was already committed. Sharon had been helping Dave with a rehearsal because Kerry was already busy meeting with Fiona from Social Studies who'd agreed to do Front of House for the production. Greta meantime, had organised to keep in for a detention her rather obnoxious Year 10 class, who had yet again gone too far over something, Vanessa was rehearsing one particular scene that still wasn't working well, Pat was working with the junior debating team and Andrew and Simon were on duty.... She didn't want to even think about asking Greg; he was likely to bite her head off. Besides, he was being a bit elusive these days. He hardly ever said where he was going to be – she seldom ever knew when or if he was coming to departmental meetings. He could be *so* rude! Sometimes she was glad he didn't turn up...

“Hi, everyone, glad to see you're enjoying the cheeses. Have you tried that Galaxy Creamy Blue one yet? I haven't, but I can't wait. What's it like?”

“It's great Liz, I've just had a piece. You know what I reckon it would go with? A tomato relish. A bit of sweet, a bit of tart...great!” Greta, the foodie and humourist amongst them, enthusiastically cut another slice from the block and placed it precariously on a Snax cracker. She grinned widely, took a large bite, wandered back to her space at the table then sat down. Rain splattered the windows and the sky darkened.

Also seated around the table were most other staff members. There was Dave, a young man in his second year still finding his way as a teacher. He was busily wiping crumbs off his jersey onto the floor and Pat, who'd been at the school for what seemed like forever, surreptitiously glanced disapprovingly over her new glasses at the scattered mess. Kerry, who loved drama and was the driving force behind the production, was sitting beside Dave and on his other side was the assistant HOD, Sharon. Slouched on the other side of the table with his usual mantle of cool was Simon while Vanessa, the most versatile and talented teacher in the school Liz reckoned, was in deep conversation with Andrew, the newest addition to the team. Bless her, she had a knack for looking after the newbies. Liz was glad Vanessa could make the meeting – she sometimes had to go to other departments' meetings and she knew this made her anxious about missing important information.

On occasions like that, Liz made a point of sitting down with Vanessa the next day, usually at morning tea time if she could manage it, and went over important issues from the meeting she had missed. She only wished that she could have Vanessa to herself, instead of sharing her with other departments. Trouble was, the other department heads felt the same way. Vanessa seemed to have the entire school as her fan club. The students really loved being in her classes and teachers admired her too – there was just something about her.... Things were not always rosy, however. Liz remembered a time when Vanessa was almost stalked by a student who became obsessed with her. It was a difficult situation and she was glad the school had effective harassment procedures in place to deal with it, although it took some doing to sort out. Thankfully, it hadn't put Vanessa off the school or off teaching. Somehow she took everything in her stride. Amazing. Liz was just blown away, especially when she herself felt completely bewildered by just about everything these days.

She was pleased nearly everyone had made it today. Only Greg was missing, and, while Liz had no idea why, which irked her, she felt secretly pleased. One less tension to deal with... She dreaded the days when people offered excuses like hair appointments (on a meeting day, for heaven's sake!!!), visits to relatives in hospital (why right now, won't an hour later do just as well?), or having something else that just had to be done right that minute (could it be *that* urgent?), or, in Vanessa's case, being torn between which department meeting to go to. For Liz, meetings were precious since they were one of the few times she could get people together and talk through issues, and she despaired of ever being able to effectively work with staff without them. She knew that there was no way that she could spend time with all staff members individually over a school week; there were too many other things happening and too many of them. God forbid she was ever an HOD in a really big school that had a lot more departmental staff to organise and lead. She gave silent thanks, secretly clasping her hands as if in prayer. She resisted the temptation to cast a supplicating glance skyward...

"Okay, everyone, while I get my coffee and something to nibble on, does anyone have anything we need to add to the agenda? Spare copies are here if you need them," said Liz, as she laid out copies in front of her.

"Yeah, we need to sort out the problem we've got with the production." This was from Sharon, whose responsibility was wardrobe.

"Right, we'll add that to general business at the end. Anything else? No? Okay, let's get started, shall we?" Liz was all business as she made her coffee, sat at her chair in front of the stack of papers, clicked her ballpoint pen and began. She didn't ever want to waste time with staff, especially after the gruelling schedule of the production rehearsals on top of their teaching loads. Everyone was beginning to feel its effects. It was clear they were getting more tired and fractious the closer they drew to the first performance in a week's time. Liz knew how tired and snappy she'd become and was aware that she was taking it out on her family. When she'd been asked for what seemed like the millionth time, "Mum, where're my socks?" she had, she remembered cringing inwardly, exploded at her daughter. It was a terrible and unwarranted thing to do and meant that both had begun the day in a bad mood: Liz, because she felt guilty and her daughter, for feeling unfairly treated.

For the first three quarters of an hour, the team worked their way through the cheese, crackers and the agenda. Tired as they were, they had to make some decisions for the budget round including the state of the textbooks and what they should replace; what new books people had read that might not only go down well at specific levels next year, but also increase the stores of bicultural texts. Then there were big groans when she mentioned they also had to think about implications surrounding organising assessment and reporting processes for the senior classes because of NCEA. They all agreed they couldn't possibly begin to think about that until after the production was over, so they promised a working bee on it during the next lot of holidays, to continue as the new term started. It seemed far enough away right now to seem like a good idea... An outline was all they could manage right now. They knew that they would be developing the study guides for each year level and designing the shape of the courses for various kinds of students that, they hoped, would

broadly match their needs more specifically than the programmes they could offer at present. It was a beautiful theory, anyway.

While they knew there was argument about the NCEA, they felt that they could use it to suit the students better than the current exams did right now. They also didn't have that much time to get it organised – the programme guides were due to be printed for students by the start of September; worrying about the negatives about NCEA would paralyse them and prevent any worthwhile attempt to meet students' needs better. Besides, there wasn't a lot of choice in the matter. Liz would also need to work with staff to match their skills with various classes, and she knew that this process could be a minefield all on its own. Lastly on the agenda, one or two specific problems some staff had with specific students were aired, and then it was time for general business.

"Can we talk about the production now?" Sharon asked, her impatience palpable. Liz, wary of Sharon's tone of voice, knew she was in for some fire-fighting. She sat up straighter and tried to look as if she was more in control than she felt. Sharon's body language – tightly crossed arms and a strong, direct gaze, confirmed her gut feeling that things were about to get out of hand. She could feel her grip tightening on her pen and tried to make herself relax. Too hard.

"As wardrobe, I really need some help. Greg is being impossible. He seems to think I can pluck things out of thin air while he twiddles his thumbs. He won't even listen when I try to explain the constraints we're faced with. What's more, he had no right to go off at me the way he did the other day."

Out of the corner of her eye, Liz could see that everyone had shifted in their seats slightly and either took sideways glances at each other, or studiously examined Snax biscuit crumbs left behind on the table. Everyone knew what Sharon meant. Greg, AWOL from the meeting, was making the whole production process fraught with what Liz described privately to herself as temper tantrums. At the best of times he was difficult. This last year though, his health had deteriorated. He was not functioning well, making him even more prickly to deal with, that's if anyone could ever find him when they needed him (where did he get to, and why can't I hide too?). Over the production, however, he was becoming almost impossible, upsetting both staff and students with his confrontational manner. Liz despaired over his class's contribution – she hoped it

would be okay in the end. It would be terrible if his students got a raw deal and were embarrassed by it, because then they might never want to participate in a performance ever again.

Greg had been teaching at this school for a long time, developing a reputation both as a verbal bully and as someone who resisted change. His first line of defence always seemed to be attack. Liz was warned about him by the principal on her first day on the job as HOD. Obviously Greg had made the principal feel wary and, given some of the things Jeff had said to Liz over the occasions she'd had to discuss Greg's antics, more or less expected her to find ways of dealing with him. It was now her problem, that was clear. Jeff was going to support from the sideline and that was all. Dealing with staff conflict was not one of this principal's strong points, Liz had noticed. She also knew that she wasn't exactly trained to deal with this sort of thing either.

Through experience, she realised that anything that Greg was asked to do differently, like changes to assessment practices implied by the impending NCEA, had to be someone's fault. And Liz was often in the firing line because she had to initiate these things. While his behaviour was often predictable, at the moment it was erratic, especially now he was in bad health. Greg could never seem to understand that sometimes his perceptions about what mattered could be unrealistic, or that the way he went about making his feelings known usually meant he offended people. Liz often had clean-up operations to perform, smoothing people's feelings as they vented their frustrations to her.

What was even worse was that whenever Liz had confronted Greg about his behaviour, he would go into denial and promise the world. Teaching was hard enough without someone like Greg making things more emotionally draining. It was all very well for her to be expected to treat staff as individuals and accept individual difference, but when this difference was counter-productive...

What was even more galling to Liz was how oblivious Greg seemed to be of the amount of work she'd had to do behind the scenes to prop him up while he was ill. While she didn't need praise, a bit of acknowledgement wouldn't have gone amiss. She'd been setting the work for all of last term for two of his classes – he only had to roll up and go through the motions. Liz was only doing this

because she didn't want the kids in his classes to suffer if she could help it. Greg had admitted to her in a private meeting earlier that year, when she'd had to speak to him about his behaviour again, that he wasn't coping because of his health but that he needed to come to work to stay sane. While she could understand that, she was beginning to resent the amount of work she was doing to rescue his stuff-ups. He was marking work erratically, getting to class late and not paying much attention to his basic obligations as a member of the department.

On the other hand, Liz felt that if she confronted him on these shortcomings he would fall apart even more which meant his classes would suffer too. It was a balancing act she thought she wasn't able to maintain much longer. How could she be supportive of his needs while he was ill and still ensure kids in his classes got a good deal, while he behaved so badly? (She'd much rather beat him up, if she could...). It seemed more and more as if she was in a trap, unable to do anything to get out. It was all very well for the principal to advise her to keep a diary of all the things that were going on so that they could institute formal competency procedures if they had to, but honestly, how on earth could she do that too? Carry around a little book on the off-chance something was worthy of writing in it? An image of a 19<sup>th</sup> century bricklayer flitted through her mind, struggling up a ladder carrying a loaded hod on a shoulder; she could feel the weight of those bricks herself. Instinctively her shoulders tensed.

The whole situation had become ghastly. She had even dreaded going to school some mornings, knowing Greg's state of mind. She knew that she would have to pick up some more pieces and deal with what felt like almost daily criticism from all sorts of staff. What really hurt was when Darren the Assistant Principal, had told her off the week before, saying she hadn't been doing her job properly because she had missed two deadlines on work he'd asked her to do on updating policies for the impending ERO visit in two months' time. There was only so much of her to go around, but it didn't stop her feeling gutted, misunderstood and terribly alone. It was times like that when she felt she needed the kind of support at school that others expected of her. And bawling her out in the staff room was really hard to take. She was so mad at the unfairness that she

had to leave the room and head for the women's toilets for a bit of private space to calm down. She hadn't wanted to cry or blow her top – there were too many people watching.

It was also times like this that she despaired of the job and wondered whether it was worth it. She kept going, she reasoned, because sometimes, she made a difference to kids. She remembered Emily, a year 10 student who had driven everyone mad at the start of the year. She had been surly, unco-operative, seldom brought the right gear to class and was often disruptive. Liz could have easily gone in and done the authoritarian number with her when the girl's English teacher sought her help. She could have behaved the way she'd seen other HODs behave with kids and berate the student into submission, but it wasn't her style.

Instead, over a period of two months, she talked with Emily, her mother and her teachers. She consulted the school counsellor and dean and made sure that she spoke with Emily at least twice a week. During those discussions, Liz actively sought Emily's advice about how she thought Liz could work with a student in one of her own classes who was being disruptive. Over time, Emily became drawn into the conversation and began to compare the other student's behaviour with her own and why she behaved as she did. It was an incredible experience for Liz. She'd never had to do this sort of thing before. Somehow it just seemed right for Emily. It wasn't long before Emily made some decisions and asked Liz about a contract for her behaviour and schoolwork who then discussed it with her parents, her English teacher and the dean. Between the school and home, some tangible rewards for Emily were put in place. By the start of Term 2, Emily had begun to improve. Her teachers could hardly believe their luck, but enjoyed the new Emily and the relief it brought to their classrooms. Liz herself basked in secret joy as she watched Emily's progress. Every now and then, Liz indulged in a secret smile. Ego? Probably. Liz remembered that it was the prospect of making a difference with students like Emily that kept her going.

"I really don't think we should talk about the situation without Greg present. It's not really appropriate," Liz pointed out, as she refocused on the meeting.



“Bugger what’s appropriate,” Sharon stormed, “I’m sick of this – why should he make my life a misery with his bad behaviour, rudeness and inability to compromise?” Others were startled by Sharon’s vehement outburst, but Liz, who’d seen Sharon soon after she’d first been confronted by Greg’s rudeness at the weekend rehearsal, was not. The problem was, she understood *exactly* how Sharon felt. However, now that Greg’s behaviour was threatening everyone’s morale, she had to do something positive and leave her own feelings aside.

Lightning zigzagged across the sky, followed by a boom of thunder. Everyone instinctively flinched and Simon’s second cup of coffee, which was halfway to his lips, suddenly spilled down his shirt. “Bugger!” he exclaimed, rapidly leaping to the tap in the tiny kitchen next door.

Liz clearly saw that the camaraderie and teamwork she’d tried so hard to foster over the four years she’d been HOD was about to turn to custard. It’d been hard going mainly because of Greg and Liz’s feelings of incompetence when faced with having to deal with someone like him. The others were pretty much happy to work together and focus their energies on the kids they taught and she really enjoyed their company. In a review two years ago, they’d agreed it was time to make changes. They’d then spent snatched hours here and there working at lunchtimes, holiday breaks and after school to develop what they felt was a better curriculum and assessment programme for juniors that also did a better job of accommodating the interests of a large population of Maori students in the school. There had been a lot of to-ing and fro-ing to get to that point, and there had been a sense of real achievement about it. It wasn’t perfect by any means, but it was theirs and they’d worked together to build it, and they felt good about it.

It had also been a really good opportunity for Liz to work closely with Sharon in sharing the leadership and build their relationship. The teamwork had paid off in how well they’d shared teaching and learning ideas to complement the programme – all except Greg, who’d spent a lot of the time moaning, “What’s the point?” or complaining that all it was going to do was create more work. He also railed against others’ belief that they needed to concentrate some of their energies into designing culturally broad units. Anything outside his comfort zone was, it seemed, in the too hard basket.

The rest of the staff coped by ignoring him and carried on experimenting with new ideas and processes in the junior school, because they felt that it was safe to try things out there. They had agreed that the changes they made would help prepare those students as well as themselves for the imminent new assessment system for the senior school. Even Simon, the most laid back member of the department was keen and was hugely creative in some of the ideas he contributed. He was the one who'd designed and resourced a visual language unit that focused on ways of both incorporating Maori texts into specific language focuses and getting kids to design web pages and 3D models. A number of staff in the department, including Liz, were blown away by it and were itching to have a go.

While the development work on the new programme was time-consuming and was on top of, yet part of, everything else they were doing, the experience had bonded them. They had taken a hard look at what they already did and decided what they wanted to keep, throw out, add to or change. It had been a liberating teambuilding task, even though Liz was finding her way through it herself; she'd not had much experience of this before, and there weren't any PD programmes for her to learn from. Liz had noticed that since then, they talked more often as a group, sharing their professional expertise. Each seemed to understand more about what each other's strengths were, seeking and giving each other advice and guidance. She was grateful for that serendipitous benefit and the opportunity for Sharon to get her teeth into a visible leadership role.

It had been a difficult relationship with Sharon when Liz first arrived as HOD. During the first year of Liz's appointment, she'd struggled to connect with her. Sharon had seemed frosty and uncommunicative at first, even though Liz had asked that they have a designated meeting time in their timetables so they could discuss the department's needs on a weekly basis. Liz had needed Sharon's insider knowledge as the assistant HOD but she seemed loath to share it. It took six months before Liz found out that Sharon had applied for the HOD job – a lot of lost time. Had she known sooner, she could have been more pro-active in helping Sharon get over what had been a bitter disappointment. Liz found out that Sharon had taken sick leave for three days after the appointment was made,

and those who supported Sharon had been quite worried about her at that time. She wished the principal had told her about Sharon's pitch for the job; he certainly hadn't hesitated telling her about Greg.

As soon as Liz found out about Sharon's disappointment, Sharon's behaviour made sense. Liz then resolved to talk about it with her as a way of getting the issue in the open. And, probably partly because some time had now passed, Sharon had admitted how she felt and explained that she was still wounded by what she saw as a rejection of her skills. Liz was determined to help the wound heal, and so actively sought Sharon's opinion and advice on professional matters in break times in the staff room so that, in an understated way, her mana as assistant HOD was broadened in a public sphere.

Later, Sharon agreed to be in charge of every second departmental agenda and often chaired the meetings. She then actively took responsibility for the oversight of the junior programmes, a task that had languished while she grieved over the job disappointment. Liz had been impressed with the way she was handling the junior focus. Sometimes, Liz had taken her to a local café for a working lunch. Over a plate of delicious food and real coffee, they chewed over what was going on and what they needed to do. It was lucky that during that year their timetabled non-contact time occurred after lunch on a Thursday, so they could work at a sensible and relaxed pace; otherwise going out for lunch would have been a waste of time. She wished they had the same timetabling arrangement this year, even though she'd asked for it.

These strategies had been invaluable and within a few months, Sharon began initiating ideas for the department to consider. Wonderfully, some of her ideas were among the best of all. Liz felt really pleased with herself that she had persevered because they worked together really well.

Now, Liz could arrive in the staff room in the mornings, see Sharon and ask, "What are you thinking about now?" That was usually an invitation for her to say, "I've just been thinking about..." and then the whole day's breaks would be caught up in snatched conversations as they explored an idea and brainstormed possibilities. It was also likely that within a week of such an exchange, Sharon would present Liz with a written summary of the idea along with a plan of what to do next. Liz admired the thinking behind Sharon's ideas

and often, most of the English teaching staff were keen to debate and develop the ideas because they were so good.

Oh yes, that was another reason she liked the job; making a difference to staff and being able to focus on creativity. She loved that. Ego had nothing to do with it, of course.

Liz really wished that somehow all of them could have at least one fewer class. She knew that the sense of community the department worked within was a fragile beast; it could shatter or splinter at any time. It was delicate partly because of time constraints and partly because of the trust they had built up in working together. Liz was acutely aware that her colleagues were motivated by their loyalty to each other and their sense of wanting to do well for the kids they taught. Both values exploited their energy and commitment. Liz knew that such commitment and energy was finite; putting on a school production tested that dedication to the limit. On the other hand, departmental staff keenly felt their responsibilities to students and the school's expectation that staff would engage in extra-curricular activities to broaden students' experiences and encourage better staff/student relationships. That was all very well, but there was little acknowledgement, it seemed to Liz, of the personal costs of this dedication. Perhaps she was tired and getting too grumpy... buck up, girl...

On the other hand, she thought of her own classes, particularly the Rumaki class she took. She loved those kids – their sassiness, lack of guile and openness - but they also sapped a lot of her energy. She knew she spent too much time planning for this class. Well, no it wasn't *really* too much time; she wished she could do the same for all her classes but it was too much time in relation to all the other things she had to. It meant she had to skim over planning for others, and knew that it was unfair on those students.

She also knew that all of them would be better teachers if they had more space to draw their breaths each day and would probably lead more whole lives. All of them felt the tension between doing a good job for other people's children and the cost of that commitment to their own. The look on her own daughter's face as she stormed off when Liz got angry over the socks, flitted into her mind. It was not a pretty sight. She shifted uncomfortably in her chair. She knew with

clarity that if she had fewer classes to teach herself, she could, for instance, follow up Andrew's needs as a beginning teacher better and spend more time with him. He needed support right now because he'd been working with a difficult class and was beginning to doubt his skills. His confidence was slipping, and she could see it happening... And she might just get on better with her own daughter...

And if she had more time she could also be more reflective about her own practice, both as an HOD and as a classroom teacher. She also wanted to enrol in further university study, so that she could learn more about leadership that might make her job easier in the long run, but felt too exhausted to even think about it right now. And she knew that if she had more discretionary time, she would not end up in the embarrassing situations she found herself in lately. She still cringed over them.

The first stuff-up occurred when she didn't check that Barbara, a clerical staff member in the main office, had given her the complete list of students entered in the Australian English competition. This lack of checking meant that twice the number of students turned up for the exam than it said on the list she had. It was too late to even order any more exam scripts. The fallout was awful too; she had to bear the brunt of an angry parent berating her in the corridor two days later about it. Liz had a terrible time keeping her temper and, in the end, thanked the parent for coming in before walking off. While she felt a bit guilty for doing that, she didn't think she needed to be told off for something beyond her control, especially in such a public space. Besides, if she'd stayed, she would have behaved badly. Not a good look.

The next humiliation occurred when she'd organised a Board of Trustees morning tea with staff. None of the BOT members turned up because the principal's secretary had forgotten to contact them, and at the BOT meeting the night before the morning tea, she'd been overtired and had forgotten to mention it... The next morning there was \$100.00 worth of morning tea and no BOT members. "Serves me right for being the staff rep.," she thought to herself, because she knew that role put extra pressure on her. It was during such times that she felt a huge, rising panic as she realised her powerlessness to make things right in such a public scenario.

She really needed to have a long lie down in a very deep bath....

Maybe, just maybe, if she had more time out of the classroom, she would have both more energy and some thinking time so she could work out what to do about Greg. At the moment she felt like she was on a roller coaster heading into a deep, dark and dizzying drop that she could not prevent. There was just too much to do in four hours of non-contact time a week. It seemed like she was expected to do her HOD job at home at night, but most of the job meant she needed to talk to and work with people during the day. As it was, she was constantly being interrupted in her lessons. Sometimes, she couldn't start a lesson for over 10 minutes because people needed her advice on something. When she was in her classroom, she was captive and others knew where she'd be. She couldn't let the kids down in her five classes and she worried about the time these interruptions took away from teaching and learning. For some classes, like her rumpy Year 9 or the Rumaki class, every minute was precious. The first few minutes of each period were crucial when she could set the tone of the lesson, yet she often couldn't use those minutes well because others interrupted her just as she was settling the class. The production sapped her strength, her time away from her own family left her feeling guilty, and Greg, well....

"Where *is* that man?" Liz fumed to herself, "I'm sick of covering for him." She had no idea why Greg wasn't at the meeting; as far as she knew, he had not put in an apology, but his absence was not unusual. She had to think fast. Her brow furrowed. What on earth was she going to do?

She looked around the room at each colleague, buying herself time as she tried to appear in control and calm a rising panic, sweaty palms and a desperate need to cry. For their sakes as well as her own, she had to get a handle on her emotions. She had to maintain her cool. "Think of the role, think of the role" she intoned to herself, remembering the advice of another HOD who'd learned to focus on being 'in role' in the job. That way, he'd been able to distance himself from some of the emotional turmoil and treat events like this as job related, rather than personal. She had liked that idea and felt it was usually good advice, but right now she was having a hard time focusing on it.

She began speaking in as even a tone as she could muster, hoping her voice would not betray how wretchedly she felt. Here goes, she thought. What am I going to say? She took a deep breath, looked around at everyone and began.

“Okay, let’s work through this. I can see you’re really upset, Sharon. We’ve had a really tough time getting this production together and I’ve admired how each of you has worked on it over the last three months. I hate admitting it, but I know my teaching has suffered because I’m not as prepared as I could be and my marking is way behind, and I don’t like that to happen. I feel really guilty about it and I guess some of you are feeling that pressure too. Having the reports due soon doesn’t help, either. I know too, that it’s cost us time with our own families and that’s also stressful. For some of us like Dave who’s having a go at a production for the first time, it’s been an even bigger learning curve. The rest of us have learned a lot too and I’m thankful we’ve got Kerry on our team to help us with things to work on with students. I think allowing Andrew to buddy up with you has been really great. And Sharon, I think you’ve done a superb job with wardrobe and getting everything ready and I know Simon’s creative solutions with props have been a godsend. And without Greta’s good humour, and Vanessa’s ability to get us to the pub on a bad day, I think we would all have been basket cases a long time ago”.

As she spoke, she glanced around the table at her colleagues, understanding perfectly the stress Greg and the production had put everyone under. She knew though, that if she allowed them to get any angrier and berate Greg while he wasn’t here, then she was setting herself up for disaster. It could be all too easy for them to use this conflict as a way of venting their frustrations and tiredness over their work on the production. What she didn’t need was Greg later filing a grievance claim.

Her words of praise were working, because she could see a visible relaxation in her colleagues’ body language. A few minutes ago, they were tense and ready to support Sharon’s outburst with one of their own. She knew they needed to talk about it just to get it out of their system, but could she risk it? She had to think hard - what and who was important here?

The rain intensified, striking the windows with staccato force. The sky blackened, further dimming the room. When she spoke next, she wanted to

sound controlled and responsible, so she shuffled the papers in front of her into an even neater pile. She then wiped her clammy palms on a serviette to try to dry them, looked up at her colleagues, and began.

“Look everyone, I know you’re upset, and I know things have been difficult. Can I think about the situation a bit more? Sharon, can we talk later about what’s especially affecting you? When would suit?” Liz opened her diary to check as a way of buying time, keeping the situation defused and, maybe, looking like she’s got things under control. “Thursday lunchtime? I think -” Liz stopped speaking as she heard a noise and turned to the door where it had come from.

The door opened and Greg walked in, shaking water from his umbrella.



## Chapter Six: Discussion of findings

This final chapter draws together key threads from the research, which exist as a testimony to some of the accumulating effects of educational change over the last decade and more. While some changes in education often appear to be treated as managerial and technical, HODs work within intense, complex and time-poor contexts in which relationships with others are central. The conclusions noted in this chapter refer to several sources of evidence: the policy and advertisement deconstruction about the role of HODs, relevant statistics, the literature, interviews and personal experiences. This chapter therefore outlines issues relating to time (homework, schoolwork and staffwork), relationships (gender, emotions and change), and students within a wider New Zealand educational context. The chapter also considers specific methodological implications especially in terms of the way relationships were central to the research endeavour. It concludes with a review of leadership and professional development issues and suggests recommendations for action. The first focus centres on issues related to time as it affects HODs' professional lives.

### Time

A key finding of this research implicates the lack of time HODs have in which to carry out their duties as teachers and as curriculum and pedagogical leaders. Gitlin and Margonis (1995) considered the notion of teacher resistance as a reaction to workload issues and this relates to time. While they focused on school change and possible reasons for teacher resistance to it, their assertion is applicable to New Zealand conditions. Teacher resistance, they suggested, could be defined not as obstructive, but as "good sense" (p. 386) especially if teachers' workloads are consistently overlooked when change is expected. The current situation for the HODs in this study demonstrated some effects of this. In some instances, members of a department were given Management Units (MUs) without appropriate time allocations. These MU holders were expected to promote their responsibility because of the authority and the status accorded the

awarding of an MU. Implied in such a responsibility is an expectation for some kind of change to occur in others, whether in practices or behaviours or both. Without the time to do this however, the MU holders were unable to meet all of the expectations tied to the MU. This situation may partly exist because the New Zealand secondary teachers' employment contract (which expired in 2000 but which was current and remained unsettled during the research periods of 2001-2002) did not stipulate time allowances for MU holders to complement the remuneration.

Through this allocation process, it was possible for principals to demonstrate flexibility and fairness. While they might expect accountability, efficiency and excellence (in terms of better student learning) in return, this did not necessarily follow in reality, especially as these MU tasks were additional to everything else these teachers did. Resistance to change from all sorts of levels is symptomatic of workload stress (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). Those who have a responsibility to implement or promote change, can become isolated and bear the brunt of others' frustrations as they too try to cope. The practice of giving MUs to people without support provisions (for example, time or administrative help) can lead to tension, unhappiness, a drop in self-confidence and deteriorating working relationships especially if MU holders must also lead change in others who are stressed by their own workloads. One example of note in this research occurred with Participant C (July, 2001), who described a situation that affected not only her performance through another staff member's inability to cope with all of the requirements of an MU because of workload, but also strained their professional relationship. A further example is noted below.

During my tenure as an HOD, the seductive 1990s terms 'flexible', 'accountable' and 'efficient' did not necessarily equate with less work or even with being more effective as teachers. And five years later, the work of two HODs in this study appears to have been particularly intensified. This can partly be attributed to these HODs being reluctant to force other staff members with an MU but no time allowance to fulfil all expectations of their role, and partly because they took seriously the need to look after staff and students. Participant A (April, 2001) for instance, attempted to protect her staff members from burnout and stress. She believed on the one hand, that while she could expect a staff

member to fulfil the requirements of an allocated MU, she was well aware that insisting on it would result in considerable stress on her colleague. A result of this could be ill health and absenteeism, ultimately affecting students' learning as a staff member's ability to work effectively became compromised. This HOD therefore settled for what the staff member could humanly manage given other aspects of her job. Some tasks therefore either remained undone, or HODs added them to their own loads, compromising their own health and ability to promote effective teaching and learning with their own classes. This expanding nature of an HOD's job is indicated in Fitzgerald's (2000) discussion of the intensification of HODs' roles.

So, while the principals in these schools appeared to allocate MUs to more equitably distribute management and leadership functions within departments and across the school, participant HODs' jobs were not lessened in an equitable way. Handy and Aitken (1986) recognised similar imbalance when they remarked on ways in which schoolwork swallowed up teachers' 'spare' time in Britain. It is telling that Handy and Aitken made this observation over 15 years ago; teachers' workplace environments and workloads in New Zealand currently reflect that observation.

Two of the principals must have been aware that the English HOD's workload was onerous, for they attempted to alleviate that by giving them a class for half a year that then became someone else's to teach in the second half. This freed the HODs for four more hours for half a year, virtually doubling their non-contact time. Without such manipulations to timetables, principals, it may be argued, collude in ensuring that HODs do a considerable amount of their work in what should be their private time. And, by taking their work home with them, HODs then obscure a great deal of the time they spend on schoolwork. While this work is hidden from a principal's gaze, it cannot be recognised or accounted for.

Participant HODs admitted that they seldom had time to rest at lunchtime. This inability to have a real break in this part of the school day is symptomatic of the multiple complexities that arise from not having enough time built into the day to fulfil both teaching/leadership responsibilities and human needs for rest and relaxation. One participant explained it thus:

...it just seems to me that I have very few lunchtimes, I am meticulous about morning teas [which are twenty minutes] because I do think it's important everyone goes to that and it's a really important time to talk to people and to see what's going on in the school. But lunchtimes are out. I do duty in one, and at least three other lunchtimes a week I [do] things and maybe once a week or once a fortnight I'll get down to the staff room for lunch (Participant A, April 2001).

The number of times in which this HOD could realistically have a proper break brings into question at least two important points. Firstly, there are the responsibilities that good employers have in fostering good workplace practices that look after staff<sup>6</sup> in order to prevent harm. The widespread practice of allowing or tacitly expecting people to work through break times because of a lack of discretionary time in which activities, events or processes can take place, is a case in point. Secondly, if we can accept that the most significant "knowledge transfer" (Jayne, 2001, July 4, p. D1) among staff occurs in informal contexts, then schools have become places where superficial exchanges are the norm. This is because most lengthy conversations or discussions with colleagues are more likely to occur in designated meeting times. Lunchtimes as noted above, were seldom informal social contexts for HODs; they are only spaces in a school day when these HODs were not teaching. Designated meeting times most often occur during lunchtimes or at the end of a school day, when staff are often emotionally and physically drained. The lack of 'spare' time is indicated in this following example. Participant A (April, 2001) admitted that "... you don't have to sit down and *make* work; it comes at you" [my italics], suggesting the relentlessness and intensity of the work day.

In an effort to not only illustrate the complexity of the job described by the HODs and the ways in which time constraints are central to this, I developed the following diagram (Figure 1), which reflects Clandinin and Connelly's (1995a) conduit or funnel metaphor described in Chapter Two. The

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<sup>6</sup>"Harm" means illness, injury, or both; and "to harm", "harmed", and "unharmed" have corresponding meanings: "Hazard" means an activity, arrangement, circumstance, event, occurrence, phenomenon, process, situation, or substance (whether arising or caused within or outside a place of work) that is an actual or potential cause or source of harm; and "hazardous" has a corresponding meaning (*Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992* 096 Commenced: 1 Apr 1993)

responsibilities often associated with the HOD role and found in job descriptions, departmental manuals and school policies, are listed in the shaded area above the mouth of the funnel. They combine both HOD functions and teaching/learning functions, blurring distinctions between the two roles. This fuzziness reflected the realities of the participant HODs professional lives. The funnel is the body of the HOD. Inadequate time is represented by two things: the squeeze on the clock and the narrow neck of the funnel. The dual squeeze indicates the intensity of the pressures of the HOD. The silhouette figures pulling the rope around the funnel's neck and the clock, suggest the juggling of the HOD to meet the requirements of the SMT in the school on the one hand, and departmental staff and students on the other. The opposing nature of the pulling on the rope illustrates the potentially contradictory nature of the groups' needs and demands. The shadows cast by these figures imply the marginalizing of teaching and learning as HODs grapple with these pressures. The trickle squeezed out of the bottom of the funnel suggests what is humanly possible to do well, compared with the flood of tasks expected of HODs at the top.

One limitation of the diagram however, is that it focuses only on school time, no specific references to an HOD's private life and the ways that it can be affected by the spill of work into that sphere, or vice versa.

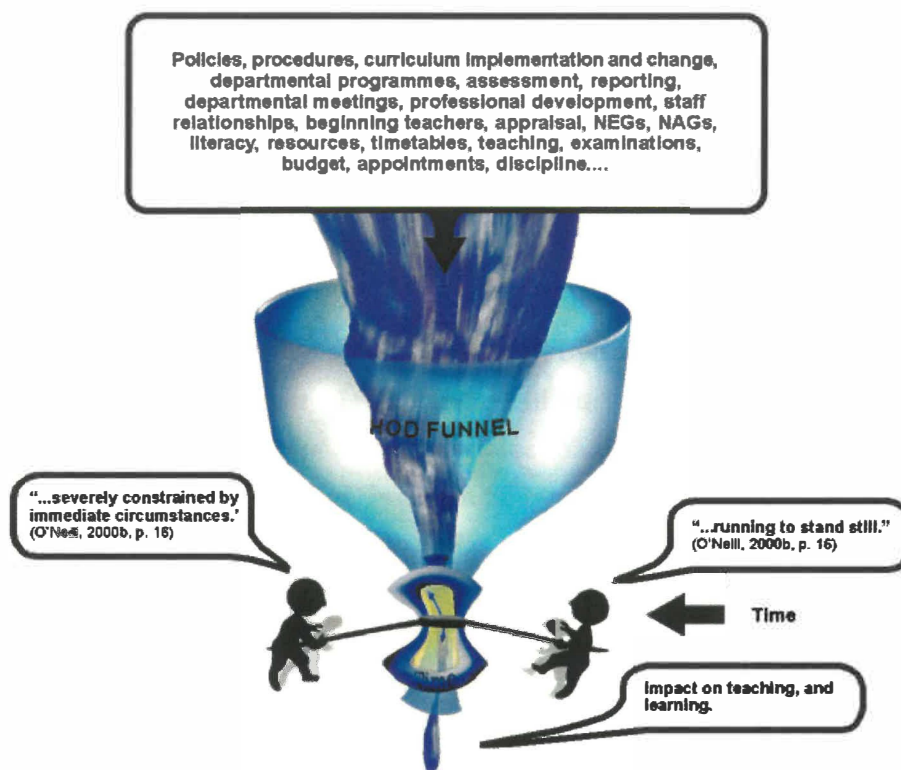


Fig 1: The conduit: the HOD as funnel

The position that the participant HODs found themselves in therefore makes it unsurprising that nationally, there is a definable upward trend in the number of re-advertisements for heads of department positions in New Zealand (see Appendix F). There is also a steady number of HODs who relinquish their HOD responsibilities and return to being 'just' a teacher<sup>7</sup>. The *Waikato Times*' (2001, October 11) editorial, while commenting on the secondary teachers' strike held on that day, pointed out that at that time, "there were 33 secondary school gaps in the Waikato – 13 at management level" (p. 6). There is a strong likelihood that such problems will widen if current conditions for HODs are not changed.

This kind of situation has some historical roots as noted by Handy and Aitken (1986) who described the British situation. They felt that "management ability is ... taken for granted" (p. 42) and that it was a "reward for climbing the ladder of subject expertise" (p. 42). Schools, they felt, were "too ready to imitate,

<sup>7</sup> From personal communication with Ministry of Education staff member 18/9/01 in Wellington, NZ

unquestioningly, the management hierarchies of business rather than the twin hierarchies of leadership and administration in the professions" (Handy & Aitken, 1986, p. 42).

These observations hint at some effects of the rise of the managerialism and market models that accompanied changes to education internationally and in New Zealand in the late 1980s. And, because of the cultural framework in which New Zealand secondary teachers work, a number of teachers have tended to accept that their private lives will be invaded by the amount of work they have to take home. The participant HODs talked of such acceptance. In a sense, this acquiescence about the nature of the job helps maintain these HODs' unenviable position of being squeezed at both ends by requirements from above (for example, from the principal and SMT, ERO, NZQA, Ministry of Education) and below (from staff, students and parents). This situation is exacerbated by the belief of those who see the job of HOD as a technical, managerial one, a development noted in Chapter Two and iterated by Codd (1990; 1999).

At the same time, implications embedded in what Handy and Aitken (1986) suggested above are applicable in New Zealand. In other words, schools that assume that the best teachers make the best managers are likely to provide little or no preparation or guidance for those new to the role and they are also unlikely to mentor people who could become such leaders as Wright, S. (2000) suggested when outlining her own experiences. It is no wonder that Liz, who took on the role of HOD with such hope in the Chapter Five story is now, a few years later, re-examining her own worth as she is caught yet again in stressful situations she has little time or energy left to deal with. While she is deeply immersed in the complexities of the role, she is unable to see that wider forces outside of her control have affected her life. These private troubles fit within the kinds of wider social concerns that Mills (1959) explained. They were symptomatic of the accumulated effects of changes to education that were also felt at a personal level.

If the participant HODs felt unable to discharge their duties effectively, they were also unable to effectively advocate for better student learning through active planning and development within the department. When the maximum positive effect for students cannot be realised because of the way social, economic

and political change has made an impact on an HOD's professional life, then we do indeed have problem of wide significance. Since HODs are "pivotal" (Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989, p. 32) in a secondary school and since students are likely to be affected in their learning if HODs don't have adequate time in which to operate, the current state of the professional lives of HODs in general is an issue about which the wider community should also be concerned. To illustrate these issues, some specific effects surrounding time are noted below under the headings homework, schoolwork and staffwork.

### *Homework*

Participant B (April, 2001) described the disbelief his father showed when he saw his timetable, saying " 'Good grief, when are you going to do your HOD work?' " His response was that it took place at home, in the evenings and at weekends. All three HODs in this study discussed the amount of sleep they existed on in term time, the time they spent thinking about school at other times and the relentless pace of their jobs. One HOD was on hypertension medication (Participant B, July, 2001), another usually woke at 5.30am on school days to prepare for what was ahead (Participant A, April, 2001), and all three spent their weekends on schoolwork.

An effect of the expectation on teachers that they take part in extra-curricular activities also forced these HODs to spend private time on schoolwork. Participant C (16/8/01) explained that acute tiredness set in after having to spend several evenings at functions for students (for example, speech competitions or theatre trips). This also meant she had to put off marking and preparation till the weekend. These occasions often created feelings of guilt, anxiety, crises of confidence and stress in the HODs because they were then unable to give timely feedback to students about their work and they were also unable to function as well as they wanted to for each class. The accumulation of a lack of sleep and the unremitting amount of work they had no choice but to take home, weighed heavily on these HODs.

Liz, the protagonist in the Chapter Five story for example, exhibits some of those stresses as she continually wonders at and worries about her relationship with her daughter as school 'stuff' gets in the way of her private life.



Participant B (July, 2001) too, talked of his son's plea to spend time with him instead of on 'school stuff' when yet another Sunday was taken up in this way. All three of the HODs commented on having to spend their private time on work for other people's children.

### *Schoolwork*

The Ministry of Education's [online] (Ministry of Education, 2001) Report of the School Staffing Review Group explained that "currently a significant amount of administration and management time is created at a cost to the curriculum and pastoral time schools have available. This draws staffing out of the classroom and is therefore at a direct cost to student options and outcomes". What is not described in this report however, are the implications of this on either students or teachers. The research for this thesis shows that HODs in secondary schools are more likely to have their leadership and management responsibilities *added* to their classroom work, rather than being drawn 'out of the classroom' as the Staffing Report suggests. West-Burnham's (1997) contention regarding the "state of permanent tension" (p. 234) between management and leadership for people like HODs as described in Chapter Two, more closely mirrors the experiences of the participant HODs.

The direct cost to student options and outcomes of practices which loaded up HODs, soon became clear. Despite the best efforts of these HODs to minimise the effects of their responsibilities on their classes, there were abundant cases of impact and collision: the number of interruptions the HODs faced during their teaching time; the longer turnaround time for assessment feedback to students, more superficial preparation of lessons, and diminishing opportunities for them to try new strategies or approaches with students. These were all concerns voiced by participants. Participant A for instance, had at least 11 interruptions to her classes on the day of observation (1/8/01). One such interruption lasted for ten minutes, reducing the teaching and learning time available to her class (see Appendix E). If these HODs had little non-class time in their timetables in which to be an HOD, it had little choice but to spill over into their teaching time. Besides, when the HOD was teaching, other staff knew

where to find them. Effects on student learning and departmental organisation cannot be ignored.

It is gratifying that the Ministry of Education's (2001) report admitted that the increased demands on staff like HODs was generally incurred as a result of the educational administration changes that introduced the self-managing schools concept. What the report appears to be unable or unwilling to indicate is the severity of the actual effects of this devolved overload on HODs on a daily basis. What is also debatable is whether this admission in the report will be reflected in changes that will positively affect the lot of HODs and in turn, students' learning.

### *Staffwork*

The number of hours the HODs spent teaching also interfered with their ability to effectively mentor and support departmental members. They believed this mentoring and support was particularly important for new teachers and those who, while being more experienced, still needed specific support on occasion, perhaps with an unruly class or with gaps in their curriculum or assessment knowledge. While there are indications that the main workforce in secondary teaching is aging, many young teachers are not continuing as teachers. As an example, Appendix F, which is an analysis by PPTA (The Post Primary Teachers' Association) of advertised vacancies in New Zealand secondary schools in 2001, indicates problems school have in recruiting people to positions of responsibility (MUs) and it shows a stark rise in vacancies in 2001, especially at the MU levels. This situation may possibly be attributed to not only workload issues related to assessment and qualifications changes, but also to the quality of the mentoring and support that young teachers get in their first few years of teaching to keep them in the job. It is probable therefore, that the problem identified by the participants is of some magnitude.

While all participants knew their obligations to beginning teachers and other department staff in terms of mentoring, it was only Participant B (April, 2001; 31/7/01) who felt able to provide one-to-one support regularly. It is significant that this HOD had no more than four staff to lead and he was able to talk with each one in a single lunchtime if necessary. He also knew full well that

in this way at least, a small department was a luxury for forging and maintaining good relationships. On the other hand, it also meant that staff in such a small department took on responsibilities without either formal recompense or time for the department to function well.

Delegating too, was sometimes difficult for these HODs, and this has been considered. The effect of giving people MUs without time allowances made HODs wary of pushing staff too much because of the possibility of burnout. The Chapter Five short story in which Liz is unable to delegate something simple like buying food for a department meeting, illustrates not only this effect, but also the complexity of almost any teacher's working day. When an HOD has a large number of staff in the department, much of the work of HODs is not only intensified, but also more complex and concentrated, squeezing their energies even more.

Essentially then, the participant HODs were hampered by the paucity of time available to them. This has been noted as a key constraint in the work of not only HODs in particular (Early & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989, 1990; Handy and Aitken, 1986), but also teachers in general (Hargreaves, 1994). The effect of very little time was felt in a number of ways from the patchwork and intermittent nature of many of the HOD tasks and the inability to complete tasks as they arose, to little quality time to spend with beginning teachers or other staff. Being time-poor is a visible effect of the self-management expectations of flexibility, accountability and efficiency when these same expectations are unidirectional.

## **Relationships**

The relationships HODs in this study had with others at school were a central aspect of their professional lives as they struggled to maintain them in the face of little flexible time. While Ball (1987) described the micro-politics of relationships in schools in Britain, he omitted specific reference to emotions or the part that they played in people's lives in schools. The way micro-politics operates in New Zealand schools and the amount of time needed to undertake this function is seldom accounted for in either research texts or the way secondary schools tend

to be organised. Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989; 1990) showed that time was critical for HODs in British schools, but they failed to fully explain its effects on real people in real terms. The sheer complexity, intensity and emotional overload a lack of time can cause in terms of managing relationships, has therefore been obscured in research literature.

O'Neill (2000a) on the other hand, attempted to describe the situation in New Zealand when he used the term *situated complexity* to explain the intense and multi-layered nature of an HOD's job, but still falls short of being able to adequately describe the problem. This thesis centralises relationships and emotions making the personal political, so that some effects on real people are exposed when a system fails to notice what happens to them. Earley and Fletcher Campbell (1989; 1990) alerted us to issues about HODs' jobs a long time ago. In the mid nineteen-nineties, when I was an HOD, I experienced first hand what having little 'spare' time could do to people. Five or so years later, this research has shown that the situation is still relatively unchanged for others, except in terms of the increasing intensity of an HOD's roles. According to anecdotal evidence and the work of Eileen Piggot-Irvine (2002), current HODs appear to be at "breaking point"<sup>8</sup>, and fewer and fewer other teachers apply for HOD positions.

As implementation dates for changes like NCEA, for instance, become a reality, HODs will be working with some staff who may be resistant, hostile or obstructive, making their job of instituting change even harder (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). It is seldom that HODs are educated to deal with either change management or relationship crises, which may be related. Such instances can become debilitating both personally and professionally. In the short story, Liz is faced with having to cope with an obstructive staff member whose behaviour affects a number of people in a number of ways. This particular instance is partially drawn from my experiences as well as Participants B and C. The inclusion of my experience in this instance is intended to hide specifics related to participants. The fact that the situation with Greg in the story does not end,

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<sup>8</sup> Conversation (20/03/02) with ex-principal, currently working in an advisory capacity in secondary schools.

suggests not only the ongoing and messy nature of such interpersonal conflicts, but also the amounts of energy expended on them.

West-Burnham and Bowring–Carr (1999) discussed the personal investment people make in their careers and the way this personal investment can affect behaviour because of its relationship to a “complex sense of self” (p. 252). The role of ‘teacher’ then, is not an objective, separate thing; it is intimately tied up with who we are as people and our relationships with others. This intimate connection between role and self, and teacher and learner, has been alluded to in both Felman’s (1987) and Gallop’s (1995) interpretations of Lacan’s ideas. Seeing the role of HOD as purely managerial as much of the rhetoric about the role suggests, especially in *New Zealand Education Gazette* vacancies, flies in the face of what being an HOD is like in reality, given the experiences of the participant HODs. Such a managerial view also makes it easier to ignore some of the potentially devastating effects of relationships on individuals. This managerial, technicist perspective also makes it easier for those above HODs to expect them to behave compliantly when directives are imposed. A managerial/technicist climate is also one in which dissent is not necessarily valued. Codd (1999) has consistently argued that the insertion of business management styles into New Zealand educational practices could and does have, detrimental effects. What we are seeing now is the accumulation of such effects demonstrated by many of the experiences of not only the participant HODs, but also my own as indicated in Chapters One and Five.

Gender and emotions, two key components of relationships intimately tied into a sense of self, are considered next.

### *Gender*

Blackmore (1998) and Sachs and Blackmore (1998) attempted to describe how women principals in their studies worked to achieve their goals. They described how conscious these principals were of being women, how they worked to protect themselves, and how they worked through others to get people on side and their goals realised. Their work required time, patience and the art of negotiation: this is within a framework in which women and leadership were often seen as dichotomous. At issue were ideas about being female and ideas

about who and what leaders should be and how they should behave. Essentially, traditional views of leadership have tended to extol supposedly masculine traits of authority, managerialism, decisiveness, power and hierarchy. The women leaders in the Blackmore's (1998) and Sachs and Blackmore's (1998) studies worked differently to achieve their aims, partly to survive as leaders, partly because it suited them to work this way, and partly to survive as women.

It is possible to apply those same perspectives to the roles of these HODs, for the research base into HODs is generally silent on issues of gender. Participant A, for instance, was acutely aware of how gender was implicated in her work both within the department and the wider school. She had to find a way to work with the caretaker to get classroom desks refurbished, and still take him to task over slighting a female staff member. On the one hand she wanted the desks finished, and on the other she did not want the caretaker to think his behaviour had been acceptable. This HOD also used male staff members to champion causes or issues she felt would have more kudos if promoted by male HODs. To that end, she made a point of lobbying male staff until they felt the idea was their own. She noted that, "as a woman ... it is so easy to disestablish yourself by being too assertive" and consciously took a co-operative approach in her dealings with others. Participant A demonstrated an intuitive understanding of the tension between being a woman and being an HOD and her efforts to lobby others, mirroring strategies detailed in Blackmore (1998) and Sachs and Blackmore (1998). For the women in their studies, the issues they wanted action on were more important than their self-promotion.

Participant C was also conscious of not only being the only female HOD in the school, but also how she behaved with the principal and with other HODs. She explained that she never put herself in a position where she would "disadvantage" herself "or put [the principal] in a position where he felt exposed" (April, 2001), learning quickly to never to ask a directly challenging question or make a direct, confrontational statement. In examples that Participants A and C recount, there is a conscious understanding of their need to act politically, reinforcing not only Ball's (1987) notion of micro-politics in action, but also ideas raised by Blackmore (1998) and Sachs and Blackmore (1998) about strategies women leaders used to get what they wanted. Court's (1989)

explanations of middle management women leaders in New Zealand circumstances also reflected those ideas. These women were highly conscious of their gender and their 'otherness' because of it. It is possible that by deliberately taking conciliatory and cooperative paths, they were taking the only ones open to them as women. Otherwise, by exhibiting traits usually associated with male leaders as noted earlier, they may have felt that they would undermine the leverage they felt they had as leaders. This tightrope of permissible behaviours necessarily affected the kinds of relationships they could have with principals and colleagues. On the one hand, these women HODs may be seen to be compliant, but on the other, they felt that the options open to them for dissent were much narrower. Negotiating positions through persuasive and cooperative means required considerable time and effort, both of which were in precious short supply for these HODs.

Participant B, the male HOD in the study, was in a slightly different situation. While he was not alone as a male HOD, he nevertheless worked with an entirely female department and for a female principal. For this HOD, extending his influence was a perk of the job. As the English HOD he felt that he could help the wider school focus on language and literacy. In this case, it appears that being a male HOD lent him the kudos to promote this focus. He did not have to rely on lobbying behind the scenes for others to promote his ideas; he could directly raise them in meetings himself. He was also in the situation of being a friend of the principal, with whom he had worked in another school in another capacity. He felt that this prior relationship made it easy for him to be relaxed with her and able to bring the friendship to work and use it advantageously to promote ideas. Because this relationship was supportive, it also allowed him to be frank when situations were problematic. This was not a freedom the other two HODs appeared to have in their relationship with their male principals. The women HODs were concerned to always behave professionally and avoid undermining themselves. The word 'professionally' is therefore a potent one, tied to specific discourses about what constitutes effective leadership and what is acceptable in terms of masculinity and femininity. These ideas appeared to affect how participant HODs viewed themselves as both leaders and as either men or women.

From data in this research, the role of emotions is tied closely to all aspects of relationships and this is the following focus.

### *Emotions*

Blackmore (1998) and Sachs and Blackmore (1998) also considered ways in which emotions were implicated in women principals' jobs by describing how these women hid certain emotions in order not to destabilise themselves as principals. Thomas's (1990) suggestion that some of the choices people make are constrained by "social expectations of masculine and feminine behaviour" (p.2) is also relevant.

The women HODs in this study felt constrained by what they saw as somewhat contradictory expectations of them as both women and HODs. Their relationships with other staff members have been alluded to in an earlier section and reflect Thomas's (1990) observation. These women HODs did not feel able to cry or express anger in public with their colleagues; these emotions were saved for private spaces. Anger, frustration, guilt and joy were commonly mentioned emotions by all three participants. Participant B also noted that since he became an HOD, he could no longer swear and get mad the way he had when he was an 'ordinary' teacher; he needed new strategies to reflect his new role and was now more conscious of others' gaze as he was cast in the HOD role. In a sense, his acknowledgement of this need to modify his behaviour reflects Foucault's (1977) discussion of prisoners in the panopticon prison who self-regulated their behaviour because of their expectations of being watched and the threat of censure. While for this male HOD the gaze centred on his role as HOD, the women HODs felt that the gaze accentuated their femaleness as leaders given that they were among the very few female HODs in the schools. This further complicated how they went about their professional lives.

Court (1996) demonstrated both the extent of the limited acceptability of anger in the work of women in educational leadership in New Zealand, and what women did to manage it. However, the ways women HODs go about exercising influence within a school or how anger and other emotions are positioned in HODs' work, has not been well researched in New Zealand. Participants in my research for example, consciously attempted to remain calm



and controlled at school so that, they believed, others could maintain confidence in their abilities to lead. Both Participant A and C described the overpowering need to cry or get really angry at times, which they suppressed because there was no private space in which to vent it. In one instance, when Participant A (July, 2001) was berated by a parent in a public corridor, she remained as polite as possible until she was unable to contain her anger. At that point, she walked away to avoid destabilising herself as HOD. Participant B, on the other hand, vented his frustrations by taking long runs once he got home. These HODs operated not only within self-imposed guidelines reflecting discourses surrounding roles and expectations of an HOD in specific school cultures, but also within wider gendered discourses that reflected social expectations about being either women or men and also leaders. It's possible too, that these behaviours reflect Hochschild's (1983) and Hargreave's (1998) discussions of the management of people's feelings in different workplaces.

The tension that the HODs felt between the rational and emotional hinged on expectations of good management – control, common sense, calm and order - compared with the rollercoaster of emotions that they felt. For the sake of others, Liz in the story (Chapter Five) feels the need to be in emotional control, and this desire is intended to reflect participants' own feelings. When Greg enters the room at a time when Liz feels she has regained a semblance of calm, the lack of closure reinforces the complex nature of both relationships and emotions. At the same time, the worsening storm outside is akin to the Shakespearean symbol of wider social and political disturbances as they impinge on personal troubles. This reflects both the changes to education in New Zealand for over a decade and their effects on people. As a result, the gathering storm in the story symbolises the accumulation of the effects of educational changes initiated by political and economic imperatives, as they find their mark in the professional lives of HODs.

Another issue seldom considered focuses on the role HODs have in leading for change. While this is considered next, it is also a limitation in this thesis, for while its effects have not been a central focus, it may be critical to not only a fuller understanding of the HOD role, but also a better understanding of

how to provide effective support and professional development for both incumbents and novices.

### *Relationships and change*

How the HODs in the study planned for change and their knowledge of change processes, had an impact on their work. Change in both curriculum and assessment has been a constant in HODs' lives and actions for over a decade as various reforms have been developed and implemented, from administrative changes, to curriculum changes, to assessment changes. What is significant is that while much of the change research that is centred on educational institutions looks at how it operates and how it is managed (Fullan, 1993), it is most often seen as the job of the principal (Vandenberghe, 1998). In secondary schools in New Zealand, it is most often a prime role of an HOD. While there are stirrings in relation to professional development opportunities for HODs, (for example, in July 2002, a two day middle manager's conference in Hamilton, promoted by Waikato In-service Training (WIST); and professional development work with HODs carried out by people like Eileen Piggot-Irvine of Massey University) there has been little co-ordinated assistance targeted at HODs to help them be better positioned to lead change within their departments.

None of the participant HODs, for instance, was able to describe institutional support mechanisms for HODs within their schools. Support and mentoring existed only when they sought it out for themselves, so it was characteristically ad hoc. Nor were there any external professional development provisions put in place. While professional development for teachers in curriculum and assessment has been nationally driven via contestable funding from the Ministry of Education, the pivotal role HODs play in making impending changes work, has not been properly accounted for in any systematic way at any level through this mechanism. Instead, HODs' needs have been subsumed by blanket provisions for teachers in the same subject area which mostly target changes to classroom practice. The professional development packages for NCEA for instance, have tended to centre attention on classroom work and how to construct NCEA assessments. As Vandenberghe (1998)

suggested, pedagogical change and organisational change are likely to go hand in hand, and so time and support mechanisms need to be in place for changes to be successfully cemented, and this is true for departmental organisation.

The burden of leading, managing and implementing specific changes is principally an HOD's, yet this is consistently undervalued. As Fullan (1982; 1993) argued, change is not only about hearts and minds and people's beliefs and fears, it is also about recognising that change is a non-linear, messy and complicated process that evolves over time. Each HOD in this research identified occasions where collegiality and teamwork were serendipitous outcomes of working with staff on the implications of developing a process and implementation strategy for a specific mandated imperative. At the same time, they were mindful of some of the downsides and stresses such change can bring (such as the length of time it took to engage with what was required and/or necessary, or coping with resistance and misunderstandings). They did not necessarily know why or how to deal with them, and so made the changes happen while working around the obstacles as best they could with the resources at hand.

HODs in this study, just as I had been as an HOD, were burdened with a major responsibility for change without adequate support, time and preparation to accompany it. What kept us going, was centring our attention on students' needs.

### **HODs and students**

The HODs cared passionately about students and this led them to acquiesce in accepting much of the sheer overload of their jobs. These HODs had a keen personal sense of what an educational entitlement meant for students within the subject English and each so sought to provide as rich a programme as possible. They also described specific instances of great satisfaction where they had made a positive difference to students. It was these occasions that tended to keep them in the job, almost regardless of the impact on themselves. At the same time, this care of students intensified the complexities the HODs faced and sometimes

made it harder for them to see beyond their daily focus to larger issues that have affected their professional lives.

The requirement of staff to contribute to the wider life of the school, which is often specified in both job descriptions and advertisements for jobs, has a huge impact on individuals, especially those who lead departments. The not inconsiderable organisation required for events like theatre trips or school productions or debating or speech competitions, eats into the time available to do other required tasks (Participant C, 16/8/01). HODs often also organise a variety of other student-centred activities like Australian English Competitions or particular New Zealand events like the Ngarimu Essay Competition. Participant C (April, 2001) described what was involved in promoting this competition:

... you have to get a list of Maori students in the school and you target them, and you talk about the competition and you show them what it is and you give them the essay topic and you send them away; they've got three weeks to write it and [I] try to keep in touch with them... I guess this is coming back to making things happen.

This kind of process is necessarily done in school time because that is when students are present; this usually means lunchtimes or after school – times when an HOD is not teaching. Student success in such activities reflects well on a school as a whole, but what it takes to make that happen, is often not accounted for because it can be hidden from view.

It is interesting that a major report into the public service by the State Services Commission noted the following:

Public servants were working hard. Three-quarters reported working more hours than they were employed for. Almost one in five (19%) said they worked 10 or more additional hours a week. But goodwill appeared to be wearing thin. Heavy workloads were a recurring complaint, and appeared to affect public servants' abilities to balance work and other commitments, including family responsibilities ([online] State Services Commission, 2002).

Teachers frequently work longer than their timetables would suggest, and HODs in this study would have consistently worked “10 or more additional hours a week” in their efforts to make a difference to students. The goodwill teachers have shown in the past may soon be wearing thin, if making a difference to students is no longer reward enough. The protracted dispute about the secondary teachers’ collective employment contract at the time of writing may be evidence of this. Current research into HODs seldom considers the effects of either the amount of work they take home, or their dedication to students.

When they felt they had made a positive difference to students, HODs kept going. For instance, a particular boy had been causing trouble for other staff, and Participant A (April, 2001) successfully negotiated a process that resulted in the student, parent and teacher being much happier. Again, efforts like this can only take place within school time, and only when an HOD is not teaching, yet these efforts are an example of the hidden core tasks of teachers in general and HODs in particular. And since the amount of non-teaching time (excluding break times) that HODs get is so small (sometimes as little as one hour in day; it is possible for HODs to have days with no non-contact period), technician and managerial attitudes about the role appear to prevail.

One of the consequences for individuals of this perspective is the conflict that arises between the needs and responsibilities inherent in HODs’ leadership role, and the needs of students in their classes. The participant HODs were aware that their classroom work could easily suffer if they put all of their energies into their leadership roles. Participant A (April, 2001) put it this way:

...somebody said to me when I [got] the job [of HOD], ‘well, you’ll just have to cut corners in the classroom’. I refuse to. To me teaching *is* the classroom and to me the reason you’re there and the reason you’re head of department *is* for the kids... and I *hate* cutting corners with the kids [my italics].

HODs in this study were adamant that their first responsibility was to students. While this was positive in the sense of focusing on teaching and learning and the welfare of students in the subject, it had its detrimental side too. At times, HODs’ commitment to students overrode their personal needs at school (for example, for breaks, food or comfort stops) on a daily basis. It also meant that their time at

home was often also consumed by schoolwork, affecting time they could spend with their own children and partners. As Participant A (April, 2001) observed, “your job is pretty much your life, it’s not something you come into and step out of, it’s part of your life culture... this job doesn’t have boundaries”. And this lack of boundaries belies the neatly packaged view of the HODs’ job that their timetables or the dates of school terms imply. There is little evidence in the research literature that this aspect of an HODs’ professional life has been considered.

The State Services Commission report (2002) had also sought to find out why public servants were not aspiring to higher positions. Workload, incursions into family life and long hours as well as a lack of mentoring were cited as some reasons. This public service situation appears then, to be mirrored by the experiences of HODs in the secondary school service. If the government is willing to address the situation in the public service, it must be willing to address it in the education service.

HODs in this study tended to accept the stresses, tensions and strains they experienced daily as a normal part of the job; they interpreted the sacrifices they make (for instance, using a lot of their own time or working through break times during a school day) as something that the job demands of them. This acceptance not only normalises what should *not* be seen as ‘normal’ but also makes it harder for them to recognise the situation as either inappropriate or something to resist. Because they accept the intensity of the workload if they are to meet learning needs of students, they are more likely to interpret this as private and personal rather than as part of wider social and educational issues. With students’ needs uppermost in my mind, I too had been seduced by a prevailing rhetoric about meeting students’ learning needs that served me ill. It is a rhetoric that served the HODs in this study poorly, too. Research literature on HODs not only, therefore, underestimates the role students have in motivating HODs, regardless of the hugely complex and tension-ridden environments they work within, but it also obscures the effects of relationships as a whole. This may partly be because such literature has predominantly focused mainly on the management roles of an HOD rather than the people ones (Brown & Rutherford,

1998; Brown *et al.*, 1997; Harris, 1998; Harris *et al.*, 1995; Hammond & Harris, 2000, September 1).

The findings in this argument centralise relationships, people and the effects of time on HODs' professional lives within a context of self-managing schools in New Zealand, and yet they appear to be issues that are treated as peripheral in the research literature. How is it that my argument focuses on those issues, when other investigations into HODs have centralised quite different issues? The next section examines some methodological implications of this research as a means of considering this question.

### **Methodological implications and recommendations for research**

As chapters three and four describe, this research is framed by an interpretive narrative focus in which the participants' experiences were central. A number of important features are worth noting because relationships have played a significant part in the processes of the study. A number of issues in particular arose that related to the following points: the selection of the participants; the development of the short story; the observation phase; my own experiences and their influence on the study; and the effects of discourses and accumulated change on the role of HODs.

Firstly, while the HODs self-selected as participants, their willingness to engage in the project was partially driven by our prior acquaintance. Because the English teaching and HOD community in this region is relatively small (relating to approximately 15 schools), we already knew each other to a greater or lesser degree. In one case, the acquaintance had existed for over ten years. Significantly, the existing familiarity between participants and I meant that the HODs began divulging information relatively quickly about relationships and difficult scenarios both within the department and the school. This opportunity to talk about their professional lives was an occasion of relief for the HODs, as I had no vested interest in the schools. Being able to talk about themselves and their jobs was an unfamiliar luxury for them. Also, our prior acquaintance helped remove some of the hurdles that Weiss (1994) argued that a researcher contends

with when interviewing participants who are strangers. Relationships were therefore not only important to HODs in their working lives, but important to the success of this research too.

The self-selection of the participants, however, may have skewed the data. Had I interviewed people I did not already know, I may have found some very different results. While I believe the prior acquaintances were a benefit to the research, it is an untested assumption. Also, all the schools represented in the research are co-educational state ones. There is therefore no data on whether or not single sex school cultures or even private school cultures would make a difference to the work of HODs. An investigation into the professional lives of HODs in single sex schools and private schools may be necessary to see if there is a difference.

Secondly, when transcripts had been returned them for editing, some participants had concerns about the sensitivity of some of the comments they had made. I knew that if I could not use at least some of these events/situations, the thesis would be compromised. Because relationships and all that they entailed had a significant impact on their work, I had to find a way to keep the trust of the HODs and protect both them and their colleagues' anonymity.

While I had originally wanted to develop individual stories in partnership with each of them to reflect ways Clandinin and Connelly (2000) went about developing vignettes of individual teacher practice, it was very soon apparent that this would be inappropriate. Collaboration with individual HODs to create single stories of experience was not possible, given the intensity and complexity of their professional lives. The frankness of their revealed experiences would have been compromised had I persisted in working to achieve my first choice. To that end, creating a story with a third person composite protagonist kept faith with participants' trust and meant that I could use some very sensitive information. Once participants read a draft of the story and were interviewed again, they not only responded positively to the idea of the story and elaborated on previously disclosed information, but also revealed new stories. This validation from the HODs was hugely important. It meant that the composite story could reflect not only the sensitive and highly personal nature of their staff, student and parent relationships, but it could also demonstrate the effects of



these stories on their professional lives in a very 'real' way through verisimilitude.

A possible issue with this story as a findings chapter however, is that while I have aimed for verisimilitude, others might argue that I have created a work of fiction; that it is not about real people in real school contexts. Some may feel suspicious of it for that reason. The validation of the experiences contained in the story via responses from the HODs in the study and others I have shared it with however, would counter that criticism. Using stories like this in professional development programmes for HODs would further test the validity, verisimilitude and usefulness of this approach.

Thirdly, my presence during the observation phase, in which I sought to establish an understanding of the HODs' individual contexts and the rhythms of their days, led to participants re-examining some aspects of their working lives. As the observation day wore on, it was not uncommon for them to reflect on certain behaviours and actions that formed part of their day. They commented on some of the routine things that had been relatively taken-for-granted before, such as interruptions while teaching or their inability to switch off their focus on school matters during break times. These reflections suggest the effects of Clandinin and Connelly's (1995a) conduit or funnel concept initially foreshadowed in both the literature review of Chapter Two, and the methods and analysis chapter (Chapter Four).

It must also be acknowledged that the single observation day with each HOD may have been unrepresentative. Therefore, there are further research possibilities in which more detailed observations can be carried out so that a broader and more substantial picture of HODs' lives can be drawn. At the same time, this study focused on HODs' views of their own work and did not accommodate principals' views or departmental members' views. This means that further research is needed to balance the close focus of this research.

Fourthly, the processes of this research suggest an interpretive framework that considers several effects of discourses the HODs operated within. One of these relates to the naming of the HOD role as traced through an examination of the *New Zealand Education Gazette* labelling of positions in the vacancies section noted in Chapter Two. Another effect notes the ways in which

HODs saw themselves differently positioned: the women were aware of contradictions in their role as both women and HODs in mainly male contexts (Participants A & C), which saw them deliberately work through men to achieve their aims; or as being in a position powerful enough (by virtue of being an HOD) to directly encourage change (Participant B). A third effect related to their beliefs about how to perform the role of HOD professionally. This often meant keeping emotions under control. This relates not only to perceptions about what is considered acceptable in school cultures regarding the display of emotions in general, but also relates to what it means to hold such positions of responsibility in particular. The fourth discourse related to HODs striving to meet the needs of the students – a phrase constantly heard in staffrooms and in other contexts about schooling, including curriculum documents, such as in the *English in the New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 1994). This discourse is a potent one, and some effects have already been discussed. The last one centres on the effects of gender and emotions. These played an important role in relationships for participant HODs because they negotiated pathways that were symptomatic of the operation of wider expectations and conventions surrounding both emotions and leadership (Blackmore, 1998; Boler, 1999; Hochschild, 1983). Both gender and emotions are under-represented in the research literature on HODs, and so a deeper understanding of their effects is not yet well known, particularly in the New Zealand context. There are therefore opportunities for research that more fully considers notions centred on discourses in relation to the professional lives of HODs.

Next, my own experiences were, of course, part of the whole process. Since the HODs knew at least something about my background as an HOD, there was a considerable toing-and-froing of ideas and experiences. My own voice and experiences, woven as they are into the fabric of this study, also reflect Richardson's (1997) discussion of the effects of writing a person's story as poetry. She found herself "rewriting herself" (p. 151) and then using the other person's words as her own. In effect, she discussed the transformative power of poetry on herself. I too, now feel a similar consequence of writing collective experiences into the composite story. What is clear to me now, and which I felt but couldn't articulate while I was an HOD, is that one of the most important parts of the job

is centred on people and relationships. Another possibility for further research relates to an outsider's view. Would someone who had not been an HOD and who investigates three HODs in one subject area, find similar themes, or would there be a completely different focus that is more in tune with current research literature on HODs? Would an outsider write a story to reflect findings? Has my own knowledge and prior experience unnecessarily tainted or slanted this study?

Also, a study focused on only three English HODs has its limitations, not only because of its size. It does not illuminate the professional lives of HODs in any other subject, for instance, and it is possible that the issues raised here are subject-specific; so far, this is an untested assumption. Cross-sectional investigations of the kind that O'Neill [online] (2000a) undertook may not provide adequate comparative information, although his participants also referred to working through and with others. Because relationships, emotions and the effects of time in an HOD's job have not been fully explored, there is a great deal of work to do before a national picture can be attempted.

It is also imperative that we seriously examine what HODs are expected to do compared with the time they have allocated. Unless that examination takes place, many of the situations outlined by the three research participants are likely to be repeated in the professional lives of other HODs.

Another important issue is the way in which HODs' current circumstances are a direct, accumulated result of political and economic changes over a considerable number of years and which affect people individually as well, it seems, collectively. The personal experiences revealed here, along with an examination of literature and the naming of the job in the New Zealand context signal the need for greater focus on the roles and expectations of HODs. As has been noted, teachers' days in Britain were described as busy over 15 years ago with little spare time, with a lot of work being taken home. As changes have accumulated in New Zealand, they have been laid over the HODs' workload to a level that I contend is fast becoming unsustainable.

## **What next? Leadership and professional development issues and recommendations**

A number of implications that may be applicable to HODs in other schools and departments have arisen from this research. These include HODs' preparation for and continued support while in the role, the role principals have in promoting changes to ways schools are organised, and changes that are required at political levels. This leads to a consideration of leadership, professional development issues and recommendations for action.

Participant HODs agreed that they had received little in the way of official or deliberate mentoring and support within their schools. As Wright (2000b) and Handy and Aitken (1986) have indicated, there is the perception that being a good teacher equates with being a good head of department in the minds of some principals, even though the jobs are quite different and require some different and additional skills and knowledge. Each of the participant HODs pointed out how initially unprepared they felt in the job. At least one of them was "terrified of asking dumb questions" (Participant B, April, 2001). None of the participants had been part of a mentoring or cohesive development programme. Piecemeal and uncoordinated attempts, such as HODs finding their own means of support, can only be stop-gaps that ignore the underlying problem of HODs having to carry too big a teaching workload for the leadership tasks they are expected to carry out.

Nationally, there are few opportunities for co-ordinated professional development for HODs focused on what it means to be effective leaders from the middle. The HODs in this study also noted that it was sometimes difficult to share concerns with others within their school for a number of reasons. For instance, there was the desire to be seen as efficient and effective and the leader of a cohesive team. Admitting problems could undermine that public face, especially when they vied for resources in competition with other HODs, reflecting Ball's (1987) argument about the operation of micro-politics in schools. There is therefore a tension between what an individual school can offer and what may be needed outside single institutions as support mechanisms. The

isolation the HODs described is therefore of concern. If their sense of isolation is more widespread, then this needs addressing.

The first recommendation has three parts. Firstly, that principals and the teachers' union, the Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) lobby more overtly with the Ministry of Education for changes so that HODs can be allocated the time the job demands. This is long overdue. Secondly, that principals investigate ways their own schools can better acknowledge HODs' roles and responsibilities through implementing changes to timetables and internal support systems where possible. Providing HODs with relief for specific classes in an *ad hoc* way is not an adequate answer. This is because the HODs then need to prepare work for the reliever to teach the classes and may result in an HOD losing contact with students and this can interfere with cohesive learning needs. The need for continuity and development in students' learning can therefore be at odds with *ad hoc* time out system for HODs. Thirdly, that the Ministry of Education fully recognise the pivotal role of HODs in schools and properly support them through funding both better staffing ratios and targeted professional development opportunities, without the PPTA and principals having to lobby in the first place. Perhaps too, the Ministry of Education could consider the extent to which the findings of the report into the public sector are applicable to the secondary teaching service (State Services Commission, 2002).

The second recommendation centres on the need for a support network for HODs. One way of approaching this is through an online system of communication. This may be a relatively cheap option to establish and be similar to the principals' *Leadspace* online community, although it will not alleviate the critical shortage of time that HODs' would appear to currently experience. Within such a community, HODs may feel freer to share problems, joys and solutions with each other within a forum open only to them and an external facilitator. HODs could through such a mechanism, have not only subject-specific spaces in which to share curriculum and assessment information, but also more formal professional development spaces in which they could discuss ideas beyond subject concerns that may also relate to further formal study. In such spaces, HODs may be able to develop their critical reflective thinking about not only their practices as HODs but also the wider issues that impact on their

professional lives. From that position, they may be better able to advocate for changes to their working lives. As Robertson (1998) suggested, such moves are “the beginnings of agency” or the “belief to be able to act otherwise” (p. 367). Because this study centred on the HODs’ views of their own professional lives, there were no intervention strategies of the kind used in action research studies to change their circumstances. (While this may be a limitation of this study it provides scope for others to create intervention projects.)

Online mentoring spaces could also be established within which new HODs are paired with an ‘old hand’ so that they can ask for and receive advice that is external to their own school, thereby providing new HODs with safe spaces within which to ask the kinds of ‘dumb questions’ Participant B (April, 2001) was afraid of asking. Experienced HODs could, at the same time, hone their reflective skills as they look behind the questions newer HODs ask, to some of the underlying conditions that may prompt them. This kind of network has the potential to be a rich source of data from which to develop not only cohesive professional development programmes tailored to the needs of HODs, but also new opportunities for research to better understand HODs’ professional lives. Ultimately, what the participant HODs cared about most – students, staff and teaching and learning – could be better served as they themselves felt more supported in their roles.

In terms of change management, also a function of HODs as they respond to requirements for implementing national mandates, HODs should be separately catered for in assessment and curriculum professional development contracts let by the Ministry of Education. This third recommendation is long overdue. Current practices in professional development contracts for curriculum and assessment change effectively render HODs invisible because their needs tend to be subsumed by attention to classroom practices. The Ministry of Education’s contract proposal specifications could be rewritten to require future proposals to include a focus on HODs’ specific needs as curriculum leaders. Change management and leadership issues and their implications for particular initiatives could then be better addressed. HODs may also gain some time allowances during implementation phases, providing them with opportunities to

exchange ideas with other HODs and have some uninterrupted development and thinking time, at least in the short term.

A fourth recommendation centres on professional development support provisions for HODs. If schools can provide this, either through specific induction processes within a school and/or externally provided credentials, then online networking can supplement this support and make it easier for HODs to consider the larger educational, social and political picture that they work within. Helping HODs understand the paradoxes of the roles can also be beneficial to their ability to carry them out. Specific reasons follow.

Silent in the research literature as I have already contended, is the impact relationships have on the work and scope of an HOD's professional life. Research literature has tended to concentrate on what the job of HODs *should* look like while underplaying both contextual factors and relationships (Harris, Jamieson & Russ, 1995; Harris, 1998; Harris & Young, 2000; Hammond & Harris, 2000, September 1). Initial obstructions Liz (Chapter Five) faces from Greg and Sharon are based on actual scenarios. HODs can be fearful of voicing their misgivings and concerns over such conflicts within their own schools if they feel that disclosures will compromise or undermine their positions. This can lead to the escalation of problems to the point where they can become explosive and seriously undermine not only an HOD's feelings of competence but also the internal departmental relationships. And unlike Deputy Principals, Assistant Principals and Principals, there is no national HOD organisation that could provide networking and support.

Keeping hidden the effects of professional relationships that sour has a negative impact on not only the ability of an HOD to perform well, but also the professional performance of all involved. Scenarios about relationships that went wrong for both participant HODs and I, shared some underlying conditions. Each of us experienced intense emotions, discomfort and feelings of guilt, which complicated dysfunctional elements in the relationships. We had trouble separating ourselves from our roles and so we experienced the situations as personal problems. We could not comprehend them as part of wider issues; we believed that we were at fault and that we had to sort them out and put on a brave, public face, much in the way Robertson (1998) suggests primary principals

feel they must behave through impression management. Participant B's (July, 2001) strategy in identifying 'the role' from 'the person' was key in his survival as HOD. The intensity of the effects on individuals of relationships should not be underestimated. HODs are also in a position of authority over others, through mechanisms like appraisal processes. There are tensions inherent in these roles and it is difficult for HODs and others to retain a sense of balance without guidance and support.

The fifth recommendation suggests a need for more research into HODs' professional lives if this critical layer of secondary school leadership is to be adequately understood and supported in New Zealand. For instance, little research exists that tracks HODs in their first year on the job. A study centred on beginning HODs could provide very rich data, especially if the HOD is also new to the school compared with one being promoted internally. The focus by HODs in this study on relationships, contrasts strongly with much of the leadership and educational management research literature centred on middle management in schools. This points to a gap in this field, suggesting opportunities for both further inquiry and targeted professional development. For instance, perspectives that imply that the HOD role is an organisational one, overlook the professional needs of HODs except in prosaic terms: the 'what' of tasks rather than the 'how'; the object rather than the person. Overall, there is little focus on the needs of HODs and how they may be more properly prepared for and supported in the important job they have to do, especially when juxtaposed with the kinds of strategies for development currently being put in place for principals in places like New Zealand, Britain and Singapore.

While there may be a growing international literature centred on heads of department in schools (O'Neill, 2001a; Glover *et al.*, 1999; Hammond & Harris, [online] 2001, September 1; Harris *et al.*, 1995) it is relatively meagre compared with the wealth of research writing about principals. After all, it is the HOD who is the link between the classroom where the core business of schools is carried out, and the wider domain of the school and national educational and social requirements. The links between these three parts is also not yet adequately explored.



Other research possibilities that fit within this fourth recommendation could include: carrying out similar studies but focused on other subject disciplines; developing interventions focused on relationships via case studies or action research; how gender influences HODs' actions and relationships within a school; or studies based in single schools to map a situation that the school may then be able to do something about, although this may be an ethical minefield. Also as already suggested, observations of HODs in action are necessary to develop a fuller picture of the daily complexities of their lives. Principals' views on the role of HODs are also not yet adequately explored, and there is a dearth of research that compares HODs' roles with that of equivalent middle management roles in different sectors of the workforce.

## **Conclusion**

This study reveals a snapshot of what the job *is actually like* for three HODs of English as they worked through the realities of relationships, emotions, and conflicts and dilemmas within the severe time constraints of their daily lives during the period 2001-2002. Their professional lives were intense, complex, and emotional as they strove to provide the best educational entitlement for students that they could within school days that were too full of teaching. It is my contention that this study has disrupted a prevailing silence about the effects of time and relationships in the work of HODs and made overt some consequences for individuals working under strict time constraints and unrealistic expectations. These unrealistic expectations can be traced through changes to the social, economic and educational environment over the last twelve or more years in New Zealand.

The study also suggests serious implications for teaching and learning and the professional health of the secondary school system on a wide scale if the experiences of these three HODs are common to others'. Therefore, it imperative that attention is paid to the accumulated effects of educational change on HODs' lives as they grapple with two onerous jobs – being full time teachers and subject department leaders.

While research literature that expresses goals and ideas for improvement either to the work of an HOD or to the functioning of a department is worthwhile and positive, paying little heed to the highly people-centred, emotional and complex nature of the HOD job is not. Underplaying the central role of people and relationships potentially suggests that the role is a straightforward, linear, unproblematic and organisational one. In other words, it presents the opposite to the world the participants experienced, which was messy, complicated, time-poor, complex, relationship-laden and emotionally highly charged. The professional lives of the HODs in this study are political. Time, a key issue for the participant HODs, is identified as significant by Earley and Fletcher-Campbell's (1989, 1990) work in Britain over a decade ago, yet as a factor in the professional lives of HODs, it continues to be underrated in both research and practice.

### *Epilogue*

The secondary teachers' collective employment contract that expired in 2000 was still being negotiated in 2002 as I wrote this work. While there was some movement by government over workload recognition in the negotiations, it was not enough to offset pay as an issue. Members of the PPTA had even questioned the PPTA officers' negotiated settlements that had yet to be ratified through wildcat strikes. It is possible that these actions reflect some of the issues brought to the surface in this thesis. Since then, the dispute went to mediation, resulting in a large pay rise for teachers, and the promise of the establishment of a working party into workload issues.

In the *Waikato Times* (2002, March 22), Monica Holt reports on a head of department – a teacher of 25 years experience - resigning that position to return to being a “regular teacher” (p. 10). This HOD of social sciences in a local school says that, “he’s had enough of the ‘never-ending grind’ of meetings and endless paperwork involved with the job...[because his] ‘health, welfare and life in general was under threat’” (p. 10). This HOD’s open letter to his Board of Trustees is printed in full (see Appendix G), (note: references to the particular school have been removed) with his permission.

# Appendices

## Appendix A

### 1. Interview schedule

#### *Descriptions of self*

- **Tell me about yourself as an HOD.**

Prompts: reasons for becoming an HOD  
influences on your practice as an HOD  
preparation for the role/professional development opportunities  
broad views of HODs; that they are 'leading professionals' as subject specialists, or, middle managers whose job it is to fulfil senior management expectations. Where would you put yourself between those two points, and what key things describe your point of view?  
what is important to you  
classroom teacher and an HOD roles – relationship between the two

- **Tell me about the department.**

Prompts: characteristics, culture, staff, relationships, ways of working, gender balance....

#### *Pleasures*

- **Tell me a story about an occasion or occasions that made you glad you were an HOD.**

Prompts: things that make your HOD job worthwhile/make you laugh...  
things that make it easy to be an HOD  
support mechanisms/networks  
other great things about the job

#### *Pains*

- **Tell me story about any situation that you may have found challenging/upsetting/stressful in your HOD role.**

Prompts: key aspects of situation: the problem, how it was resolved, anything that could have been done differently in hindsight  
things that might be hard to reconcile/find a balance between  
things which might cause anxiety/stress  
things which might get you angry

#### *Impact on personal life*

- **When I was an HOD I spent far too many hours on being a teacher and an HOD in my personal time than I should have. What do you do to balance your job with your private life?**
- **Tell me a story if you can, about an occasion where being an HOD had an effect on/enriched your private life.**

#### *Wish list*

**Now is the time to dream: what would make your life as an HOD perfect?**

Prompts: resources, staff, environment...

### Introductory Letter

Date:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to invite you to be part of a doctoral research study I am conducting this year. The focus is centred on the lives of HODs' English.

This letter explains the study, what it involves and what you may need to consider before agreeing to participate. It includes a *consent form*, *starter questions* for the first interview (the interview schedule), and a sheet requesting *biographical information*.

### The Study

This research aims to find out how HODs' English go about their lives. It seeks to consider the school each HOD works in, what each HOD finds pleasure in, and what HODs must do in order to meet the often highly complex and dilemma-laden nature of the job while balancing family life.

To gather data, I want to interview six participant English HODs for about 90 minutes, shadow each person for at least one day and observe at least one departmental meeting. I also want to gather some written data: job descriptions, departmental manuals and timetables. There may be other items you consider to be relevant, too.

There will be another hour-long interview about half-way through the year, and there will be on-going communication to clarify and develop the story from the data. Each interview will be taped and transcribed, and returned to you for comments and amendments. All information will be kept securely so that no-one else has access to it, to protect your privacy.

All participants will have pseudonyms as will schools. This also helps protect confidentiality and reduces potential harm to you and staff in schools. You will be able to withdraw for any reason from the study any time until six weeks after the first interview in 2001.

### Aspects to consider

Becoming involved in research will take up your valuable time. It may also compromise your situation at school when it is obvious you are part of a research study. Having a researcher around may also be highly intrusive in your interactions with others. In order to make clear the role of the researcher and what ethical considerations may be involved, I will need to address a whole staff meeting to explain the processes. At that meeting, I will ask staff for a

'blanket' consent for me to take notes that may involve their interactions with you while I am shadowing you or observing a departmental meeting. Should any staff feel uncomfortable with that, I will of course, respect their wishes and withdraw from those interactions, including the departmental meeting.

### **Benefits to participants**

Most of the benefits will be intangible, consisting of aspects like: partnership in creating stories crafted from the data; opportunities to reflect on your practice and further develop your understanding of your HOD role; sharing experiences and a support network; contribution to the researched knowledge about the HOD role in New Zealand/Aotearoa secondary schools.

### **What to do next**

(a) If you would like to know more, or meet with me to discuss the project before making any kind of decision, please feel free to contact me. I will be happy to address your concerns. I can be contacted in the following ways:

By phone: (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (it is also an answer phone and fax);  
(work) \_\_\_\_\_

by email: [noelinew@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:noelinew@waikato.ac.nz)

- (b) if you would like to participate and feel that you are happy with this information, please:
- (i) sign the enclosed *consent form*,
  - (ii) complete the *biographical information sheet*,
  - (iii) provide the requested *written documents* and
  - (iv) return all of them as soon as possible in the addressed envelope.

Please feel free to photocopy the consent form and biographical information sheet before you return them so that you have a copy.

(c) I will telephone you one to two weeks after this letter is sent if you have not replied in some way. You may use that opportunity to discuss any issues that concern you. I will ask you at that point if you wish to participate and you are free to decline or accept.

Once I have received consent, I will telephone you to establish a meeting time for the first interview. You will already have a copy of the questions for the interview to think about.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Regards,

## Informed Consent

## Appendix C

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to becoming a participant in the doctoral research being conducted by Noeline Wright on English HODs' lives.

I understand that the research will involve:

- ◆ two taped interviews that will be transcribed, kept securely, and returned to me for comments and amendment;
- ◆ shadowing of at least one day at school
- ◆ observation of a departmental meeting, where the researcher will take notes;
- ◆ written records: **please supply a copy of the departmental manual and a copy of your job description and timetable.** Return with this consent form.
- ◆ on-going discussions and development of the data into stories for a thesis, conference papers and journal articles.

I consent to stories being negotiated with me about my experiences. I understand that all stories and composite stories will use pseudonyms and will avoid disclosing the names of schools and staff within them. Schools will be given pseudonyms and staff will be identified in generic terms (eg the principal; the longest serving member...) where possible. Pseudonyms will be assigned if this is too clumsy, or where descriptions would make it easy to identify a staff member.

I consent to my story or stories being part of a doctoral thesis and subsequent conference papers and articles.

I understand I am free to withdraw from the research at any time until six weeks after the first interview in 2001 and if I wish seek redress for concerns I may contact the research supervisors at the University of Waikato.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full name: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

(home) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

phone: \_\_\_\_\_

phone: \_\_\_\_\_

fax: \_\_\_\_\_

email: \_\_\_\_\_

email: \_\_\_\_\_

preferred method(s) of contact: phone / letter / email / fax (circle preferred modes)

preferred place of contact: home / school (delete one)

## Return of Transcripts

## Appendix D

*(a) letter to accompany return of transcripts*

address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Enclosed is the transcription of the interview conducted on \_\_\_\_\_. No one else has seen this script, since I transcribed the data. The text is on my computer and has a password for access purposes, so it is secure. The audio tape from which the transcription was made is securely locked away.

The transcription is verbatim, except for the removal of fillers (umms, ahhs) and unnecessary repetitions (for example, parataxis and anacoluthon). Because it is raw data, it does not have the refinements of written language. Instead, it conforms to natural rhythms of conversations, and so may seem disjointed in places. When stories are being developed from raw data, information will be altered to better reflect both story and writing conventions. The development of stories from your data will be in consultation with you.

I would appreciate you reading the transcription and adding, deleting or altering any parts you wish. Please make comments on the transcription itself, and return it by mail with the accompanying form releasing the transcription for use.

If you have no alterations to make, please keep the transcript copy and simply return the enclosed form. You may fax it back if it is more convenient.

If you have named particular people, and they may be relevant to a story that develops, you may choose a pseudonym to protect their privacy. You can indicate this on the transcription.

If you would like to discuss the transcription before returning it, please feel free to contact me.

I look forward to receiving your responses and the accompanying form. If I have not received this release after three weeks, I will telephone you.

Regards,

*(b) return of transcript form*

### Release of transcript for use

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

I have received the transcription of the interview and have read it. The following applies:

- The transcript is acceptable as raw data provided that the conditions agreed to on the original consent form are met. I have kept the transcript because I have made no alterations.
- I have corrected the text of the transcript. The annotations accompany the return of the transcript. Once the alterations are made, the text is OK as raw data provided that the conditions agreed to on the original consent form are met.
- I want to withdraw from the project. Please destroy any data you have collected from me.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Fax to: \_\_\_\_\_ (07) \_\_\_\_\_  
(if you keep the transcript and there are no changes; or if you wish to withdraw)

Or send by snail mail to: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE: don't forget  
to post the transcript and  
annotations**



**A. HOD in a large Decile 4 school. This HOD has close to 20 staff in the department (but not all are full time English)**

7.55am	departmental meeting
8.30	full staff briefing
8.40	class 2 interruptions (staff)
9.35	class 5 interruptions (3 staff, 2 students)
10.30	interval: discusses 3 students with 3 different staff members; Talks with 3 other staff about other matters
10.45	non-contact: checks reports for error; writes some more; discusses specific reports with other staff member present. Visits caretaker to check on progress of desk cleaning and refurbishment. Discuss how to do changeover for another class lot later in the week. Organises and receives from another staff member help in accessing student records and other school computer systems. Makes 5 phone calls. 3 staff seek advice on report comments. Organises work experience student to do departmental tasks.
11.45	class 1 interruption (staff)
12.40	non contact: back to report checking; at same time confers with assistant HOD in department about the following: staff problems, appraisal, Australian English competition preparations; sees several students about work
1.45	lunch: talks with 3 staff and caretaker again; goes to hall to support staff organising school's cultural festival; 3 staff seek advice
2.30	tutor group meeting: attendance, money collection, work progress 2 interruptions (staff)
2.40	class: 3 interruptions (2 staff, one student); these last for 10 minutes at the start of lesson
3.25	end of school: student arrives for tutorial 2 interruptions (staff)
4.20	leaves for home
7.30pm	BOT meeting; gets home at 11pm [reported later]

## 2. HOD in small Decile 1 school: 4 staff + HOD

8.10am	briefs reliever for absent staff member
8.15	prints out from computer the work prepared the previous night; at same time, discusses Manu Korero competition and organisational details with Assistant HOD.
8.25	uses photocopier to make class copies of work; discusses school information with 2 staff members
8.30	staff briefing
8.45	tutor group: absences, pastoral care. returns to staff room for class work; 2 interruptions (students) on the way there. Class for double period.
10.30	interval: 2 students seek help; discusses school matters with 7 staff
10.55	non-contact (double period): meets with departmental staff member re long term planning while she's on maternity leave; went to classroom to tidy it for afternoon classes; goes back to staff room to check pigeonhole; sorts contents; does grounds duty to check for truants; has lengthy meeting with principal over staffing, classes, English curriculum/assessment matters.
12.55	lunch: meets with 6 different staff on school matters over lunch
1.20	goes to class to prepare for next lessons
1.25	class
2.20	class
3.20	tidies up room; talks with students who stay behind; returns to staff room to deal with absence form; checks pigeonhole; meets with 2 staff to discuss matters for next day
3.45	leaves for home – departmental meeting cancelled because 50% of staff away sick
8.00 pm	begins marking [reported later – plus next 2 entries]
9.30	preparation of work for one class
11.00	bed

### 3. HOD of Decile 4 rural school: 7 staff + HOD

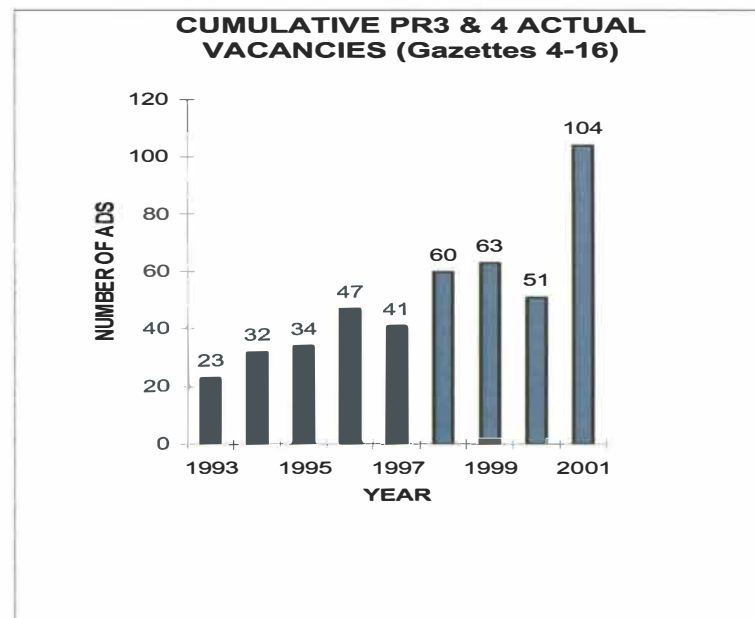
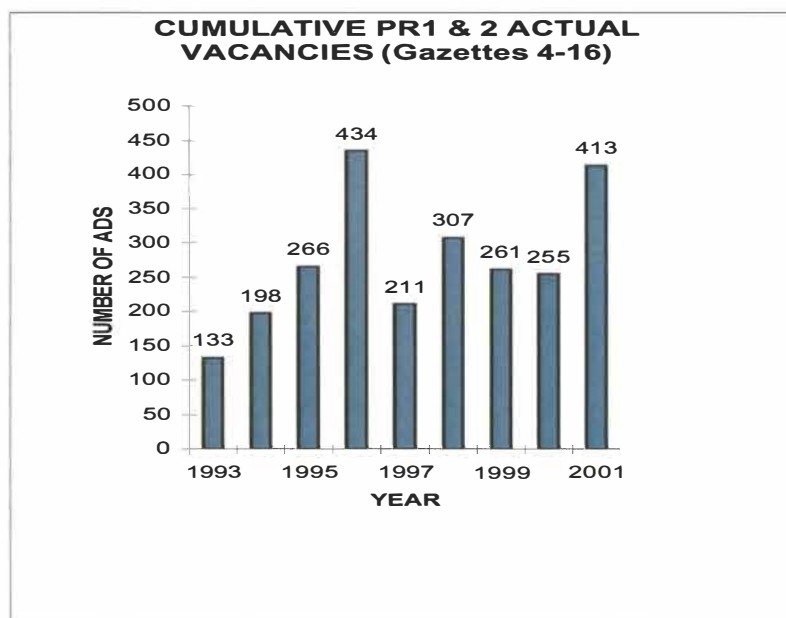
8.00-8.20	travel to school; share ride with another staff member; discuss previous night's theatre performance ; took a busload of students.
8.25	consults with 2 staff and student teacher about specific planning for day
8.30	staff briefing
8.40	talks with 2 departmental staff; uses photocopy machine to make class copies of work
8.50	class
9.50	class
10.55	tutor group: absences, pastoral care, work progress; student details admin.
11.10	interval: meets with learning Support Teacher and discusses work for class and its follow-up; discussion continues as they walk to class
11.30	class
12.30	non contact: discussion with 2 staff members and Learning Support person; begins organising Shakespeare Day details; discusses arrangements with another staff member; checks information at office.
1.40	lunch: meeting with 2 staff; parent arrives to see HOD – an unplanned meeting;
2.10	prepares for next class
2.20	class
3.20	tidies classroom; 2 interruptions (staff) ; on way to car meets person in charge of relief – discusses arrangements for Shakespeare Day
7.00	Begins marking [reported later]
10.30	bed

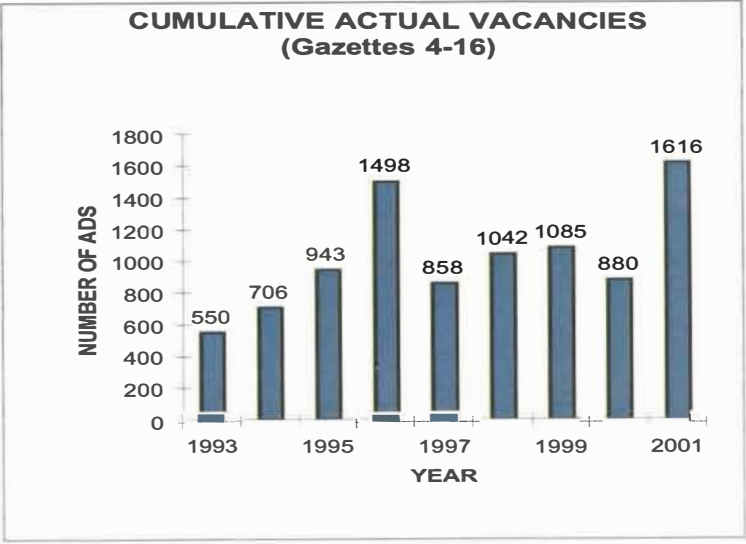
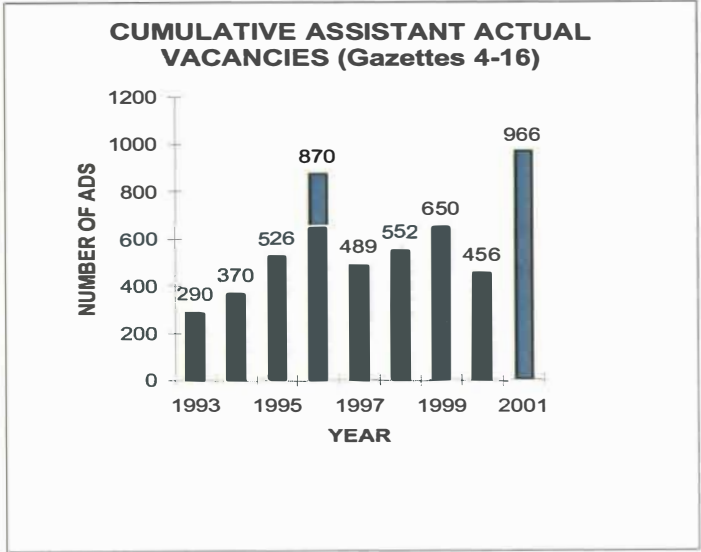
## Appendix F

PPTA analysis of advertised vacancies (courtesy of PPTA headquarters, Wellington, 2001)

"[PPTA's] work on supply shows that not only are principals not filling vacancies, but they are getting very small fields of applicants. Often they are making selections from one or two candidates.

The attached graphs may be of interest - they show the number of actual permanent position vacancies advertised each year between Gazette 4 and 16 (after March 1st when staffing positions have been confirmed and up to the latest Gazette). They are broken down into assistant, 1/2 unit and 3/4 unit positions." (email from Rob Willets, PPTA, 20/09/01)





13 March 2002

An Open Letter to the Board of Trustees/Senior Management Team \_\_\_\_\_ High School

After 25 years as Head of Department Social Studies at \_\_\_\_\_ High School, I have decided to resign from that position. While there have been many high points over that time, it has been a time of rapid educational change, rising expectations from all who have, or think they have, a stake in education and over the past few years an unrelenting pressure of task expansion without the time and remuneration to make it worthwhile. It became apparent to me that my health, welfare and life in general was under threat and a decision had to be made. In short, the gas tank was empty, or to put it another way, the barrel was full and could take no more.

I think it is important at this time of an unresolved Collective Employment Contract, the introduction of a new qualifications system and increasing expectations of teachers in general with reduced support that a statement be made and hopefully awareness of the crisis in secondary education can be highlighted. The Head of Department position responds to above and below, but the job has got too big, as well as the teaching, to be sustainable any longer. Some of these pressures on middle management (not in any particular order) are:

1. Subject Expertise - there is an expectation that I keep in touch with seven different subject areas and attend meetings in five of those areas to keep at the forefront of developments. These are in Social Studies (Waikato Social Studies Association), Geography (Waikato Geography Teachers Association), Tourism (Central North Island Tourism Teachers and Tutors Group), Languages (particularly French - Waikato Language Teachers Association), and Driver Education (Commercial Road Transport Logistics and Training). Many of these I have held executive positions in, all activities take place outside school hours, but as an HOD there is an expectation that attendance at these gatherings is part of the job.
2. Outside Classroom Aspects of Teaching - I have been a member of the PPTA all of my teaching career and consider it important to remain so as a professional extension of teaching. I have been the Branch Chairperson for 10 years and often this involves working closely with Senior Management, the Board of Trustees and specific member concerns. I have also been in charge of cricket at the school and been involved at regional and national level for 30 years. I see this as part of a teacher's role but increasingly it has become impossible to do justice to the role with boys and girls teams. Often during the season I am not home

until 7.15 pm and the responsibility involves coaching at lunchtime and after school, and attendance at games during weekends. The school has high standing in cricketing circles but personally I feel frustrated I cannot do as much as is needed. My involvement in a number of other committees, task forces and specific professional research has been part of the Middle Management role.

3. School Based Tasks of an HOD
4. Responsibility for Department Discipline - badly behaved students are referred to me from teachers in the Department (range from 8-14 teachers in any one year) for discipline reasons. I am then giving punishments which means more paperwork and time, eg lunchtime detentions.
5. Professional Development - arranging this essential updating for teachers is another responsibility as is an expectation to attend conferences/courses to keep up with trends and transfer to other teachers. Each year we have a Professional Development Day organised by me.
6. Appraisal - a very time consuming task with visits, paperwork, interviews for a number of teachers, again inadequate time is available for this.
7. Administration/Paperwork - a myriad and huge amount of communication from people and firms wanting to sell something and lots of other things has grown to avalanche proportions - again a lack of time to deal with all that comes in causes frustration.
8. Assessment - responsibility for all exams in five different subject areas and oversight of NCEA. Its introduction at Year 11 in 2002 and other levels in the future will necessitate an enormous amount of work - meetings, writing drafts, marking, etc. There is no extra time for this despite the fact it is an "extra production" for teachers but particularly HOD's who coordinate these.
9. Financial and Resource Management - balancing the budget, penny-pinching, conserving scarce resources is another aspect of the job causing frustration, juggling money around and making savings is constantly in the back of your mind. The Operations Grant does not go for enough.
10. Multi-Tasking/Multi Teaching - switching between different subjects, levels and juggling tasks is mentally exhausting on top of a normal teaching load and the other "in-school tasks" such as duty.
11. Assisting with School Profile/Image - in a competitive environment the school needs to work hard to maintain its pecking order in a free market environment. This involves setting up promotions, linking with Intermediate School and generally 'flying the flag'. This is an

extension again of the classroom and takes time. Contributions and attendance at many school meetings reduces time outside for reflection and preparation.

12. Personal - the key point here is that there is never any sense of completion of anything and as teacher morale/stress bites deeply at various times of the year, as HOD you are expected to be a role model/activator when you are under stress yourself. There is frustration at a lack of time, resourcing, meetings without solution and an inability to apparently make a difference to young people's lives. The pressure on HOD's to deliver the curriculum, academic results and a positive school image in an environment of pressure, scarcity of resources and real sense of direction for education generally has forced me to retreat to the world I can manage - my classroom with my own students. I will enjoy that release. Unfortunately in school, the sharing of ideas and resources has been replaced by selfishness and an expectation that "the HOD will solve it".

#### What are the solutions?

##### GENERAL

1. Politicians need to listen top educators - increased staffing and remuneration would help. The job of an HOD/Middle Manager is not seen as attractive as it used to be.
2. Expectations and the status /value the community put on teachers in general needs to be examined.
3. Within schools decision making processes, leadership and staff welfare markedly affects the job Middle Managers do. Often we try to translate decisions and systems into reality and make them work, even if flawed.
4. Address the pressures placed on schools and teachers in general. The need to compete in a cultural environment, the increasing attitude of teachers towards selfishness also has an impact on HOD's trying to move the school in a desired direction and produce results.
5. Provide opportunities for refreshment with paid sabbaticals would give a chance for teachers who have served for a number of years an opportunity to recharge the batteries and come back stronger. Study awards can do this but their purpose is different at present.
6. Address specific non-contact time for HOD's - New Zealand teachers in Middle Management have much less non-contact time than overseas counterparts, and the pay rates are less than 50% for an equivalent job.



## CONCLUSION

In short, I have hit the wall and am not prepared to continue. I seldom get a free morning interval, lunchtime or after school period to relax in the staff room. Increasingly, evenings are committed as are weekends and holidays. I am expected to keep on top of trends in seven different subject areas and teach in five of them. Time for preparation and marking is scarce and often not done thoroughly. Teachers contemplating Middle Management are being turned off by the burden of work with inadequate remuneration for the extra hours the job involves. The HOD position used to be seen as a stepping-stone to Senior Management - this alone is not enough to encourage high quality applicants. The enjoyment of the job has long since disappeared and when that happens it is time to move aside and seek a real life. I have now made that decision - not an easy one but one which was essential for my own survival. The future pace of change and the key role of the Middle Manager in carrying out developments is daunting and I see no light at the end of the tunnel.

signed (name provided)

HOD SOCIAL STUDIES (1977-2002)

Participant A. (April, 2001). Interview. Hamilton, NZ  
Participant A. (July, 2001). Interview 2. Hamilton, NZ  
Participant A. (1/8/01). School Observation. Hamilton, NZ  
Participant B. (April, 2001). Interview. Hamilton, NZ  
Participant B. (July, 2001). Interview 2. Hamilton, NZ  
Participant B. (31/7/01). School Observation. Hamilton, NZ  
Participant C. (April, 2001). Interview. Hamilton, NZ  
Participant C. (July, 2001). Interview 2. Hamilton, NZ  
Participant C. (16/8/01). School Observation. Hamilton, NZ

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