

**THE PERCEPTIONS OF HEADS, MIDDLE LEADERS AND CLASSROOM  
TEACHERS ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP ON  
TEACHING AND LEARNING. A STUDY IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN THE  
WEST MIDLANDS OF ENGLAND.**

**by**

**AFRICA MOYO**

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## **Abstract**

There has been a significant increase in interest in distributed leadership among policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in educational leadership over the past decade. Most of the literature has focused on distributed leadership as a leadership approach and has paid little attention to its effects on student learning outcomes. This study explores the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. The study uses semi-structured interviews with four headteachers, six middle leaders and eight teachers from two primary and two secondary schools in the West Midlands region of England. From these semi-structured interviews with eighteen participants, the study captures their perceptions of distributed leadership: what it means to them, how it is practised in schools and the perceived effects on teaching and learning.

The findings show that distributed leadership has the support of leaders and teachers. They perceived it to have a positive effect on teaching and learning and the majority of practitioners believe that distributed leadership contributes to improvement in student learning outcomes. The participants' responses also reveal that distributed leadership is believed to contribute to effective school leadership and involvement in decision making.

The study identifies two interrelated yet competing principal approaches to the practice of distributed leadership. First, responsibilities are devolved across the school through formal mechanisms in a top-down manner. Second, was the emergent approach where bottom up influences were operational. Whilst the majority of the literature on distributed leadership promotes the latter approach, findings from this study reveal that the former is predominant in terms of how distributed leadership is practised in schools.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of teachers, middle leaders and headteachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. Distributed leadership has gained increasing interest and focus from policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in education in recent years nationally and internationally. In the research community 'distributed leadership has currency' (Hartley, 2007, p. 1), and is 'in vogue' (Harris 2004, p.13), its time has come; it is a 'new kid on the block' (Gronn, 2006, p.1) and 'attracting growing attention' (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005 p.192). In England the government established the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) in 2000 and distributed leadership was given high priority. (The NCSL has now changed its name to National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services). Furthermore, in England the governance of leadership training is increasingly framed by a quango; the NCSL. The government has made huge investment in maintaining and developing school leadership through the creation of the NCSL and the associated development of the National Qualification for Headship (NPQH). In the United States of America (USA), recent studies have shown that the responsibility for leadership is often distributed across the school and includes teachers who have no formally designated leadership positions (Spillane, 2006). Research in Australian schools (Crowther et al, 2002) and in the USA and Canadian schools (Hargreaves and Fink, 2004) revealed that leadership is increasingly no longer centred on the principal or headteacher but is distributed across the school. These studies highlight that distributed leadership may have great

potential in improving school leadership by involving the practices of multiple individuals: those in formal leadership positions and those without formally designated leadership positions. According to Spillane (2001), this involvement of multiple individuals in school leadership enhances instructional innovations.

However, notwithstanding the increasing popularity of distributed leadership, there is very little evidence of a direct causal relationship between distributed leadership and school achievement though one conclusion has been that there is an indirect causal relationship (Hallinger and Heck 1999). Similarly, attempts to show a direct causal relationship between leaders' behaviour and pupils' achievement have yielded little that is definitive (Bell et al, 2002 ; Leithwood et al, 2000; Bush, 2005; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). In a recent study, Harris (2007) found that most of the empirical evidence suggesting organizational benefits from distributed leadership are not located in studies that have focused centrally on this form of leadership but in the broader literature concerning school improvement and organizational change. It is worth noting that there is growing consensus among researchers that the influence of leadership on student outcomes is in many ways indirect (Bush, 2008; Southworth 2004; Burton and Brundrett, 2005).

Despite the lack of a direct causal effect between leadership practice and school attainment, some studies reveal a positive perception that leadership makes a difference and that schools need many leaders at all levels (Leithwood et al, 2006). In *The Seven Strong Claims about Successful School*

*Leadership*, Leithwood et al (2006) are optimistic that distributed leadership has an influence on school performance. In particular the fifth strong claim is explicit that “school leadership has a greater influence on schools and students outcomes when it widely distributed” (p.12). Equally, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) assert that the behaviours of school leaders have a greater influence on pupils’ performance than school structures or models.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to explore the perceptions of teachers, middle leaders and headteachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning within their schools.

### **Importance of the study**

This is an important area for study because it is potentially useful to policy-makers, practitioners and trainers. For practitioners, the study could prove useful for continued professional development and the creation of professional learning communities. Policy-makers can use findings from the study to formulate new leadership approaches based on distributed leadership while trainers may come up with training needs for all school staff that include leadership distribution. Researchers can use it to set the future agenda for research. As Harris (2007) notes, “...distributed leadership has captured the imagination of those in educational leadership and is appealing to policy-makers, researchers and practitioners alike” (p.315).

Whilst the literature on distributed leadership is abundant, we know less about distributed leadership in action. To date, there is little empirical data to support the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. By investigating the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers in their school settings, the study highlights how distributed leadership is practised in schools. The findings from the study will contribute to knowledge as well as provide useful feedback to practitioners and policy-makers who are continuously seeking ways of school improvement and effective leadership. Practitioners, especially headteachers and teachers can use the study to identify how distributed leadership practices can contribute to school improvement. For this researcher who has been in school leadership for a long time, the study is important because it offers a chance to reflect on past practice and find new ideas on effective school leadership and teaching.

### **Setting the context**

There has been escalating interest in distributed leadership particularly in the field of education. Reasons for this include, inter alia, new government policies, the greater complexity of the tasks that beset school leaders, the failure of the charismatic hero associated with transformational leadership, contribution to school improvement capacity building, teacher involvement and staff development (Leithwood et al, 2006; Harris, 2000; Muijs and Harris, 2003). Additionally, it is one of the requirements of the National Standards for Heads which states that headteachers provide effective organisation and management of the school “ and among professional qualities they must be committed to distributed leadership” (DfES 2004, p. 9).

Some recent studies show that interest in distributed leadership continues to grow. For instance, Hartley (2007) observed that ‘the recent emergence of distributed leadership has been very marked’ (p.202), and that it has received official endorsement in England. Hartley attributes this to three possible reasons: first, it accords with contemporary reform of the public services; second, it is legitimated by an appeal to a culture wherein all categories and classifications are rendered increasingly permeable; and third, it is regarded as functional for the new work order (p.202). Despite the growing popularity of distributed leadership, Hartley notes that the evidence base which supports this endorsement is weak. Similarly, Harris (2007) argues that the empirical base underpinning many studies in distributed leadership ‘is weak or non-existent’ (p.315).

This present study acknowledges Hartley’s explanation of the emergence of distributed leadership and the argument that the empirical base is weak but focuses on the perceptions of practitioners as they are the people directly involved in the implementation and practice of distributed leadership. The study also hopes to contribute to knowledge by adding some knowledge base to distributed leadership.

There is a range of new inter-related government policies which require greater partnerships and collaborations among professionals and these impact on the role of school heads. These policies include Every Child Matters, workforce remodelling, and the 14-19 agenda (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007). Related to this is the introduction of league

tables which has put extra pressure on schools to perform. The main roles and responsibilities for headteachers cover a range of strategic and operational areas including setting the strategic direction and ethos of the school, managing teaching and learning, developing and managing people and dealing with the requirements of the accountability regime (DfES, 2004).

The introduction of new government policies and initiatives in education and the greater complexity of headship tasks have also made the charismatic hero or hero head more unsuitable in school leadership (Gronn, 2003).

According to March and Weil (2003), it is not the heroic leader who makes an organisation function well but it is the competences of its members, the prompt use of initiative and identification with shared destiny based on trust and a collective endeavour and unobtrusive coordination which make an organisation work well. These new trends in school leadership perceptions give more weight and support for distributed leadership in schools. Distributed leadership in schools is fast replacing the single leader (Gronn, 2003). As a consequence leadership is being shared within the school and schools are restructuring leadership responsibilities through the creation of new teams with emphasis being placed upon teachers as leaders. Many schools are actively trying to create distributed leadership by re-allocating responsibility and authority within the workforce of the school (Harris 2007). This implies that decision making processes are widely shared and that school development is now the responsibility of teams rather than the senior management group (Harris and Muijs 2005).

Given this current paradigm shift in school leadership, the study seeks to explore distributed leadership in action through the lens of the practitioners. The study does not intend to generate theory about the practice of distributed leadership but to get explanations and descriptions from those directly involved.

Apart from reasons stated above, some studies suggest that distributed leadership serves to reduce the workload for headteachers so that they can concentrate more on teaching and learning. For instance Supovitz (2000) argues that ;

“Instructional improvement is the mantra of school reform today. Distributed leadership practices can help principals free up some time to focus on instructional leadership. Principals’ leadership roles are so often defined by the managerial aspects of their work that instructional improvement gets crowded out” (p.1).

He observes that principals and headteachers spend very little of their time in the classrooms or talking to students about their academic work because they are overwhelmed by the managerial aspects of their work. Supovitz argues that formally distributing leadership roles to other members helps headteachers correct this situation and free up their time for instructional focus, which is to reinforce the paramount school mission of teaching and learning. Arrowsmith (2007) supports the idea that the headteacher’s role has become over-crowded with too many managerial demands. He notes that the headteachers’ job descriptions:

...were among the most diverse and demanding of any senior executive across the business and education spheres .The headteacher role was becoming unsuitable and distinctly unattractive to many senior staff who would in a quieter age have aspired to the role (p.27)

Arrowsmith argues that distributed leadership enhances the development of the capacity of the school and lightens the headteacher's burden freeing her/him to do those key things only headteachers can do.

On capacity building, Harris (2004) argues that distributed leadership is at the core of the capacity building model. Building a broad capacity base is not possible if control is limited to a few individuals but it works better when there is broader distribution of leadership (see Elmore, 2000). In his research report for the NCSL, Kimber (2003) notes that strategies to build capacity relate to developing more effective leadership teams, involving more staff in the leadership of the school by establishing an extended leadership team, supporting and enhancing the role of middle leaders, considering what part advanced skills teachers might play in moving forward the teaching and learning agenda, extending the range of professional development activities and evolving more rigorous self-evaluation. Harris (2003) also argues that leadership is "a shared and collective endeavour that engages all members of the organisation" (p.75) and that this mode of leadership challenges the conventional orthodoxy of single and heroic individualistic leader.

In addition to capacity building, distributed leadership was seen as means for transforming the school system in the UK (Hatcher, 2005). For example in answer to the question: What is the problem to which distributed leadership is claimed to provide the solution? Hatcher (2005) argues:

The government is engaged in a profound transformation of the school system from a social democratic to a neoliberal system whose primary objective is the production of human capital for economic competitiveness (p.1).

Hatcher argues that to achieve this objective, the hearts and minds of the teachers have to be won, and sees distributed leadership as a means to gain the support and participation of teachers.

Whilst most of the studies cited above paint a positive picture of distributed leadership and its potential to enhance school improvement and student achievement, other studies are cautious about this. For instance, Bennett et al (2003), in their NCSL research report, point out that there are no empirical data on the effectiveness of distributed leadership in terms of pupil or student achievement. They also note that there is little agreement as to the meaning of the term distributed leadership but instead there are different interpretations of the term. Thus in reality each school has its own understanding and practice of distributed leadership. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) warned that distributed leadership can easily slip into delegation if not carefully planned and implemented. Arrowsmith (2007) also warns of the possible descent into anarchy as he notes that :

... the NCSL –commissioned Hay Group DL research 2004 identifies the need for accountability as leadership autonomy is rolled out across the school, to prevent a decent into anarchy .Conversely ...accountability is an inhibiting fear factor. In these lively days of unannounced Ofsted inspections, league tables and parental choice it is understandable that some headteachers might not feel confident in distributing responsibility very widely, if at all beyond the most conventional of job descriptions (p.24).

In view of this, the study also seeks to find out what the term distributed leadership means to frontline practitioners; that is headteachers, middle leaders and teachers, and how it is practised in schools. This study will examine these issues by exploring the perceptions of teachers, middle

leaders and headteachers. This will include finding out their understanding of the term distributed leadership, how it is practised and what they perceive as its effect on teaching and learning.

### **Aims of the study**

The study has three aims; firstly, to investigate the perceptions of headteachers and teachers on the impact of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. Secondly, to explore the contribution of distributed leadership to school leadership as perceived by teachers and headteachers. Thirdly, it seeks to find out any emerging models of distributed leadership by studying how distributed leadership is practised at each school. The NCSL was established for leadership development and distributed leadership is also central to the leadership development framework adopted by the National College for School Leadership (Hatcher, 2005). In the National Standards for Headteachers, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2004) sets out six key areas representing the role of the headteacher; and these are shaping the future of the school, leading learning and teaching, developing self and working with others, managing the organisation, securing accountability, strengthening community and that heads must be committed to distributed leadership. Thus the impetus for distributed leadership in schools also comes from government. In research, distributed leadership has also come to 'prominence' and the literature on distributed leadership is 'vast' (Storey, 2004; Muijis and Harris 2007, Hatcher 2005). It is against this backdrop that this study aims to explore the perceptions of those involved in distributed leadership. It is acknowledged that headteachers and teachers are not the

only players in education but there are other equally important groups and individuals like students, school governors, parents, the community, local education authorities and government agencies whose views and perceptions would be invaluable in this study. However, it is not possible to conduct a study that incorporates the perceptions of all these stakeholders within the scope of this study at this time.

Various studies have concluded that effective leadership is one important factor in a school's success and as a result it is generally accepted that effective leadership is a central component in securing and sustaining school improvement (Muijs and Harris 2007; Bell et al 2002). However, some studies suggest that this link is largely indirect. As Bell et al (2002) note:

The evidence relating to the effect of headteachers on student outcomes indicates that such effect is largely indirect. It is mediated through key intermediate factors, these being the work of teachers, the organisation of the school, the relationship with parents and the wider community . . . Hence one tentative conclusion from these findings is to suggest that leadership that is distributed among the wider school staff might be more likely to have an effect on the positive achievement of student outcomes than that which is largely, or exclusively top-down (p.3)

Other researchers also support the view that effective leaders have an indirect influence on student outcomes. For example, Bush (2005) drawing from the work of Leithwood and Levin (2004) notes that "linking leadership to student outcomes in a direct way is very difficult to do" (p.6) and that the impact of leadership on student outcomes is not easy to detect because it is mostly indirect (see also Hargreaves and Fink 2006). Since it has been argued in various studies as cited above that it is very difficult to establish direct

correlation between leadership and positive student outcomes, this study seeks to add to the knowledge on distributed leadership by exploring the perceptions of headteachers middle leaders and teachers on the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) also argue that “Educational leadership, including distributed must be judged by the evidence of its impact on student learning...” (p. 98).

### **Research questions**

Three research questions underpin this study. The research questions are closely linked to the aims of the study which have already been stated. These research questions are:

1. What are the perceptions of (a) headteachers (b) middle leaders (c) teachers, about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning.
2. To what extent does distributed leadership contribute to effective school leadership?
3. What model/models of distributed leadership are practised in schools and why?

Since the focus of the study is on perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers these research questions are important because they guide the interview questions in the collection of data and thus capture the views of the participants. These will also drive the literature review.

## **Research design**

This study is adopts a subjective/ interpretive approach. Habermas (1971) suggests a typology of the kind of questions and knowledge which researchers seek. In the typology Habermas presents an account of human cognitive interests: these being the technical, which relates to the world of work, the practical which relates to how we understand each other and the emancipatory which relates to the matter of power. In Habermas' typology, if a researcher has practical interest, then his/her interest is in understanding and interpreting; a kind of knowledge which is generated by the interpretive mode of inquiry. This study is premised in the interpretive mode of inquiry.

The interpretivist approach in this study also reflects the researcher's ontological and epistemological position. This researcher subscribes to the view that reality and truth are the product of individual perception and that there are multiple realities shared by a group of people (ontology) and that knowledge is subjective and based on experience and insight (epistemology). The study uses the qualitative method to collect data.

The study involves four schools in the West Midlands of England. These were two primary and two secondary schools. Before the study started, the researcher established that these schools practised distributed leadership. This was done by approaching headteachers who were also undertaking doctoral studies in the school of Education at the University of Birmingham who apart from confirming that their schools practised distributed leadership, agreed to participate in the study. The issue of access to schools for the

purpose of the study was resolved once the head teachers agreed to participate. Research interview consent forms were sent to each of the four schools and all interviewees were asked to sign (see Appendix 1).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four headteachers, six middle leaders and eight teachers. In total 18 interviews were conducted. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed and analysed. Data analysis was done following Miles and Huberman (1994). Miles and Huberman suggest that data reduction is the first step in data analysis. This is a process of selecting, focusing, simplifying and transforming data. The next stage is data display which involves organizing and compressing data so that it makes meaning, followed by data display which involves organizing and compressing data so that meaning can be made out of the data. The last stage in Miles and Huberman's analysis is conclusion drawing and verification. Details of the data analysis are discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis.

### **Ethical issues**

In this study the researcher observed ethical principles. Among the ethical issues observed were confidentiality, voluntary informed consent, anonymity, honesty and the right to withdraw. As Denscombe (2003) points out, researchers are expected to respect the rights and dignity of the participants, avoid harm for the participants and operate with honesty and integrity in the collection, analysing and dissemination of the findings. These ethical considerations are also at the core of the British Educational Research

Association (BERA) guidelines for educational research (2004). The principles underpinning BERA guidelines are that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values and academic freedom. This researcher took due consideration of these guidelines.

The researcher prepared a consent form and sent it to the schools (Appendix 1). The participants were assured that only their collective views will be published in the thesis but their individual identities are going to remain anonymous. It was also explained at the interview that participants who wish to withdraw from the study are free to do so. Participants will get feedback through an executive summary, which the researcher will send to each of the participating schools, but individuals who wish to read the complete study can find it from the university library.

### **Antecedents of the study**

There has been a huge increase in the literature on distributed leadership in the recent past. Such an increase is indicative of the growing interest in the topic among researchers, practitioners and policy-makers. The literature shows that the term distributed leadership has different meanings to different people in different contexts (MacBeath, 2004). One of the definitions of distributed leadership is that it is leadership that is spread over many leaders; it is shared leadership that involves stake holders like teachers, governors and support staff (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2004; Harris and Muijs, 2007; Goleman et al, 2002). It has also been defined in terms of what it does rather than what

it is. In this respect it has been described as leadership that inspires staff and contributes to effective learning for students; it is leadership that creates a strong web of relationships between teachers and the administration (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Blasé and Blasé 1999; Yurkl, 2002; Oduro, 2004).

The study will explore the various definitions and perspectives on distributed leadership in the literature review. In particular it will seek to find out what the term means to headteachers, middle leaders and teachers who are the participants in this study.

Most of the literature available supports the idea that distributed leadership holds tremendous potential in improving school leadership and students' academic performance (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000; Lambert, 2003; West et al 2000; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). While the literature evidence shows that distributed leadership helps to mobilize instructional innovations through involving the practices of multiple individuals (Halverson and Diamond, 2001), the effect of the principals on student achievement is indirect and mediated powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and supportive working conditions ( Elmore,2000; Lambert, 2003; Spillane et al, 2004; Leithwood et al 2006). However, despite the extensive body of literature, to date there has not been any empirical data to support the effect of distributed leadership on student outcomes (Hartley 2007; Rhodes and Brundrett, 2010). This study will therefore contribute to knowledge about the

effect of distributed leadership on teaching and learning by providing some empirical evidence from headteachers, middle leaders and teachers.

The literature available reveals that distributed leadership is associated with a number of concepts and themes. These include empowerment, teamwork, staff motivation, capacity building, teacher leadership and to a lesser extent professional development (Early and Weindling, 2004; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006, Muijs and Harris, 2007; Hall, 2001; Wallace, 2001). These themes will be explored in more detail in the literature review.

Most recently, some studies on distributed leadership have focused on leadership for learning; a concept that places emphasis on improvement of learner outcomes (Rhodes and Brundrett 2010). Similarly, this study also aims to investigate the impact of distributed leadership on teaching and learning.

While the literature highlights that there is a strong belief in the efficacy of distributed leadership, there is not a great deal of evidence about how it operates (Hartley, 2007). A small number of researchers have offered some explanation of how distributed leadership operates. For example, MacBeath (2005) came up with six categories of distribution and Hargreaves and Fink (2006) suggest a continuum of distributed leadership. The study will investigate how these apply in schools. The report in this thesis draws on findings from semi-structured interviews with 18 participants; 4 headteachers, 6 middle leaders and 8 teachers.

## **Outline of the thesis**

The thesis is in six chapters: introduction, literature review, research design, the findings, discussion of the findings and conclusion. In the first chapter, the focus of the study is stated, that is the perceptions of heads, middle leaders and classroom teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. The context of the study is set by highlighting the reasons for the emergence of distributed leadership. Aims of the study and research questions are also stated in the first chapter. Chapter two of the study reviews the literature and it adopts a thematic approach. The third chapter outlines the research design as well as the methodology. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection. In chapters four and five the findings are presented and discussed respectively. Finally, chapter six which is the conclusion, sums up the study, highlights the contribution to knowledge and makes some recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 2 A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

There is a vast and extensive literature on distributed leadership. From about 2000 research on distributed leadership took an upward trend and this was followed by an increase in publications in professional journals as well as books. The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on distributed leadership. The review adopts a thematic approach. It starts by outlining how the literature search was conducted and also states some core authors in the review. This is followed by a discussion of some definitions and perspectives about distributed leadership. Apart from the last two sections which are on a critique of distributed leadership and models of distributed leadership, the rest of the chapter explores themes and issues associated with distributed leadership. These include empowerment, teacher leadership, collaborative leadership, leadership for learning, instructional leadership, capacity building, creating a culture for learning, effective leadership, change teams, good communication, team work, trust and accountability, distribution of leadership functions, distributed leadership in schools, favourable conditions for promoting distributed leadership and factors that inhibit the implementation of distributed leadership.

### **Literature search**

The literature for this study was mainly found through electronic search. I conducted an electronic search in order to find relevant literature on the subject. I went through google scholar, clicked on “more” then found *scholar.google.com*. After typing the key words *distributed leadership*, a range

of journal articles on the subject appeared on the screen, showing author, title of paper and year of publication. I selected journals from 2000 from information services at [www.is.bham.ac.uk](http://www.is.bham.ac.uk) through clicking on the eLibrary. I also used the following websites: the DfES at [www.dfes.gov.uk](http://www.dfes.gov.uk) and the National College for School Leadership at [www.ncsl.org.uk](http://www.ncsl.org.uk).

The review is driven by the three research questions, which underpin this study. These are; what are the perceptions of heads, middle leaders and teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning? To what extent does distributed leadership contribute to effective school leadership? What models of distributed leadership are practised in schools and why? The following authors are at the core of the discussion in this review; Spillane (2006), Hargreaves and Fink (2006), Hall (2001), MacBeath (2005), Wallace (2001), Muijs and Harris (2007), Storey (2004), Harris (2004), Oduro (2004) Rhodes and Brundrett (2010) and Hartley (2009). In addition to these authors, the review will refer to many more researchers who wrote on this topic. These researchers discuss various aspects of distributed leadership and come up with some common thematic issues which are discussed in this review.

### **Distributed leadership: some definitions and perspectives**

This section of the review explores some central tenets of what distributed leadership is. It does not claim to offer the definitive word on distributed leadership but rather to highlight the range of scholarly expositions. There seems to be very little agreement on the meaning of the term distributed

leadership (Bennet et al 2003). Offering a solution to this, Bennet et al (2003) suggest that it is best to think of distributed leadership as “a way of thinking about leadership” (p.2) rather than another technique. Spillane (2006) contends that “distributed leadership is leadership that is stretched over multiple leaders” (p.15). He argues that in distributed leadership it is the collective interactions among leaders, followers and their situation that are paramount and sums it up thus;

This practice is formed in a very particular way, as a product of the joint interactions of school leaders, followers and aspects of their situation such as tools and routines. This distributed view of leadership shifts focus from school principals... and other formal and informal leaders to the web of leaders, followers, and their situations that gives form to leadership practice (p. 3).

Distributed leadership is premised upon leadership as a collective rather than a singular activity or entity and there are many leaders not just one (Spillane, 2004; Goleman et al, 2002). As Goleman et al (2002) observe, leadership resides not solely in the individual at the top but in every person at the entry level who in one way or the other acts as a leader” (p.140). The implication of this in school settings is clear; it is not only the head and senior staff who are leaders, but classroom teachers too have leadership roles. Harris views distributed leadership as implying that the practice of leadership is one that is shared and extended within groups and networks which can be formal or informal. For example, when teachers, parents, governors and support staff work together to solve problems, they occupy developmental space within the school and by their actions they are engaged in distributed leadership practice. Harris’ (2004) view of distributed leadership is inclusive and implies:

Involvement of the many rather than the few in leadership tasks and is premised on collective capacity building in schools. Distributed leadership is first and foremost about leadership practice ; it is the result of the interactions between all those who contribute to the life of the school-the teachers, governors classroom assistants, support staff, parents classroom assistants support staff parents and students (p. 46).

Similarly, Hargreaves and Fink (2006), describing distributed leadership in terms of what it does rather than what it is, contend that distributed leadership is leadership that

...inspires staff members, students and parents to seek, create and exploit leadership opportunities that contribute to deep and broad learning for all students (p. 95).

However, Hargreaves and Fink are quick to remind us that leadership starts with the principal or head because he/she does the distributing of leadership and creates the culture in which distribution emerges.

Equally, Storey (2004) observes that "...in the context of school leadership, the official orthodoxy has been that it is the role of the head teacher which is paramount and crucial" (p. 250). Drawing on DfEE (1997, 1998, 1999), Storey notes that leadership in schools has at times been equated with 'head-teachership' and points out that this has been partly due to the desire of government officials (in the UK) to identify clear accountability and reporting lines. She further notes that there was considerable disquiet and uneasiness among workers in the public sector about this centralized assertive leadership. As a result, Storey argues, the public services have been instrumental in the spread of ideas on distributed leadership. This is similar to what Harris (2004) sees as the central role of those in formal positions. She notes:

... the job of those in formal leadership positions is primarily to hold the pieces of the organisation together in a productive relationship. Their central task is to create a common culture of expectations around the use of skills and abilities. In short distributing leadership equates with maximizing the human capacity within the organization” (p. 14).

These arguments suggest that those in formal positions, especially headteachers have a great influence on the practice of distributed leadership (Fink, 1999; Elmore, 2004). But the effects of heads on student outcomes are largely indirect since the heads improve student learning by influencing the adults who affect the learning more directly (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007, Rhodes and Brundrett, 2010). Teachers are the adults who are in direct contact with learners in the majority of cases and hence influence their learning. But in order to achieve this, teachers need to be involved and motivated by the leadership. This suggests that school leadership must create conditions that are conducive for teachers to participate.

Some recent studies indicate that distributed leadership has moved from the assumption that school leadership is synonymous with the head (Muijs and Harris, 2007). These two authors cite Murphy (2000) who argues that in the last decade the “great man” theory of leadership prevailed in many parts of the western society as evidenced by the emphasis on individual leaders in the business arena and in the many appeals to ‘strong leadership’ in the political arena. This ‘great man’ theory was prevalent in school leadership and it led to the emphasis on charismatic heads ‘turning around’ under achieving schools. Some findings from recent research studies of effective leadership show that authority to lead need not be located in the person of the leader but can be

dispersed within the school and among people (Muijs and Harris, 2007; Bell et al 2003; Day et al, 2000). These research findings highlight the growing focus on distributed leadership in schools.

Some studies show that in contrast to the traditional notions of one man theory, distributed leadership is characterised as a form of collective leadership in which teachers develop skills and expertise, by working together (Southworth, 2002; Hopkins, 2001; Harris 2004; Hall, 2001). For instance, Harris (2004), concludes that:

Distributed leadership therefore, means multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organisation, made coherent through a common culture. It is the glue of a common task or goal- improvement of instruction and a common frame of values for how to approach that task (p.14).

Distributed leadership in schools can also be understood not in terms of leaders or what they do, but in terms of leadership activity, which can be defined as “ the interaction of leaders, followers, and their situation in the execution of particular leadership tasks” (Spillane et al 2004, p.10). This suggests two important aspects of leadership activity, firstly that leadership activity involves three essential constituting elements; leaders, followers and the situation and secondly, that it does not reside in any of these elements but each is a pre- requisite of leadership activity.

A synthesis of some of the literature on distributed leadership and school improvement identifies several macro school-level functions that are thought essential for instructional innovation and improvement. These include constructing and selling an instructional vision, developing and managing a

school culture conducive to building norms of building trust, collaboration, procuring and distributing resources, supporting teacher growth and development both individually and collectively, providing both summative and formative monitoring of instruction and innovation and establishing a school climate in which disciplinary issues do not dominate instructional issues (Blasé and Blasé 1999, Spillane et al 2004, Spillane 2006, Sergiovanni, 2007).

In an equally compelling analysis of distributed leadership, Yurkl (2002) argues that distributed leadership can be conceptualised as:

A shared process of enhancing the individual and collective capacity of people to accomplish their work effectively...Instead of a heroic leader who can perform all essential leadership functions, the functions are distributed among different members of the team or organisation (p.432).

As the above definition highlights, inherent in the concept of distributed leadership, is the idea of sharing leadership amongst all stake holders. These stake holders, as stated earlier include headteachers, middle leaders teachers, parents and students. This links distributed leadership with teamwork. It becomes a collective endeavour in which all those concerned bring their efforts together to see to it that meaningful contexts and opportunities for learning are created (Hall 2001, Donnellon, 1996, Cardno 1998). This further implies that a teacher's duties do not stay within the confines of the classroom, rather they transcend them by contributing to the community of learners beyond the classroom.

Oduro's (2004) conceptualisation of distributed leadership captures the main concepts discussed in relation to distributed leadership. Oduro is less concerned with technical definitions of distributed leadership but looks at terminologies related to distributed leadership. He argues that an examination of the definitions of the terms 'dispersed leadership,' 'collaborative leadership,' 'democratic leadership,' 'distributive leadership' and 'shared leadership' throws light on the definition because all of them project an element of distribution. While all these terms have an element of distribution, there are some differences in their meanings. According to Oduro (2004) 'dispersed' (p.5) suggests that leadership can be viewed as an activity that can be located at different points within an organisation. Citing Green (2002) Oduro further argues that dispersed leadership is like a "leadership community" (p.5) which involves a community in which people believe they have a contribution to make and can exercise their initiative. Thus dispersed leadership is not concentrated in an individual and does not necessarily give any particular individual or category of persons the privilege of providing more leadership than others.

Collaborative leadership operates on the basis of partnership or networking and can go across boundaries. It may be expressed in schools' joint work with community agencies, parents, teacher groups and other external stakeholders.

Distributive leadership is a post heroic phenomenon in which distribution does not solely depend on the headteacher's initiative (Oduro 2004). It is a less

formalised model of leadership where leadership responsibility is dissociated from the organisational hierarchy. Individuals at all levels in the organisation and in all roles can exert leadership influence over their colleagues and thus the overall direction of the organisation.

Shared leadership can be understood when leadership is explored as a social process; something that arises out of social relationships not simply what leaders do, it does not dwell on an individual's qualities or competences but lies between people within groups in collective action. It is built around trust, openness, respect and appreciation (Oduro, 2004).

According to Oduro (2004) democratic leadership has four defining characteristics. First, it is a leader's interaction with, and encouragement of others to participate fully in all aspects of leadership tasks. Second, it is wide-spread sharing of information and power. Third, it is enhancing self-worth of others and fourth, it is energising others for tasks. Oduro further argues that democratic leadership can either take the form of consultative where a leader makes a group decision after consulting members of their willingness or participative decision making where a leader makes the decision in collaboration with the group, often based on majority rule.

Oduro (2004) argues that the message that runs through these terms is that "leadership is not the monopoly of any one person, a message that is central to the notion of distributed leadership" (p. 5). The relationship between these terms is illustrated in Figure 1 below:

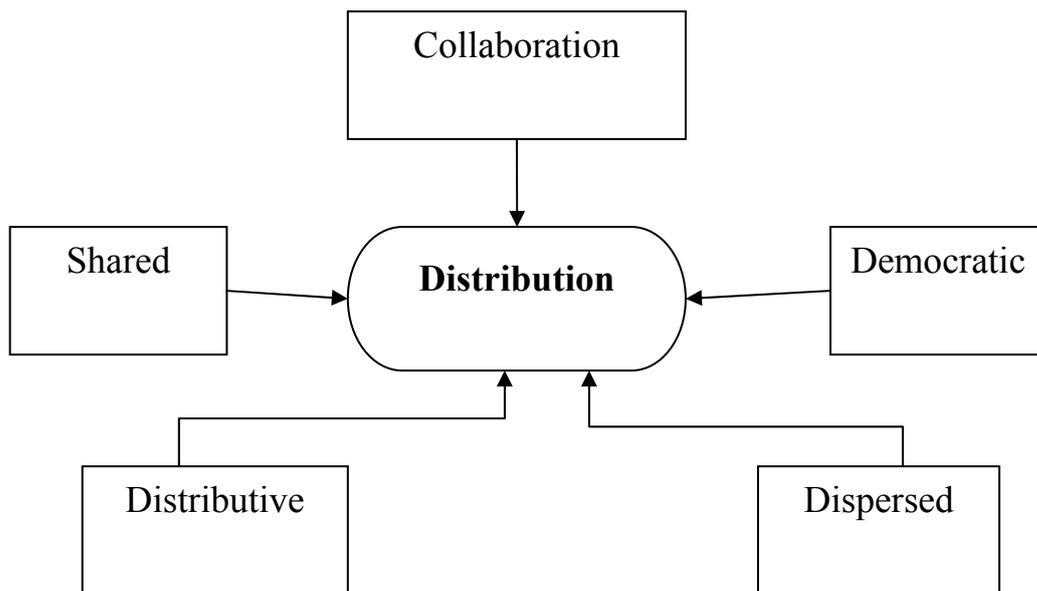


Figure 1: Terminologies related to distributed leadership

(Adopted from Oduro, 2004, p.6).

One important aspect of Oduro's presentation is that he makes a distinction between delegation and distributed leadership. *Delegation*, according to Oduro, is a 'heroic' phenomenon in which distribution is initiated solely from the top (headteacher) and *distributed leadership* is a 'post-heroic' phenomenon in which distribution does not solely depend on the headteacher's initiative.

### **Distributed leadership as a means to empowerment**

In a presentation to the *Mate 27th Annual National Conference*, Belhiah (2007) argues that:

The kind of leadership that is needed in our educational institutions, and without which educational reforms are likely to proceed clumsily and ineffectively is distributed leadership (p.2).

One of the central arguments in Belhiah's presentation is that distributed leadership empowers teachers. He observes that the common denominator in terms like 'lateral leadership', 'participatory leadership' and 'democratic leadership' which are associated with distributed leadership is their call to treat employees as partners in leadership rather than subordinates who must execute orders from the top. Hence the need to move away from the vertical, hierarchical, bureaucratic style of leadership "is a stepping stone toward empowering teachers and democratizing education" (p.3). However, Belhiah points out that:

Empowerment is not necessarily synonymous with relinquishing power and giving teachers absolute power. It simply means giving them the opportunity to experience a sense of ownership and lead aspects of the change (p. 6).

Thus even with empowerment, the overall accountability lies with the headteacher who may find it hard to let go (MacBeath 2005; Sergiovanni, 2001; Silins, 2002, Robinson; 2006). However, one critical thing with regards to distributed leadership is that teachers get involved in leadership when leaders encourage them to voice their views more openly and vigorously without fear of retribution, regarding school policies, curriculum and educational practices. There are four types of teachers' voices; namely voting voice, advisory voice, delegated voice and dialogical voice (Allen, 2004). Voting voice is where teachers cast their votes on issues pertinent to school policies. Advisory voice is where teachers provide their input regarding school decisions, policies, and governance. With delegated voice teachers are involved in leadership teams that make decisions. Dialogical voice is where teachers are encouraged to express their views more openly and use their

potential as leaders to create change in their schools. Allen argues that it is the dialogical voice that is more likely to bring meaningful change and transform educational practices since it involves a substantial amount of commitment and risk taking.

There is further literature which features empowerment as an integral component of distributed leadership (Sergiovanni 2007; NCSL, 2004; Yurkl 1989). Sergiovanni (2007) makes a distinction between power “over” and power “to” in order to expose how empowerment works in the school context. Power “over” emphasizes controlling people and events so that things turn the way the leader wants. This suggests that power “over” is concerned with dominance, control and hierarchy. Sergiovanni argues that teachers will resist this form of power both formally and informally and that even if teachers respond to this approach, it is not very effective for bringing about sustained involvement. By contrast, transformative leaders are concerned with “power to,” As Sergiovanni (2007) succinctly puts it:

Transformative leaders are more concerned with the concept of “power to”. They are concerned with how the power of leadership can help people become more successful, to accomplish the things that they think are important, to experience a greater sense of efficacy. They are less concerned with what people are doing and more concerned with what they are accomplishing (p.76).

Jackson’s NCSL (2004) paper prepared as a “think piece” for school leaders also supports empowerment. Like many researchers cited earlier, Jackson views leading as “an enacted activity” (p.1) which exists through its manifestations and believes that it is profoundly interpersonal. Thus from this perspective, leadership is distributed and Jackson argues that “the role of the

leader is ... to harness, focus, liberate, empower and align that leadership towards common purposes and by so doing, to grow, to release and to focus its capacity” (p.2).

It is evident from the above citation that leadership has to be liberated and available to all. Equally significant is that the leader (the head teacher) is pivotal and “the critical change agent” (p.6). However, despite the pivotal role of the head teacher, Jackson argues that it is not super ordinate but that it is about distributing leadership that is “creating spaces, the contexts and the opportunities for expansion, enhancement and growth amongst all” (p2).

Jackson rejects the myth that distributed leadership equates with delegation and argues that delegation is a manifestation of power relationships. Instead he contends that distributed leadership is about empowerment that is, creating opportunity, space, support, capacity and growth among all stakeholders.

Thus it is clear that distributing leadership responsibilities to teachers offers a means of empowering others to lead (Leithwood and Riehl, 2005; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999, Harris 2004). Like Jackson, Harris (2004) notes that it is important to ensure that “distributed leadership is not simply misguided delegation” (p.20).

According to Sergiovanni (2007) empowerment and purposing go hand in hand. Purposing is defined as “that continuous stream of actions by an organization’s formal leadership which has the effect of inducing clarity,

consensus and commitment regarding the organization's basic purposes" (p.79).

Transformative leaders, Sergiovanni argues, practise the principle of power investment, they distribute power among others in an effort to get more power in return. They also understand that teachers need to be empowered to act, "to be given the necessary responsibilities that releases their potential and makes their actions and decisions count" (p.75). The net result according to Sergiovanni is that "when directed and enriched by purposing and fuelled by empowerment, teachers and others respond with increased motivation and commitment to work with surprising ability" (p.75).

The message that comes out from the literature is that empowerment of teachers is one of the essential components of distributed leadership. The literature also highlights the importance of the leader in creating and nurturing conditions for distributed leadership.

### **Teacher leadership and distributed leadership**

The literature on teacher leadership and distributed leadership presents evidence that distributed leadership is significantly premised upon high levels of teacher involvement (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006). Harris (2005) argues that an obvious place to look for distributed leadership in action has to be with teachers because collectively they offer the greatest but often untapped, leadership resource in schools. He notes that teachers tend not to see themselves as leaders unless they occupy formal

leadership roles. Contrary to the principle of distributed leadership, many teachers equate leadership with formal roles and responsibilities rather than individual capacity building or capability (Harris, 2005; Chapman et al, 2008; Sergiovanni, 2001). Some studies suggest that the concept of teacher leadership is attracting growing attention among school leaders. For example in the U.S.A, Spillane (2006) found evidence of “school leaders hiring teachers with a view toward cultivating teacher leadership” (p.43). Teacher leadership is widely viewed as contributing to the important mission of all schools which is teaching and learning (Danielson, 2006; Lakomski, 2001, Hoyle and Wallace, 2005).

Danielson (2006) argues that teacher leadership is exhibited in a number of settings in the school; within an instructional team or department in the classroom, throughout the school or beyond the school when teachers collaborate. He highlights this point when he describes teacher leadership as a term that refers to:

That set of skills demonstrated by teachers who continue to teach students but also have an influence that extends beyond their own classrooms to others within their own school and elsewhere. It entails mobilizing and energizing others with the goal of improving the school’s performance of its critical responsibilities related to teaching and learning (p.12).

The above citation also demonstrates that teachers have some leadership roles outside the classroom which may be informal. This is also echoed by Muijs and Harris (2007) who note that teacher leadership involves formal and informal roles as well as pedagogical responsibilities. This view of teacher leadership is illustrated in the following quotation;

However most commonly it is interpreted as comprising of the formal leadership roles that teachers undertake that have both management and pedagogical responsibilities, that is head of department, subject coordinator, key stage coordinator and the informal leadership roles that include coaching, leading a new team and setting up action research groups (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001) (p.112).

Muijs and Harris (2007) also posit that teacher leadership is conceptually closely linked to distributed leadership. Other studies highlight that teacher leadership enhances greater teacher involvement in school decision-making and that it is a collective and collaborative process that promotes teacher learning and contributes to school improvement (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Harris, 2004 and Spillane, 2006). Hargreaves and Fink argue that the confidence in teacher leadership comes from the belief that teachers are closest to the students and better placed than other leaders such as heads to make changes that benefit students' learning.

The literature on teacher leadership presents evidence that teacher leaders contribute to school development and classroom change, promote teacher collaboration within and across schools that leads to school effectiveness, improvement and development, improves schools' decision making process, enhance teacher self-efficiency as well as morale and retention in the profession and treat leadership as an emergent property of a group rather than as a function of an individual (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006, Frost , 2009; Gronn, 2000; Mylles, 2006; Lieberman, 2004; Johnson, 2006).

As highlighted in the above benefits of teacher leadership, the teacher is at the centre and other studies support this. For instance, Stoll (2004) argues that:

The individual teacher as a learner is located at the centre of school change. Nothing or no one is more important to school improvement than a teacher (p.3).

Stoll identifies eight interacting influences that are important in determining the capacity of teachers to engage in and sustain continuous learning and school improvement. These are life and career experience, beliefs, emotional well-being, knowledge, skills, motivation to learn, confidence that he or she can make a real difference and sense of interdependence. Research findings by Harris and Muijs (2004) also demonstrate the centrality of the teacher in distributed leadership. In their overview of the literature on distributed leadership, Harris and Muijs (2004) identify three major benefits of distributed leadership. These are improving school effectiveness, improving teacher effectiveness, and contributing to school improvement. For school effectiveness, Harris and Muijs argue that several studies suggest that collaboration between teachers is key to school effectiveness. They cite Wong (1996) who claims that a strong sense of collaboration between teachers and headteachers has a positive impact on students.

It is pertinent here to explain the two concepts: improvement and effectiveness. Hopkins (2001) argues that school improvement can be regarded as a strategy for educational change that focuses on student achievement by modifying classroom practice and adopting management arrangements within the school to support teaching and learning. Similarly

Harris et al (1996) view school improvement as a systematic and sustained effort aimed at change in the learning conditions with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively. School effectiveness refers to “being good at achieving goals of schooling” (Harris et al 1992 p.15). Kyriacou (1997) views effective teaching as teaching which successfully achieves the learning by pupils intended by the teacher.

With regards to teacher effectiveness, Harris and Muijs (2004) contend that by engaging teachers through distributed leadership, teachers’ expertise will reach new heights and their confidence and self- esteem will be boosted. They further argue that as a result of this, teachers will be more apt to take risks and experiment with novel, cutting-edge teaching methods, which will in turn have a beneficial impact on their effectiveness as teachers and leaders both inside and outside the classroom.

On the third benefit, which is contributing to school improvement, Harris and Muijs (2004) contend that current research suggests that collegiality, which is an essential component of distributed leadership, is crucial in improving schools and ensuring their success. They argue that school improvement is more likely to take place when teachers have more confidence in themselves, in the ability of their colleagues to create change, and in the ability of their schools to enhance their professional development.

Equally, Belhiah (2007) argues that in order to achieve these benefits of distributed leadership, it is necessary to view teachers as partners in the

educational process by stretching leadership across teachers. He suggests that some of the areas in which leadership can be stretched to enable teachers to take up their potential as leaders are evaluation of colleagues' teaching performance through team work, selection of textbooks and instructional materials, recruitment of new staff, teachers and administrators, curriculum development, school policies, coordination of programmes, professional development and coaching and mentoring students.

### **Conditions promoting teacher leadership**

Evidence from some studies suggests that distributing leadership through teacher leadership can make a substantial contribution to teaching and learning. The literature on teacher leadership also highlights that in order for teachers to make that contribution there must be conditions which promote and sustain leaders in schools (Spillane 2006, Harris 2004, Danielson 2006, Lieberman, 2004; Frost and Durrant, 2003). Danielson (2006) sees the conditions promoting teacher leadership as falling into two broad categories: cultural and structural conditions.

### **Cultural conditions**

According to Danielson (2006), there are three aspects of a school's culture that promote the emergence of teacher leaders; a culture of risk taking, establishing democratic norms and treating teachers as professionals. The cultivation and sustenance of these conditions depend on the headteacher's willingness to involve teachers in all aspects of the school. As Danielson (2006) observes:

The culture to promote teacher leadership must be established and maintained first of all by district and site administrators (headteachers). They set the tone for the school; they create the expectations for teachers and foster teachers' expectations for one another. This tone, although intangible, is real, and it can take time to develop if it has not been present previously. Although it is not possible to analyze such a tone and extract its component parts, the general characteristics are easily recognised: an underlying sense of professionalism, an absence of "us versus them" thinking, and an acceptance of the deprivatization of practice (p .126).

Danielson further argues that administrators must convey to all staff that the environment is a safe one in which to take the professional risks. This suggests that there are no penalties for mistakes as such mistakes will provide insights into how new ideas can be tried and modified (Frost, 2009; Crowther 2002; Durrant and Holden, 2006). A prevailing norm of democracy is also an essential aspect of a culture supportive of teacher leadership. There should be no favourites and all teachers need to be confident that their "ideas will be received warmly and evaluated on their merits" (Danielson 2006, p.127). On the third aspect of culture, Danielson argues that if teachers are to emerge as leaders, they must be treated in such a manner that they are, and feel themselves to be valued as professionals. This suggests that teachers are treated as people who not only follow the directives of headteachers but also make contributions and professional decisions. Teachers, it is argued, need to have their judgements valued and also feel that they are part of a collegial community. However, there are times when directives from government prevail but even then it should be in a context of professionalism.

## **Structural conditions**

Danielson (2006) posits that structural conditions that promote the development of teacher leadership revolve around matters to do with how the school is organised, what opportunities are available and how teachers can become engaged in shaping the work of the school.

In this category, Danielson identifies four conditions which promote teacher leadership. These are; mechanisms for involvement in school governance, mechanisms for proposing ideas, time for collaboration and opportunities for skills acquisition.

The administrative organisations of the school must be such that teachers have an opportunity to become involved. There must also be formal opportunities for teachers to put forth ideas for consideration. Danielson notes that most of the work involved in teacher leadership requires time as it is typically undertaken in addition to a teacher's primary responsibility of teaching students. It is therefore necessary to make time for teachers to engage in collaborative activities. In the U.K., the recently introduced planning, preparation and Assessment (PPA) workforce remodelling initiative can potentially create this time for collaboration.

As stated earlier, conditions which promote teacher leadership need to be cultivated at school level. Opportunities for skills acquisition are to be created because "very few teacher preparation programs include the skills necessary to serve as teacher leader" (Danielson 2006, p.129).

These ideas are also substantiated by Muijs and Harris (2007) who argue that teacher leadership is an emergent property which has three implications.

First, it implies a different power relationship within the school where the distinctions between followers and leaders tend to blur. Second, it implies division of labour especially when tasks are shared more widely. Third, it opens up the possibility of teachers becoming leaders at various levels. This last dimension has potential for school improvement because it is premised upon collaborative forms of working among teachers. As Muijs and Harris (2007) note:

...research evidence points to the importance of shared norms and values and of collaborative practice between teachers. The evidence suggests that teacher leadership flourishes most in collaborative settings, and that therefore creating a culture of trust that allows collaboration to grow is crucial in the development of teacher leadership (p.113).

A number of structural changes must be implemented within the schools if the above has to happen. These changes include setting time aside for teachers to meet and plan and discuss issues such as curriculum matters, developing school plans, leading study groups, organising visits to other schools, and collaborating with colleagues (Frost, 2009; Crowther 2002; Muijs and Harris 2007). Two other research findings support this contention. First, Onvambo (1994) found that being freed up for teacher leadership tasks was a crucial element of success in schools where teacher leadership was being implemented. Second, Louis et al (1996) found that in the more successful schools teachers were given more time to collaborate with one another.

One of the main areas of capacity building for teacher leadership is the need to improve teachers' self-confidence to act as leaders in their schools.

Teachers gain this self-confidence through collaborating with teachers in other schools, engaging in trialling new teaching approaches, disseminating their findings to colleagues and engaging in action research ( Muijs and Harris, 2007; Frost 2009).

Collaboration enhances teacher learning, reduces teacher isolation and promotes teachers' personal and professional development (Drago-Severson and Pinto 2006). In a study of some schools in the U.S.A, Drago-Severson and Pinto (2006) found that the majority of principals highly valued and supported teacher learning and that when they employed practices that facilitated teacher learning, teachers were challenged to grow professionally. This professional growth led "to high quality teaching that contributes to optimal student learning and achievement" (p.130). A professional learning community is one where staff direct their learning efforts towards improving student learning (Hord 1997). Thus distributed leadership enhances teacher learning which in turn leads to improvement of teaching and learning.

It is therefore evident from the literature that distributed leadership enhances opportunities for teachers to be involved in leadership and decision-making; thus moving away from the old tradition where teachers' voices were silenced (Spillane 2006; Copland, 2003; Day, 2002). Teachers construct others as influential leaders based on their interactions with them as well as conversation with colleagues about these individuals (Spillane, 2006).

However, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) note that teacher leadership can be detrimental when teachers exploit the situation to protect their own interests at the expense of students' learning. They also point out that distributing leadership responsibilities becomes problematic when other teachers receive extra money for responsibilities while others receive nothing. As Spillane (2006) observed:

Some teachers who took on these roles had released time from teaching. Other teachers taught full- time while they juggled their leadership responsibilities. Some received stipends, while others received no additional compensation (p.43).

There is also the problem of role conflict, which comes about when roles are poorly defined causing conflict with other leadership positions such as department leaderships.

Similarly, Storey (2004) found evidence of power conflict in relation to distributed leadership. In a case study involving some schools in the Midlands (UK), Storey reports that:

The experiment in distributed leadership which is examined in this case surfaced fundamental tensions between the headteacher and significant others occupying positions as key subject leaders. These multiple leaders came increasingly into conflict as their competing visions, models, and ideas of 'success', 'good practice', and appropriate performance measurement at whole school department and individual levels, became increasingly evident (p.253).

Other studies also highlighted that distributing school leadership among administrators and teachers was problematic. For example, in a study of principals' perspectives on democratic leadership, Blasé and Blasé (1996) found that leaders experienced stress over loss of control. Commenting on this perceived loss of control, Danielson (2006) argues that it is about power

struggle between administrators and teachers. She describes it as the “contested ground” between teachers and administrators and argues that “some administrators are reluctant to cede whatever they consider their authority to teachers and they do not provide sufficient opportunities to work together and exercise leadership responsibilities” (p 125).

However, Danielson notes that despite the power struggle, heads and teachers know that they need each other; teachers know that principals play an essential role in effective schools , they also know that they can obtain their best results with students only in a school that is well managed under the guidance of a strong and instructional leader. At the same time, by recognising teacher leadership, heads enhance their own standing within the school. This suggests that while serving as formal leaders and ultimately being accountable for results, heads must consider themselves part of a team through their daily interactions with teachers and support staff. As Danielson (2006) argues:

Enlightened administrators recognize that achieving their aims of high-level student learning can happen only through the active engagement of teacher leaders. Thus, even if they were not committed to teacher leadership, self interest would suggest that cultivation of teacher leaders is a wise move (p.126).

This underscores the importance of teacher leadership in effective school leadership and improvement. Given the overwhelming size of the job of headteachers, teacher leadership, arguably takes off some of the workload from heads.

There are some barriers to teacher leadership and they depend on, among other things, school contexts. In a case study on some schools, Muijs and Harris (2007) observed that decision making in some schools, rested with the senior management teams (SMTs) while in other schools teachers and SMTs were involved and that gave rise to different barriers to teacher leadership. Altogether, perceived barriers in the case study by Muijs and Harris were that some teachers saw themselves only as classroom practitioners and were reluctant to take on leadership roles, others were reluctant to engage unless there was some additional salary attached. It was also observed that distributing leadership roles to teachers was more difficult in schools facing challenging circumstances because “of the tasks facing the head on a daily basis” (p.121). Lack of time, experience and confidence of teachers were also cited as barriers to teacher leadership. The case study also revealed that some senior managers were not responsive to teacher initiative and involvement.

In spite of the barriers to teacher leadership, most of the literature suggests that distributed leadership significantly enhances teacher involvement in decision-making, capacity building and school improvement. As cited earlier, the evidence from the literature persistently highlights that distributed leadership flourishes in a collaborative setting, culture of shared values and norms and trust. Harris (2004), drawing on studies by Hopkins and Jackson, (2002) ; Blasé and Blasé, (1999) and Gold et al; (2002) suggests that,

...formal leaders in schools need to orchestrate and nurture the space for distributed leadership to occur and to create the ‘shelter condition’ for the leadership of collaborative learning (p15).

From these studies, collaboration emerges as another important theme in distributed leadership. As Telford (1996) notes:

The notion of leadership density, where teachers (and others) become empowered to take on the role of leaders, and jointly undertake the institutionalisation of a school's vision is fundamental to the notion of collaboration (p.24).

### **Collaborative leadership**

Cognisant of the notion that collaborative leadership operates on the basis of alliance or networking across the boundaries of individual institutions (Telford 1996), the discussion in this review will be limited to collaboration within a school. This is because this study is mainly concerned with the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning and will be based on semi-structured interviews at individual schools.

Collaboration enhances teacher participation in decision- making (Spillane 2006, Harris 2004). Although collaboration and collegiality are closely linked there is some difference in their meanings. Collaboration has three elements, namely jointly developing and agreeing on a set of common goals, sharing responsibility for obtaining those goals and working together to achieve those goals using the expertise and resources of each collaborator. Collegiality implies that all staff in the school work together as colleagues and treat each other equally and fairly regardless of their role and position. It also implies that staff are united in a common purpose and respect each other's abilities to work towards that purpose. According to Sergiovanni (2007), collaboration goes hand in hand with collegiality because they are both powerful and

practical school improvement strategies. Both elements thrive in an atmosphere of distributed leadership. Collegiality entails high levels of collaboration among teachers and is characterised by mutual respect, shared work values, cooperation and specific conversation about teaching and learning. When collegiality is high, a strong professional culture emerges in the school (Sergiovanni, 2007).

Bolman and Deal (1991) organised collaboration into four frames, namely structural frame, human resource frame, political frame and symbolic frame.

These are illustrated in Figure 2 below:

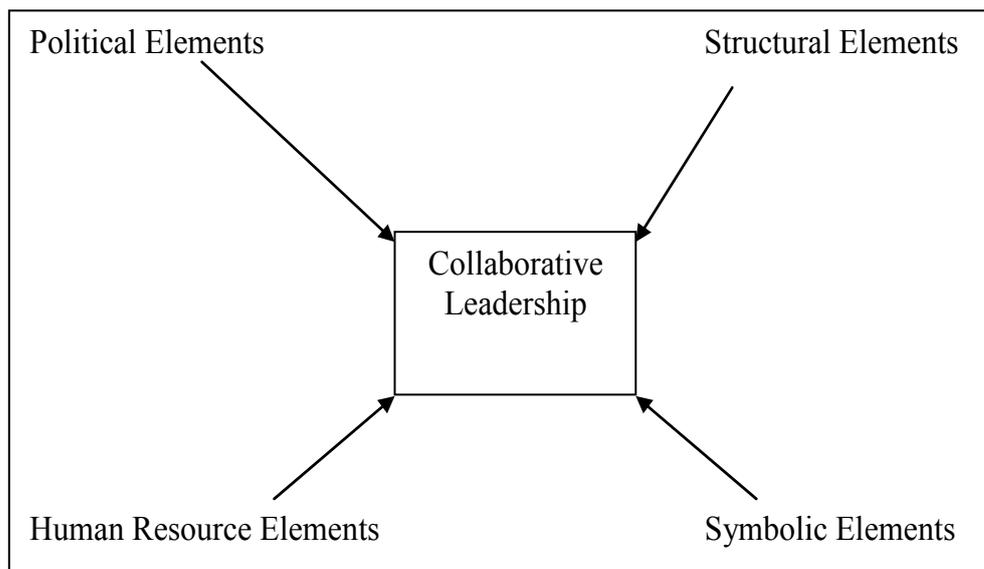


Figure 2: Elements of collaborative leadership. (Adopted from Telford 1996 p. 26).

Drawing on Bolman and Deals' four frames, Telford (1996) argues that structural elements of leadership which contribute to a collaborative leadership:

...refer to the way in which leaders structure decision making processes to allow appropriate staff, student and parent participation such that a shared vision and agreed-upon ways of implementing the direction, policies and programs of the school can occur (p.26).

It was noted that the structural frame is also characterised by flat hierarchy frank and open communication, listening, respecting and valuing people and empowerment.

The human resource elements refer to the professional development of staff through cooperative sharing of their collective experience. Its central focus is learning and teaching as the school's primary purpose. The political elements of collaborative leadership are based on reaching agreement through discussion, negotiation and compromise in a climate of openness.

According to Telford (1996); symbolic elements of collaboration are characterised by deep-seated often unspoken, shared beliefs, values and attitudes which bring about norms of interaction, friendly, informal staff relations and a pervasive camaraderie. Telford argues that " collaborative leaders value diversity, acceptance of differences, interpersonal openness and an atmosphere of genuine care, and concern for colleagues, personally and professionally is the norm" (p26-27).

Some authors appear to agree with the notion of the elements of collaborative leadership. Among them are Drago-Severson and Pinto (2006) who argue that collaborative leadership provides access to information and alternative perspective, fosters dialogue and reflection, and develops a culture supportive

of learning and progress. However, they note that qualities of collaboration vary by school context. In a case study of six UK schools in challenging circumstances, Ainscow et al (2006) also found that “Given the social processes involved, it is inevitable that collaboration will look different from place to place. In other words, there is not one format that will fit every context”(p.197). Ainscow et al (2006) make three suggestions based on their findings. First, that there is strong evidence that collaboration can widen student learning opportunities and help address the needs of vulnerable groups and learners. Second, that there is substantial evidence that collaboration can be effective in helping schools to resolve immediate problems. Third, that there is some evidence that collaboration can be effective in raising expectations, if the context is right. Although the study was on school to school collaboration based on schools in challenging circumstances, the findings are equally applicable to schools that are not in this category. Thus collaborative leadership varies substantially depending largely on the school’s context, culture, mission, location and the principal’s mission for implementing such a strategy.

### **Leadership for learning**

According to Rhodes and Brundrett (2010), leaders in education have no more important role than that of enhancing the learning of students in their care. They argue that leadership has the potential to raise student outcomes in academic, personal and social development. In addition, they note that the term leadership for learning is increasingly being used nationally and internationally despite the lack of a firm definition. Research into the linkages

between management processes and learning has led to a recognition that leadership for learning can occur at all levels in schools. Frost (2008) argues that more distributed forms of leadership in which teachers are encouraged to take a greater role in the leadership of change and innovation are key to better outcomes. It is this link between leadership for learning and distributed leadership that is of interest in this review as it is relevant to this study.

MacBeath and Dempster (2009) identified five major principles that underpin leadership for learning. These are shared or distributed leadership, a focus on learning, creation of the conditions favourable for learning, creation of a dialogue about leadership and learning and the establishment of a shared sense of accountability.

The literature evidence has sought to establish a link between leadership and learning. For instance Rhodes and Brundrett (2010) argue that the impulse to improve the effectiveness of educational organisations in order to secure improved learner outcomes has been a key driver of change in many countries over several decades. They note that central government directives and local initiatives in schools and colleges have sought to offer the necessary pressure and support to enable the desired improvements to be realised.

These improvements have focused on the quality of teaching and learning as a major element in raising learner attainment. Burton and Brundrett (2005) point out that it has become clear that because of the perceived role of school leaders in raising learner attainment, new forms of leadership that accentuate collaboration and distribution of power and authority are central to learning.

There is has also an acceptance that leadership would enhance school improvement and the learning outcomes of students. Leithwood et al (2006) emphasise the link between leadership and learning and claim that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.

Equally, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) suggest that the behaviour of school leaders have great impact on pupil performance. School leaders exert their influence on pupil performance indirectly by distributing leadership. The adoption of learner centred approach to teaching and learning has been seen as having potential to effect learner inclusion, engagement and improved achievement. Leadership for learning and becoming learning centred are both seen as empowering middle leaders and teachers to take a direct lead in teaching and learning within a trusting environment (Fitzgerald and Gunter, 2006; Frost, 2008)

### **Instructional leadership**

Instructional leadership has been associated with school improvement and learner outcomes (Barber, 1997; Spillane 2004, Sheppard, 1996; Blasé and Blasé, 2004). These authors also argue that instructional leaders can best achieve their objectives of school improvement and learner outcomes by distributing leadership. Barber (1997) argues that the quality of teaching is the single most important factor in successful education. This view appears to concur with Elmore (2000) who has used the term 'instructional leadership' in the USA to describe a focus on instructional (teaching) improvement with a

view to improving learner outcomes. Instructional leaders influence learner outcomes indirectly through their actions and by distributing leadership to teachers and middle leaders.

In the United States, Blasé and Blasé (2004), Sheppard (1996) and Spillane (2004) have developed an understanding of instructional leadership that embraces leadership actions that seek to enhance instruction, teacher and also student learning. Commenting on this view, Rhodes and Brundrett (2010) observe that :

These authors advocate that successful instructional leaders talk to teachers about their instruction, encourage collaboration between teachers and empower teachers to foster decision-making, professional growth, teacher leadership, status, autonomy, impact and self efficiency (p.157).

As discussed earlier in this review, collaboration, empowerment, involvement of teachers in decision-making, autonomy and teacher leadership are all key to successful implementation of distributed leadership. Indeed, as research evidence suggests, instructional leaders would only succeed in their endeavours to improve school leadership and learner outcomes by effectively distributing leadership across the school.

Some studies show that the term instructional leadership is gradually being replaced by the term learning-focused leadership (Knapp et al, 2006).

Southworth (2004) argues that the importance of learning centred leadership is about how school leaders influence teaching and learning in classrooms and across the school. However, the literature evidence shows that the impact of instructional leadership on school improvement is largely indirect. For

instance, Mulford and Silins (2004) in a study of Australian schools concluded that leadership impact is predominantly indirectly related to student outcomes via the more direct influence exerted upon the way in which teachers organise and conduct their instruction, their educational interactions with students, and the challenges and expectations teachers place in their pupils. Similarly, Leithwood et al (2006) claim that school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and supportive working conditions. Also Addison and Brundrett (2008) argue that there is evidence that achieving good learning outcomes for pupils and good behaviour serves to further motivate teachers. What is significantly important to this study is that these literature findings suggest that leadership distribution can impact on teachers' decision-making capacity and motivation and act positively upon student learning and achievement. The literature further suggests that senior and middle leaders also need to model and pursue a focus on teaching and learning. For instance Busher (2006) advocates the creation of departmental sub-cultures to develop teaching and learning in which middle leaders act as role models for team members to show effective teaching and learning. It is therefore clear from the literature evidence that leadership distribution can enable more staff to contribute to and sustain learning centred leadership.

### **Capacity building**

Capacity building as indicated earlier in this review, is one of the integral components of distributed leadership. In this section the review discusses

capacity building in relation to distributed leadership. According to Harris (2002):

Capacity building is concerned with creating the conditions, opportunities and experiences for development and mutual learning. Building the capacity for school improvement necessitates paying careful attention to how collaborative processes in schools are fostered and developed. It implies that individuals feel confident in their own capacity of the school to promote professional development ( p. 2).

This suggests that capacity may be built by improving the performance of teachers, adding more resources, materials or technology and by restructuring how tasks are undertaken. According to Harris (2002), this has two implications for the head. Firstly, it suggests that building leadership capacity requires distributing leadership to others. Secondly, even though teacher leadership is at the heart of building leadership capacity, the leadership of the head remains the most vital and urgent form of intervention. This is because heads set the climate for improvement, they can empower others to lead, they are catalysts for change and they can engage others in building collaborative and trusting relationships (Harris 2002).

Harris further argues that schools must operate as professional communities and describes a professional community as one where teachers participate in decision -making, have a shared sense of purpose, engage in collaborative work and accept joint responsibility for the outcomes of their work. This view suggests that schools are professional communities where teachers have the opportunity to learn from one another and to work together. Harris (2002) contends that in such communities leadership is distributed throughout the system and improvement occurs from within.

Similarly, Dolour (2004) suggested that professional learning communities in schools emphasise three key components; collaborative work among the schools professionals, a strong and consistent focus on teaching and learning with that collaborative work and the collection and use of assessment and other data for shared, inquiry into performance over time.

Equally, Bezzna (2008), in a study of a school in Malta, found that the head distributed leadership and encouraged teacher leadership and decision-making in order to transmit a shared and collaborative focus on team working, classroom practice and pupils' learning.

From this research evidence, it is clear that effective professional learning communities take collective responsibility for staff and student learning and need leadership and management focused on the set up and maintenance of a professional learning community, necessitating the need for shared values and vision, openness, inclusion and mutual trust and support. Harris (2002) identified the following as school-level conditions for capacity building: a commitment to staff development, practical efforts to involve staff, students and the community in school policies and decisions, transformational leadership approaches, effective coordination, strategies, and a commitment to collaborative planning.

The commitment to staff development as identified by Harris (2002) can be linked to continuing professional development (CPD). Forde et al., (2006) argue that CPD should be seen as:

A professional obligation and responsibility on the part of the employer in order to maintain and develop their professional practice throughout their career, reviewing practice, acquiring new skills and practice and experience with colleagues and new entrants to the profession (p.128).

Carroll (2009) used CPD in the context of Scottish schools to refer to anything that has been undertaken to progress, assist or enhance a teacher's professionalism. Both capacity building and CPD highlight principles associated with leadership distribution and collaborative practices. For instance Elliot (2003) identified the following as the key assumptions underpinning the process of CPD:

- Teachers are best placed to identify areas of practice to experiment or 'tinker' with order to meet the needs of the children in their schools.
- Teachers 'tinkering' with areas of practice is likely to be more effective in promoting improvement.
- Teachers help each other through working collaboratively.
- Teachers grow in their practice and so become more effective.
- Teacher leadership is encouraged.

Adey (2004) outlines some factors that are necessary for effective CPD.

These include senior management who are committed to innovation and who share their vision with department leaders, teachers working in groups and sharing experiences, teachers who communicate effectively among themselves and that teachers should be given an opportunity to develop a sense of ownership of the innovation. Research indicates the CPD is collaborative and sustained, and provides teachers with opportunities for

discussion and exploration with colleagues. It involves experimentation and reflection, away from the pressures of the classroom (Lydon and King, 2009). It appears that the granting of time for preparation, planning and assessment (PPA) in UK schools offers the opportunity for teachers to reflect while away from the pressures of the classroom.

The NCSL (2004) provides useful insight into how leaders can be assisted to build capacity in their schools. In the NCSL “think piece”, West-Burnham (2004) argues that this can be achieved by moving from a focus on leaders to a focus on leadership which can have four main components. These are, building trust, redesigning jobs, changing organisational structures and creating a learning culture. West-Burnham stresses that the focus should be on leadership and highlights how leadership is different from management and administration. Leadership, he argues is concerned with doing the right things, path making and complexity, while management is concerned with doing things right, path following and clarity and administration is doing things, path tidying and consistency. The four components identified by West-Burnham are discussed below.

## Building trust

As illustrated in figure 3, below there are stages in building trust from control, delegation, empowerment to subsidiarity.

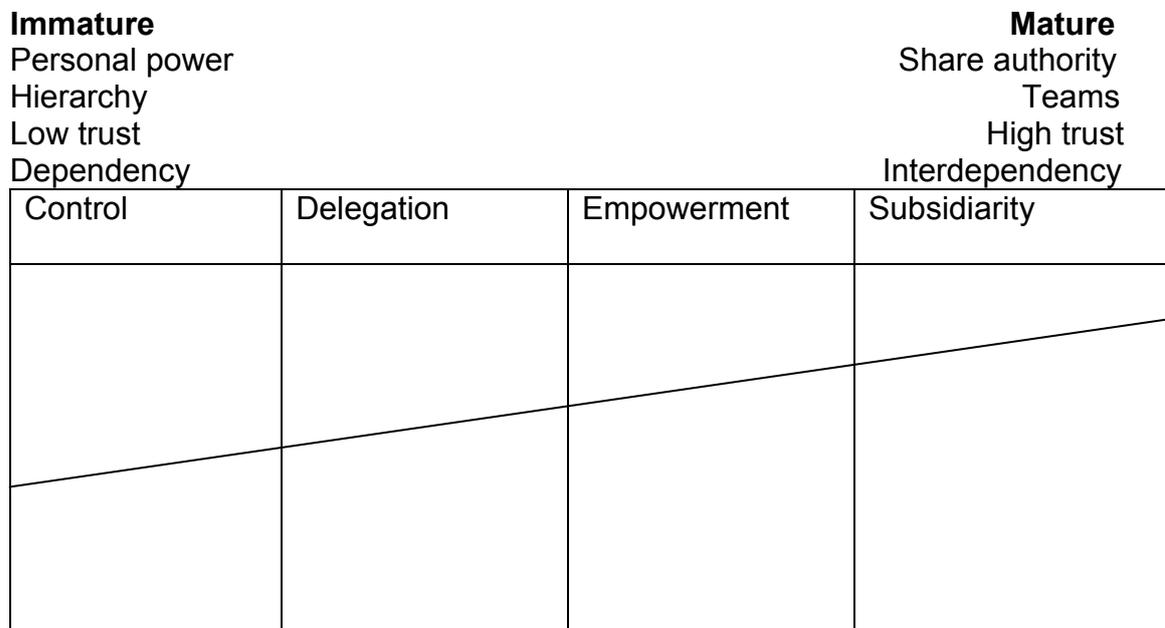


Figure 3. Stages in building trust.

(Adopted from West-Burnham 2004, p.3)

When an organisation is at the control stage, one person is responsible for all decisions and teachers carry out orders. In the case of schools that means the head makes all decisions and teachers carry out orders. However this can be appropriate in an emergency but it usually leads to teachers being passive and alienated.

Delegation is when individuals are given limited authority and responsibility within defined levels of tasks and outcomes. This is opposed to empowerment which entails that high levels of authority are devolved. With empowerment

individuals or teams have defined tasks but have the responsibility to decide how to do the tasks. Thus they will have control over resources, methods and decision-making. West-Burham (2004) sees a mature organisation as one which is in the subsidiarity stage. This is characterised by full distribution of power across the organisation. He concludes that the movement through delegation and empowerment to subsidiarity results in growth in trust and thereby a growth in the leadership capacity of the organisation as more people have opportunity to lead. This view represents the ideal situation that would promote distributed leadership but it has practical problems as stated by Oduro (2004). In his study Oduro noted that while headteachers acknowledged distributed leadership as a tool for promoting pupils' learning and improving the performance of their schools, they face external pressure . As Oduro (2004) argues,

...the aspect of distribution that requires a headteacher to relinquish his/her role at times as ultimate decision maker and trusting others to make the right decisions remains problematic. It places the headteachers in a dilemma as they struggle between fulfilling external expectations characterised by accountability and creating an environment that will not give them(heads) the privilege of providing more leadership than others (p.12).

## **Redesigning jobs**

According to West-Burnham (2004) the move from control has to be demonstrated through a significant rethinking of how jobs are designed and defined. He argues that jobs are defined in terms of leadership responsibilities rather than tasks. For him the crucial movement from administration (no choice) to management (some choices) to leadership (making choices) is a direct reflection of the level of trust and this has to be clearly set out in any job definition. This in turn serves as a basis for recruitment to the job, identifying

outcomes for which the job holder is responsible and strategies to support professional development and learning.

## **Changing organisational structures**

The focus of an organisation should be on learning and shared leadership. Hence the classic hierarchy with its levels of authority and responsibility often limited with line management and the chain of command is the least appropriate structure for an educational organisation (West-Burnham 2004). He contends that a team is the most suitable organisational structure and sums it up thus:

Teams are probably one of the most powerful ways of developing leadership potential and capacity. They can be seen as nurseries where there are abundant opportunities to develop and learn the artistry of leadership in a secure and supportive environment. The authentic team is both a powerful vehicle for effective leadership and one of the most effective and fertile contexts for learning (p.5).

Teams, it is further argued are the most appropriate in school contexts if they have the following characteristics; a shared sense of purpose, clear values, agreed protocols for working, an emphasis on building effective working relationships, leadership which is rotated according to need not status and a clear focus on learning through group processes. Teamwork is discussed in detail later.

## **Creating a learning culture**

Creating a learning culture is the fourth component in moving from a focus on leaders to a focus on leadership. West-Burnham argues that the most powerful means for developing leadership is to create an organisational

culture which values the sorts of learning most likely to enhance the capacity of individuals to lead. He goes further and identifies three modes of learning relevant to capacity building. These are shallow learning, deep learning and profound learning. Shallow learning is concerned with the acquisition of information while deep learning by contrast is focused on the creation of knowledge through the development of understanding. Profound learning describes the situation where knowledge is converted into wisdom and where understanding becomes intuition. These modes of learning build upon each other to create capacity building.

These studies suggest that distributed leadership underpins every aspect of capacity building and school improvement. In an equally compelling report, Stoll, (2004) argues that the context of successful schools that promotes and enhances learning is the school's internal capacity. Stoll defines internal capacity as "the power to engage in and sustain continuous learning of teachers and the school itself for the purpose of enhancing pupil learning" (p.2). This description of internal capacity building highlights some central components of distributed leadership which are engagement and involvement of teachers.

Stoll (2004) also notes that there are two contexts which influence internal capacity building ; the school learning context and external contextual influences. The school learning context refers to the interaction of individuals with the learning context in which they are located. This is influenced by social forces like the particular mix of pupils, the school culture, history structures

and leadership. Equally significant are external contextual influences on a school's internal capacity and central among these are the local community, the broader community, and political climate. More fundamentally, Stoll (2004) argues that:

... policy makers and others outside schools have their own important role to play in helping enhance schools' capacity for learning, but ultimately the key players are those within schools because they know their schools best... understanding schools is the single most important precondition for improving them (p.4).

It is evident from the above statement that teachers are those within the school are crucial to internal capacity building. Thus by distributing leadership to teachers, headteachers enhance internal capacity building.

## **Distributed leadership and change**

Jackson (2004) poses a paradox in relation to change in schools and distributed leadership:

Distributed leadership is unlikely to happen if schools stay as they are. Schools are unlikely to transform themselves without distribution of leadership (p1).

This implies that change and distributed leadership go hand in hand. Hence by adopting distributed leadership, schools simultaneously engage in a process of change. The foregoing section of this review discusses change in schools in relation to distributed leadership. It draws on studies on change and relates these to workforce remodelling initiatives in the UK. The work of the National Remodelling Team (NRT) in England is particularly relevant.

Fullan (2003) states that 'change is a process not an event' (p. 52). In the process of change, there are a number of key themes and issues that arise. One of the issues in the change is the context. According to Fullan (2003) the context is a 'set of conditions under which we operate' (p.28) and it must be changed. He argues that "Once people realise the change potential of context, and begin to direct their efforts at changing it, the breakthroughs can be amazing" (p.29). In Fullan's argument, even seemingly small things like reinforcement of good behaviour by pupils can contribute to positive change and consolidate the gains. Likewise, teachers and other staff members can contribute to change when the context is changed. The importance of context in change is also highlighted in Fullan's earlier work. For example Fullan (1999) puts it this way:

...there never will be a definitive theory of change. It is a theoretical impossibility to generate a theory that applies to all situations ( p.21)

He maintains that local context is a 'crucial variable' (p.21) if change is successful. In both studies (1999 and 2003) Fullan emphasises the importance of changing the context but he does not say who should change the context.

Rutherford (2005) seems to agree that changing context is necessary for change to be successful and is more explicit on who should change the context. He observed that headteachers changed contexts in order to facilitate change. For example Rutherford (2005) noticed that the headteacher in one school 'implemented a behaviour policy with emphasis on rewarding good behaviour rather than the previous culture of blame and punishment'. In

another school a new strategy was used, which was 'focusing on raising the teachers' expectations of their pupils and on introducing new practices in teaching and learning' (2005, p.22). The concept of changing the context is also supported by the National Remodelling Team (NRT) (2003) which 'recognises that schools must formulate unique solutions to common problems – one size doesn't fit all' (2003, p.3).

It is evident that by changing the context, schools are attempting to find solutions to their problems. This study will argue that it takes an effective leader to realise the need to change context so that change becomes successful. There is greater potential for teachers to have positive perceptions of the change when the context is changed. There are organisational implications in this, and one of them is that leadership must be distributed for teachers to feel part of the change and participate in the change meaningfully.

The introduction of guaranteed professional time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) within school sessions is part of the workforce remodelling process. According to the National Remodelling Team (NRT) (2006)

For remodelling to be successful and sustainable there must be a compelling reason to change, a clear vision for the future and a coherent plan for getting there ( p. 21).

The article further states that schools that are remodelling have teaching and learning as their main focus and involve all the school workforce and other relevant stakeholders in making decisions. As indicated earlier in this review, having teaching and learning as the main focus of the school, setting clear directions and involving teachers and relevant stakeholders are all important

components of distributed leadership. Thus distributed leadership enhances change in schools.

### **Effective leadership**

The important role of effective leadership in initiating and implementing change has been highlighted in different studies. For example Rutherford (2005), NRT(2003) and Ofsted (2006) argue that the leadership of the headteacher is the key to a school's success. The following quotations from NRT (2003) and Rutherford (2005) respectively illustrate this view:

A cornerstone of successful remodelling is open inclusive leadership that provides clear direction and focus, drawing on the contributions of staff and stakeholders (NRT 2003. p.1).

Rutherford (2005) illustrates the same view by arguing that:

All the evidence shows that heads are the key to a school's success. All schools need a leader who creates a sense of purpose and direction, sets high expectations of staff and pupils, focuses on improving teaching and learning, monitors performance and motivates staff to give their best (p. 21).

The studies cited above endorse the view that effective leaders need the support of the staff and other stakeholders, welcome and value contributions of the staff in change programmes, provide direction and focuses on teaching and learning. This writer will also agrees with Fullan that involvement of staff in change programmes makes staff feel they own the programme and are likely to have positive perceptions. Staff can be involved, included, and contribute to change through change teams. These processes can succeed where leadership is genuinely distributed (NRT, 2003).

## **Change teams**

Change teams, according to NRT (2003) include representatives from all staff departments. Some benefits of change teams as outlined in NRT (2003) are that staff feel more included and valued, staff morale is improved, staff develop a sense of shared responsibility, improved standards of teaching, a culture of collaboration and direct interaction. This agrees with Rutherford (2005) who says:

I will also argue that school leadership, if it is to be really effective must include major contributions from the deputy, the senior management team, the rest of the school workforce and the governing body (p.22).

Although Rutherford's argument embodies the Senior Management Team (SMT) and the change team, the point remains that there is need for involvement and inclusion of staff and other stakeholders for change to be successful. The big picture emerging is that for staff to be involved, included, feel valued, the leadership must be effective. Hence change is more likely to be successful when the leadership creates conducive conditions and change conditions. The NRT (2003) aptly sums up the importance of effective leadership thus:

A more open, democratic and effective leadership model does not mean the end of a role for the headteacher and the leadership team. Although the change involves developing a more open culture, strong core leadership remains a crucial constituent of all successful schools (p.1).

Thus as cited above, for any change to have meaningful impact and yield the desired effect, strong core leadership remains a crucial constituent. Also implicit in the above citation is that distributed leadership is effective since it is

an open and democratic model in principle. Effective leadership is also expected to communicate vertically and laterally.

### **Good communication**

Fullan (1999) warns that while top-down communication strategies do not, work successfully, the force of top-down mandates are still needed. He argues that 'Top-down mandate and bottom-up energies need each other' (1999, p.19). A combination of both strategies will ensure that information is passed to leadership and staff. As Rutherford, (2005) argues, one of the key responsibilities of SMTs is 'to ensure good communication throughout the school so that everyone knows what's going on and has a hand in shaping this' ( p.23). Although this was with particular reference to SMTs, it will hold for change teams that must communicate with the rest of the staff whom they represent. Pupils too are not passive recipients of education so communication must reach them, they must be kept well informed of changes going on in the school.

### **Teamwork and distributed leadership**

In the preceding sections of this review it was argued that among other things distributed leadership flourishes where there is collaboration, involvement of teachers, collective decision- making and shared goals and vision in the school. Closely linked to all these aspects of distributed leadership is teamwork. Evidence from the literature on distributed leadership suggests that teamwork is crucial to the success of distributed leadership practices (MacBeath, 2005, Hall 2001, Wallace 2000 and Storey, 2004). As Blandford

(2006) notes, "teams are necessary within the context of schools as organisations and effective teamwork within schools should be valued" (p124).

A team as stated by Everard et al (2004) is:

A group of people with common objectives that can effectively tackle any task which it has been set to do. The contribution drawn from each member is of the highest possible quality, and is one which could not have been called into play other than in the context of a supportive team (p.163).

Central to the above statement and of particular relevance to the concept of teamwork is that teams do not act as teams simply because they are described as such but they need to work together on a common purpose. The above statement is also explicit that teams do not spontaneously arise but they are set up for a purpose. In the context of schools, teams are set up by the head or school leadership. This suggests that the head must have the willingness to distribute leadership to teams. Northouse (2004) stresses the need for heads to focus on what makes teams effective or what constitutes team excellence. He argues that heads cannot cognitively analyse and then appropriately function to improve groups without a clear focus on team goals or outcomes. Northouse (2004) advocates eight criteria for the implementation of effective teams. First, there must be clear elevating goals; the team should be kept focused on the goals so that outcomes can be evaluated against objectives. Second teams must be results driven. This implies that the teams must find the best structure to accomplish their goals. Third, team members must be competent. To achieve the degree of competence required they must be provided with the appropriate information and training to be able to carry out the tasks effectively and to work collaboratively. Fourth, there must be unified commitment; teams must be carefully designed and

developed. Involving team members in the various processes can enhance the sense of unity. Fifth, there must be a collaborative climate founded on trust out of which develops honest openness and respect. Sixth, there must be clear and concrete standards of excellence. Seventh, teams need external support and recognition; they must be provided with the necessary resources to carry out the required tasks. Eighth, effective teams are founded on effective team leadership. On effective team leadership, Northouse notes that leaders influence teams through four processes; cognitive by helping the team to understand the problems, motivational by uniting the team and helping the team to achieve the required standards, affective by helping the team to cope with difficult situations and finally coordination through matching individual skills to roles and providing clear objectives.

Many of the current school initiatives have been introduced to enhance the school organization to improve the quality of student and teacher outcomes and that teamwork is among these initiatives (Pounder, 1998). Drawing examples on some middle schools in the U.S.A, Pounder (1998) notes that teachers are organised into interdisciplinary grade -level teams that have decision -making responsibilities for the particular group of students. These decisions include curricular emphasis and coordination, student management and behavioural interventions, student assessment, staffing decisions and budgetary allocations. This range of responsibilities arguably involves teachers in the life of the schools and allows teachers greater comprehensive knowledge of and responsibility of student learning and outcomes. Thus successful teams thrive in a climate of distributed leadership. As Pounder

(1998) argues, “educational teams hold the potential to rebuild schools as long as they maintain the focus on the educational needs of pupils rather than auxiliary issues” (p.66). Similarly, Storey (2004) argues that distributed leadership is a shared process of enhancing the individual and collective capacity and

... instead of a heroic leader who can perform all essential leadership functions, the functions are distributed among different members of the team or organizations (p. 252).

In an a study base on some schools in the UK, MacBeath (2004) illustrates how team work can be used successfully by giving an example of a head of department who valued teamwork. He noted that a new head of science faculty at a school in the UK gained the support of the staff and became successful because he ‘...expressed confidence in the positive outcomes of team building, and trust in distributed leadership’ (p.255). The perceived impact of teamwork and team building in the study was positive. Also, Hall (2001) presents a similar perspective :

The leader’s role in teams is to provide a context for effective team functioning at all levels, in other words to orchestrate team members involvement (p.334).

Wallace (2001) identifies five principles that he argues support sharing leadership through teams and points out that these principles centre on staff entitlement. First, staff are entitled to contribute to decisions about development of the school, which affect their work. This principle is akin to what Muijis and Harris (2007) observed as “...the advantages to the school of staff involvement in decision- making, namely the wider range of viewpoints .... ” (p 117) when everybody feels part of the decision-making process. The

clear message here is that there is great potential for staff support and acceptance of decisions in which they are involved. Second, Wallace posits that staff are entitled to enjoy the comradeship that working with colleagues can engender. Third, staff are entitled to further their progressive development through the experience of working with others in teams. Fourth, staff are expected to be role models and by working as a team children will emulate them. Fifth, effective school leadership can be achieved through teamwork and staff contribute so that leadership tasks can be fulfilled. Hall (2001) argues that when staff work as a team, they become involved, empowered and committed to teamwork, thus achieving an optimum degree of synergy. Synergy, according to Hall, is increased effectiveness or achievement produced by combined action or co-operation.

So far the discussion in this section has painted a bright scenario for teamwork, but some studies have revealed that there are some barriers to teamwork. Teamwork, like teacher leadership has some operational problems. Hall (2001) notes that educational leaders are confronted with many policies and they have to choose either to adopt a team approach to leadership or other forms of leadership. The evidence from the literature reveals that the school leader has an important role in teamwork. Taken in the context of distributed leadership, this presents a problem because once the leader has the final say, it defeats the spirit of shared/ distributed leadership. Wallace (2001) is more explicit on this. He portrays the position of the leader and the SMT as hierarchical and this is not favourable for teamwork.

Team members can also create barriers to effective teamwork (Cardino, 2002; Zappulla, 2004). As Zappulla observes, the behaviour of some teachers can frustrate teamwork and render it ineffective as:

Personalities, self interest, poor leadership, unclear guidelines and inadequate resources may thwart the team's purposes and give rise to defensive behaviours (p.30).

What emerges from the above citation is that the headteacher must provide clear goals and adequate resources in order to keep team members focused. Cardino (2002) explains the issue of "defensive behaviours" and notes that people are taught to be defensive in their early stages of life. As a result, the defensive reasoning of individuals contributes to the emergence of defensive routines which make it difficult for teams to function efficiently. Thus a leader must find ways to overcome the defensive reasoning that are "ingrained in both individual and collective behaviour" (Cardino 2002, p.220).

Middle leaders and teachers can also pose barriers to effective teamwork by offering minimal compliance to the headteacher. Wallace (2001) noted that some department heads could negatively influence other teachers by complaining behind the headteacher's back "generating a widespread perception of a disgruntled team" (p.161). Wallace further notes that disgruntlement among teachers can also be fuelled by headteachers who dictate team activity. In addition to disgruntlement, Eden (2001) also argues that recalcitrant teachers upset group cohesion and negatively affect collegiality in teamwork. Teams are meant to enrich both teachers and students but some teachers see them as being manipulated by headteachers and "... serve as a hidden control mechanism" (Eden 2001, p.104). Such voices of discordance highlight that teamwork is not always smooth. However,

in spite of these barriers to teamwork, evidence from the literature suggests that teamwork is very important for the success of distributed leadership practice.

### **Trust and accountability**

Distributing leadership throughout the organisation emerges as one of the strongest themes from the literature on effective school leadership (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP 2007). Despite this trend in the literature, evidence from some studies suggests that heads of schools remain accountable for whatever happens in the school and that impacts on the extent to which leadership can be distributed (MacBeath 2005 ; Wallace 2001) As MacBeath (2005) points out , distribution is premised on trust but at the same time, exposes the problems faced by heads. He notes that:

Trust presents the most acute of dilemmas because, while headteachers believe in the importance of trust they feel the pressure of accountability from external powers and trusting others to deliver implies a risk for which they personally pay the price (p.353).

Although MacBeath is not explicit on where external sources pressure come from, it is apparent that it comes from government, the public, Ofsted and parents. In an earlier study in the UK, Wallace (2001) raises the accountability issue and is explicit about where the external pressure comes from. He posits:

Heads alone are charged with legal responsibility, for running the school within the oversight of the governing body. The accountability measures have increased the likelihood that headteachers will be publicly vilified if evidence is revealed of failure to implement central government reforms or to reach stipulated targets for educational standards (p.156).

Thus trust and accountability though desirable elements tend to militate against the practice of distributed leadership. In an equally convincing

argument, Oduro (2004) articulates that headteachers' efforts to distribute leadership are hampered to some extent by trust and accountability as a result of external pressure. Oduro succinctly presents his contention thus:

While I do not refute the fact that schools depend on external support and must therefore be accountable to external bodies, I believe strongly that subjecting the school to extreme compliance to mandate threatens successful distribution of leadership. Once a school's position on league tables continues to determine its success and for that matter the effectiveness of its leadership, headteachers will be cautious of how far leadership should be distributed (p.12).

The studies cited above present distributed leadership not only as complex but also problematic in terms of how best to implement it without compromising accountability. It appears that successful implementation of distributed leadership will entail reduction of external pressure on the school. This should involve giving schools greater autonomy in determining what they want to do and how they want to do it. As Oduro (2004) suggests, politicians and their agencies such as Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) should allow schools more freedom to speak for themselves by taking "more responsibility for their own accountability, a greater role in steering and shaping their own role" (p13).

Similarly, MacBeath (2005) noted that without mutual trust, relationships and respect are compromised as distribution of leadership also implied mutual acceptance by staff of one another's leadership potential. MacBeath concluded that trust is a multi-faceted, multi-level concept which operates at four levels: the individual level, which may be characterised at trustworthiness, interpersonal level (reciprocal trust); at whole school level (organised level); at the wider community and public level, which may be defined as social trust.

These various levels of trust add another complex dimension to the practice of distributed leadership. Levels of trust will vary from school to school depending on how distributed leadership is practised. This suggests that the head may not distribute leadership fully if he/she does not have the trust. According to some recent studies, this position prevails in some schools in England. For example PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) found that there is a persistence in many parts perceived as responsible and accountable for everything. Thus accountability, though necessary is at the same time one of the barriers to distributed leadership. More specifically of the schools system of the 'hero-head' model in which headteachers are PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) note that:

Some of the barriers to distributing leadership that we have identified included the persistence of the traditional 'hero-head' perception amongst heads themselves and their staff, coupled with parental and community expectations of an ever-present, ever-available head. In addition, there are a number of legislative, accountability and resource-related barriers that prevent heads distributing leadership further (p. 9).

Spillane et al (2004) make similar observations and argue that the literature on leadership, regardless of tradition, has focused mostly on those in formal leadership positions, chiefly on the chief executive officer, in the case of schools, the headteacher. They further argue that such approaches to leadership have defined leadership chiefly as a function of individual personality, ability, traits and style and focus on "the venerable great man theory continues unabated" (p.6). While the focus on positional leaders provides valuable insight into leadership, other research underscores the need to move beyond those at the top of the organization in order to

understand effective leadership. In the case of schools this entails distributing leadership to teachers and other stake holders. As Spillane et al (2004) put it:

Research on schools has suggested that leadership is not the sole purview of the school principal; teacher- leaders and other professionals also play important roles in leading instructional innovation (p.6).

In spite of the barriers to distributed leadership cited above, research evidence remains in support of distributed leadership for effective school improvement and student achievement. Given the complexity of heads' tasks brought about by a multitude of new policy imperatives, distributed leadership offers great potential to ease pressure on heads, thus allowing them to focus on teaching and learning.

### **Distribution of leadership functions**

Research evidence suggests that multiple individuals perform leadership functions. Spillane (2006) argues that in addition to heads, deputies and other middle leaders, teachers take responsibility for leadership routines and functions. He cites a recent study by Camburn et al (2003) involving one hundred U.S. elementary schools, which found that:

“...responsibility for leadership functions was typically distributed across three to seven formally designated leadership positions per elementary school” (p.31).

The positions in the study included principals, assistant principals, programme coordinators, subject area coordinators, mentors, master teachers, and other auxiliary professional staff. A study by Hargreaves and Fink (2004) also revealed that teachers on their own or collectively take responsibility for leadership functions and routines at times in an effort to make up for

leadership gaps that result from formally designated leader's lack of expertise or oversight. This suggests that teachers without formally designated leadership positions voluntarily take up leadership functions. But there must be a culture of collaboration, unity of purpose and collegiality if teachers have to willingly and voluntarily participate and contribute to leadership functions (Wallace, 2001; Muijs and Harris 2007).

Various studies suggest that distributed functions are performed by those in formally designated leadership positions like heads and middle managers as well as those without formally designated leadership positions like classroom teachers. The literature on distributed leadership shows that teachers are also key in the performance of leadership functions and routines "...and individuals who had no formal leadership position also took responsibility for leadership functions" (Spillane 2006, p.32). However Spillane (2006) goes further and points out that although leadership functions are distributed across the school it does not mean that everyone has a hand in every leadership function in the school. He argues that:

While leadership is distributed both among formally designated leaders and among those who are not formally designated as leaders this does not mean that everyone in the school has a hand in every leadership function or routine. The distribution of leadership differs depending on the leadership function or routine, the subject matter the type of school, the school's size, and a school or leadership teams development stage (p.33).

According to Spillane these five factors; that is leadership function, the subject matter, the type of school, the school's size, and school leadership team's development stage affect distribution of leadership in different ways. Basing on studies in the U.S.A schools, Spillane notes that distribution depends on

leadership function when principals perform functions like instructional leadership, building management, procuring resources and sustaining relationships with external constituents. These functions are almost exclusively performed by the principal and assistants. In the study it was found that people were involved in a function like teacher professional development in language arts instruction, which involved the principal, assistant principal, literacy coordinator teacher leader and external consultant.

The U.S.A study also found that the number of individuals involved in the performance of leadership functions and the extent to which formally designated leaders were involved depends on the subject matter. It was observed that school principals and their assistants were more likely to be involved in the performance of routines in language arts than in mathematics and science.

School type was also shown to affect the distribution of responsibility for leadership functions. Spillane (2006) also found that regardless of the type (public, private, Catholic or magnet) leadership is imperative in seven critical areas; instruction, culture, management, human resources, strategic planning, external development and micro politics. Responsibility for leadership in these areas was found to differ depending on the type of school in which the practice took place.

School size was also found to affect the distribution of leadership among formal leaders and teachers. On the basis of a study of one hundred elementary schools, Spillane concluded that:

... in general, the larger the school the greater was the number of formally designated leaders over whom responsibility was distributed; larger schools had larger leadership teams (p.37).

However, other factors such as a school's developmental stage were believed to influence the distribution of leadership among informal leaders. Time was seen as a key variable in a school leadership team's developmental stage.

### **Distributed leadership in schools**

As stated earlier in this literature review, one of the reasons for implementing distributed leadership is to reduce heads' workload which has become complex and cumbersome. This is also reflected in Oduro's (2004) and MacBeath's (2004) studies. Oduro (2004) drawing from MacBeath (2004) reports that:

Headteachers' workload, as revealed in our shadowing of their activities involved complex simultaneous tasks: receiving visitors, attending meetings, handling discipline matters monitoring teaching and learning, taking care of cleanliness issues, managing paperwork and many other incidental activities (p.8-9).

Findings from the shadowing of headteachers also revealed that these tasks are not always scheduled as there was "unpredictable interactions with different people" (p.9). More importantly for this study, Oduro's observations highlight headteachers' perceptions to distributed leadership. Oduro articulates this as follows:

Furthermore, they see distribution not only as having the strength of preparing teachers and students for leadership but more importantly as

a means of reducing the pressure of overwhelming workload on them. Once leadership is effectively dispersed, teachers are able to attend to the needs of pupils thereby reducing the frequency and amount of time headteachers would have to spend with pupils (p.8).

These views from headteachers offer insight into distributed leadership in action. Oduros' study is also one of the few but compelling systematic empirical inquiries in school contexts on distributed leadership. The implementation of distributed leadership in schools has positives and setbacks. Oduro (2004) notes that the development and sustenance of leadership in schools may be either promoted or inhibited by internal and external factors. He comes up with "pull" and "push" factors. Pull factors according to Oduro are those which tend to make distributed leadership favourable and attractive, pulling headteachers, teachers and pupils to its implementation. "Push" factors are those which are frustrating and do not make distribution appealing to heads, teachers and pupils, thereby pushing them away from participating in leadership. The factors which promote or inhibit the implementation of distributed leadership are summarised in Figure 4 below.

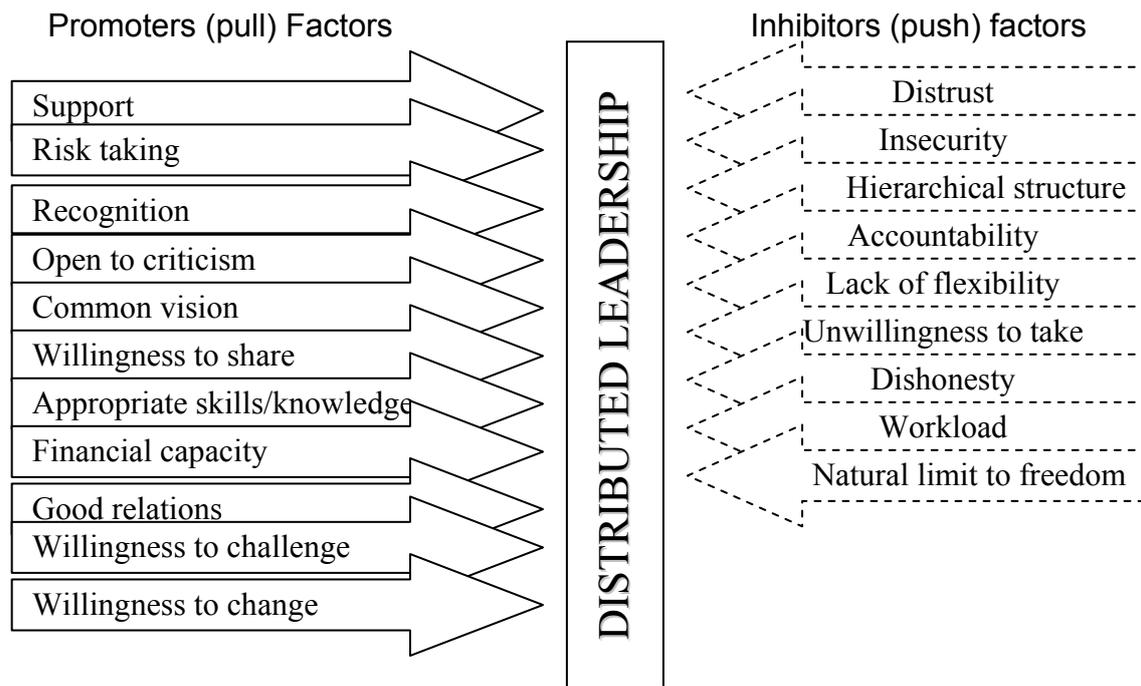


Figure 4. Push and pull factors that affect distributed leadership. (Oduro, 2004 p.12).

### **Favourable conditions for promoting distributed leadership**

Most of the factors promoting the implementation of distributed leadership have been discussed earlier in the review. However, they are summarised here with respect to Oduro's (2004) empirical study. Significant factors in Oduro's study (figure 4 above) include trust, willingness to share and pursue common goals, moving towards the same direction, creating an enabling atmosphere of risk taking and making people confident. In his study Oduro quotes one secondary headteacher who said:

Trust, confidence, a supportive atmosphere, and support for risk taking – a culture that says you can take a risk – you can go and do it. If it doesn't work, we learn from it. I think there's a range of cultural issues that support distributed leadership and create a climate; high levels of communication, willingness to change and to challenge; a climate that recognises and values everybody's opinion (p.10).

This citation aptly sums up the 'pull' factors that have been identified in Oduro's study as being favourable for the implementation of distributed leadership in schools.

### **Factors that inhibit the implementation of distributed leadership**

Oduro explains that the converse of the pull factors outlined above inhibit the implementation of distributed leadership (see figure 4) above. Distrust is one of the "push" factors and this is illustrated by what some headteachers in the study said. For example, Oduro quotes two headteachers who pointed out that distrust and lack of shared vision are among the factors that inhibit the implementation of distributed leadership. One headteacher said:

Where there's disagreement between a teacher's vision and the school's vision, I don't suppose to have leaders in school where their vision undermine the shared vision of the school (p.10).

And the other headteacher who attributed teachers' apathetic attitude towards leadership responsibility to insecurity noted:

If staff are given a role they need to feel secure with that role. For example, the ICT specialist will block other members from sharing his secret garden of knowledge if that person feels unconfident (pp.10-11).

The above citations suggest that distrust and insecurity operate at two levels; the head can have no trust and confidence in his/her teachers and teachers themselves, as illustrated by the ICT teacher can have no trust and confidence in his colleagues. This will inhibit the implementation of distributed leadership.

Headteachers in the study by MacBeath (2004) also cited pressure from workload as another push factor. According to a headteacher quoted in the study, the overwhelming nature of the workload on teachers tend to have an adverse effect on their motives about shared leadership. This sounds contradictory to the principle of distributed leadership because among other benefits, distributed leadership is aimed at easing pressure especially for heads. By the same token, distributed leadership should lessen the workload on teachers especially when implemented alongside other initiatives like guaranteed time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA).

The hierarchical structures of the school system and staff attrition were also highlighted as 'push' factors in the implementations of distributed leadership. Heads in the study noted that it was not only the hierarchical structures of the school that militates against distributed leadership but also its associated demand for accountability exacerbated the situation. Headteachers reported that they found staff attrition equally frustrating, the frequency with which teachers left their schools after being developed in skills was worrying for the headteachers. As one headteacher explained:

But one of my biggest worries, and I don't think it will ever go away, is the thought that if you give a particular specialism to any one individual, that the institution is weakened – not necessarily because of the way that individual is fulfilling that role but the consequences of that individual, for whatever reasons, not being there next year or the year after to do that (p.11).

This is indeed a genuine concern for headteachers but it raises two imperatives for headteachers. Firstly, this calls for headteachers to put in place retention policies if these are not there or alternatively review them if

they already exist. Secondly this researcher argues that leadership should not be concentrated in individuals but spread and shared among all. In this way, the departure of one teacher for whatever reason would not be as frustrating as in the case quoted above. The situation can be avoided by following MacBeath's (2005) strategic distribution. According to MacBeath strategic distribution puts more emphasis on people as team institution players than individual competences so that the institution is not weakened by the departure of one member.

### **A critique of distributed leadership**

The "push" factors, highlighted above can serve to draw our attention to the fact that distributed leadership has some problems and is not necessarily a perfect approach to school leadership. As discussed earlier, distributed leadership can pose problems when some teachers exploit the situation to protect their own interests at the expense of students' learning (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). Distributing leadership can also be problematic when other teachers receive extra money for distributed responsibilities and others receive nothing (Spillane 2006). Other studies revealed that headteachers are reluctant to distribute power because they would lose control (Blasé and Blase, 1996; Danielson, 2006).

Contrary to most researchers who have portrayed a positive perception of distributed leadership, Hartley (2007) is cautious about its efficacy as a form of leadership practice. He notes that while distributed leadership has received official endorsement in England, the evidence base which supports this

endorsement is weak. Hartley, like Hallinger and Heck (2003) observes that there is very little evidence of a direct causal relationship between distributed leadership and school achievement though one conclusion has been that there is an indirect causal effect. Similarly, Levacic (2005) argues that attempts to show a direct causal relationship between leaders' behaviour ( be it distributed or otherwise ) and pupil achievement have yielded little that is definitive (see also Gorard, 2005). But there is strong belief that "effective schools virtually always have strong leadership" (Fullan, 2004 p. 2). Equally, Leithwood (2006), in the fifth of the NCSL *Seven Claims about Successful School Leadership* asserts that 'School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed' (p.12).

Since there is no empirical evidence to support this claim, critics of distributed leadership have argued that policy is ahead of evidence (Wilmot, 2003; Hartley, 2007). Linking research on distributed leadership to the Habermasian sense, Wilmot (2003) argues that it is technical in that it purports to enhance prediction and control. Another criticism of distributed leadership is that "it occurs with and enables soft bureaucracy where processes of flexibility and decentralisation co-exist with more rigid constraints and structures of domination" (Courpasson, 2000, p.157). Also Woods (2004) argues that as with other discourses of legitimation like empowerment and ownership, the notion of distributed leadership appears to incorporate democratic procedures but it arguably does no such thing because leaders do not arrive at their position as a result of an election but they are appointed. Thus, although distributed leadership is associated with empowerment and creating a sense

ownership among staff (Spillane,2006; Oduro, 2004; Chapman et al, 2008; Elmore, 2000; 2004; Hallinger and Heck, 2005), this can also be turned into criticism of the concept as in this case. There is further literature evidence showing that the position of the headteacher is central and that the “top-down” and “leader-follower” (Gunter and Rayner 2007 p.51) system is still dominant. This position renders the followers (teachers) powerless despite the claim that distributed leadership empowers teachers. The DfEE (1998) also highlights that heads are the key to a school success and hence dominate the leadership scenario as illustrated in the following statement;

All the evidence shows that heads are the key to a school’s success. All schools need a leader who creates a sense of leadership and direction, sets high expectations of staff and pupils, focuses on improving teaching and learning, monitors performance and motivates the staff to give of their best. The best heads are as good at leadership as the best leaders in any other sector including business. The challenge is to create the rewards, training and support to attract, retain and develop many more heads of this calibre (p.22).

Commenting on the above, Gunter and Rayner (2007) note that this is a model of transformation which is personalised and focuses on the headteacher as leader of systems, leader of consumers and leader of performance who controls the practices of the work force.

Hatcher (2005) is more critical about the claim that distributed leadership empowers teachers and sees it as “the contradiction between the proclaimed intention of greater freedom for teachers and the continuing, and in some cases even stricter, apparatus of centralised control over them” (p.255). He further describes distributed leadership as “the Strategy’s double speak on

professional autonomy: an ambiguity of intent – a desire seen to be offering freedom while in reality maintaining control” (p.255). In short this argument views distributed leadership as a way of controlling teachers rather than a means to achieve their participation and empowerment. In his critique of distributed leadership, Hatcher (2005) explores the contradictions between the claims that it is a means to achieve the participation and empowerment of teachers and to create democratic schools. He notes that the role of headteacher is the decisive link between the Labour government project for reforming education and its implementation in the schools. This has some managerial contradictions. As Hatcher (2005) succinctly puts it:

Government education policy does not rely primarily on headteachers’ exercise of transformational leadership skills to secure the commitment of teachers through distributed leadership. It prefers to rely on a battery of regulatory and performance-management put in place to ensure that the compliance of teachers is forthcoming whether or not their commitment has been won. Headteachers in England must see themselves as strategists for implementing external directives, and as monitors, evaluators and managers of teacher and pupil standards which are defined elsewhere (p.254).

Two instruments are cited as examples of government’s control of headteachers and teachers. These are Ofsted inspections which are more frequent and the pay and promotions of teachers where headteachers review teachers on the main spine annually. With this system in place teachers can only move up the scale if they are graded as satisfactory. Thus it can be argued that the system indirectly coerces teachers to comply with directives. As Hatcher (2005) argues, there is “a fundamental contradiction between distributed leadership and government- driven headteacher managerialism” (p.255).

Another contradiction with respect to distributed leadership arises from the fact that in the school the head occupies the dominant position in the power structure. This means that leadership from below (bottom-up) can only be translated into action when it is sanctioned by the authority of the headteacher. In view of this, Hatcher (2005) concludes that “officially sanctioned distributed leadership is always delegated, licenced, exercised on behalf of and revocable by authority — the headteacher” (p.256). He further notes that the source of power of the headteacher lies outside the school; it is delegated by the State.

Given that headteachers’ power is delegated by the State and that they are central to implementing Labour’s education project, sharing leadership becomes risky for headteachers. Hatcher (2005) contends that distributed leadership may not succeed in reinforcing teachers’ commitment to management agendas because it is headteachers who are held accountable for meeting government targets. As Wallace (2001) points out:

Headteachers are confronted by a heightened dilemma: their greater dependence on colleagues disposes them into sharing leadership. In a context of unprecedented accountability, however, they may be inhibited from sharing because it could back- fire should empowered colleagues act in ways that generate poor standards of pupil achievement, alienate parents and governors, attract negative media attention or incur inspectors’ criticism (p.157).

There is also the danger that teachers may take advantage of the opportunity offered by distributed leadership to challenge and resist the dominant policy agenda. In view of this, the strategy most commonly adopted by headteachers to minimize the risk of distributed leadership is to restrict its operation to a minority of staff and the Senior Management Team (SMT). Wallace (2001)

observes that this creates a division among teachers, between leaders and followers and that distributed leadership that is limited to the context of the SMT is more amenable to authority.

As discussed earlier in this review distributed leadership has been associated with transformational leadership (Sergiovanni 2007) and this has been criticised by some researchers. For instance, in the research papers *Remodelling the School Workforce* (TSW project) (Gunter, 2007) and *Modernising the workforce in England* (Gunter and Rayner, 2007) the authors raise critical arguments about transformational leadership and hence distributed leadership. Gunter (2007) argues that :

Remodelling is a form tyranny because it works through the ordinariness of everyday practice in ways that can be handled and seen as sensible but makes teachers complicit in a form disconnected from learning and which could be leading to the deregulation of the profession (p.2).

The TSW project with its emphasis on transformative leadership has some short comings which are also linked to distributed leadership. Gunter (2007) and Gunter and Rayner (2007) identified three flaws with this approach. First, the TSW project emphasises organisational change with the school as a separate unit of analysis. This means that schools could not share expertise and resources. There was also no collaboration as discussed in Oduro's (2004) typology. Second, some work was transferred from teachers to "other adults in the school" (Gunter and Rayner 2007 p.57). This means that teaching assistants delivered lessons while teachers did the planning. The fundamental flaw here according to Gunter and Rayner (2007) is that it was technical transformation which ignored pedagogical issues where teachers as

professionals make interventions into the lives of the children. Third, the TSW project did not put students and their learning first but rather emphasised organisational changes. This point is well argued by Gunter and Rayner (2007) when they write:

For leaders, this means that there is a need to practise educational leadership where structures and cultures develop from educational settings, and are by virtue of working with them, educative. Controlling educational purposes at the school level requires the educational leader to develop power processes that give opportunities for participation and localised policy making. (p.57)

From the above discussion it appears that contrary to the notion that distributed leadership has to be shared distributive, dispersed, democratic and collaborative (Oduro's 2004 typology) some studies indicate that control and power remain with the headteacher. As Gunter and Rayner (2007) point out " students, along with their teachers, remain the objects of reform rather than participants working on issues together to develop their learning opportunities" (p.57).

However, despite such criticisms, the overwhelming majority of researchers cited in this study highlight that distributed leadership holds great potential for leadership effectiveness and school improvement.

### **Models of distributed leadership**

The literature review in this study discusses two models of distributed leadership; one by MacBeath (2005) and the other by Hargreaves and Fink (2006). These models are considered pertinent and significant to this study because they provide a theoretical and conceptual framework in approaching

the research. While these models provide valuable guidelines for the study, this researcher will follow the models that will emerge at each school then compare and contrast them with these. In both models the researchers present a continuum of distributed leadership .

MacBeath (2005) presents six categories in the continuum; distribution formally, pragmatically, strategically, incrementally opportunistically and culturally. He argues that these categories are “neither fixed nor mutually exclusive”. MacBeath notes that each category is appropriate at a given time and given context. The emphasis on time and context reflects one of his findings in a study he conducted in the UK where he concluded that:

The context and history of the individual school was seen as critical in shaping teachers’ views of leadership and their own role in it, while the length of time (history) a head had been in post had major effect on how they viewed distribution (p.356).

This finding is also significant to this study, especially in relation to the research question: what are the perceptions of heads, middle leaders and teachers on the impact of distributed leadership on teaching and learning?

### *Distribution formally*

In the model, distribution formally is done through roles and job description.

The head distributes leadership roles to those in formally designated leadership positions like deputy heads, head of year and subject heads.

MacBeath argues that the advantage of formal distribution is that it has a high degree of security for both staff who occupy formal roles and the rest of the staff.

### *Pragmatic distribution*

Pragmatic distribution is often a reaction to external events like demands from government, the local authority or parental pressure. In this context the head distributes leadership to ease the pressure. This pragmatic distribution is characterised by its *ad hoc* quality. It also depends on the headteachers knowledge of his/her staff; those who have the capacity to perform the tasks. MacBeath points out that in this situation heads tend to play it safe by avoiding the risk of delegating responsibility to untried staff.

### *Distribution as Strategic*

According to MacBeath, the distinguishing feature of strategic distribution is its goal orientation. It is focused on long term goals of school improvement. It puts more emphasis on people as team players than individual competences. Individual expertise is seen as weakening the school because if an individual with the expertise leaves, the institution is weakened. Thus distributed expertise which is spread within a team is preferred in this category.

### *Distribution as incremental*

In this category, when “people prove their ability to exercise leadership, they are given more” (p360). Heads in the study by MacBeath reported that they distributed leadership roles to staff who showed commitment, capacity and ability to lead.

### *Distribution as Opportunistic*

MacBeath argues that in this category leadership is not distributed but it is dispersed, it is taken rather than given. Teachers see what needs to be done and just do it. In a separate study, Storey notes that there is a call for everybody to “act as a leader without appointment simply because they are motivated to do so by feelings of personal responsibility” (p.252).

Opportunistic distribution as portrayed by MacBeath functions well in a climate of shared purpose, where there is clarity of purpose binding all staff together so that they go in the same direction. The risk in opportunistic distribution is that there is room for subversion and this is a challenge to leadership.

Leadership needs to be prepared to respond to divergent views and to manage conflict.

### *Distribution as Cultural*

This is the sixth category in MacBeath’s model. In this category leadership is expressed in activities rather than roles. Distribution is embedded in the culture of the school, characterised by team working, leading and following. People work together to a common purpose. MacBeath argues that in this category the emphasis switches from leaders to a school community in which the leadership becomes a shared aspect; with everyone accepting “the way we do things round here” (p.362). He also emphasises that distribution culturally is marked by agency and reciprocity; “as agency transfers from individual control to collective activity, it requires reciprocity” (p.363). In this category of distribution, MacBeath draws reference to teacher leadership not

as tied to positions or status but as exercised individually and in a culture of collective activity.

The six categories of this model hinge on formal leadership. When the head creates an enabling environment, then distribution of leadership can take place. It is noted that the context of the school influences the head to adopt a particular approach to distribution. While the model may not be applicable to all schools, it serves as a useful guide in this study.

Hargreaves and Fink suggest a continuum of distributed leadership as shown in Figure 5 below.

Anarchy  
Avoid Anarchy

↑Assertive Distribution

Be even more steadfast and passionate about shared purposes and values. Involve resisters early. In clued and listen to minorities. Be prepared for criticism but insist on respectful dialogue.

↑Emergent Distribution

Remain clear about purposes and values. Ensure they are genuinely shared. Encourage staff to innovate. Demonstrate trust. Learn to let go.

↑Guided Distribution

Rely on more than your structures. Develop better relationships. Bring people together. Show interest in your staff members as people. Concentrate on core purposes. Model the attentive behaviour you expect of others.

↑Progressive Delegation

Extend and amend your structures, teams and committees. Create new roles. Focus people's roles and responsibilities on learning and improvement. Consult your teams and committees.

↑Traditional Delegation

Handover some power. Appoint good deputies, and seek to rely on their counsel. Respect their autonomy. Don't do everything yourself.

↑Autocracy

Figure 5. A continuum of distributed leadership.

Adopted from Hargreaves and Fink (2006 p.138)

In the first step which is autocratic leadership, the head controls almost all aspects of the school and they entertain little or no involvement of teachers.

The head makes all the important decisions though he/she is assisted by some department heads. Teachers are not involved and they do not share the goals of the school. Hargreaves and Fink warn that with this type of leadership, teachers are likely to sabotage the head's plans at every stage.

However, they point out that the autocratic leadership should only be used in extreme circumstances like when teachers ‘abdicate responsibility for poor performance’. While autocratic leadership may be justified in such cases, it is not an effective leadership approach.

The other two steps of the model, traditional delegation and guided delegation are more of delegation than distribution. With traditional delegation, the head controls the school through his/her line managers deputies and department heads. The involvement of other teachers depends on the leadership style of the individual department head. This makes the rest of the staff feel excluded from important decisions in the school.

In progressive delegation leadership is more widely distributed but it still depends on formal structures, that is deputies and department heads. Although teachers become more involved, they are not allowed to deviate from the organizational framework. It is therefore evident that there is no room for innovation and initiative taking among teachers. As Hargreaves and Fink point out, in traditional delegation teachers are frustrated due to lack of involvement and in guided delegation teachers’ hopes are raised but dashed because they cannot go beyond the organizational framework.

Guided distribution has more teacher involvement; through co-ordination between the head, assistants and various grade teams. Teachers meet regularly in “collaborative grade teams”. In this step of the model, Hargreaves and Fink argue that “strong professional learning communities” (p121) can be

related. However the distribution remains guided and directed. Though teachers have some degree of flexibility in the collaborative teams, there remains little room for innovation.

Emergent distribution occurs when “leadership emerges from individuals who seize the initiatives to inspire their colleagues” (p122). At this stage teachers get more involved and leadership spreads across the whole school rather than remain with formal leaders. Hargreaves and Fink point out that at this step senior leadership can contribute to the development of emergent distributed leadership by creating “an inclusive, purposeful, and optimistic culture in which initiatives can easily come forward” (p123). This step is also characterised by the emergence of professional learning communities.

In assertive distribution, leadership is taken and this depends on the head to accept and build a culture of assertive leadership. Teachers in the school feel free to challenge the head, they also feel empowered to assert their leadership provided it strengthens and improves the school. Assertive distribution calls for leaders to be able to endure and encourage assertive distribution. However, if not properly monitored assertive distribution can easily degenerate into anarchy, which is the last step in the model. According to Hargreaves and Fink anarchy is a result of distribution by neglect, especially where leaders are never present, cannot maintain clarity of purpose and are afraid and weak. The model warns that anarchy should not be allowed to develop.

The two models discussed in this study present various ways of distributing leadership. The models have different approaches but what they have in common is that they highlight that at every stage distribution depends on leadership; it is formal leaders who create conditions for distributed leadership. Cultural distribution in the MacBeath model and assertive distribution in the Hargreaves and Fink model have some striking similarities. In both cases leadership is taken rather than given and it also depends on the acceptance of the head. There is a possibility that it can develop to anarchy in both cultural and assertive distributions if the head is too weak. In both models, the two stages offer greater potential improvement in teaching and learning.

## **Conclusion**

The review explored various studies on distributed leadership. The various studies discussed in this review did not present a definitive definition of distributed leadership but a common message that runs through all the expositions is that leadership is not the monopoly of one person. Distributed leadership is shared leadership, it is spread across the whole school, and it is dispersed. Hence its association with the following terminologies shared, distributive, dispersed, democratic and collaboration (Oduro, 2004). The literature also highlights that distributed leadership enhances capacity building, teacher leadership, empowerment of others as well as assisting to relieve pressure from heads. The literature also suggests that teamwork, trust, effective communication, collegial relationships are essential elements of distributed leadership. There is a considerable body of evidence from the

literature which suggest that distributed leadership has potential to enhance pupil performance, facilitate change and contribute to school effectiveness. However, there are some factors which inhibit distributed leadership and among them are distrust, insecurity, workload, dishonesty and accountability. The review also discussed two models of distributed leadership. These models are important because they offer conceptual frameworks to analyse and interpret the practice of distributed leadership in the study.

Although this study focuses on the perceptions of heads, middle leaders and teachers on the impact of distributed leadership on teaching and learning, evidence from the literature suggests that leadership functions in schools are spread beyond these three categories of practitioners. The evidence in all the studies discussed in this review indicates that the headteacher is at the centre of all the interactions between and among middle leaders, teachers, pupils and all other stakeholders.

In the next chapter research methods are outlined and discussed in more detail, highlighting their strengths, weaknesses and appropriateness to this study.

## Chapter 3 Research Design

### Introduction

In this chapter the methodology and methods which underpin this study are explored and justified. The study employs a qualitative method. The chapter locates the research into wider theoretical frameworks and highlights the researcher's philosophical approach to knowledge as well as stating the ontological and epistemological position that informed this study. The chapter also outlines how data were collected and analysed. It also discusses significant aspects of research such as access, ethics, validity and reliability.

### Wider frameworks

This part of the chapter locates the research within wider frameworks. In placing the research into wider frameworks, the study draws from Habermas' (1971) typology and Ribbins and Gunter's (2002) 'knowledge domains'. Habermas (1971) suggests a typology of the kinds of questions and knowledge, which researchers seek. In the typology Habermas presents an account of human cognitive interests. These are; the *technical*, which relates to the world of work, *the practical*, which relates to how we understand each other, and the *emancipatory* which relates to the matter of power. In Habermas's typology if you have a practical interest, then your interest is in understanding and interpreting; a kind of knowledge, which is generated by a hermeneutic or interpretive mode of inquiry. This study is premised in Habermas's 'practical' interest which favours the interpretivist mode of inquiry. The interpretive mode of inquiry was considered useful for this thesis because

it helps in understanding the perceptions of heads, middle leaders and teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. In addition to Habermas’s (1971) typology, this research is placed in a wider frameworks following Ribbins and Gunter’ (2002) who conceptualised “five knowledge domains”, namely; *conceptual, critical, humanistic, evaluative and instrumental*. The Ribbins and Gunter typology is summarised in Table 1 below:

Knowledge domain	Meaning
Conceptual	Concerned with issues of ontology and epistemology, conceptual clarification.
Critical	Concerned to reveal and emancipate leaders and followers from social injustice
Humanistic	Gathers and theorises from the experiences and biographies of those who are leaders and managers.
Evaluative	Abstracts and measures the impact of leadership effectiveness on organisational outcomes.
Instrumental	Provides leaders with effective leadership strategies to deliver organisational outcomes.

Table 1: The Five Knowledge Domains (adopted from Ribbins and Gunter, 2002, p.378).

The researcher attempted to place this research into Ribbins and Gunter’s wider frameworks but it became evident that it did not be wholly fit into one knowledge domain. However, the meanings of the conceptual, humanistic and instrumental knowledge domains suggest a closer link for this research. The

research fits in the humanistic approach because it relies on the experiences of heads, middle leaders and teachers as they are exposed in the interviews. In this study, the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning are understood through the interviewees as they relate their experiences and perceptions.

This study also fits within the instrumental knowledge domain. As stated in Table1, the meaning of instrumental research is that it provides leaders with effective leadership strategies to deliver organisational outcomes. Equally relevant to this study is Ribbins and Gunter's definition of *instrumental* research which is that:

It seeks to provide leaders and others with effective strategies and tactics to deliver organizational and system level goals...At its best such research can offer helpful practical assistance about what works and what does not (Ribbins and Gunter, 2002, p. 376).

In this study distributed leadership is considered as a strategy to deliver and improve organisational goals. The research will therefore fit within the domain of instrumental research but the researcher also takes note of the overlap with humanistic theory as stated above.

### **Philosophical approach**

Greenbank (2003) argues that:

When researchers are deciding what research methods to adopt they will inevitably be influenced by their underlying ontological and epistemological position. This in turn will be influenced by their values ... (p.92).

Similarly, this researcher was influenced by his ontological and epistemological stance in deciding the research design for this thesis in terms

of methodology and method. In order to explain the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance, the two terms are defined and explained below.

### **Ontology**

Ontology is concerned with reality; it is the science or study of being. The reality can be external to individuals or produced by individual consciousness (Cohen et al 2000). There are two extremes of reality: reality as the individual's own making and external reality lend themselves to subjective /interpretive and objective/positivist approaches to research respectively. As Gunter et al (2006) note, in the subjective /interpretive paradigm, reality and truth are the product of individual perception and there are multiple realities shared by a group of people. In this domain reality is normally researched through qualitative methods. The other view is that reality and truth are given and are external to the individual and that there is shared reality which most people would subscribe to. This is normally associated with quantitative research methods.

This researcher subscribes to the view that reality and truth are the product of individual perception. This ontological position has led to the adoption of the qualitative approach in this study.

### **Epistemology**

Hartley (2006) defines epistemology as:

The philosophical study of the nature, limits, grounds and production of knowledge...it is concerned with what distinguishes different kinds of knowledge claims – what are the criteria that allow distinctions to be made and how what exists can be known (p. 2).

Hartley further notes that like ontology, epistemology has two extremes. On one hand, it can be argued that knowledge is based on experience and insight. In this domain knowledge is normally researched using qualitative methods. This study adopted this epistemological stance because it is thought that knowledge about the effects of distributed leadership can better be obtained through the experiences and insights of heads, middle leaders and teachers. On the other hand it can be argued that knowledge is hard, real and capable of being transmitted in a tangible form (Hartley, 2006). In this form knowledge is normally researched using quantitative methods.

The above discussion on ontology and epistemology has highlighted this researcher's philosophical approach in terms of the research design. However, it is pertinent to discuss qualitative and quantitative research designs in order to further clarify the choice of a qualitative approach.

### **Research strategy**

In this section, the researcher's justification of the overarching approach to the chosen research methodology is discussed. According to Cohen et al (2000) the research strategy chosen can be subjective, objective or mixed in nature and depends on the researcher's epistemological and ontological views. This study adopts a subjective/interpretive approach which was influenced by the researcher's epistemological and ontological position. The strategy accords with Denscombe's (2003) phenomenological approach which focuses more on people's interpretation of events giving rise to multiple realities (ontology). Accordingly, this study focuses on headteachers', middle leaders' and

teachers' interpretations, understanding and perceptions of distributed leadership its impact on teaching and learning. As Cohen et al (2000) argue, in the subjective strategy the concern is not with creating universal laws but more with the '...the way in which the individual modifies and interprets the world he or she finds himself or herself' (p.7). The strategy relies on qualitative data. Denscombe (2003) identifies four distinctive features of this strategy. These are that the strategy emphasises subjectivity rather than objectivity, description more than analysis, interpretation rather than measurement and agency rather than structure. This approach deals with peoples' perceptions and meanings, attitudes and beliefs, feelings and emotions. These features of the objective strategy are seen as a rejection of positivism (Denscombe 2003) and more in line with Trochim's (2002) post-positivism which emphasises the importance of multiple measures and observations. According to Trochim (2002) most post-positivists are constructivists who believe that we each construct our view of the world based on our perceptions. As will be shown in chapter 4, the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning are presented through each participant's perceptions' experiences, feelings and attitudes.

This researcher does not subscribe to the positivist strategy which favours a scientific approach characterised by procedures and designed to produce universal laws to explain reality being researched (Cohen et al 2000). The researcher rejects the positivists strategy which views science as "the way to get to the truth to understand the world well enough so that we might predict and control it", (Trochim 2002 p.1). The positivist's view according to Trochim

(2002) portrays the world and universe as deterministic. That is to say they are operated by laws of cause and effect that we could discern if we applied the unique approach of the scientific method. The positivists believe in empiricism, that is the idea that observation and measurement were the core to the scientific endeavour (Trochim 2002).

Cohen et al (2000) argue that the objectivist strategy can be referred to as nomothetic. This has resonances with Trochim's (2002) positivism which this research rejects. The researcher in this study does not subscribe to the nomothetic approach which is in favour of the idea that human behaviour is rule bound and that it should be investigated by methods of natural science. This leads to research that emphasises determinacy (a truth that can be known) then rationality (no contradictory explanation) and prediction (that knowledge claims can be made for generalisation of purposes) (Scott and Usher 1996). The methodological approach adopted turns to be quantitative in nature, observing measurable phenomena by collecting data to validate a hypothesis or to create and test a theory.

The objectivist strategy has been criticised for focusing exclusively on methods and outcomes. As a result it fails to ask any questions about the research processes (Schott and Usher 1996). Cohen et al (2000) also criticised this scientific quantitative approach for its mechanistic reductionist view of nature which excludes individuality and choice. With this in mind this research subscribes to Heck and Hallinger's (2005) argument that theories can become problematic when seeking to investigate actual detail and

richness (p.233). In this study theory would inhibit rather than promote the exploration of detail and richness of participants' descriptions of their experiences and perceptions of the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning.

However, despite the criticism of objectivist strategy other studies advocate for a mixed approach. For instance, Wellington (2000) criticises this 'false polarisation' (p.17) of the two approaches (quantitative and qualitative) and argues that quantitative approaches are not always theory laden or hypothesis driven. He also notes that qualitative methods do not always depend on inter-subjectivity and argues that the two methods complement each other.

As already stated this researcher is in favour of qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative studies allow for the richness and insight of human interaction within educational settings (Foskett et al 2005). With qualitative research the researcher is involved in the collection of data and is part of the interpretation and analysis. The researcher will therefore attempt to minimise researcher bias by letting the participants speak for themselves as will be highlighted through quotations in chapter 4. Details of this methodological approach are discussed in the next section which is on research methodology and methods.

## **Research methodology**

According to Cohen et al (2000), methods refer to techniques and procedures used in the process of data gathering. They argue that the aim of

methodology is to describe and analyse these methods, “throwing light on their limitations and resources, clarifying their presuppositions and consequences, relating their potentialities to the twilight zone at the frontiers of knowledge” (p.45).

The research methodology in this study is a multi-site case study involving respondent triangulation but only one method. Cohen et al (2007) define a case study as a “specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle” (p.253). They also cite Adelman et al (1980) who describes a case study as “the study of an instance in action” (p.253). Denscombe (2003) highlights that the case study focuses on just one instance of the thing that is to be investigated. He argues that “What a case study can do that normally a survey cannot is to study things in detail” (p.30). The distinguishing characteristics of a case study have been summarised by Cohen et al (2007) who identified the following “hallmarks” (p.253).

- It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of events relevant to the case.
- It blends a description of events with the analysis of them.
- It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perception of events.
- It highlights specific events that are relevant to the case.
- An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report.

The above are applicable to this study. The four schools constitute the multi-site aspect of the case study while the descriptions and analysis are presented in chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

Bassey (1999) also adds that case study data is strong in reality and that a case study allows generalisations either about an instance or from an instance. In his 1981 paper about pedagogic research, Bassey makes a distinction between predictive and retrospective generalisations. He cites Stenhouse (1980) who contends that predictive generalisations arise from the study of samples and are the form in which data are accumulated in science and that retrospective generalisations arise from the analysis of case studies and are the form in which data are accumulated in history. Bassey (1981) goes further and makes a distinction between empirical generalisations which are open and those which are closed. He defines empirical generalisation as “a collation of observed results, or findings or conclusions” (p.78). Bassey makes a clear distinction between closed and open empirical generalisations as follows:

A closed generalisation refers to a closed set of events: an open generalisation to an open set of events. An open generalisation is a statement in which there is confidence that it can be extrapolated, beyond the observed results of the sets of events studied, to similar events with the expectation that it will be similarly applicable. A closed generalisation is a statement which refers to a specified set of events and without extrapolation to similar events. A closed generalisation is descriptive; an open generalisation is both descriptive and predictive (p.79)

Thus in this study there are opportunities for making closed generalisations about this particular set of schools. In Bassey’s view, a closed generalisation can be used by a teacher trying to relate what has happened in other

classrooms to what is happening to his. Bassey also suggests that “the merit of study of single events lies not in the extent to which it can be generalised, but in the extent to which a teacher reading it can relate it to his own teaching” (p.73) and concludes that “The relatability of a case study is more important than its generalisability” (p.85).

However, despite the strengths of the case study outlined above, Denscombe (2003) noted the following weaknesses of this methodology:

- It is vulnerable to criticism in relation to the credibility of generalisations made from its findings.
- It is often perceived as producing soft data. In this regard the case study is accused of lacking the degree of rigour expected of social science research.
- The boundaries of the case can prove difficult to define in absolute and clear cut fashion.
- Negotiating access to case study setting can be a demanding part of the research process.
- It is hard for case study researchers to achieve their aim or investigating situations as they naturally occur without any effect arising from their presence.

## **Research method**

This study used semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to collect data. The interview questions were based on issues from the literature review. A copy of the interview schedule can be found in Appendix 2. May (1997) notes that

'interviews yield rich insights into people's experiences, opinions, aspirations, attitudes and feelings' (p.108). This is considered important and relevant to this study because it seeks to explore the perceptions of heads, middle leaders and classroom teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning.

The semi-structured interview, Robson (2002) points out, has predetermined questions but the order can be modified based on the interviewer's perception of what seems to be most appropriate. Denscombe (2003) raises this same point and adds that in a semi-structured interview, the interviewee can develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher. He also points out that answers are open-ended, and there is more emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest. The interviewer can change the question wording; some questions which appear inappropriate with particular interviewees can be omitted. This was applicable to this study because three categories of participants were interviewed: heads, middle leaders and classroom teachers. Even with participants in the same category there were changes in some questions because they were in different contexts.

The semi-structured interview was selected because it has a number of advantages which are considered useful to this study. Although there are some disadvantages, they are outweighed by advantages.

Several studies have elaborated the advantages and disadvantages of interviews ( e.g. Denscombe, 2003; Robson, 2000; Payne and Payne, 2004). Advantages of interviews include high response rate, validity, flexibility, use of simple equipment, depth of information and informants' priorities.

The high response rate was a distinct advantage over other methods like the questionnaire. The interview is prearranged and scheduled for a convenient time and location. The face-to-face interview offers the possibility of modifying one's line of enquiry (flexibility), following up responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that postal and other self administered questionnaires cannot. Knight (2002) underscores this point when he argues that researchers using the face-to-face inquiry can improvise and change the direction of a whole inquiry to accommodate new insights, comments made by participants or "they can also jettison things that aren't working"(p.50). This researcher had to change some of the questions after piloting. By comparison, Knight argues that a researcher who is dependent on a questionnaire and realises that it is not being completed as expected is stuck with hundreds of useless answers. As Knight puts it, "with research at a distance, the researcher watches helplessly as the inquiry keeps heading on to the rocks" (p. 50). However, Knight warns that no book can give exhaustive advice on any one technique and he leaves it open to individual investigators to decide which technique is suitable for the purpose of answering given research questions. Accordingly this researcher adopted the semi-structured face-to-face interviews as it was thought that the approach would best capture the perceptions of heads, middle leaders and teachers as they relate their

experiences. Another positive aspect of interviews is that non- verbal cues may give messages which help in understanding the verbal response and this has the potential of providing rich and highly illuminating material. Thus interviews produce data which are detailed.

In terms of equipment, interviews require only simple equipment for recording. This researcher used a tape recorder for recording the interviewees. All the interviewees in this study were interviewed at their schools. The dates and times of interviews were agreed and arranged through the respective headteachers. The rooms for the interviews were also arranged by the headteachers. To avoid loss of data, information was stored in three different forms; on a lap top, on a memory stick and as hard copies.

Pole and Lampard (2002) argue that tape recording offers the most comprehensive method of recording dialogue but remind us of the following inherent difficulties:

- some interviewees may refuse to be tape-recorded fearing that the tape may be played to people they may not wish to hear their opinions
- excessive background noise
- quietly spoken interviewees
- faulty tapes and the problem of recording over a previous interview before it has been transcribed.

As regards the above problems, this researcher came across a few soft spoken interviewees and it took much longer to transcribe the tapes because he had to play them over and over. One of the interviewees feared that her

voice was going to be heard in large lecture theatre. She was assured that the tape was not going to be listened to by no one else except this researcher and possibly programme tutors if need be.

A verbatim transcription of the tape recorded interviews was produced in order to facilitate data analysis. Transcription of the interviews was time consuming and this is one of the disadvantages of the interview method. Robson (2000) estimates that an hour long tape takes up to ten hours to transcribe fully though this depends on the clarity of the audio tapes and the skill of the researcher. Other time consuming aspects of interviews include making arrangements to visit, securing necessary permission, confirming arrangements and rescheduling appointments in case of absences and other unforeseen developments.

In addition to time consuming, the interview method has the following disadvantages; the data is non-standard and hence more laborious to analyse as compared to coded answers in some questionnaires, reliability is adversely affected, the presence of the tape recorder can inhibit the respondent and interviewing itself can be invasion of privacy (Robson 2002, Denscombe 2003). The interviewer effect can affect the data that is collected. As Denscombe (2003) notes, 'research on interviewing has demonstrated fairly conclusively that people respond differently depending on how they perceive the person asking the questions' (p.169). He further notes that factors like sex, age, ethnic origins of the interviewer can affect interviewees. In this research these did not apply because the topic of the interview did not involve sensitive issues like religious beliefs, incomes and ethnicity.

The advantages and disadvantages of interviews are summarised in Table 2 below.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Enable depth and detail of information collection	Time consuming: transcribing and coding of interview data is expected to be lengthy.
Valuable insights gained from depth of information gained	Data analysis from non-standards responses will make it harder to compare data
Informants have the opportunity to expand their ideas and views and identify what they consider as crucial factors (rather than the researcher)	Interviewer effect: responses are based in what interviewees say rather than what they do or did
Flexibility allowing for adjustments to the order and can further develop lines of enquiry	Invasion of privacy, particularly with life history as they could be seen as very personal
Can be a rewarding experience for the informant, especially spending time reflecting about their life story.	Reliability: the impact of myself as the interviewer and the context means that consistency and objectivity may be hard to achieve

Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of the use of interviews (adopted from Denscombe, 2003 p.189-190)

### **Role of the researcher**

According to Creswell (1998), in a qualitative study, the role and close distance between the researcher and the participants have implications for bias within a study. The use of semi-structured interviews inevitably will create a closer relationship than the methods employed by a quantitative study like questionnaires. Denscombe (2003) concurs that the data collected using this method is affected by the personal identity of the researcher. Thus it is necessary to declare this relationship in the study.

I have no personal involvement with any participant and I do not work in the schools system and therefore could be considered an 'outsider'. This could have affected the interviewer/interviewee relationship in that interviewees may have felt uncomfortable to disclose all their perceptions to a complete stranger. This was likely to be the case with some teachers who may have had views that are critical of leadership. However, this was addressed by assuring informants of confidentiality and anonymity at the beginning of the interviews. As I am a male researcher, female participants may have felt uneasy to sit in a room with a male stranger and this could have affected their responses. To minimise this effect, I always sat at a reasonable distance from all interviewees, so as to respect their personal space. Headteachers, by virtue of their positions, had better professional expertise than me and this could have impacted on the how and why they gave certain responses to questions.

## **Sample**

Various studies have concluded that researchers cannot obtain data from everyone so they select a portion that is thought to represent the population they want to study (Denscombe 2003, Best and Khan 1998, Robson 2002).

May (1997), drawing from Ferber et al (1980) defines a sample as:

As method of gathering information from a number of individuals, a 'sample' in order to learn something about the larger population from which the sample is drawn (May 1997, p.85).

The sample in this thesis is four schools; two primary and two secondary. It is acknowledged that this sample posed potential problems in terms of size, sector, complexity and contexts. However, it was considered that such

differences would not affect the study since the focus was on the perceptions of the participants about the effect of distributed leadership on teaching and learning.

All the four schools are urban and fall under one Local Education Authority (LEA); Birmingham Education Authority. The first school is a large secondary school with an enrolment of 1131. It is a community school with a specialist arts status. The school had Ofsted inspection in the previous year and was judged as satisfactory. The overall effectiveness of the school was grade 3. In the Ofsted report the inspectors noted that the school was led by a highly committed headteacher and a senior team. The team were commended for introducing leadership approaches which had increasingly brought accountability and rigour in the management of teaching.

The second was a primary school with 375 pupils on roll. The headteacher explained that the school had small class size due to demographic changes in the area. Like the first school it had Ofsted inspection in the previous year. The school had a rating of good or better in all aspects. Among other things, the inspection report noted that the head provided good leadership and strong vision, the standard of work was above average, much of the teaching was good and pupils were kept well motivated.

The third was a secondary school. It is a sports college with an enrolment of 817 pupils. In its mission statement the school highlights three things it is trying to achieve; upward trend in English and Mathematics in Key Stage 4,

extending community access through sports and enhancing leadership of learning. The school got grade 2 for overall effectiveness from Ofsted Inspectors. It was also praised as a good school characterised by outstanding care and inclusion of all students. The report further highlighted that the school has excellent leadership and management by the head and the senior staff and that teaching is good.

The fourth is a primary school with 420 pupils. It was described by Ofsted as large and had grade 2 of overall effectiveness. In their Ofsted report the inspectors noted that leadership and management are good. In particular they stated that there is strong leadership of the headteacher supported by effective and purposeful senior management. They also added that leadership has a focus on improving teaching and learning and that there is extensive training for teachers which creates good capacity for further improvement in the attainment of good behaviour for pupils and personal development.

In this study it is acknowledged that primary and secondary schools are significantly different. Secondary schools have more people on roll and thus are larger than primary schools. Large schools have been regarded as offering a wide and varied curriculum (Kimber 2003). Kimber further observed that those holding leadership posts in small schools will be leading smaller teams. In his research paper "*Does size matter? Distributed leadership in small secondary schools*", Kimber (2003) reports that there are some inclinations about small schools regarding leadership. Some of these are that:

- Leaders are more hands on. They know what is happening in the school and are more accessible. But there are just as many jobs to do as there are in larger schools though there are fewer people to do them.
- Leaders wear many hats. They take on many leadership roles but struggle to balance several responsibilities. Teams are smaller and more cohesive units .There are smaller departments
- Communication is easy and leaders can offer more personal support.
- Relations with the school are usually good. Leaders know the staff and pupils better.

These inclinations point to some of the differences between primary and secondary schools.

Whilst size is one significant aspect of the differences between the two sectors, there are other characteristics which distinguish them. In the *Effective Pre-school, Primary and Secondary Education 3-14 Project* (EPPSE 3-14), Evangelou et al (2008) highlight some of the differences between primary and secondary schools. These include organisation of learning, frequency of parents and teacher meetings, catchment area, opportunities for enhancing self esteem and identification pupils with learning difficulties.

Evangelou et al (2008) note that in primary schools one teacher teaches a whole range of subjects and has more contact with the same pupils while subject specialists in secondary schools teach their subjects only. This calls

for different organisation of the teaching and learning programme. As a result secondary schools tend to focus more on examination outcomes while primary schools tend to be more learner centred. It has also been observed that teachers and parents in primary schools meet readily but generally meet at parents' evenings in secondary schools. Thus there is less parental involvement in secondary schools and lack of a sense of community. Children in primary schools generally come from the immediate community. By contrast a significant number of pupils in secondary schools come from the wider community and are often bussed to school. The EPPSE 3-14 project also highlighted that opportunities for enhancing self esteem are enhanced in primary schools but less in secondary schools because of larger numbers. The study further notes that pupils with learning difficulties can easily be identified in primary schools whereas this may not be the case in secondary schools.

However, in spite of the differences between the two sectors, it was considered appropriate to include both systems in the study as it would potentially lead to a wider range of perspectives and models of distributed leadership. The intention was not to compare the two sectors but to broaden the potential range of perspectives to inform this first study. Thus in the analysis of the findings to this study no comparisons between the two sectors were made but emphasis was on the perceptions of the participants.

From each school, the headteacher, deputy or middle leader and at least two teachers were interviewed. Two of the schools presented five teachers for the

interview, giving a total of five interviewees from each of the two schools. In all a total of 18 people were interviewed. These were 4 headteachers, 6 middle leaders and 8 teachers. The choice of participants was done by the headteachers who also arranged the rooms and times for the interviews. This was done before hand and I was given this information on arrival. However, I explained the research ethics and consent issues to each participant before beginning each interview. I had explained the purpose and topic of my research to headteachers when I was seeking permission to do the research. I negotiated with heads before hand to have both male and female participants in order to have a broad based sample which would offer potential variety of perceptions.

The decision to allow heads to nominate other staff interviewees within their schools was accepted within the frame of this study. However, it is acknowledged that there was potential bias in this procedure. Heads were asked to invite individuals with experience in distributed leadership within the school. Whilst it is acknowledged that heads may have chosen individuals who were perhaps positive about their experiences of leadership distribution, this was deemed acceptable for this first study given that the objective was to explore what their own perceptions were within the context of that particular school. In the interviews, interviewees were probed to express and critique the conceptualisations adopted. In this way the study was appropriately served. The concerns of bias were allayed when some teachers expressed dissenting voices in the interviews (see interviewees 13 and 17 in chapter 4).

Purposive sampling was used to select the schools. Qualitative samples as noted by Miles and Huberman (1994) tend to be purposive rather than random partly because with small numbers of cases, random sampling can be biased. The schools were selected by approaching headteachers doing doctoral studies at the university of Birmingham. The four schools confirmed that they practised distributed leadership at their schools. As Denscombe (2003) argues:

Purposive sampling is applied to those situations where the researcher already knows something about the specific people or events and deliberately selects particular ones because they are seen as instances that are likely to produce the most valuable data (p.15).

The idea is consistent with Silverman's (2001) argument that purposive sampling allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process which we are interested in. Drawing from the work of Denzin and Lincoln (1994), Silverman points out that many qualitative researchers employ purposive, and not random sampling methods because they seek out group settings and individuals where the processes being studied are most likely to occur. This applies to the sample in this thesis because the researcher had information that that these schools practise distributed leadership.

Sample size is another important variable in sampling. There is no agreement among researchers as to what is the right sample size as it is influenced by factors like resources, time scale and purpose of the study. Best and Khan (1998) contend that the ideal sample must be large enough to serve as an adequate representation of the population about which the researcher wishes to generalise and small enough to be selected economically. Having considered all these factors, the researcher considered that four schools are

adequate for the purposes of this first study. Miles and Huberman emphasise this point when they argue that for sampling in qualitative research:

You need to set boundaries: to define aspects of your case(s) that you can study within the limits of your time and means that connect directly to your research questions, and that probably will include examples of what you want to study...at the same time, you need to create a frame to help you uncover, confirm, or qualify the basic processes or constructs that undergird your study (p.27).

### **Access**

According to Burgess (1984), access to schools for the purposes of research has not been regarded as a problem by many researchers and has been taken for granted or ignored completely. He also notes that in the past many researchers who conducted studies in schools and classrooms regarded teachers and pupils as a docile and accessible population on whom to administer numerous tests and questions. Burgess argues that "At its most basic, access involves gaining permission to do a piece of research in a particular social setting or institution" (p.38). He stresses that there is really no way in which a school study can be done openly without seeking the permission from the headteacher and reminds us that:

To gain access to the school you need to first approach the Local Education Authority; to gain access to the staff, you need to approach the head. Each fieldwork contact is thus sponsored by someone in authority... (p.39).

Accordingly, this researcher had to seek permission from the headteachers of the respective schools in order to gain access not only to the school but also to the middle leaders and teachers. After getting access from headteachers, consent forms were then sent to each of the schools (see Appendix 1)

## **Piloting**

Bryman (2008) contends that it is always desirable if it all possible to conduct a pilot study before administering a self completion questionnaire or structured interview. He further argues that piloting the instrument does not only ensure that survey questions operate well but has also a role in ensuring that the research instrument as a whole functions well. Pilot studies are also considered to be especially important for self-completion questionnaires as there will be no one to explain. In interviews piloting is equally important as it helps to clear any problems that may emerge. This researcher conducted a pilot study at one school. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the head, deputy and two teachers. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and analysed. During the pilot study, some interviewees sought clarification on some questions so changes to interview questions were made to better elicit responses in relation to the research questions. This also eliminated any misunderstanding on the wording of the questions. The pilot study was not included in this main study but it helped to refine questions for the main study. As Bryman (2008) observes, '... questions that seem not to be understood or questions that are often not answered should become apparent' (p.248).

In the pilot study, the researcher observed that one teacher became nervous with questions that related to the effectiveness of school leadership and also how much power and authority she had as a result of distributed leadership. This agrees with Bryman (2008) who argues that in interview surveys, it may be possible to identify questions that make respondents feel uncomfortable.

This suggested that, as it later turned out to be, she feared retribution. The teacher was reassured of the confidentiality of the interview data. This was a useful guide for me in the main study. I had to assure all participants in the main study that their responses would be confidential and anonymous.

This researcher found the pilot study very helpful as a confidence booster. The interview transcripts were carefully studied and at the same time the researcher reflected on the whole process, thinking of how that could have been done better. As Bryman also notes: "Piloting an interview schedule can provide interviewers with some experience of using it and can infuse them with greater sense of confidence" (p. 247).

Piloting, which is a small-scale replica of the main study is necessary for preparing the main case study because it helps the researcher to estimate how long the survey is likely to take, how the people will react, how much it will cost and how much to include in the interviews (Bryman, 2008). This is indeed a valuable point but in this study it did not have a significant bearing because there were no huge costs involved. As stated earlier the researcher used a tape recorder and the only costs in monetary terms were travelling costs and blank cassettes whose value were quite insignificant. The four schools were all in urban areas within the West Midlands and the travelling costs were very low.

### **Summary and lessons from the pilot study**

The interview schedule was piloted at one school to assess the:

- Appropriateness of the questions and the meanings attributed to them by the respondents.
- Clarity of the questions.
- Feelings and attitudes of interviewees about answering them.
- Amount of time to allocate for each interview.
- My own interviewing skills.

From the pilot study, I learnt the following lessons after self-assessment:

- Not to talk at the same time with the interviewees as this caused problems with transcribing when the two voices came out together.
- To be aware of any background noise which could affect the clarity of the recording.
- To listen carefully to responses and make follow up questions if need be.
- Re- assess questions that need to be clarified to improve informants' understanding.

## **Validity**

Validity refers to the degree to which what is observed or measured is the same as what was purported to be observed or measured (Robson, 2002). It seeks to ascertain the truth status of a research report. The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of practitioners about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. The research report will be valid if it has measured or observed what it claims to observe, that is the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers. Triangulation was done in order to further enhance the validity of these findings. Triangulation

can enhance validity of the data by corroborating the findings. Denscombe (2003) argues that the purpose of triangulation is not to prove that the researcher was wrong or got it wrong or right but to give some confidence that the meaning of that data has some consistency.

Stressing the need for triangulation, Cohen and Manion (1980) argue that triangulation gives the researcher the confidence that the data being generated are not simply artefacts of one method. This study used one method but there was respondent triangulation as the informants were asked similar questions. In view of the importance of triangulation in adding the validity of the research, it is pertinent to discuss the theoretical aspects of triangulation in relation to how it was applied in this thesis.

### **Triangulation**

Flick (2002) points out that the term triangulation is used in social research to refer to “observation of the research issue from at least two different points... (and) is most often realised by means of applying different methodological approaches” (p.178). He draws from the work of Denzin (1978) who understood triangulation as a validation strategy and distinguished the following four different forms of triangulation:

- *Triangulation of data*-combines data drawn from different sources and at different times, in different places or from different people.
- *Investigator triangulation*-characterised by the use of different observers or interviewers to balance out the subjective influences of individuals.

- *Triangulation of theories*-approaching data with multiple perspectives and hypothesis in mind.
- *Methodological triangulation* –this could be within method, for example the use of different subscales within a questionnaire and between methods. This could be also be achieved by using the same method on different occasions or different methods on the same object of study (Cohen et al, 2000).

Flick highlighted two criticisms levelled against Denzini's (1978) perspective of triangulation. First, it pays little attention to the fact that every different method constitutes the issue that it seeks to investigate in a specific way. Second, it is noted that theories and methods should be combined carefully and purposefully with the intention of adding breath or depth to our analysis but not for objective truth. As a result of these criticisms there was a shift in the perspective of triangulation where it is "now seen less as a validation strategy within qualitative research and more as a strategy for justifying and underpinning knowledge by gaining additional knowledge" (Flick 2002, p179). In the light of the theoretical shift in the perspective on triangulation, this researcher applied triangulation not only as validation strategy but also for gaining additional knowledge about the research subject. Following Denzini's (1978) forms of triangulation, this study applied triangulation in the first form, that is triangulation of data. This was done by comparing and contrasting responses from teachers, middle leaders and headteachers.

### **Generalizability and reliability**

Generalizability refers to the characteristic of research findings that allow them to be applied to other situations and other populations while reliability means that the research instrument produces the same data each time it is used (Robson, 2002). Variations should not be caused by the instrument but must be due to the phenomena being investigated (Denscombe, 2003). Basing on Bassey's (1981) study, empirical closed generalisation is applicable to findings in this study. Bassey (1981) concludes that "while open generalisations are the more useful in pedagogic practice, they also seem to be more scarce" (p.73). In one of his studies, Harris (2004) also observed that the possibilities for generalisation are limited in a small sample of schools but the range of data collected provided rich insight into the leadership practices. This is equally applicable to this study as the findings will provide potentially useful insight into the perceptions of heads, middle leaders and classroom teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. The work may be relatable to other schools who want to reflect on their practices. In terms of reliability this study largely depended on the consistency of the researcher in conducting semi-structured interviews. Similar questions were asked across the categories of participants.

### **Ethical issues**

Research ethics refer to rules of morally good conduct for researchers. They are a communal discipline upheld by communities of researchers and others who police research conduct (Gomm, 2008). In this study the researcher observed and followed ethical research principles. Among the ethical issues

observed were confidentiality, voluntary informed consent, anonymity, honesty and the right to withdraw.

Studies on ethical issues highlight that researchers are expected to respect the rights and dignity of the participants, avoid harm for the participants, operate with honesty and integrity in the collection, analysis and dissemination of the findings, voluntary participation, informed consent confidentiality and anonymity (Denscombe, 2003; de Vaus , 2002). These ethical considerations are also at the core of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) guidelines for educational research (2004). The principles underpinning BERA (2004) guidelines are that all educational research should be conducted within an ethic of respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values and academic freedom.

The researcher in this study complied with the above guidelines because consent was sought through the headteachers and the issues were explained in a self introductory letter which was sent to all participating schools.

The literature on ethical principles reveals that research that is likely to harm participants is regarded by most people as unacceptable (Bryman 2004; de Vaus 2002; Christians 2002). Bryman explains that harm can entail a number of facets; physical harm, harm to participants' development, loss of self esteem, stress and inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts. Drawing from the *British Sociological Association* (BSA) statement on ethical practice Bryman (2004) enjoins researchers to:

...anticipate, and to guard against consequences for research participants which can be predicted to be harmful and to consider carefully the possibility that the research experience may be a disturbing one (p.510).

In this study the envisaged harm to participants especially classroom teachers was that their perceptions of distributed leadership might be different and in disagreement with middle managers and heads. There might be possible victimisation if the researcher discloses them to other people. The researcher made an undertaking to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality entail maintaining the identities and records of participants confidential. As de Vaus (2002) notes:

The most obvious way in which participants can be harmed in survey research is if confidentiality of responses is not honoured. Typically, survey participants are assured that their answers will be either anonymous or confidential. As part of the process of obtaining informed consent it should be clear to respondents how their responses will be treated (p.62).

There are three main reasons for assuring confidentiality (Bryman 2004; de Vaus 2002). First, to improve the quality and honesty of responses. Second, to encourage participation in the study and thus to improve the representativeness of the sample. Third, to protect the person's privacy. The researcher in this study ensured that the tape recorded semi-structured interviews are not accessed by other people. The interview transcripts and findings will only be made available to university lecturers supervising the thesis and possibly the external examiner.

However, Christians (2000) reminds us that despite attempts at privacy, water-tight confidentiality has proved to be impossible, noting that:

Pseudonyms and disguised actions are often recognised by insiders, what researchers consider innocent is perceived by participants as misleading or even betrayal. What appears neutral on paper is often conflictual in practise (p.139).

Despite the envisaged harm to participants, Gomm (2008) argues that the majority of social research does none of the subjects any significant harm or good. Similarly, Lewis and Nicholas (2006), in a study of social research participants found that:

Research generally emerged as a positive experience for most people in the studies reviewed. A number of studies highlighted that interviews which were painful could, nevertheless be, overall, positive experience. Recounting painful experience could itself provide an important opportunity for catharsis and a chance to reflect (p.2).

Another ethical concern relates to invasion of privacy. This issue is invariably linked to anonymity and confidentiality. Gomm (2008) observes that while people's right to privacy is an important right, breaching it does little tangible harm without an accompanying breach of confidentiality. He warns that breaches of confidentiality may have serious consequences if the information falls into wrong hands. Bryman (2004) also stresses the importance of confidentiality and points out that the participant does not abrogate the right to privacy entirely by providing informed consent. Participants might refuse to answer certain questions in an interview if they feel such questions delve into their private lives especially income, religious beliefs or sexual activities. This researcher did not encounter this problem as he did not ask questions about private lives.

## **Data analysis**

Miles and Huberman (1994) define qualitative data analysis as 'consisting of three concurrent flows of activity, namely, data reduction, data display and conclusion/ verification' (p.10). This study adopted this approach to data analysis and made some adjustments as necessary. In the Miles and Huberman analysis, data reduction is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying and transforming the data. Miles and Huberman argue that data reduction sharpens, sorts, focuses and organises data in such a way that conclusions can be drawn and verified. The researcher in this study grouped the interview transcripts into three categories: heads, middle leaders and classroom teachers. Within each category the data were coded according to common themes. This thematic approach to data analysis helped to identify the issues that emerged from the interviews. Themes within and across categories were recorded on a matrix. A tick was made in the appropriate box when a particular theme or issue came up. I then made a note of illustrative quotations to support each theme or issue. In analysing the data particular attention was paid to research questions. Each research question was allocated a colour and highlighted on the transcript and later transferred to a matrix.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data display is an organised compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing. Conclusion drawing and verification is the last in the Miles and Huberman analysis. However, verification was not done in this study as it focused on conclusions to be drawn from the data analysis. Miles and Huberman argue

that conclusion drawing starts during data collection when the researcher makes tentative conclusions, notices regularities, patterns and explanations. The conclusions are verified as the researcher reflects, refers back to field notes, seeks explanations and makes effort to replicate a finding in another set of data. This was applied in this study by referring and comparing the findings with the literature review.

Qualitative data analysis has some advantages and disadvantages and these are summarised in the Table 3 below;

Advantages	Disadvantages
The descriptions and theories are 'grounded' in reality, i.e. the analysis has its roots in the conditions of social existence.	Difficult to generalise from the data and therefore may be less representative than quantitative research
There is a richness and detail to the data which enable a sound analysis of the subtleties of each individual's life story	Interpretation is intertwined with the 'self' of the researcher. The findings are a creation of the researcher rather than a discovery of fact
There is tolerance of ambiguity and contradictions which reflects the social reality of what is being investigated	There is the possibility of decontextualising the meaning. Providing quotations in the analysis may well take the spoken word out of context and the meaning becomes lost
There is the possibility of alternative explanations because it draws on the interpretative skills of the researcher rather than the presumption that there is one correct explanation.	There is a danger of over simplifying the explanation if anomalies identified and do not 'fit' with the themes constructed.

Table 3: Advantages and disadvantages of qualitative analysis (adopted from Denscombe 2003, pp. 280-281).

### **Limitations of the approach**

The limitation of this approach, whether for quantitative or qualitative purposes, is that it can only be a snapshot which is dependent on the local and temporal context of when it was carried out (Denscombe, 2003). As a result, its applicability to wider contexts may be undermined.

In this study, a potential flaw is recognised in that one principal method of data collection was used; semi-structured interviews. Methodological triangulation may have given additional validity about the perceptions of informants on the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. Additional methods like questionnaires (as in the work of Huberman, 1993 and Smith, 2002) and focus groups were considered but could not be used in this study due to time, financial and logistical constraints. However, whilst the sample cannot be deemed representative of all other schools outside this study, the data should not be regarded as insignificant because it gives useful insight into the perceptions of informants about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. The findings should be used as a useful starting point for further research in this area of study.

### **Conclusion**

The focus of this thesis is to explore the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and classroom teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. In this chapter the researcher located the study into wider frameworks and explained his ontological and epistemological position which influenced the choice of a qualitative approach adopted in this study.

Ethical issues were discussed not only in general but in as far as the researcher applied them in the field. The data analysis process was also explained. The findings from the data analysis are presented in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4 Presentation of the findings**

### **Introduction.**

In this chapter findings from the data are presented. Analysis of the interview scripts revealed some common themes and perceptions regarding distributed leadership in the schools that participated in the study. These came from the questions that were asked in the interviews (see Appendix 2). There were no marked differences in perceptions between the schools so the participants' views were considered together. However, these were discussed according to the three categories of interviewees, that is headteachers, middle leaders and teachers. Middle leaders in this study refers to those in formal leadership positions below the headteacher like deputies, senior teachers and heads of department while teachers are the ordinary classroom teachers without any formal position of leadership. I have used numbers to refer to interviewees but rather according to categories as follows: 1-4 headteachers, 5-10 middle leaders and 11-18 teachers. In presenting the findings, I will let the interviewees speak for themselves as much as possible. Hence there will be many direct quotations. Samples of interviews are included at the end of this study shown in Appendices 3, 4 and 5. These are for one headteacher, middle leader and teacher respectively.

### **Distributed leadership**

The four headteachers in the study expressed their understanding of the term *distributed leadership* in different ways but interestingly, two expressed it in terms of what it does and the other two in terms of the administrative structure

of the school. Those who gave their view of distributed leadership in terms of what it does pointed out that it is about empowering others to engage in the management and leadership of the school. They viewed distributed leadership as a means of giving power to the teachers so that they can lead and make decisions. Of those who defined distributed leadership in terms of what it does, one headteacher simply described it as "...distributing duties so that everybody feels part of the organisation so that they have an opportunity to make decisions" (interviewee 2, headteacher). However, the other headteacher had a much broader view of distributed leadership as illustrated in the quotation below:

Right ok, distributed leadership is about empowering others to engage in management and leadership of the school. It's about giving them the power to make decisions, it's about giving them the power to implement actions and carry them through. But alongside that is also the notion of accountability because in distributing management and leadership you also distribute the accountability as well. So genuine distributed leadership has two elements to it: giving the power to lead and manage and taking on board the accountability management and evaluation. So that's my general perception of distributed leadership (interviewee 1, headteacher).

The same headteacher (see Appendix 3) stressed that within distributed leadership one has to hold people accountable "... because if people do not have accountability, the probability of them discharging their duties for the outcomes and results is very low" This suggests that accountability in distributed leadership is used both as a tool to motivate teachers to do their best to achieve the best results and as a means to make teachers get a sense of ownership.

The other two headteachers who expressed distributed leadership in terms of school structure described a hierarchical structure with the head at the top followed by the middle management team. Ordinary classroom teachers are at the bottom of the structure. Both heads pointed out that in their schools teachers work in teams, which have the authority to make decisions. The following quotation is a typical example of how distributed leadership was expressed in terms of leadership structure:

Leadership is distributed because we have got a staffing structure of head, deputy head, and assistant headteacher so they form the senior management team. Then we have got two phase leaders, one phase leader for KS1 and one for foundation stage. The assistant headteacher is for KS2, so that's three-phase leaders in fact. Then beneath that we have got subject leaders who work in teams with classroom teachers. So almost all leadership is distributed in the school (interviewee 3, headteacher).

In spite of this hierarchical structure, one headteacher reiterated that distribution of leadership to teams gives rise to a shared structure in her school. She stressed that by distributing responsibilities to teams, everybody knows what is going on in the school. "...everybody has something to say, something to contribute so it isn't one person autocratically at the top". She summed up her view of distributed leadership as follows:

So it's very much a shared responsibility and I think when you have everybody in-putting, you also have got good ideas shared, haven't you? You definitely got ownership when you have got a lot of people involved in decision making. It's not me telling them what to do when they don't know what I am talking about (interviewee 4, headteacher).

Her statement echoes some of the sentiments raised by the other headteachers who also stated that distributed leadership entails sharing of ideas and responsibilities, involvement in decision-making and creating a sense of ownership among all teachers in the school.

There were six middle leaders in the study and they all invariably defined distributed leadership in relation to management structure or staffing structure.

The following quotes illustrate typical responses from deputy headteachers and other middle leaders:

We have a management structure; the senior management and the middle management. Obviously the senior management structure consists of the head and deputy. The middle management are the subject coordinators (interviewee 5, deputy headteacher),

What we have in the school is a staffing structure. This structure is made up of the headteacher, deputy head and the senior management team. My role in leadership is to be in charge, working at that subject area across the school, how to develop it across the school, what impact it has on teaching and learning right down from foundation stage to year 6 (interviewee 7, deputy headteacher),

and

I think in a big school like this you have got the headteacher, he should not do absolutely everything. Responsibility should be distributed to the whole team so as to avoid one person doing absolutely everything but we are responsible for specific areas and we are accountable (interviewee 8, deputy headteacher).

The quotations from the middle leaders suggest that they do not frequently use the term 'distributed leadership' but they practise it. As they explained further it became clear that distributed leadership is practised as shown by middle leader 7 quoted above. One of the middle leaders explained that her view of distributed leadership is that the headteacher does not have to do everything but shares it with all teachers in the school. She also stated that all teachers are involved in some kind of leadership, both formal and informal. Her own perception of distributed leadership was that:

The head has an overarching view of what is happening but gives off responsibility to other people to carry out in moving our school forward. Basically what she does is that she shares that responsibility but still manages to feel and control it (interviewee 9, middle leader).

Viewed from the perspective of middle leaders, distributed leadership seems to be premised upon management teams in the school. However they go further and underscore the importance of sharing responsibilities among individuals as well as making people accountable. All the six middle leaders highlighted that responsibilities are distributed and shared.

The eight teachers in the study explained their understanding of distributed leadership in much the same way as middle leaders. They all referred to the leadership structure of the school, which has the head and senior management at the top. Like middle leaders, the teachers' view of distributed leadership centred on sharing of responsibilities and working in teams. The following quotation from one teacher captures the perceptions of teachers' about distributed leadership:

I suppose that means sharing it out amongst the whole school, dividing it amongst everybody not just senior members of staff. I suppose you distribute different subjects, such as special education needs and extra curricular activities. So it's giving everybody that extra something to make sure that they are contributing to the whole school and not just in class (interviewee 13, teacher).

In the study, all of the eight teachers said they had no formally designated roles like head of subject or year but they still felt that they were part of the distributed leadership. They all said that they contributed to team meetings and activities and had responsibility and control of their classes. As one teacher put it:

I do not have any leadership roles but I am part of the humanities team but there is a leader. But I am in charge of my class (interviewee 16, teacher).

One of the teachers volunteered to do something extra in addition to her class. This was being in charge of recycling in the school. She explains that:

I only took this role as someone in charge of sustainability because it's something that interests me, and I asked if I could do it. I am in charge of getting the school to recycle, getting involved in community projects, getting the school doing something environmentally friendly (interviewee 14, teacher).

The teachers in the study showed not only willingness to share responsibilities in the school but also taking extra duties as shown in their definitions of distributed leadership. This also suggests that distributed leadership in a way motivates them to do extra for the school.

## **Summary**

The definitions of distributed leadership which were proffered by headteachers, middle leaders and teachers highlight that it is about sharing responsibilities across the school, working in teams, being accountable, empowering others, participation in decision-making and making staff develop a sense of ownership. The headteachers' perceptions of distributed leadership are broader and wider in scope and encompass concepts like empowerment and authority while middle leaders and teachers focus mainly on sharing responsibilities. This was also the general view of teachers. It was also clear that although headteachers distribute leadership, they still have some control.

## **Power and autonomy**

There was consensus among the four head teachers that the people to whom responsibilities have been distributed must have the power and autonomy to make decisions. One of the headteachers sounded very passionate about giving power and autonomy to the staff. She emphasized that genuine distribution entails allowing people to have the autonomy to make decisions.

To put it in her own words:

I think if you distribute leadership then it needs to have autonomy and power to make decisions because otherwise it's not pure distributed leadership. If there is no autonomy and power to make decisions then it's merely kidding (interviewee 2, headteacher).

This was corroborated by two teachers from her school who stated that the head allowed them to make decisions as long as they kept her informed.

However, the teachers were quick to point out that they had the power and autonomy to make decisions in other aspects of the school except policy, the school budget and the curriculum.

The other three headteachers had similar perceptions, with one emphasizing that he does not like people coming back to him asking if they could do this or that. He pointed out that "they got the authority to make the decisions". The other two headteachers stressed that teachers at their schools had the power and autonomy to make decisions as teams or as individuals in their classrooms and that:

I suppose also with accountability and decision making powers there is ownership of the subject and obviously you don't want to own something that doesn't work very well. I think that has allowed people to develop themselves and their own management styles and skills (interviewee 3, headteacher).

The extent to which teachers could exercise power and autonomy differed from school to school depending on the perception of the headteacher. One headteacher acknowledged that he has not given teachers enough power and said:

I haven't empowered people enough to be heads and managers. I haven't let go enough (interviewee 1, headteacher).

He explained that there are two things that he would hold centrally. These were the budget and core standards of education. As he stressed:

Standards of education and the budget for example, I hold those centrally. It's a six and a half million-dollar budget so I hold on to that centrally. So it's a hard thing to let go some things as you can see from the size of the budget.

In the interview with this headteacher, he mentioned that the reason why he cannot let go things like educational standards and the budget is that it was him and the governors who are ultimately responsible; "... its me and the governors who are subsequently responsible in particular for the educational outcomes in terms of standards of attainment and increasing pupils well-being." He also expressed his fears about the competence of some teachers in carrying out the distributed responsibilities effectively. This was revealed in the following statement:

I think it's about competence of those whom you distribute the leadership to. I think if you are going to let go you have to feel comfortable and confident that those people are able and willing not just to do the job but to account for it and that takes time.

This differed from another headteacher who said that she would let teachers get the experience of doing everything as long as she monitors. In her opinion this was a way of building capacity and preparing teachers for leadership. She

also believed in training people for new roles and discussing things in meetings before distributing the responsibilities. But in those meetings she would have the final say as she highlighted in the following quotation;

Normally we thrash things out so that we have some common ground but at the end of the day what I say would be followed otherwise you go round and round in circles, don't you? But at the end of the day if I feel that something is correct then it's correct. It is followed by everyone (interviewee 2, headteacher).

This suggests that while there is debate about issues in the school it might be difficult to sway the headteacher as her decisions have to be followed. She was however quick to point out that in making the final decisions, she takes the teachers' input on board.

The other two headteachers had something in common; they both control and make decisions on policy. One of the two headteachers explained that 'teachers here feel free and are very autonomous to make decisions in their classrooms and year groups but making global decisions about the direction of the school was her area.' The other headteacher also said:

If it means the school is going in a completely different direction obviously that decision will be made higher up ( interviewee 3, headteacher).

Like the first headteacher, she also controls the budget but 'lets go' some aspects of the curriculum. Although she is ultimately responsible for everything, her teachers are responsible for the curriculum in their teams. Her control of the budget was clearly evident in her statement:

I want to keep my hands on some things so the budget is one of them because I am ultimately responsible for it. I keep my fingers on it. I like to be accountable for it and I want to know exactly what is going on (interviewee 4, headteacher).

Middle leaders and teachers in the study appeared satisfied with the power and autonomy that they had in distributed leadership. None of the 6 middle leaders and 8 teachers showed concern that there was a limit to which distribution could be done but appeared happy with the way things were. As one deputy head stated:

To be honest everybody has a certain amount of power and autonomy down to the teachers who are in charge of a subject or class. There, they are to ensure that things actually happen the way they want them to happen. So we don't have to concentrate on every single aspect because there are people in charge (interviewee 8, deputy headteacher).

Another deputy headteacher supported this idea by giving areas where she is in charge. She is in charge of key stage 2 as well as her own class in which she is responsible for her class achievements, behaviour and well-being of the whole child and every child matters. She concluded thus:

So that's what we are responsible for in our class. Making the child safe, making the child happy, making sure they learn and making sure they continue to improve and develop in school.(interviewee 7, deputy headteacher).

For most teachers their power was in the classroom. Six of the eight teachers in the study stated that they have the authority to make decisions on teaching methods. The following statement by one of the teachers is representative of what 6 of the teachers said:

We have the autonomy to set our own internal deadlines. We have the power to make decisions, for example the power to decide on the best teaching methods. I think there is a lot of flexibility in distributed leadership. But for some big decisions for example changing the curriculum, obviously you need senior management to decide (interviewee 15, teacher).

Her last statement echoes what the headteachers raised; that policy and big decisions are dealt with by the headteacher. For one teacher distributed leadership is a “democratic process” because the headteacher has given her a “free range” in a sustainability project that she is in charge of.

There was one deputy headteacher who perceived empowering people through distributed leadership as something that causes insecurity among teachers. He expressed his perception thus:

I think empowering people to make their own decisions is something that can create insecurity because people ask ; am I doing the right thing or not ? (interviewee 6, deputy headteacher ).

His views are in contrast with those of one middle leader who perceived empowering people as a “...democratic process and professional conversation” ( interviewee 10, middle leader).

## **Summary**

Findings from this study suggest that power and autonomy are necessary for distributed to be effective. However as stated earlier, there is a limit on the extent to which power and autonomy can be given to teachers. Headteachers cite accountability as the main factor that controls the extent to which they can distribute responsibilities. The budget is one thing that headteachers would not let go. Middle leaders and teachers endorsed the idea that there is a limit on the power and autonomy that can be distributed but they appear to understand the reason for this and are apparently satisfied.

## **Teamwork, collaboration and distributed leadership**

When asked how leadership was distributed in their schools, all respondents referred to working 'collaboratively in teams'. They all stated that they shared expertise in teams and that they practised 'team teaching' which according to one respondent was a means of achieving uniform standards across the school. This is clearly illustrated in the response by one headteacher who explained that:

At this school teachers work in phase teams. They work together, they team-teach. For example we have got in the school, two classes for each year group so they work together, plan together, share work and mark together so that it is standardised. So you don't have a very good teacher and a very poor teacher in one year. Expertise is shared so we have got standardisation across the year groups and across the phase groups (interviewee 4, headteacher).

This was highlighted by other respondents who reiterated that through teamwork there was sharing of expertise, which they believed, led to better quality of teaching and learning. A typical example of this was the response by one teacher:

I think teamwork benefits both teachers and students. I think it's very hard to work in isolation whatever you do. So if you are working together, you give each other confidence, you share expertise and that leads to better quality teaching and learning (interviewee 17, teacher).

Most teachers spoke of teamwork as something that gave them a sense of belonging and identifying with their school. They also spoke of 'being' happy and keeping a strong sense of purpose by working in teams as illustrated in the following statement by one teacher:

There is lots of working together and doing group work. And I think the whole school stands as a team. Like everyone here, I am very happy to be part of the school team, we all like to associate and identify with the school. It's a happy team. It's nice to be a part of a team you can work together and it makes things easy (interviewee 15, teacher).

Two of the respondents went further and explained that in addition to management, phase and subject teams they also have teams, which were formed for specific purposes. These could be for writing a new policy or curriculum change. In one school the headteacher explained that external agents are also involved in these temporary teams. This is illustrated in the following statement:

We might form a new team for example if we are writing a new policy about something. We also involve external agencies in our teams if we need their support. These might be psychologists, learning support workers or people who have knowledge in behavioural problems (interviewee 3, headteacher) .

This suggests that there is wider networking and collaboration.

When probed further about their roles in teams, all heads made it clear that they have a monitoring role because they had to make sure that there was effective teaching and learning. They all acknowledged that they would intervene if things were not going in the right direction. One headteacher emphasized that by distributing responsibilities to teams, she has not distributed accountability. The following quote from one headteacher serves to illustrate how headteachers reacted to teams that were not performing as expected:

In general you find yourself involved in some teams than others because some of them are not producing the outcomes. You get feedback from kids that teaching is not the best then you have to intervene (interviewee 1, headteacher).

The headteachers highlighted that some teams were very strong and collegial. That had a positive impact on teaching and learning in a particular subject according to the heads. As one headteacher put it:

Some teams have strong leaders and clear processes and systems of accountability; you have teams, which are effective and incredibly collegial for example performing arts. It's very collegial. They have a big impact across the school, the kids love the subject (interviewee 2, headteacher).

They also spoke of teams which are not so strong and slightly dysfunctional and members who are not modelling the outcomes as they should.

The success of teams was largely attributed to the ability of team leaders to engage with other team members. The team leader was expected to inspire and engage team members. This is clearly illustrated by a quote from one of the headteachers:

I think one of the biggest factors is the leader of the team. They must engage others their leadership style and how they treat others in the team. They must involve them, they must treat them equally and with respect. I try to be a role model in this respect but I might have my short falls (interviewee 4, headteacher).

Common to all was the notion that teamwork creates a sense of unity of purpose and enhances involvement and participation. Working in teams and getting involved "made us very enthusiastic" (interviewee 11, teacher) and "makes us feel that we own the teaching and learning programmes"(interviewee 13, teacher). Responses from many of the interviewees suggest that being a member of an achieving team motivates and "makes you want to achieve the best" (interviewee 15, teacher) because "you don't want to let down the team" (interviewee 18, teacher).

All the respondents were unanimous that there is time set aside for collaboration among teachers. This was seen as extension of teamwork. Time for collaboration was mainly made available through the time for planning

preparation and assessment (PPA). This can be seen in the following three examples:

All teachers have their PPA time, which we don't interfere with (interviewee 6, deputy head),

We all have PPA time where we usually spend together planning and doing all sorts of things to do with our teaching like all the year groups we plan together, what lessons to teach and what resources we need. So there is a lot of collaboration between year groups and we spend a lot of time together (interviewee 15, teacher),

and

There is PPA time, we plan together. Because we do it together, we got a lot of ideas from each other as well as expertise. It's effective because we teach the same way which benefits the pupils (interviewee 13, teacher).

## **Summary**

The evidence from the findings suggests that teamwork and collaboration are important elements that contribute to successful implementation of distributed leadership in schools. Through teamwork, teachers share ideas and expertise. All the participants in the study perceived the sharing of ideas and expertise as contributing to teacher motivation and better teaching and learning. It was also believed to give teachers a strong sense of belonging to both the small team at subject level and the whole school team. Responses from the interviewees, especially teachers, suggest that teamwork does not only foster a stronger bond with the school but also makes them develop a sense of ownership of the learning programme and spurs them to want to do better. The perception of the participants seems to be that by working collaboratively they share skills and expertise for the benefit of learners.

## **Benefits of distributed leadership**

When asked about what they perceived as the benefits of distributed leadership, the participants spoke of how it had made work easier for headteachers as well as motivating teachers. All the four headteachers stated that distributed leadership made their work easier, less stressful, gave them 'capacity to focus on more enjoyable aspects of the job' and that 'it keeps the organisation running effectively' (interviewee 2, headteacher). This headteacher also added that her work life balance had greatly improved since she started practising distributed leadership. This was supported by another headteacher who remarked that:

I no longer feel as tired as I used to be on most days. At least I have time to talk to my family and friends after work because I no longer carry my work home as I used to do. It gives me better peace of mind and I can switch off when I get home (interviewee 4, headteacher).

Headteachers expressed the benefits of distributed leadership not only in terms of their job but also of benefits for teachers. These included giving teachers the opportunity to innovate, discharging their duties more effectively, taking responsibility and developing professionally. This was clearly captured in the words of one headteacher as follows:

In terms of my work, my work is easier and less stressful. That might give me some capacity to focus on the more enjoyable aspects of the job. In terms of the staff I think they have a genuine influence, they can innovate and can develop professionally. Actually, maybe I am naïve, I should think people enjoy their role more, hence more motivated and they discharge their duties more effectively... And actually, I think if people are generally engaged in the process of leadership and management and decision- making, they develop partnership of the institution they are more into it and their commitment is possibly enhanced (interviewee 1, headteacher).

It was interesting to note that out of the 18 interviewees, 14 (including all the four headteachers) expressed the view that distributed leadership kept the organisation moving effectively. Equally common were the findings that most respondents acknowledged that the head could not do everything and that distributed leadership led to sharing of skills and exchange of ideas. The following examples illustrate how these findings were expressed by different interviewees ;

I think it works well because you don't have all the skills and knowledge in one person. It keeps the organisation running effectively. It's also about work load and work balance. I think headteachers can't and cannot claim it, can't do everything, so there is the need to distribute key aspects of the school because the job is far too big for one person (interviewee 2, headteacher),

Overall I think it is really effective because leadership roles are distributed to various people with specific responsibilities (interviewee 12, teacher)

and

If the head were to do absolutely everything, touch wood, he is not going out for a month, and we are going to fall to pieces because nobody would know how to pick it up. ...and distributed leadership allows a good exchange of ideas. More mouths are better than one and this creates a professional conversation in which the outcome may be completely different and much better than the original you started with because ideally development is part of sharing (interviewee 8, middle leader).

Creating a positive environment, a sustainable system and becoming more involved in the school were also raised as some of the benefits of distributed leadership. As one middle leader put it:

One of the biggest things is sustainability. The other thing is that it creates a positive environment, everybody has a place in the bigger picture and willing to contribute (interviewee 7, middle leader).

Many teachers appeared to be fully convinced that distributed leadership contributed significantly to effective school leadership. One teacher emphatically stated that:

I think it's the only way you can run a school because there are many aspects to leadership, you have to distribute the leadership because no one person can be in charge of everything (interviewee 13, teacher).

And another pointed out that “everybody has their little bit to look after, and it's much more organised and the whole school runs smoothly” (interviewee 17, teacher).

Teachers also found that with distributed leadership “there is always someone you can approach if there is a problem” (interviewee 11, teacher). It was not only the availability of someone to approach but also that one can choose who he/she is ‘happy’ and confident to approach that also made distributed leadership appealing to some teachers. For example one teacher noted that:

So it's really good because it's not one person in charge and you can approach someone whom you feel happy and confident to approach if you have a problem. I think there is more help because there are many people to approach (interviewee 12, teacher).

While most of the respondents highlighted the benefits of distributed leadership to teachers and headteachers and how it contributed to effective school leadership, 5 respondents went further and explained how it benefited the learners. They spoke of how genuine distributed leadership contributed to the ‘enjoyment of children’. A typical example was one headteacher who made a distinction between managing and leading. This was expressed as follows:

I think it's important to make a distinction between managing and leading. Managing I suppose is just making sure that everything that is supposed to happen is happening. Leading is a different thing altogether, it's about taking risks. Having the courage and conviction to take those risks for the enjoyment of children. And if you got that enjoyment we are getting them to get the idea that school is fun (interviewee 3, headteacher).

This suggests that with distributed leadership there is great potential for learners to enjoy the learning and teaching process.

Few of the participants (two headteachers) saw some negative aspects and problems with distributed leadership. They pointed out that its success depends on, among other things, the willingness of all staff to cooperate and carry out the distributed tasks as expected. This was linked to the ability of those to whom leadership was distributed to efficiently carry out the tasks. The heads also expressed the fear that they were ultimately held accountable so that affected what they distributed and the extent to which they distributed those responsibilities. Lack of time to perform the distributed duties was also cited as one of the problems affecting distributed leadership.

## **Summary**

The unequivocal message that came from all participants in the study was that distributed leadership made immense contribution to effective school leadership. This was achieved in different ways. For headteachers distributed leadership freed up time for them to do other duties, improved their work life balance and made their work enjoyable. For teachers it ensured that they were involved in the life of the school and this was perceived as contributing

to effective school leadership. Distributed leadership was also seen as making learning more enjoyable for the students.

## **Effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning**

### **Headteachers**

All the four headteachers were asked what they thought were the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning (see Appendix 2). The responses revealed common perceptions among the four headteachers that distributed leadership “would raise the attainment and achievement of pupils” (interviewee 2 headteacher), “confident teachers providing a very good quality education”, (interviewee 4, headteacher), “had a positive impact,” (interviewee 3, headteacher) and that “the overall impact has been to secure some improvements in standards of teaching and learning” (interviewee 1, headteacher). These responses suggest that there is consensus among headteachers that distributed leadership has led to improvement of teaching and learning in their schools. Headteachers saw the improvement as a result of motivated teachers who are empowered and becoming ‘role models of the children’.

The headteachers also perceived the improvement in teaching and learning through ‘innovative’ teachers who shared ‘the vision of the school’ with everyone sharing the ‘same aim and goals for the whole organisation and everybody will be working collaboratively towards those things’ (interviewee 2, headteacher). One headteacher was certain that distributed leadership

motivated teachers and that in turn led to better teaching and learning. This can be illustrated in his statement:

But certainly for the majority of the staff, engaging them in the process of management and leadership is quite a powerful motivating factor (interviewee 3, headteacher).

The overall perceived impact of distributed leadership on teaching and learning can be captured in the words of one of the headteachers in the following quotation:

I think if a teacher feels part of the institution he does role model, because teachers are powerful role models of the children. Kids do sort of spin off their behaviour. The kids will feel something special to be taught by the teachers who have a high level of enthusiasm, teachers who have been empowered. The kids will see the institution in a positive way. I also think that if you feel good about something you try harder, you become more confident. So I believe through distributed leadership, teachers develop a positive attitude and image of the institution. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that it motivates them to work better, become more innovative and resourceful (interviewee1, headteacher).

It was also evident from the above quotation that the impact of distributed leadership was not only seen in terms of improvement in educational standards but also in terms of improved behaviour among the pupils who saw the institution in a positive way. When probed further to give some examples to illustrate that distributed leadership was working in their schools, headteachers gave different accounts of things that applied to their respective schools. One headteacher reported that “if you go back three years where we didn’t have this (distributed leadership), teaching and learning at the school was satisfactory but now it is very good” (interviewee 3, headteacher ). The most significant achievement at that school, according to the headteacher was that the school has moved from the bottom in the authority to the top 2 percent nationally. This is clearly shown in the headteacher’s statement:

I haven't had a conversation with the teachers on their perception but I suppose some of it is implicit in the achievements and improvements we have made in the school. When I started this distributed leadership we were bottom in the authority but we are now in the top 2 per cent nationally for outstanding achievement, which is fantastic. I think it's also peer pressure from other members to say your subject is not doing well. I think staff have risen to the challenge (interviewee 3, headteacher).

He was not alone in stating achievements, which were attributed to distributed leadership. Another headteacher reported that she was proud because her school was 'rising from the bottom 1 percent of the authority' to a point where "at least 60 per cent of the children were getting to where they should be at the age of 11" (interviewee 4, headteacher). She also spoke of how her school has improved in the new way of writing phonetic teaching to a "a very developed way of reading which involves phonetics" and "great strides in SATS examinations".

The other two headteachers gave examples of improvement in some subjects as a result of distributed leadership. They noted that it varied significantly across the curriculum. As one headteacher put it:

Well standards across the school vary significantly. If you look at some curriculum areas, you will find that some teachers have a grip of their subject areas. They have a collegiality approach and good teams. You are beginning to see significant improvements in subjects like maths and performing arts (interviewee 1, headteacher )

Whilst acknowledging some improvements across the curriculum, one headteacher was quick to point out that it takes time for the results of distributed leadership to be noticed:

For me in terms of pupil performance in exams, if you are going to have improvement in results you are looking at 5-10years, not just 2-3 years. You have got to distribute leadership, you have got to emit it in every classroom. You have got to have teachers taking responsibility and

having the power to try to organise their curriculum to monitor it and assess it. To be able to do those, teachers must have power (interviewee 4, headteacher).

One of the headteachers went beyond the classroom and academic achievements in citing some examples to illustrate that distributed leadership is working in his school. He talked of the number of pupils remaining in education, reduction in teenage pregnancies and the number of kids getting socially accepted in the society. This was shown in the following statement:

I am not just talking of exam results; I am talking about the number of kids staying in education and getting employment, reducing the number of teenage pregnancies, you are talking about kids leaving school socially able to engage in the society. I know the government puts emphasis on exam results but we are looking at developing on individuals who can fit in society equipped with survival skills you need in the world (interviewee 1, headteacher).

### **Middle leaders**

Middle leaders were also asked the question about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. They responded in much the same way as headteachers. They said that by distributing leadership, you empower teachers and that can “then impact positively on learning and teaching” (interviewee 5, deputy headteacher). A common perception among middle leaders was that staff take ownership and deliver to their best and were kept well informed in the developments in their subject. Some typical comments were:

The leaders of the subjects keep up to date with the developments. They have time for curriculum meetings when they inform other staff about latest developments in their subject or policy. So staff take ownership and staff deliver what they have been trained in (interviewee 5, deputy headteacher).

and

Everybody has got better understanding and we all work towards a common goal. Teachers know the expectations of the school. It's a vital model. Everyone feels valued and we achieve together (interviewee 7, deputy headteacher).

Every middle leader underscored the need for having common goals as something that develops with distributed leadership. In addition to the above statements this was reiterated as follows:

So it impacts positively because we work together in the school as a team. Everyone sings the same song about the curriculum and the children know where they are going as well (interviewee 6, deputy headteacher).

One of the middle leaders, like another headteacher noted that distributed leadership impacted positively on teaching and learning because "it has enforced good behaviour in children, it has enforced a wonderful environment for children to learn in" (interviewee 9, deputy headteacher)

Some middle leaders pointed out that distributed leadership made teachers feel "valued and involved" and that motivated them to teach to their best potential. A typical comment was from one deputy headteacher who fervently supported distributed leadership as follows:

I think I would personally hate to work in a school where there is no distributed leadership because you can't teach properly if you are undervalued, but with distributed leadership you are valued and you do your job to your best potential. In our school all personnel are now enthused about what they do and that of course has a positive effect on teaching and learning (interviewee 8, deputy headteacher).

## **Teachers**

In response to the question on the impact of distributed leadership on teaching and learning, a number of teachers mentioned that "it makes a happy

environment for children and teachers” (interviewee 13, teacher) “it builds on peoples’ skills and expertise” (interviewee 14, teacher) and that “teachers benefit from sharing ideas and expertise” (interviewee 16, teacher).

Teachers also stated that distributed leadership was useful for helping new teachers as a way of induction and offering support. This is illustrated in the following comment:

Those who are new to the school or system get a lot of support from others; it makes life easy for everyone, teachers and students (interviewee 17, teacher).

Responses from other teachers suggested that distributed leadership has made teaching enjoyable for teachers as they experiment with new methods.

This is illustrated by the following remarks by one of the teachers:

I think obviously with teaching, we try new ways, which we think benefit pupils. We discuss these in our staff and team meetings. When we go out to pupils we find that they work better. We also enjoy using the new methods (interviewee 18, teacher).

Like headteachers and middle leaders, teachers saw “a positive effect” (interviewee 14, teacher) and “a huge improvement in the school especially in the children’s education and learning” (interviewee 17, teacher) as a result of distributed leadership. They also cited role clarity as yet another distinct aspect, which made a positive impact on teaching and learning. In particular they noted that “teachers tend to be better prepared and know their job roles better” (interviewee 15, teacher) and that the achievement of children is improving in the schools “because roles have been modified” (interviewee 17, teacher).

One teacher perceived a happy teacher as capable of inspiring the children to enjoy the learning process. She succinctly expressed this as follows:

I think it is always more inspiring for the child to be taught by someone who has a passion for their teaching. This benefits the pupils and I think the greatest benefit is that they are taught by teachers who are happy, well prepared and all working for the same goal (interviewee 15, teacher).

## **Summary**

All participants in the study shared similar perceptions about the impact of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. The overall picture was that it has a positive impact on teaching and learning because it created motivated, confident and innovative teachers. This has a positive impact on learners because teachers did their work to the best of their abilities. Headteachers attributed a number of achievements at their schools to distributed leadership. These include better achievement in examinations, good behaviour of children, schools moving up in local and national achievements and producing children who are socially acceptable in society.

## **Changes and teacher involvement**

There was consensus among the four head teachers in the study that all teachers were involved in all changes in the schools. They all stated that before introducing changes in the school, they involved all staff through whole school meetings or department meetings. The following statements are examples of this:

We don't introduce something without involving teachers, especially curriculum changes if we have got any curriculum development or change, we identify a teacher day for it and we will talk about it, we will trial it (interviewee 2, headteacher)

and

We can't throw in something and say do it. No, we have got to involve all the staff from the start and in the end they will say it's our initiative. They will support it and own it (interviewee 4, head teacher);

Most of the teachers who were interviewed confirmed that they were indeed involved before changes were introduced. Many reported that most changes came from them and that they get involved very much in the implementation of the curriculum. Others reported that at the level of the department the teachers' views are valued and talked about. This goes for any changes in the school. The level of teacher involvement varied from school to school but the general view from the teachers was that they are involved in changes in the school and that head teachers want ideas from the staff. As one teacher aptly put it:

The head will always want to get ideas. She is always interested in what we think. She doesn't like to do it alone. We always make suggestions and the head listens but ultimately she decides on what is best for the school. But I think it's a fair way of leadership, it's democratic. It's a good way of running a school because all roles are shared and everybody feels valued (interviewee 12, teacher).

In spite of the consensus about involvement in school changes that emerged, there were a few discordant voices, who said that they were only made to feel as if they were involved yet things would have been decided by senior management. They felt that they only endorsed decisions made by senior management. Two of the interviewees from different schools were particularly critical about how decisions were made. One of them expressed her dissatisfaction as follows:

Eh... I don't think we are involved as much as we should .I think we are sometimes made to feel as though we are involved. I think sometimes

they (senior leadership) decide what they want to do and they ask us our opinion but actually they have decided what they want to do. So we are at times made to believe that we have a say in what goes on in the school yet that is decided by senior management. (interviewee13, teacher).

The other teacher who was also equally critical about how decisions were made said:

But overall they were very much decided by senior management team and then fed down to us. We have a small amount of input because things are very much decided before we got a chance to give our opinion (interviewee 17, teacher).

One middle leader appeared to acknowledge this when he said:

Teachers are not involved as much as they should, but again that's something gradually happening. We are taking it in stages (interviewee 9, middle leader).

However his remarks did not suggest disgruntlement as appears to be the case with the two teachers cited above.

The views of the two interviewees who were critical about how decisions are made have something in common with other teachers who said they were happy; they all point out that the heads make the final decisions in any discussion. Although most of the teachers were "happy" to be involved in the school changes, it was noted that they all acknowledged that "ultimately they (heads and senior management) make decisions in the best interest of the school and teachers" (interviewee 15, teacher), "we make suggestions to the leadership but if they say no, that's it" (interviewee 14), and "ultimately she decides on what is best for the school" (interviewee16, teacher). One deputy head teacher was clear and empathetic about this:

We discuss it with the staff further. It's the head teacher and the senior management team who have the final say. That's our policy and we expect staff to follow it (interviewee 5, deputy headteacher).

### **Training and its relationship with distributed leadership**

Training was identified as one of the main ways of implementing changes through distributed leadership. In three of the four schools that participated in the study, teachers were involved in training, and this was mainly school based. The training depended on identified programmes or individual needs, which could be a whole school programme, departmental or individual need. New programmes were trialled after "a teacher day" then discussed again after being trialled and the "decisions are framed by their professional development through training" ( interviewee 2, head teacher).

The training varied from school to school. One school involved an external trainer for their change initiative and the way the head teacher described it suggests great commitment. Part of her description of the training programme clearly shows her commitment:

Well as I said in the example about writing, that was a massive way of changing the way we teach writing, that was right from reception to year 6. So we had a training day. We brought in a trainer at quite a huge expense to the school. We had a whole day on it. Then we had the following week at the staff meeting. Teachers went away to talk about it and a week later we met again to discuss their worries and concerns before they started the new way of writing. We had weekly reviews to see if it was working or not (interviewee 4, head teacher).

Most of the changes and the training that followed centred on curriculum issues. Teachers talked of their school being "very flexible in the way we teach as long as we hit the objective of the main curriculum (interviewee 13, teacher), and that "teachers were involved very much in the implementation of

the curriculum” (interviewee 7, middle leader). The curriculum issues were either centralised if they affected the whole school or decentralised to departments if they were considered small. As one interviewee explained:

If it is a big school curriculum change, then we discuss it as a school. However if it is a small curriculum change for example, the history topics being swapped around, then that would be a faculty decision, so that would be an autonomous faculty decision ( interviewee 3, headteacher).

This prominence given to the curriculum by all the interviewees in this study suggests that teaching and learning form part of the core business of the school.

Common to all schools was that most of the communication was through staff meetings. Staff meetings were held weekly in some schools while in some schools it was every fortnight. However it varied depending on the business to be discussed but in general it was from one to two weeks. Interviewees spoke of “time spent in staff meetings”, “we have faculty meetings every week so there is specified time for those meetings” and “ it is first discussed in a staff meeting.” Many teachers mentioned that senior management “give us feedback in staff meetings” The frequency of the staff meetings in all schools suggests that it is one of the effective ways of communication being used.

## **Summary**

The findings show that schools in the study involve teachers in change initiatives as a way of making them feel that they are part of and own the initiatives. This is perceived as one of the ways of enhancing the success of distributed leadership. In principle this also suggests a democratic approach to school leadership. However, other teachers felt that their involvement is

peripheral because they are given a false sense of involvement They claimed that they are consulted as mere formality when decision have actually been made by senior management. Even those who were “ happy” with the way changes were implemented acknowledged that the final decisions are made by senior management. In most cases the staff were trained before the changes were introduced.

### **Capacity building and distributed leadership**

When answering the interview question: What do you see as the benefits of distributed leadership to the heads, teachers and students?, many interviewees invariably mentioned capacity building. As a follow up question, interviewees were asked how they thought distributed leadership enhanced capacity building. All the four head teachers referred to “grooming future leaders”, giving everyone experience and developing people’s confidence. One head teacher gave a scenario where if “I dropped dead today, the school must continue” (interviewee 3, head teacher). In this scenario she emphasized that by distributing leadership, “you develop teachers professionally and avoid a situation where you will have a vacuum at some point in time”. The headteachers’ perceptions of capacity building through distributed leadership focused mainly on “developing teachers professionally”, giving “them an opportunity to practice leading”, “building their confidence”, giving “them hands on experience” and making them feel “they have greater ownership.” This can be shown in the following statements:

It’s also about giving them autonomy to lead and develop professionally. It’s again also about identifying and developing potential future leaders and giving them the opportunity to practise leading in specific areas. By

so doing you boost their confidence and give them hands on experience (interviewee 2, head teacher),

and that;

It is also capacity building, and it encourages them to be strategic, to be forward thinking to understand the process and consequences as well as outcomes and to see the bigger picture. I think it also sets them roles for the future (interviewee 4, head teacher).

Another head added two other dimensions to capacity building; sustainable schools and developing “that culture of succession”. This is shown in the following statement:

If you are going to have a school that is sustainable, and when I say sustainable I mean that if it remains effective, if it is going to develop, move forward and be able to take on board initiative and development whether they are national or internal, you have to have self-generating sustainable capacity. And also to a degree development of succession so that when you move on you have people ready to move in. I think in a way that’s what distributed leadership will achieve in the end, develop capacity, involve and engage people in leadership and management any you wont have a crisis when a head moves on (interviewee 1, headteacher).

Middle leaders and teachers also confirmed that distributed leadership enhanced their confidence as a way of capacity building. This was shown by interviewees who said that with responsibilities “a lot of the times when you move up your career and stand in front of people you become more confident” (interviewee 8, middle leader). They also noted that distributed leadership enhanced their capacity by exposing them to “decision making, exercising control, teaching you leadership and building your confidence” (interviewee 12, teacher)

Several teachers mentioned that because of distributed leadership they were able to use their skills and expertise in different areas. They referred to

building on people's skills and expertise "as a way of capacity building" and as something which "makes the job enjoyable when you use your expertise" (interviewee 13, teacher)

Out of the 8 teachers interviewed, 5 thought that it was a chance to prove one's when responsibilities are distributed. As a result they viewed it as a developmental process in their career. Interestingly, only one teacher out of all the interviewees appeared to be least confident to take up responsibilities.

This is shown in her statement:

But I always feel exposed because I am not sure if the decision I have made is right or wrong. The senior management always support me but I find it hard, it's better to be told what to do (interviewee 15, teacher).

With the exception of one, all teachers did not openly express their intention of being senior leaders. Even the teacher who referred to leadership was not very explicit in stating her intentions. This can be shown in her statement; "Getting involved in something regularly gives you that experience, and who knows one day you can end up a head teacher" (interviewee 18, teacher).

## **Summary**

Headteachers in this study perceived distributed leadership as a way of capacity building where teachers were groomed for leadership and even take over in the event of the headteacher's immediate departure. The focus of capacity building according to the headteachers is to develop teachers' professionally, building their confidence, giving them hands on experience and sustainability. Middle leaders and teachers also stated that distributed

leadership enhanced their capacity by exposing them to leadership and decision making.

### **Barriers to distributed leadership**

In response to the question about what they encountered as barriers to distributed leadership, the majority of the interviewees stated that time was a barrier. Although time was mentioned as a barrier, there were differences in perceptions on how it affected distributed leadership. For teachers, there was 'very little time to do the distributed responsibilities' because of their teaching loads Middle leaders also found little time for the distributed responsibilities, and they thought teachers were not affected in the same way because they had less responsibility. For example;

I also think time is a constraint in distributed leadership. Perhaps classroom teachers have less management time because they have less distributed responsibilities. But the further up you go, the less and less time you got to do it. ( interviewee 9, middle leader)

and that:

The biggest barrier for any distributed leadership is being able to do what you have to do, so time can be a barrier because most of the time is taken up with teaching duties. So that leaves very little time for other roles like ensuring that subjects are run well, meetings are held. So I suppose time is the biggest barrier. (interviewee 7, middle leader)

In contrast, headteachers did not appear to see lack of time as a problem but expressed that distributed leadership takes time to be fully operational. As one headteacher put it:

So it takes time and that might be a bit of a down side but it still needs to be done. So really I don't think there is any disadvantage, it's the right way of doing things (interviewee 4, headteacher).

The competence of the people to whom responsibilities were to be delegated was cited as one of the barriers. This was expressed in various ways as shown in the following examples:

I think it's about the competence of those to whom you distribute the leadership. I think if you are going to let go, you have to feel comfortable and confident that these people are able and willing not just to do the job but also to account for it and that takes time. (interviewee 1, headteacher)

and that:

Distributing responsibility to someone who might not be able to do it is quite difficult but its something you have to do so that they develop professionally (interviewee 5, middle leader).

In some cases it was reported that other teachers were finding 'it extremely difficult to cope' and the responsibilities were redistributed that again takes time as they have to start again.

All the four headteachers in the study raised accountability as a barrier to distributed leadership. Whilst teachers were accountable in their areas, the "buck stops with the head as she is responsible for the overall picture of the school" (interviewee 7, middle leader).

That heads are pre-occupied with accountability is further illustrated by the following examples:

But ultimately the accountability rests with me so it affects true and genuine distribution (interviewee 2, headteacher),

and that:

Ultimately if there is a complaint from a parent or a leak to the press or severe health and safety incident in the school, the only person who is accountable is the headteacher. (interviewee 3, headteacher).

One headteacher observed that “there is an assumption that people want to be distributed to yet that was not necessarily the case” (interviewee, 1 headteacher). Others also noted that some people want to be given clear guidance. As a result this created problems in the distributing leadership roles because some people would decline, preferring to concentrate on their teaching duties.

The other barrier to distributed leadership was linked to the historical set up of schools in England where headteachers gave instructions. This was aptly captured by one headteacher who stated that:

Headteachers and senior management are historically hierarchical, wanting to make decisions and giving instructions. I think it’s an obstacle (interviewee 4, headteacher).

Despite these barriers to distributed leadership, there was overwhelming consensus that distributed leadership is potentially the best leadership approach.

## **Summary**

The study revealed four barriers to distributed leadership as perceived by headteachers, middle leaders and teachers. These are time, competence of teachers, unwillingness of some teachers to have distributed responsibilities and the historical set up of schools in England. Time was seen as a barrier because teachers and middle leaders were occupied by their teaching duties and as a result had little time for other duties. Other teachers were unwilling to do other duties, preferring to do teaching duties only. Heads saw time as a barrier because they argued that it takes time for distributed leadership to be

fully operational. The historical set up of schools in England was seen as a barrier because traditionally headteachers are used to making decisions and giving instructions without involving other people. Again this takes time for some headteachers to adjust to the new approach to school leadership.

### **Models of distributed leadership**

When asked if there was any model of distribution followed, most of the interviewees discussed staffing structures and management teams in their schools. This is evidenced by statements like “what we have in school in the school is a staffing structure” (interviewee 6, middle leader), “we have got a staffing structure of head, deputy head, deputy head, assistant head teacher” (interviewee 4, head teacher)

and:

In our school we have got the head and deputy then we have got an assistant head. They form the main structure of our senior management team. Then we have got faculty managers who are incorporated in that management team. (interviewee 17, teacher).

One interviewee explained that the head, deputy and phase leaders “ would hold most of the senior posts in the school (interviewee 4, head teacher). This set up was common to almost all the schools and clearly reveals a hierarchical structure of leadership within the schools. Only one interviewee referred to the “hierarchy of leadership in the school” (interviewee 7, middle leader).

While the common leadership structure in almost all schools was based on management teams, there appeared to be no formal model that was followed.

Although most of the interviewees did not specifically acknowledge this, one was explicit and stated that:

We don't follow any model, we just made our approach based on people's strengths and skills. We have a small group in the management team. So really it's like a pyramid effect where the main persons are at the top and other persons feed information (interviewee 3, head teacher).

While management teams were a recurring theme in terms of leadership distribution, each school appeared to have its own criteria for distribution. People were selected to leadership positions on the basis of their skills, interests and experience: "...giving roles to people who meet set criteria and certain skills to offer. It is not only about skills but it is also about interests and experience." (interviewee 18, teacher).

For some schools distribution was based on "ability to engage with people" (interviewee 1, head teacher), people who "got specific strengths" (interviewee 3, head teacher) and "people who are good with people and assertive" (interviewee 7, middle leader). Others put emphasis on "areas of expertise" (interviewee 4, head teacher) and the "ability to motivate others" (interviewee 8, middle leader) in the distribution of leadership.

While acknowledging that "we put trust on these leaders" (interviewee 6, middle leaders) one middle leader stated that many people were given a chance:

However we do not always choose people that we trust. We give other people a chance to shine, and actually show us what they can do. So we have a mix (interviewee 6, middle leader).

Without referring to it as a formal model, one school emerged as having a

systematic way of distributing leadership. The school leadership approaches teachers whom they think “might be able and interested” (interviewee 5, middle leader). These teachers are offered leadership then given a week to think about it. This is clearly illustrated in the following statement:

The whole idea is that you talk to staff, give them time to think about it because actually if you give a role to a person who hates it they might not do it or enjoy it. In an ideal world you have to trust them (interviewee, 1 headteacher).

Once the teacher has been given responsibilities the senior leader will “let them do it without interfering” but only “point out a few things and advise” in a professional way. The teacher is left to grow professionally while carrying out new responsibilities. This suggests that there is gradual distribution of responsibilities at this school.

## **Summary**

The findings show that there is no formal model of distribution that is followed at these schools. However, there are some common trends which emerged from these findings. First, distribution is based on management teams. Second, leadership is distributed according to teachers’ strengths like expertise, ability to motivate others and ability to engage others. Third, some heads distribute leadership to teachers they trust while others give everyone a chance. Fourth, teachers to whom leadership is distributed are given time to develop and they are given these in small measures at a time which suggests that it is gradual and incremental.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, findings from the interviews with headteachers, middle leaders and teachers were presented. As outlined above, the respondents had different meanings of the term distributed leadership. However, it was clear that the term was associated with empowerment, sharing of ideas and expertise, capacity development team work and collaboration. All respondents in the study share the view that distributed leadership has a positive impact on teaching and learning. Headteachers perceived distributed leadership as capable of motivating teachers who as a result deliver their best to the learners. The study identified some barriers to distributed leadership. These include lack of time, unwillingness of some teachers to take up distributed roles and that some headteachers are not willing to distribute more responsibilities because of accountability. Although the interviewees stated that they do not follow any models of distribution, the way distributed leadership is practised in these schools suggest patterns of distribution that are akin to some models.

The next chapter discusses these findings, linking them to the literature review and the research questions of this study.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion of the findings**

### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the discussion of the findings that were presented in the previous chapter. The discussion links the findings to the literature review and identifies some emergent themes. The chapter has three main sections. The first section summarises the main themes identified from the findings. The second section addresses each of the three research questions of this study. A summary is presented at the end of each research question to highlight the perceptions of the participants about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning and the emergent themes. Finally, in the third section the emergent overarching themes are presented.

### **The main themes**

This present study revealed the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. It also highlighted their perceptions and understanding of the term distributed leadership. The study also revealed models of distribution that are practised in the schools that participated in the study.

### **The research questions**

#### **Research question 1**

What are the perceptions of (a) headteachers (b) middle leaders and (c) teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning?

This research question was answered in two phases for the purpose of clarity.

Firstly, I examined the responses to the interview question about what the interviewees understood by the term distributed leadership (see Appendix 2). Secondly, I examined their perceptions about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning.

### **Headteachers' perceptions**

The perceptions of the four headteachers about the effects of distributed on teaching and learning were first highlighted in their responses to the interview question: What do you understand by the term distributed leadership?

Headteachers' view of distributed leadership was that among other things, it is leadership that empowers others to engage in management, gives others the power to make decisions and that it is shared responsibility. These responses concur with earlier findings from the literature like 'shared leadership' (Southworth, 2002), 'involvement of many rather than few in leadership tasks' (Harris, 2004) and 'leadership that is stretched over multiple leaders' (Spillane, 2006). As the findings from this study reveal, the headteachers gave prominence to empowerment of their staff and they saw this as a way of ensuring successful implementation of distributed leadership and motivating staff.

It appears that empowerment was seen as one of the important pre-requisites for distributed leadership to work in practice. But this also implies a top-down approach to distributed leadership because the heads in this study distributed leadership from the top. Thus in practice, the power dynamics in the participating schools is through formal authority and control of resources

whereby heads exert their influence by devolving responsibilities through formal structures.

One headteacher stressed that distributed leadership entails spreading responsibilities across the school, ensuring that everybody has something to say and that she is not 'autocratically at the top'. Her views seem to challenge the 'great man' theory of leadership (Muijs and Harris, 2007) and she is in favour of more distributed forms of leadership in which all staff are involved. There is evidence from the literature which criticises the idea of equating leadership in schools solely with headship (Storey, 2004; DFEE 1997, 1998, 1998; Southworth, 2002). The headteachers in this study made it clear that they prefer leadership that is distributed across the school. The literature supports the finding that leadership needs to be distributed across the school. For instance, Spillane (2004) makes this quite clear by pointing out that distributed leadership is best understood as a practice distributed over leaders, followers and their institution. Similarly, Goleman (2002) notes that when leadership is distributed, it 'resides not solely in the individual at the top' (p.140) but is spread across the organisations. It is also clear here that Goleman's (2002) view that leadership must not reside in one individual at the top accords with the perception of one of the headteachers who reported that she is not autocratically at the top.

While most of the literature reviewed in this study recognises distributed leadership as an alternative approach to the heroic leader model, findings from this study reveal that the latter model of leadership is silently present in

schools. Despite pronouncements by heads that they distribute leadership across the school, they still remain in control and accountable. The majority of middle leaders and teachers expressed the need for formally recognised leaders who provide a clear vision and monitor progress. The interviewees stated the need for an inspirational and visionary leader to cultivate the culture of distributed leadership. I would argue that this has resonance with the heroic leader model where power, influence and personal traits of the head like charisma play a role. Furthermore, this finding reveals competing tensions for heads as regards the practice of distributed leadership: the ideal versus reality. In this case the ideal is that heads want to distribute responsibilities across the school but the reality is that it is devolved.

Two of the headteachers expressed their view of distributed leadership in terms of management structure of the school. Like Oduro (2004), both leaders emphasized that leadership was distributed and not the monopoly of one person. While headteachers had some common themes in their understanding of the term distributed leadership, there were variations on how it was practised at their schools. This showed resonances with MacBeath's (2005) study which aimed to explore the practical expression of what distributed leadership means in the day to day life of schools.

It is clear from analysis of the four headteachers' responses that the purpose of distributing leadership is to enhance the learning outcomes of the students. This appears to be covered in the leadership for learning concept (see Rhodes and Brundrett (2010)). The acknowledgment and emphasis by

headteachers in this study that teachers need to be empowered and to be accountable through distributed leadership underscores the importance of achieving better outcomes for the learners. Thus the heads perceive distributed leadership as a form of leadership that contributes to improved learner outcomes.

Equally significant and relevant to the heads' responses is MacBeath and Dempster's (2009) argument that there are five major principles that underpin leadership; these being shared or distributed leadership, a focus on learning, creation of the conditions favourable for learning, creation of dialogue about leadership and learning and the establishment of a shared sense of accountability. Findings from the study support this argument as detailed in the headteachers' views of the term distributed leadership.

Given the bureaucratic nature of schools and that power, authority and control of resources remain largely with heads and those in formal leadership positions, leadership practices appear to be at odds with the principles of distributed leadership. In such circumstances the notion of a shared sense of accountability remains an idealistic fantasy which is yet to be achieved. However, the findings reveal participants' desire and intention to operate within the principles and premise of distributed leadership.

When stating what they understood by the term distributed leadership, all the four headteachers spoke of how distributing responsibilities made everybody feel part of the school. Middle leaders and teachers also agreed that

distributed leadership made them feel part of the school. Making teachers part of the school does not only encourage teacher leadership but also promotes high levels of teacher involvement (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2006). The headteachers' reference to involvement in decision making has a striking similarity with Allen's (2004) study which identifies four types of teachers' voices; voting voice, delegated voice, dialogical voice and advisory voice which apply when teachers contribute to decision-making in the school. There is further evidence from the literature which suggests that distributing leadership encourages teacher leadership and involvement in decision-making (Bezzina, 2008; Danielson, 2006; Leithwood, 2006). This is clearly demonstrated in the findings as the headteachers spoke of how teachers got involved in many aspects of the school and contributed to decision-making.

Although not all the four headteachers specifically mentioned accountability, they referred to it in their definitions of distributed leadership. However, one headteacher made it abundantly clear that 'in distributing leadership you also distribute accountability as well.' He also stated that if people do not have accountability the chances of achieving desired outcomes are very low. This concurs with MacBeath and Dempster (2009) who view a shared sense of accountability as one of the five major principles that underpin leadership for learning (see also Bush, 2008). It is quite clear from headteachers' view of distributed leadership that accountability is perceived as leading to improved student outcomes because every teacher has ownership of the teaching and learning programme and is ultimately responsible for the outcomes. As stated

in the findings, teachers and middle leaders did not want to own something that was a failure so by being empowered to own the teaching and learning process they reported that they were motivated to do their best in order to achieve the best teaching and learning outcomes. Heads also perceived empowerment as something that motivated staff. This perception of distributed leadership where accountability mechanisms enhance teacher empowerment appears to stem from the national standards for heads of schools (DFES, 2004; Ofsted, 2005). However, it is pertinent to point out that empowerment should not be viewed as a commodity to be given out but as a change in the social relationship between individuals.

It was evident that leadership distribution is a formal and top-down process whereby decision-making authority was devolved via formally designated channels. This was from the head, deputy, senior teachers and heads of department to teachers. Thus accountability for any devolved functions was vested in the holders of formal leadership positions. Despite statements by heads that they distributed accountability, findings from this study reveal that this is more of aspiration rather than reality because this was devolved through top-down processes with holders of formal positions remaining accountable.

It was clear from two of the headteachers that their perception of distributed leadership was that it was based on staffing or management structure which consisted of head, deputy head and assistant head. This had close accordance with MacBeath's (2005) argument that 'this formal process of

distribution has the advantage of landing a high degree of security, not only to staff who occupy those formal roles but also to other staff who, as a result, know where they stand' (p.358). Thus the two headteachers' perception of distributed leadership fit well with MacBeath's formal distribution in the taxonomy of leadership distribution.

### **Middle leaders**

While all six middle leaders in the study defined distributed leadership in terms of leadership hierarchy, a close analysis of their statements reveals similarities with headteachers' perceptions of distributed leadership. In addition to management structure the middle leaders talked of distributing responsibility to teams, having people accountable, and working towards a common purpose. This is well supported by Jackson (2004) who argues that apart from empowering people, distributed leadership must align people towards common purposes (p.2). The view of the middle leaders wholly accord with Hall's (2001) argument that when staff work as a team, they become involved, empowered and committed to achieving a common goal. Equally, Wallace (2001) stresses the importance of working in teams and also Harris (2007) points out that 'everybody feels part of the decision-making process' (p.117).

Although headteachers distribute and share responsibilities among staff, findings from the study show that they remain in control. One of the middle leaders in the study makes this point when she says that the headteacher shares that responsibility but still manages to feel and control it'. This

suggests that the headteacher can distribute responsibilities but still remains in control. Evidence from the literature points out that because of legislative and accountability related issues, the headteacher will always remain answerable even when he/she distributes leadership (Spillane, 2004; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007).

From what heads and middle leaders say about distributed leadership, it is evident that both top-down and bottom-up processes are needed not just as an ideal but for distributed leadership to have the desired effects on teaching and learning. What is evident from this research is that the practice of distributed leadership is largely dependent on holders of formal leadership positions. However, the study reveals the presence of bottom- up and emergent leadership.

### **Teachers**

Teachers seemed to share the same perceptions of distributed leadership with middle leaders. Apart from mentioning the management structure of the school, they referred to distribution of subjects, extra curricular activities and 'giving everybody that extra something to make sure that they are contributing to the whole school and not in just in class' (interviewee 13, teacher). Even those who had no formal leadership roles, perceived themselves as leaders because they were in charge of their classes. This corresponds with Rutherford's (2005) argument that if school leadership is to be effective, it must include contributions from the rest of the workforce. Similarly Spillane (2006) observes that in addition to heads, deputies and other middle leaders,

teachers take responsibility for leadership routines and functions. Spillane's (2006) argument that, with distributed leadership, 'individuals who had no formal leadership position also took responsibility for leadership functions' (p. 32) is supported by findings in this study. For instance, one teacher volunteered to take on extra responsibilities like getting the school to re-cycle and doing environmentally friendly projects. This finding illustrates MacBeath's (2005) taxonomy when leadership is cultural where leadership is assumed rather than given. Thus teachers who have no formal leadership positions have an opportunity to lead and this is one potential example of bottom-up influence. The majority of the teachers (6 out of 8) in the study said they enjoyed distributed responsibilities and they were happy to contribute to team meetings where they brought up new ideas about teaching and learning as well as new initiatives.

Apart from the example of re-cycling mentioned above, other initiatives cited by teachers include experimenting with new teaching methods, school based sports competitions, drama and quiz days. These were aimed at promoting pupil participation, introduce variety and to learning and to motivate pupils. The teachers in this study reported that heads gave approval for such activities.

From this finding, it is clear that there were both bottom-up and top-down processes because the initial ideas came from the teachers but they had to be approved from above before they could be implemented. Thus this study has found that for effective implementation of distributed leadership, there is a

need to strike some form of balance between the bottom-up and top-down processes. However, this depends on the task involved; a devolved approach where leadership is orchestrated from the top would be more acceptable to heads when finance and the core curriculum are involved and an emergent approach for initiatives cited above was initiated by teachers. What the teachers said about introducing and leading new initiatives point to more bottom-up and emergent processes of collaborative and informal leadership whereby those without any formal leadership positions took on responsibilities. Leadership in areas like sports, development of teaching methods and other school based activities was represented by those teachers without formal leadership positions as spontaneous, opportunistic and emergent rather than formally devolved.

Some literature evidence indicates that distributed leadership is growing in popularity and indeed as Gronn (2006) observes, 'its time has come' (p.1). However, despite the increasing popularity of distributed leadership and support from participants in this study, some studies suggest that distributed leadership is problematic. For instance, Hartley (2007) asserts that, 'distributed leadership admits some confusion: its conceptual elasticity is considerable' (p.202). He further notes that this lack of conceptual clarity does not allow for a clear conceptualisation of the concept in conceptual terms (p.220). Even more striking, the literature highlights that despite its increasing popularity there is very little evidence of direct causal relationship between distributed leadership and student learning outcomes though it is thought that there is an indirect casual effect (Hallinger and Heck, 2003). But Leithwood et

al, (2006) appear to contradict this in the fifth 'strong claim' in which they state 'school leadership has greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed' (p.12). This study did not set out to look for this relationship but rather to explore the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. However, it is pertinent to refer to this as all the interviewees expressed the perception that distributed leadership contributes to improved learner outcomes. From the way they defined the term distributed leadership, all interviewees showed support for a leadership approach which is shared across the school. Although they had a common perception of leadership, there were variations in which leadership was conceived largely dependent on the task and position of individual; that is whether one was in formal leadership or had no formal leadership position.

## **Effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning**

### **Headteachers' perceptions**

The four headteachers shared the common perception that distributed leadership had a positive effect on teaching and learning. This was evident from statements like distributed leadership would 'raise the attainment and achievement of pupils' (interviewee, 2 headteacher), 'confident teachers providing very good quality education' (interviewee 4, headteacher) and 'the overall effect has been to secure some improvements in the standard of teaching and learning' (interviewee 1, headteacher). Additionally the headteachers believed that distributed leadership has led to school improvement. Their perceptions accord with research findings which have led

to the acceptance that leadership development is a key component of school improvement (Bush, 2008). However, despite the heads' perception that distributed leadership leads to school improvement and raising the attainment of pupils, the literature evidence suggests that school heads improve teaching and learning indirectly through their influence on staff motivation, development, well-being and working conditions (Rhodes and Brundrett, 2010). Similarly, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) argue that the effects of heads on student outcomes are largely indirect but the heads improve student learning by influencing the adults who affect the learning more directly.

The headteachers in the study appeared to be convinced that one major effect of distributing leadership was that it motivated teachers. Their perceptions were that teachers got a sense ownership and job satisfaction. From the accounts given by headteachers, it seems the motivation was seen by the way teachers readily co-operated with senior leadership, taught their students well and participated in all school activities including taking up responsibilities voluntarily. The study did not find any evidence of coercion as neither those in formal leadership posts nor teachers referred to it. Instead all interviewees except two teachers portrayed a particularly strong culture of working together, happy and satisfied staff and a sense of belonging and shared purpose. Despite this, two of the teachers thought that the decisions were made by senior management and they just implemented them. It appears that from the heads' perspective, distributed leadership was seen as an approach that helped to create an enabling environment in which others can feel empowered to take action. They perceived motivated teachers as

being innovative and sharing the vision of the school with everyone. As the literature findings suggest, teachers are motivated when they are involved (Danielson 2006; Muijs and Harris, 2007) and they would channel all their efforts towards the central mission of the school; teaching and learning (Stoll, 2004).

Empowerment of teachers was repeatedly singled out by headteachers as one of the important things resulting from distributed leadership. The heads' perceptions were that when teachers are empowered they perform better, they develop a positive view of the institution, and they become resourceful and that they feel part of the institution. There are several citations from the literature which support these findings. For instance, Sheppard (1996), Spillane (2004) and Blasé (2004) advocate that successful instructional leaders talk to their teachers about their instruction, encourage collaboration between teachers and empower teachers to foster decision-making. Similarly, Belhiah (2007) argues that empowerment is a means of giving teachers the opportunity to experience a sense of ownership to lead aspects of school changes and innovation.

The heads' perceptions outlined above highlight the ideal scenario that these formal leaders aspire to. There is evidently a desire for genuine teacher involvement yet the way distributed leadership is practised points to devolution of responsibilities. Judging from the way distributed leadership is practised in schools, it can be argued that it is primarily a rhetoric device; it appears to offer an ideal to which headteachers, middle leaders and teachers

can aspire while greater powers remain in the hands of those in formal leadership positions.

Some headteachers gave examples of improvements which they attributed to distributed leadership. In particular, heads believed that the improvements came about because distributed leadership helped to motivate teachers who in turn taught with enthusiasm, employed new methods which were believed to motivate learners. The improvements cited include raising the standard of teaching from satisfactory to very good, the school moving from the bottom in the authority to the top 2 percent nationally for outstanding achievement, the school rising from the bottom 1 percent in the authority to a point where at least 60 percent of the pupils get where they should be by year 11 and improved behaviour among learners who saw the school in a positive way. In all cases the headteachers were acutely aware of the effects of empowerment on teachers who directly interacted with the learners. Their actions accord with Jackson's (2004) argument that in distributed leadership, the role of the leader is to harness, focus, liberate, and 'empower and align that leadership towards common purposes' (p.2). This finding adds weight to Danielson's (2006) proposition that instructional leaders who are enlightened recognise that achieving their aims of high level student learning can happen only through the active engagement and empowerment of teacher leaders and teachers themselves.

The headteachers in the study gave further examples of improvements which they directly attributed to distributed leadership. As detailed in the findings one

headteacher noted great strides on SATS examinations, two reported improvements in subjects like mathematics and performing arts. The third headteacher, talked of improvements across the curriculum but pointed out that it takes time for the effects to be noticed. These findings concur with Spillane's (2006) study of some U.S.A schools where he found that leadership distribution differed from school to school depending on the schools developmental stage.

Headteachers also spoke of working with the community and other stakeholders and this has resonance with some studies in the USA which have shown that greater stakeholder involvement can contribute to improving student behaviour and learning outcomes, retention, attendance and drop out rates (Van Voorhis and Sheldon, 2004; Sanders and Lewis, 2005). The Every Child Matters (2003) agenda and the DFES (2005) Extended Schools Prospectus seem to be addressing these issues as well.

### **Middle leaders**

Middle leaders' perceptions of the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning agreed with heads' views. They all confirmed heads' view that distributing leadership empowers teachers and this has a positive effect on teaching and learning. The middle leaders also concurred with heads' that distributing leadership, motivates teachers to do their best in order to improve the learning outcomes. There is literature evidence to support this perception. For instance, Leithwood et al (2006) claim that school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on

staff motivation, commitment and supportive working conditions. Equally, Addison and Brundrett, (2008) argue that there is evidence which suggest that achieving good learning outcomes for pupils and good behaviour serves to further motivate teachers.

Middle leaders saw distributed leadership as giving ownership of the teaching and learning process to teachers. As stated earlier in the findings, middle leaders had a common perception that teachers take ownership and deliver to their best and were kept well informed of the developments. This is all linked to empowering teachers and motivating them which is most likely to lead to the adoption of enhanced classroom learning opportunities (Southworth, 2004).

There was a common conception by middle leaders that when teachers are empowered to take action, not only do they take ownership of the teaching and learning, but they develop a better understanding of their department and subjects. This appears to be an area where leadership is cultural and teachers willingly take initiatives. At this level there was emergent leadership which is characterised by bottom-up processes. According to middle leaders, when leadership is distributed, staff take ownership and deliver what they have been trained to do in a better way. They (middle leaders) also pointed out that when leadership is distributed, teachers work towards a common goal and they all feel valued and achieve together. This accords with Busher's (2006) view that through the creation of departmental sub-cultures, middle

leaders may act as role models for team members to show effective teaching and learning.

The way in which distributed leadership was presented by middle leaders points to the dynamics of power and influence within the schools. Power is devolved from the heads who have formal authority. From this hierarchy and chain of command, it is evident that heads have to convince middle leaders what is to be done and middle leaders in turn pass that on to teachers.

However it can be argued that although ordinary classroom teachers have no formal power, they have expert power base. This is the expertise which they have and use in their subject areas. Admittedly, this involves bottom-up and emergent leadership when teachers initiate new teaching methods.

The emphasis on teaching and learning agrees with Southworth's (2004) argument that 'the single most important task for school leaders is about influencing teaching and learning in classrooms and across the school' (p.4). Similarly, Leithwood et al (2006), emphasising the link between leadership and learning, claim that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. There is more literature evidence that supports this view. For instance, PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) suggest that the views of school leaders have a great effect on pupil performance and affirm that there is widespread recognition that school leaders have a vital role in raising the quality of teaching and learning within their schools.

Middle leaders' shared three perceptions about the effect of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. These were that, firstly distributed leadership has positive effects on teaching and learning because we "work together as a school team" (interviewee 6, deputy headteacher). Secondly, everyone in the school sings the same song about the curriculum and thirdly "the children know where they are going as well" (interviewee, 6 deputy headteacher). By attributing these perceptions to distributed leadership, the middle leaders seem to confirm Addison and Brundrett's (2008) claim that leadership distribution can influence teachers' decision making capacity and motivation and act positively upon student learning and achievement. Equally, Southworth (2004) advocates for the distribution of learning centred leadership to increase the focus on teaching and learning throughout the organisation.

The acknowledgement by middle leaders in this study that staff work better in school teams when leadership is distributed concurs with some studies. For instance, Northouse (2004) argues that among other things, teams must have clear goals so that outcomes can be evaluated against objectives. All the leaders in the study, both headteachers and middle leaders are very clear that the school goal is teaching and learning. They were also unanimous that the main focus of the school is improved learning outcomes. As Pounder (1998) suggests, many of the current school initiatives have been introduced to enhance the school organisation to improve the quality of student and teacher outcomes and that teamwork is among these initiatives (see also MacBeath, 2004).

A perspective which was common to all middle leaders was that when all staff work as a team, they get involved and feel part of the decision-making process in the school, they feel valued and motivated and they get a sense of ownership of the whole school teaching and learning process. By being part of the decision-making process, the teachers know where the school is going at every stage. According to the middle leaders, this creates a conducive learning environment for pupils. These views are abundantly supported by findings in the literature review. As stated in the literature review, Wallace (2001) identifies five principles which he argues support sharing leadership through teams. Also, Muijs and Harris (2007) identified the advantages of school staff involvement in decision making and Hall (2001) argued that when staff work as a team, they become involved, empowered and committed, thus achieving an optimum degree of synergy.

Although the study revealed common perceptions of middle leader about the effect of distributed leadership on teaching and learning, one of the six middle leaders saw distributed leadership as having a positive effect on teaching and learning because “it enforced good behaviour in children” (interviewee 9, deputy headteacher). It appears that most the literature does not explicitly refer to this perceived good behaviour in children as a result of distributed leadership. However, a close examination of the literature reviewed suggests that the effect of distributed leadership on student behaviour is indirect and in some cases is inferred through the likelihood of successful student outcomes (Barber 1997; Elmore, 2000; Southworth, 2002; Day et al, 2007). The

literature reviewed suggests that students can be involved and empowered through 'pupil voice' (MacBeath, 2005; Frost, 2008). It is thought that students are likely to engage in positive behaviour when their voices are heard especially on how the curriculum is delivered.

## **Teachers**

It was clear from the analysis of teachers' responses in this study that some of their perceptions about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning were similar to those expressed by middle leaders. Like middle leaders, teachers saw leadership distribution as contributing to a 'happy environment for children and teachers'. In the teachers' view, this happy environment had a positive effect on teaching and learning. This has close resonance with Mulford and Silins' (2003) study of Australian secondary schools in which they concluded that leadership impact is predominantly indirectly related to student outcomes via the more direct influence exerted upon by the way in which teachers organise and conduct their instruction, their educational interaction with students, and the challenges and expectations teachers place on their pupils. The teachers' emphasis on a 'happy environment for children' highlight their perception that in such an environment it is possible to achieve good learning outcomes for pupils (Addison and Brundrett, 2008). This further verifies Mulford and Silins' (2003) assertion that pupils' positive perceptions of teachers' work directly promotes participation in schools, academic self concept and engagement with school and the possibility of good academic achievement.

From the responses of teachers in this study, it was clear that they were able to develop their skills and expertise. As highlighted in the findings, teachers reported that they benefitted from sharing ideas. The teachers attributed these benefits to the fact that leadership was distributed in their schools.

From the teachers' perceptions, it is possible to identify devolved and emergent processes because leadership is devolved from the top and at the level of teachers there is emergent leadership as they use their expert power base to influence how the students are taught.

The teachers noted that by working together they developed a common school culture which was the improvement of learning outcomes. Thus the teachers' perception accord with Harris' (2004) idea of 'a common task or goal-improvement of instruction' (p.14). This is also concurs with Harris and Muijs (2007) who claim that by engaging teachers through distributed leadership, teachers' expertise will reach new heights and their confidence and self esteem will be boosted.

Teachers, like middle leaders saw distributed leadership as an approach to leadership which allowed them to share ideas through teamwork. Teamwork as discussed earlier, is essential for distributed leadership to work effectively because teachers become involved, empowered and work collaboratively (Hall, 2001; Muijs and Harris, 2007; Wallace 2001). Despite the support for teamwork by both formal and informal leaders (teachers), it is noted that it is another form of devolution because the initiative to form and work in teams comes from the top. The teams are led by formal leaders and team decisions

have to be approved by the head if they involve budgets, resources and other big issues.

Whilst the study reveals that both middle leaders and teachers view teamwork as contributing positively to teaching and learning, it also highlighted some barriers to teamwork as outlined in the literature review. For instance Zappulla (2004) observes that the behaviour of some teachers can frustrate teamwork and render it ineffective. Teachers defensive behaviours, minimal compliance, negative influence and 'hidden control mechanism' (Eden, 2001 p.104) can upset group cohesion and negatively affect collegiality in teamwork (see also Cardino, 2002; Wallace 2001).

The teachers in the study were happy to state that as a result of leadership distribution they felt empowered and authorised to 'try new ways which we think benefit pupils'. They also mentioned that they enjoyed using new methods for the benefit of the pupils that distributed leadership had a positive effect on teaching and learning. It is evident that teachers take this empowerment and authority to experiment with new method as some kind of leadership in their subject and or curriculum area. This is one typical example of emergent leadership in the study. As the literature evidence suggests, teacher leadership and distributed leadership are significantly premised upon high levels of teacher involvement (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Harris 2004; Spillane, 2006). The fact that teachers in the study feel free to try new teaching ways and methods wholly accords with Harris and Muijs' (2004) argument that by engaging teachers in distributed leadership, they will be

more apt to take risks and experiment with novel, cutting-edge teaching methods, which will in turn have beneficial impact on their effectiveness as teachers and leaders both inside and outside the classroom.

With distributed leadership teachers in the study perceived themselves as happy and 'capable of inspiring the children to enjoy the learning process' (interviewee 15, teacher). One of the teachers saw this from the point of view of students and explained that it is more inspiring for the child to be taught by a teacher who are happy and have a passion for teaching. When further expressing that distributed leadership has a positive effect on teaching and learning, three of the eight teachers mentioned that their job roles have been clarified and modified. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) seem to support these findings when they argue that the confidence in teacher leadership comes from the belief that teachers are the closest to the students and better placed than the other leaders such as heads to make changes that benefit students learning. Equally, Bezzna (2008) in a study based in a school in Malta, found that the head distributed leadership and encouraged teacher leadership and involvement in decision-making in order to transmit a shared and collaborative focus on team working, classroom practice and pupils' learning. Although Bezzna's (2008) study was on learning communities, it concurs with the perceptions of teachers in this study.

Despite the common belief and perception among headteachers, middle leaders and teachers that distributed leadership has a positive effect on teaching and learning some studies question this. For instance Levacic (2005)

argues that attempts to show a direct casual relationship between leaders' behaviour, be it distributed or otherwise, and pupils' achievement have yielded little that is definitive. Relevant here are statements from the findings such as; 'distributed leadership would raise the attainment of pupils' and 'the overall effect has been to secure some improvements in the standard of teaching and learning'. While the headteachers who made these statements believed that this was happening, some literature evidence appears to dispute this (Bell et al., 2003, Bennett et al., 2003). Offering another useful critique about the claim that distributed leadership has a positive effect on students attainment, Hartley (2007) argues that since there is no empirical evidence to support this, 'the policy is ahead of evidence' (p.204). Comparing the research on distributed leadership to the Habermasian sense, Hartley claims that it is technical. That is to say, it purports to enhance prediction and control. In this context it can be argued that the assertion that distributed leadership positively influences students' outcomes is more of prediction and expectation rather than reality. Thus it can be argued that distributed leadership is being primarily used as a rhetoric device and an ideal to which school leaders and followers aspire. Notwithstanding the critique from the literature (Hartley, 2007; Bell et al., 2003, Bennett et al., 2003) the findings from this study, based upon the perceptions of the participants, tentatively offer empirical evidence that distributed leadership raises student attainment. However, the area needs further research.

## Summary

From the findings to this study, it is quite clear that there was no common definition of the term distributed leadership among the participants. But there were concepts associated with it. These included empowerment of teachers, shared leadership, leadership by many rather than an individual, involvement of teachers in decision making, management structure, shared responsibility, teamwork and making everybody feel part of the school. Distributed leadership therefore means different things to different people. It appears this is what Hartley (2007) refers to when he says “distributed leadership admits some confusion: its conceptual elasticity is considerable” (p.202). Despite this apparent lack of common understanding, the above concepts and themes emerge as central tenets of distributed leadership in both the findings and the literature reviewed. To this end, this study will argue that given the growing popularity of distributed leadership, especially in England where the government has given its priority through the NCSL, there is a need for further research. This would ideally produce evidence about how it works in practice. Additionally it would also help to generate theory and a better conceptual framework of the term. This present study has identified two interrelated but competing principles about how distributed leadership is practised. Firstly, leadership is devolved from the top and secondly, leadership distribution is an emergent approach associated with bottom-up processes. Three types of leadership distribution which fit well with MacBeath’s (2005) taxonomy were evident: these are formal, opportunistic and cultural distribution. These are discussed later under research question 3.

The responses from the interviewees about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching highlight new knowledge which needs further research as a stepping stone has been provided in this study. Of relevance here are four claims by the headteachers in the study. The claims are that; distributed leadership raises the attainment of pupils, secures some improvement in the standard of learning, raises the standard of teaching and leads to school improvement. As outlined in the findings, one headteacher gave examples of great strides in SATS examinations and improvement in mathematics and performing arts as evidence that distributed leadership was contributing to school improvement and student attainment. These beliefs point to the need for further studies in order to advance our current knowledge base because the literature cited earlier indicates that there is little evidence of a direct casual relationship between distributed leadership and school achievement.

These findings provide some tentative empirical evidence that distributed leadership contributes to student attainment. At the same time these findings point to a gap in the literature about the relationship between distributed leadership and school achievement. This topic is considered to be of particular importance and interest for the on going research agenda.

The study made some findings which highlight new beliefs and perceptions about distributed leadership. The findings were that:

- Distributed leadership creates a happy learning environment for children because they are taught by teachers who are motivated and well prepared

- Teachers are empowered and have the authority to try new methods which they think benefit students
- Teachers confidence and esteem are boosted
- Teachers develop and utilise their skills and expertise, they also share ideas by working together.

These findings begin to advance our knowledge base further and what makes them unique is that they come direct from the practitioners.

The study opens avenues into some areas where little research appears to have been done. Of particular relevance here are the following findings:

- distributed leadership leads to improved behaviour among students
- there is a marked reduction in teenage pregnancies
- the number of children who remained in school significantly increased
- stakeholder involvement contributes to improved student behaviour, learning outcomes and retention.

The above beliefs and perceptions potentially link distributed leadership to a guidance and counselling role.

These were perceptions of participants in the study and they directly attributed them to distributed leadership. As stated earlier in this discussion, not much investigation has been done in these four areas. However it is acknowledged that this is a small scale study the findings cannot be widely generalised. The study proposes further research into these areas to explore these findings.

## **Research question 2**

To what extent does distributed leadership contribute to effective school leadership?

From the responses of the four headteachers distributed leadership perceived to make the workload of headteachers lighter and more manageable. All the four headteachers in this study shared the view that distributed leadership made their work less stressful and gave them time to focus on strategic leadership since some of the work was distributed to other staff members. This verifies findings from the literature. For instance, MacBeath (2005) observed that headteachers' workload involved complex meetings, handling discipline matters, monitoring teaching and learning and many other incidental activities. Such a host of responsibilities and activities hampered their leadership effectiveness and MacBeath argues that distributed leadership offers a solution to this. Similarly, Oduro (2004) found that headteachers see leadership distribution as 'a means of reducing the pressure of overwhelming workload on them' (p.8).

Although headteachers in the study view distributed leadership as a way of reducing their workload, it is pertinent to point out that some studies position distributed leadership within the broader policy spectrum for the public services. Relevant here is the PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) report which refers to a range of new government policies which require greater partnerships and collaborations among professionals. In particular the report cites the Every Child Matters agenda, workforce remodelling and the 14-19 agenda as examples of new government policy.

The headteachers also mentioned that distributing leadership has led to improvement in their work life balance. As one headteacher explained, she no longer felt as tired as before implementing distributed leadership, she no longer carried work home, had time with her family and she would come to school the following day fresh and ready for her leadership role. The perceptions of headteachers about the contribution of distributed leadership to effective school leadership point to managerial convenience through the distribution of managerial workloads. This is beneficial to the heads and the school and can potentially address leadership shortages and disenchantment by increasing leadership retention when heads feel less pressure of work and stay in post longer.

There were resonances here with the NRT (2004) initiatives which among other things sought to improve the work life balance for both teachers and headteachers. The headteachers in this study were convinced that leadership distribution contributed to effective school leadership because they believed that it motivated teachers and they were also able to use their expertise. Given that all interviewees put emphasis on how teachers utilised their expertise for innovations in teaching, it is possible to conclude that this was linked to their professional identity and self-esteem. All participants in the study mentioned that distributed leadership 'keeps the organisation running effectively' because everyone is motivated. Headteachers further mentioned that distributed leadership gave teachers the opportunity to innovate and discharge their duties more effectively by taking responsibility. However, as

stated earlier, the responsibilities were largely devolved. This has resonance with MacBeath and Dempster's (2009) idea of leadership for learning. The literature evidence also supports the finding that teacher involvement, innovation and motivation contributes to effective school leadership. For instance, the DfES (1998) contends that all the evidence shows that heads are the key to a school's success because they are expected to set high expectations for staff and motivate staff to give their best. Similarly Rutherford (2005) argues that school leadership, if it is to be really effective must include major contributions from the deputy, the senior management team and the rest of the school workforce.

### **Empowerment**

The theme of empowerment has been discussed in the first research question but it came up as a key issue in relation to effective school leadership. As the literature indicates (Jackson, 2004; Harris, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2007; Harris and Muijs, 2004; Blasé and Blasé, 2004) empowering teachers is central to achieving effective school leadership and school improvement. The literature further suggests that distributed leadership works through empowering others to lead (Harris 2004). Empowering teachers increases their motivation and commitment to work (Sergiovanni, 2007) and they also get involved in decision-making (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). The acknowledgement by all the leaders in this study that teachers are empowered and are involved in decision-making supports these views. The headteachers in the study explained how they involved teachers through meetings and teamwork in

order to ensure that everyone 'sang the same song' and that decisions are carried through.

As stated in the findings (chapter 4), middle leaders in the study appeared satisfied that they were empowered and they expressed the view that this contributed to effective school leadership. Danielson's (2006) view that a prevailing norm of democracy is an essential aspect of a culture supportive of teacher leadership is clearly evident in these findings. In particular the assertion that for teacher leadership to succeed, the school must establish a culture of democratic norms and treat teachers as professionals is well supported by middle leaders. For instance, the middle leaders shared the views of one of them who perceived empowering people as a "... democratic process and professional conversation" (interviewee, 8 deputy headteacher). This was also echoed by one teacher who thought that distributed leadership is a democratic process because the headteacher gave her the power and authority to make decisions about school activities and other innovations as long as she keeps the headteacher informed. This resonates with West-Burnham (2004) who postulates that with empowerment, individuals or teams have defined tasks but have responsibility to decide how to do the tasks, have control over resources, methods and decision- making.

Although the interviewees talked of democracy, power and authority to make decisions as a result of distributed leadership, this appeared to be limited and dependent on the function involved. From the descriptions of distributed leadership given by the participants, it was clear that managerial workload and

other responsibilities were formally devolved while power and authority remained with the heads.

While the literature supports middle leaders and teachers' perception that distributed leadership is a democratic process, there are other studies which dispute this. Courpasson (2000), for example, argues that distributed leadership occurs within, and enables a 'soft bureaucracy' (p.157). By this he means an organisation 'where the processes of flexibility and decentralisation co-exist with more rigid constraints and structures of domination' (p.158). To some extent this appears to be the case with schools in this study because despite implementing distributed leadership, headteachers seem to dominate and bureaucracy is still evident in the management structures.

Similarly, Hartley (2007) argues that the notion of distributed leadership 'like other discourses of legitimation such as empowerment and ownership, appears to incorporate democratic procedures, but it arguably does no such thing' (p.205). Hartley further observes that distributed leaders arrive at their positions not as a result of an election but they are appointed. In addition, there is also a presumed harmony and consensus about distributed leadership. What seems to add weight to Hartley's argument is that in England the governance of leadership training is framed by a quango, the National College for school leadership (NCSL). This can be viewed as leadership that is customised to deliver government policy (Gronn, 2002b) or a 'new hegemony in the formation of school leaders' (Grace, 2000, p.236). One implication of these research findings to this study is that the participants,

headteachers in particular, paint a very successful picture of distributed leadership, perhaps in order to comply with government policy. It can also be argued that distributed leadership is being used within government policy framework as an analytic framework and appealing term for exploring leadership in schools. As an analytic framework, distributed leadership recognises different forms of leadership and influence which include top-down and bottom-up processes.

The majority of the teachers (6 out of 8) stated that they had the power and autonomy to decide and experiment on new teaching methods and to use resources as they liked. But this was only limited to their subject area and other small issues. Despite this autonomy, the teachers were consciously aware that they had to keep their heads well informed of any developments in the department and classroom. This is something positive because it highlights dialogue, confidence building, sharing and planning. It is therefore clear that although heads in this study distribute leadership, they still want to keep some control, possibly because of accountability (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). However, evidence from the literature reviewed suggests that in addition to accountability, there are other reasons why heads would want to be in control. For instance, MacBeath (2005) found that some headteachers expressed the need to be in control because of the anxiety of not being in charge, fear of being removed from the school and the concern about becoming surplus to the establishment. In the same study MacBeath (2005) found that heads enjoyed being in control and being

respected and they felt that giving too much independence may undermine that human need to be needed.

Although the headteachers in this study did not specifically mention these reasons, their actions appear to vindicate MacBeath's (2005) findings. As the findings from this study highlight, apart from being in control heads stated that they would not let go what they perceived as critical areas: the budget, core curriculum and school policy. The majority of the heads (3 out of 4) would not let go of the curriculum. Even the one who said she would distribute curricular responsibilities maintained that she would want some control. There is clear resonance here with Storey's (2004) findings from a study of distributed leadership in some UK schools where she found that there were "fundamental tensions between headteachers and significant others occupying positions such as key subject leaders" (p. 253). Similarly, Blasé and Blasé (1999), in a study of principals' perspectives on democratic leadership found that leaders expressed stress over loss of control. Equally, Danielson (2006), commenting on this perceived loss of control says it is power struggle between administrators and teachers and describes it as the 'contested ground'. However, in this study there was no apparent power struggle or tension between heads and teachers possibly because teachers in this study were very much aware of the boundaries.

Most the teachers in this study (6 out of 8) stated that their power and authority to make decisions was mainly limited to making 'decisions on teaching methods' making their own internal deadlines and extra curricular

activities. This finding contrasts with Sergiovanni's (2007) concept of transformative leadership and Danielson's (2006) view of democracy in distributed leadership. But this also supports findings studies in the USA by Spillane (2006) who reported that although leadership functions are distributed across the school, not everyone has a hand in every leadership function in the school. It would appear that although there is distribution of functions in the schools in this study, the schools have not reached West-Burnham's (2004) 'subsidiary stage' which is characterised by full distribution of power across the organisation.

### **Introducing changes in the school**

All the four headteachers in this study shared the perception that one of the ways in which distributed leadership contributed to effective school leadership was that teachers were involved in all changes in the school. According to the headteachers, involving teachers made the changes acceptable since the teachers participated and contributed in the decision-making process. The headteachers in the study were keenly aware of the need to involve teachers "from the start and in the end they will say it's our initiative" (interviewee, 4 headteacher). This has close accordance with the NRT (2006) contention that a cornerstone of successful change and remodelling is open inclusive leadership that provides clear direction and focus, drawing on the contributions staff and stakeholders.

Middle leaders and teachers in the study also confirmed that they were involved in changes. According to four teachers and all the six middle leaders

in this study, involvement gave them a sense of ownership of the changes. It was also clear from the findings that most of the changes were initiated by headteachers although at one school two teachers reported that most changes come from them. This evidently shows the presence of both top-down and bottom-up influences. These findings agree with Fullan (2003), Rutherford (2005) and the NRT (2003) who all argue that the headteacher must change the context. As Fullan (2003) notes, once people realise the change potential of the context, and begin to direct their effort at changing it, 'the break through can be amazing' (p.29). Equally, Jackson (2004) also maintains that schools are unlikely to change without distribution of leadership. The fact that middle leaders and teachers in the study acknowledged that they were very much involved in the implementation of the curriculum and other changes in the school adds weight to the contention that leadership distribution contributes significantly to effective school leadership (Rutherford, 2005; Jackson, 2004).

However despite the acknowledgement by all the 6 middle leaders and 6 of the 8 teachers that they were involved in changes in the school, two teachers saw things differently. They stated that they were only made to feel as if they were involved yet things are decided by the senior management. Although these two teachers are in the minority (2 out of 8), their views appear to expose potential dissatisfaction among some teachers about the way distributed leadership is implemented. It would appear that some of the changes are imposed from the top and this is likely to be resisted by teachers. Such an approach suggests that while distributed leadership may be used to

enhance a sense of belonging, participation and ownership among teachers, it can equally be used by those in formal positions of power (headteachers) to give the illusion of consultation and participation. If the scenario presented by these two teachers were prevalent this would be a barrier to distributed leadership and effective school leadership. As Rutherford (2005) and Fullan (2003) observe, meaningful change and effective leadership thrive among other things, where there is good communication, teacher involvement and teamwork as these are central to distributed leadership. Perhaps one way to avoid this is to adopt assertive distribution as proposed by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) in their continuum of distributed leadership in which they argue that heads must include resisters early and also include and listen to minorities.

### **Teamwork, collaboration and effective school leadership**

Findings from this study appear to share the view that behaviours of school leaders have a great impact on the performance of pupils and that leadership has the potential to raise student outcomes in academic, personal and social development (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007). The evidence from the literature also suggests that there are new forms of leadership that accentuate collaboration and distribution of power and authority as central to learning (Rhodes and Brundrett, 2010). There are many examples from this study, which illustrate these views. For instance all the headteachers in this study spoke of sharing expertise through teamwork and how they perceived this to lead to better quality teaching and learning. Teachers and headteachers explained that in addition to sharing expertise through teamwork there was

team teaching. Team teaching was perceived as a means of achieving uniform standards across the school.

The literature evidence suggests that collaboration and collegiality are essential for distributed leadership to be implemented successfully (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2004). Findings from this study support these views. In particular this research supports Telford's (1996) four elements of collaborative leadership; namely human resource, symbolic, political and structural elements. Firstly, the findings from this study reveal that the human resource elements of collaborative operate as staff co-operate and share ideas and experience in order to improve the teaching and learning outcomes. The fact that all respondents in the study referred to 'working collaboratively in teams' is indicative of the presence of the human resource elements of collaboration.

Secondly, the political elements of collaborative leadership manifest themselves in the way school leaders in this study reach agreement through open discussion and compromise. As detailed in the findings, ideas are discussed in teams and staff meetings. There is also close accordance with Drago-Severson and Pinto's (2006) argument that collaborative leadership fosters dialogue and develops a culture of learning and progress.

Thirdly, symbolic elements are shown as staff share similar beliefs and values in the school. As the findings from the study highlight, teachers share common organisational goals and values. Fourthly, structural elements of collaborative leadership in this study are clearly shown as teachers communicate openly

and share ideas. They spoke of the time set aside for PPA where they plan, discuss and share ideas and resources. The provision of PPA time accords very well with Lydon and King's (2009) argument about continued professional development (CPD), which they say, "involves experimentation and reflection away from the pressures of the classroom" (p.67). It is noted that this study did not investigate CPD nor was it mentioned by any of the eighteen interviewees but the findings point to what Carroll (2009) identified as key assumptions underpinning the process of professional enquiry. This finding also supports the contention by Ainscow et al (2006) that collaboration can widen student learning opportunities. As outlined in the findings, teamwork and collaboration are strategies that are aimed at improving the learning outcomes of learners. These are viewed as part of leadership distribution and its successful implementation contributes significantly to effective school leadership (Leithwood et al, 2006; Southworth, 2006).

### **Capacity building and effective school leadership**

The headteachers in this study were consciously aware of the effects of leadership distribution on school leadership and learning outcomes. They all spoke of how leadership distribution enhanced capacity building for all teachers. This perception accords with the work of Harris (2002) who suggests that building leadership capacity requires distributing leadership to others. Similarly, Frost (2008) argues that more distributed forms of leadership in which teachers are encouraged to take greater role in leadership are the key to better outcomes.

There are many illustrations of this in the findings in this study. For instance, the headteachers spoke of grooming future leaders, giving everyone experience, developing people's confidence and giving them an opportunity to practise leadership so as to make them feel they have greater ownership. These statements appear to represent heads' aspirations or at least some ideals to which schools aspire.

This recognition of the need to develop leadership capacity by the headteachers in this study supports some literature findings which suggest that the relationship between high quality leadership and successful schools has become increasingly well established (Southworth, 2004; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). Although the heads in this study spoke of capacity building as a way of grooming future leaders, none mentioned a specific plan to implement it. There was also no reference to a national programme to groom future leaders. This appears to support Rhodes' (2006) opinion that such lack of succession planning clearly militates against choice.

The literature evidence suggests that leadership development is a key component of school improvement leading to improved learner outcomes (Bush, 2008). The four headteachers saw leadership distribution as a way of capacity building which developed teachers professionally. By putting emphasis on 'developing teachers professionally' the headteachers appear to accord with the work of Harris (2002) in three ways. First, Harris argues that schools must operate as professional communities which she describes as one where teachers participate in decision-making, have a shared sense of

purpose and engage in collaborative work for better teaching and learning outcomes. Second, in a professional community, teachers have the opportunity to learn from one another in order to achieve better learner outcomes. Third, in a professional community, leadership is distributed throughout the system and improvement occurs from within. These views were also corroborated by findings from the study. For instance, middle leaders reported that leadership distribution enhanced their capacity because they were exposed to decision-making and that helped in building their confidence. The same was true for teachers. They spoke of enjoying their jobs as they used their expertise and viewed capacity building as a developmental process in their career.

Although none of the respondents in this study referred to continued professional development (CPD), the findings suggest clear resonance with the literature on CPD. For instance, Lydon and King (2009) recognised the role of CPD for teachers in bringing about change in the classroom and how a clear focus on learning and learners were important ingredients for effective CPD. Equally, Adey (2004) argued that for effective CPD to take place, senior management must be committed to the innovation and they must share their vision with staff. Furthermore, Adey argues that effective CPD can take place when teachers work in a group to share experience, communicate among themselves about the innovation and “are given the opportunity to develop a sense of ownership of the innovation” ( p.194). Findings from this study support all these principles about CPD. It appears that in building capacity through distributed leadership, the heads engage in CPD activities.

## **Summary**

The discussion on research question two has brought to light a number of issues concerning how practitioners in this study perceive the contribution of distributed leadership to effective school leadership. These are summarised here.

All headteachers concurred with research findings (MacBeath, 2005; Oduro, 2004; NRT 2006) that distributed leadership makes the workload easier and helps improve their work life balance. The study also found that there was consensus among the participants that through distributed leadership, teachers were motivated. This contributed to effective school leadership because teachers did their work without being pushed by leaders. There was also a development of a sense of ownership which motivated teachers more.

In the findings one of the central tenets of distributed leadership which came out clearly was empowerment. Both leaders and teachers pointed out that empowerment was central to achieving effective school leadership. What was also clear from the discussion was that the participants exposed how empowerment contributed to effective school leadership. They saw empowerment as a tool to give teachers control over resources, power and authority to experiment with new methods for the benefit of the students, giving teachers the power to make decision and to be involved in decision making. It was also seen as leading to democracy in the institutions. Thus this study makes a contribution to knowledge here because it has shown through participants' perceptions how empowerment contributes to effective school

leadership. Although the findings indicate democracy develops as a result of empowerment, some studies dispute this and argue that distributed leadership does not lead to any democracy (see Hartley 2007; Hatcher, 2005).

### **Research question 3**

What models of distributed leadership are practised in schools? Is there a common way of leadership distribution across the schools?

In order to address this research question, this study will use the models of distributed leadership proposed by MacBeath (2005) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006) which have been identified in the literature review. They have been chosen for this research because these studies are among the few that have attempted to present how distributed leadership works in practice. These models will be used as useful framework to explore how distributed leadership was practised at the schools that participated in this study.

What was common to all schools was that leadership distribution was based on the management structure. All the schools had a clear hierarchical structure of leadership and leadership distribution was based on this. The structure was made up of the head, deputy, senior teachers, HOD all the way down to the classroom teacher. This structure clearly supports MacBeath's (2005) observation that English schools are by history and nature hierarchical. It is clear that when comparing the leadership distribution described at the schools in this study with MacBeath's (2005) taxonomy of distribution, this would fit into the formal distribution category. This distribution is based on job roles and responsibilities like HODs. The advantage of this kind of distribution

is that it is also based on people's strengths and skills and when people use their skills their chances of improving teaching outcomes are high. This type of distribution is also akin to traditional delegation in Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) continuum of distributed leadership. The formal distribution which was practised in the schools concurs with Supovitz (2000) who argues that formally distributing leadership roles frees up headteachers' time for instructional focus, which is to reinforce the paramount school mission of teaching and learning. It is clear that formal distribution does not only contribute to effective school leadership by freeing up heads' time for instructional focus but it also enables them to involve teachers by giving them responsibilities. This finding is also linked to research question 2; to what extent does distributed leadership contributed to effective school leadership? It appears that formal distribution points to the efficacy of distributed leadership as a form of leadership practice. One thing that is clear from distribution formally is that it is devolved leadership associated with top-down influence.

Other schools distributed leadership on the basis of people who met set criteria, people who were assertive and those who had the ability to engage with other people. These practices have close resonance with Bennett et al's (2003) argument that in reality each school has its own understanding and practice of distributed leadership. This has close resemblance with MacBeath's (2005) distribution as incremental because in this category, people who prove their ability are given more responsibility. However, there

seems to be no match with any stage in Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) continuum at this stage.

Leadership distribution was also based on management teams. This has close accordance with MacBeath's (2005) distribution as strategic and Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) progressive delegation. As stated in MacBeath's taxonomy, school improvement is the goal of strategic distribution. The literature evidence also supports this. For instance, Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006) argue that leadership for learning may be about empowering middle leaders and teachers to take direct lead in teaching and learning within a collaborative and trusting environment.

Management teams in distributed leadership resonate with the government's general focus on better public services for all (Hartley, 2007). This structure depicts a typical top-down approach which agrees with the hierarchy regime of governance. Although the approach appears to be top-down, findings in this study suggest that headteachers consult and involve teachers in their approach to distributed leadership. However, top-down influences associated with devolution were more dominant. But there were two teachers in the study who mentioned that there was no genuine consultation or involvement as matters were decided higher up. These voices, though in the minority highlight potential tension in the practice and implementation of distributed leadership.

From the study, three headteachers distributed leadership roles to those they trusted while one said he gave everyone a chance. While the three headteachers were happy to devolve responsibilities, they found it difficult to

let go of control, power and responsibility due to accountability. Distribution based on trust creates a dilemma which MacBeath (2005) describes as 'holding on and letting go' (p.354) because in the end headteachers do not know how far to step back and not intervene. As one headteacher explained, if things went wrong or there was a leak to the press, he would be held accountable. It appears that distribution based on trust is likely to exclude other teachers as heads may distribute leadership roles to their favourite teachers. Equally, such an approach could be used by heads to indirectly coerce teachers to comply. This potentially alienates other teachers and would militate against the successful implementation of distributed leadership. It is clear that this type of distribution is almost similar to emergent distribution in Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) continuum but there appears to be no corresponding category in MacBeath's (2005) taxonomy.

There was evidence of MacBeath's (2005) opportunistic and cultural distribution where leadership is not distributed but taken. Examples of this include cases of teachers who volunteered to lead the school in recycling and other environmentally friendly projects, leading in drama and sports. Such findings reveal evidence of emergent leadership associated with bottom-up influence.

Findings from this study did not find MacBeath's pragmatic distribution which is often a reaction to external events like demands from government or local authority. It appears this kind of distribution would apply to schools in special circumstances which were not investigated in this research.

None of the schools in this study were autocratic as described by Hargreaves and Fink (2006). Findings from the study support this because all the heads reported that they distributed leadership. In particular, one of the four heads categorically stated that she was not autocratically at the top. What was also common to all schools was that they avoided anarchy as identified in Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) continuum of distributed leadership. As discussed earlier, the heads distributed leadership but they monitored and also remained in control and this is one way to avoid anarchy.

### **Summary**

Findings from this study provide some tentative answers to the research question: what models of distributed leadership are practised in schools? Is there a common way of leadership distribution across the schools? Findings from the study revealed resonances with Macbeth's (2005) taxonomy of distribution and Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) continuum of distribution. Three trends emerged about how leadership was distributed.

Firstly, there was formal distribution which reveals that leadership is devolved.

Secondly, there was cultural and opportunistic distribution which show the presence of emergent leadership associated with bottom-up processes.

Thirdly, there was distribution as strategic (MacBeath, 2005) which resembles progressive delegation in Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) continuum of distribution. Fourthly, some headteachers distributed leadership to those they trusted. This is similar to emergent distribution in Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) continuum of distribution.

The implication for this study is that the findings offer an insight into how distributed leadership is practised in schools. Fundamentally, the findings reveal two approaches to distributed leadership: devolved and emergent leadership. However, it appears that the theoretical evidence which informs the practice of distributed leadership is not well founded as there was no uniform way of distributing leadership across the four schools. The participants did not refer to the terms in the taxonomy or continuum. This might further suggest the absence of an established theory. There is therefore a gap in literature on this aspect of distributed leadership and this study tentatively begins to address that gap.

### **Chapter Summary and emergent overarching themes**

This study set out to explore the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. Based on findings from interviews with these participants, the study has provided data that have in many ways supported and concurred with many views expressed in the literature review. The study has also presented some new findings that could contribute towards new knowledge about distributed leadership. This section will outline the overarching themes that emerged from the discussion of the findings. These broad themes or emergent overarching themes will relate the findings to all the research questions of this study.

### **Devolved leadership**

The first overarching theme in relation to distributed leadership is devolved leadership. This study found that interviewees described distributed leadership primarily in terms of formal mechanisms for the distribution of operational decision-making roles and responsibilities were devolved from the top via holders of formally designated posts like deputies, senior teachers, HODs and team leaders. Thus it was a top-down process. This was vital for heads not only for accountability purposes but because they wanted to hold on to budgets and control of resources. The study revealed that heads devolve responsibilities but not necessarily power and authority.

### **The emergent approach**

Emergent leadership which is associated with bottom-up influence is the second overarching theme that emerged from the study. Interviewees in the study pointed to bottom-up and emergent processes of collaborative and informal leadership. In this case individual teachers without any formal leadership positions willingly took on responsibilities and initiated new projects and teaching methods. Examples of this from the study include teachers initiating and experimenting with new teaching methods, recycling projects and drama and sports activities. From this perspective leadership is not given but taken, it does not follow clear lines of hierarchy of command as in developed leadership. With emergent approach, everyone has a part to play in the leadership of the school, whether formally recognised or not. However the emergent approach does not seem to be very well developed in the schools that participated in this study as it was limited to fewer initiatives.

### **Perceptions about the effects of distributed leadership**

There were common perceptions about the effect of distributed leadership on teaching and learning as well as on its contribution to effective school leadership. The views and perceptions by interviewees include empowerment of staff, motivation, capacity building, creating a sense of ownership involvement in decision-making reduction of managerial work loads and use of expertise by teachers. Despite these perceptions and the support from the majority of the literature, findings from this study reveal the manner in which distributed leadership is being practised in schools is primarily as a rhetorical device. There appears to be a strong desire among all participants to practise distributed leadership in a collaborative and collegial way and it seems this approach offers an ideal to which heads and staff can aspire.

The study found there are complementary and competing influences of devolution and emergent leadership where the former influence is more dominant. Given this, the study argues that the perceptions expressed by interviewees are at this stage an illusion because real power, authority and accountability still remain with the headteachers. Additionally, the concept of distributed leadership appears to have an appeal to headteachers and leaders perhaps due to the connection with notions collegiality, participation decision-making.

### **Task based distribution**

Task based leadership distribution is the fourth overarching theme emerging in this study. While there were some variations in the way distributed

leadership was being practised in the four schools, task based distribution was common to all. The study identified four approaches to leadership which were largely dependent on the task to be performed. These approaches broadly match with MacBeath's (2005) taxonomy of leadership distribution. First, leadership was distributed formally. In this approach heads devolved other managerial tasks except finance, accountability and core curriculum. Secondly, there was incremental distribution where those in formal positions were given some tasks in stages until they proved capable. Thirdly, there was opportunistic distribution. With opportunistic distribution people willingly took additional responsibilities. In this study this was mainly done by teachers who had no formal leadership positions. Fourth, there was evidence of cultural distribution where leadership was assumed. It was noted that with opportunistic and cultural distribution bottom-up influences were common while top-down influences were characteristic of the first three.

In the next chapter, conclusions and recommendations, the overall conclusions from the findings of the study in relation to the main aims and conceptual framework drawn from the literature are presented. The contribution of this study to knowledge will also be highlighted.

## **Chapter 6 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the key findings of this study and discuss their implication for the whole research. It also seeks to highlight the contributions of the study to knowledge about distributed leadership. The chapter is divided into five sections. First, it summarises the research purpose, research questions and findings. Second, it discusses the implications of the study. Third, it highlights the contributions of this study to knowledge and how the study can be applied. Fourth, limitations of the study are outlined. Fifth, it makes recommendations for further research.

### **Research purpose and design**

The primary purpose of this present study is to explore the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. The study investigated what interviewees understood by the term *distributed leadership* and how it is perceived to be distributed with a primary focus on its perceived effects on teaching and learning. The study employed semi-structured interviews with 18 participants to collect data. The participants were four headteachers, six middle leaders and eight teachers from two primary and two secondary schools in the West Midlands of England. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed and analysed. By using semi-structured interviews the study was able to capture rich narrative accounts from participants about their experiences and perceptions about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning.

## **The research questions and findings**

The three research questions that underpin this study are:

1. What are the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning?
2. To what extent does distributed leadership contribute to effective school leadership?
3. What model/ models of distributed leadership are practised in schools and why?

The key findings of this study are summarised in Figure 6 below. There was a great degree of commonality in the perceptions expressed by the interviewees about distributed leadership. In particular they all expressed distributed leadership as shared leadership. They all perceived distributed leadership as capable of raising learner outcomes. However, there were some variations in perceptions as shown in Figure 7. These variations apply mainly to the way distributed leadership is implemented. For headteachers, distributed leadership entailed devolving responsibilities via those in formal positions. This was done in a top-down approach, giving rise to formal distribution. There was also incremental distribution as heads distributed leadership roles in stages until they were satisfied that the person to whom they had distributed roles could perform the duties efficiently. Findings from this study revealed that, although the heads distributed responsibilities, they retained power and authority and they also remained accountable. With the exception the approach to distributed leadership, middle leaders shared similar perceptions with headteachers as shown in Figure 6. They were the recipients of devolved

roles. Findings from this study suggest that within the top-down approach, middle leaders ensured that teachers implemented what came from above. The way teachers practised distributed leadership point to emergent processes associated with bottom-up influence. This is also akin to opportunistic and cultural distribution as shown in Figure 6 below:

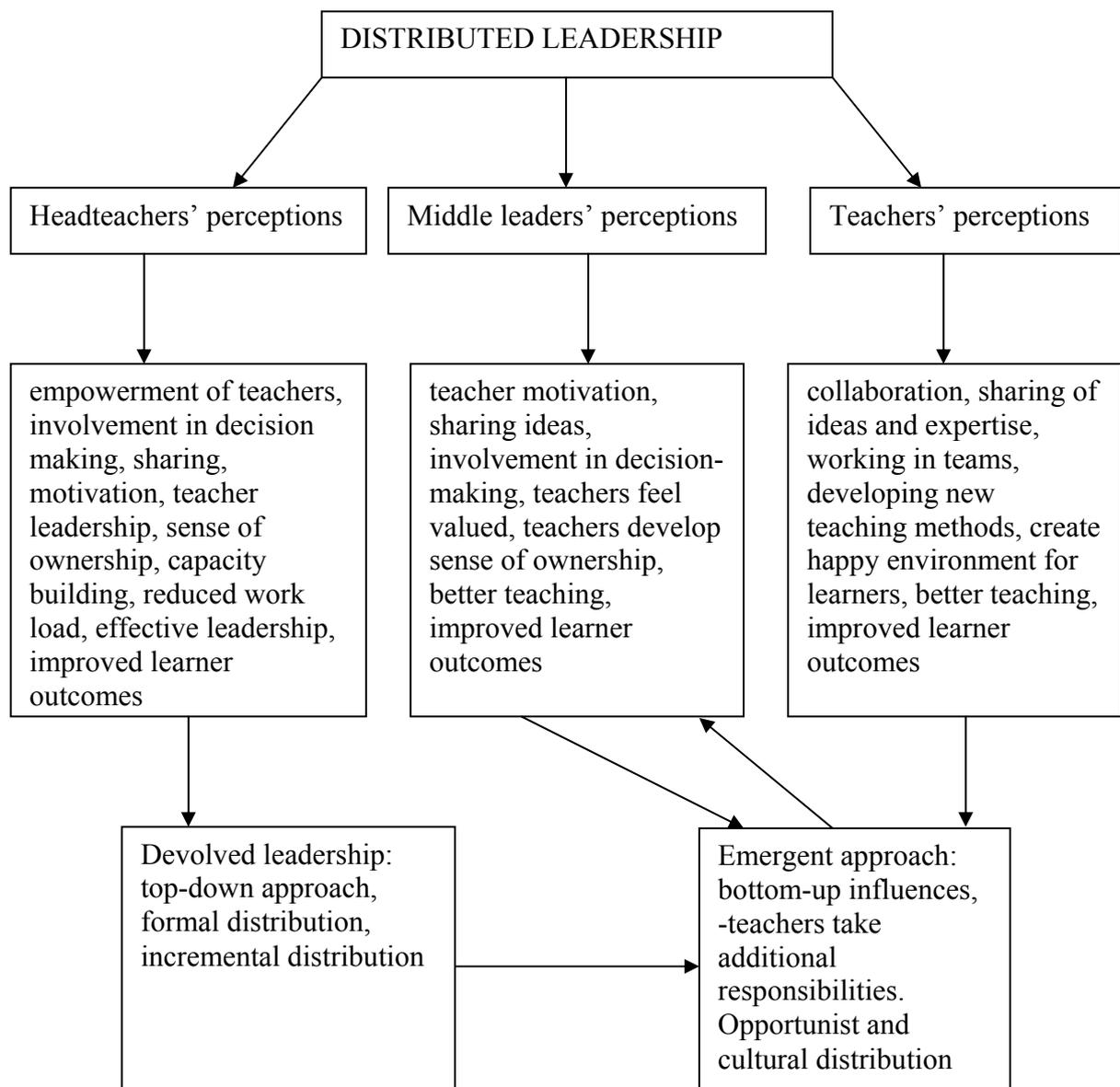


Figure 6: The key findings from the study.

Devolved leadership is more predominant than the emergent approach.

The representation in Figure 6 largely reflects the findings that were discussed in the previous chapter but also highlight devolved and emergent approaches. All the three research questions were discussed and answered and what emerges from the perceptions of the interviewees is that distributed leadership enhances teaching and learning outcomes for students. A number of researchers in education (e.g. Spillane, 2006; Southworth, 2002; Harris, 2004; Muijs and Harris 2007; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006 ; Rhodes and Brundrett 2010) discuss how distributed leadership has been increasingly associated with shared leadership, teacher leadership, leadership for learning, involving teachers and middle leaders in decision-making and giving teachers a sense of ownership. These are seen as powerful and critical factors that motivate teachers. Equally significant from the findings to this study was that empowering teachers has become an essential practice of distributed leadership.

There was agreement among the four headteachers in this study that empowering teachers aligns them towards a common purpose, which is the improvement of learning outcomes. The headteachers in the study also recognised that high levels of student learning can happen through the active engagement and empowerment of both teachers and teacher leaders. This finding indicates agreement with a number of researchers (e.g. Danielson 2006; Jackson, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2007). However, the literature findings indicate that leaders influence student learning outcomes indirectly through teachers (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007; Leithwood et al 2006).

The main theme in all these principles associated with distributed leadership was that it was perceived to secure an improvement in teaching and learning outcomes of the students. This has been clearly evident in this study and within other research (Frost, 2008; Busher, 2005). The study has highlighted that a focus on improving student learning outcomes coupled with leadership distribution to middle leaders and teachers and involving them in leadership and decision-making clearly suggest a collaborative approach within a supportive culture. Telford (1999), Rhodes and Brundrett (2010) and Fitzgerald and Gunter (2006) all discuss how distributing leadership within a trusting and collaborative culture empowers middle leaders and teachers to take a direct lead in teaching and learning in order to achieve improved outcomes.

Findings from this research also highlight that one pre-condition for distributed leadership is involvement of middle leaders so that they can accept and develop a sense of ownership of all changes and developments in the school. It would appear that other principles associated with distributed leadership, namely; empowerment, shared leadership, teacher leadership, autonomy, capacity building, all fall into place once middle leaders and teachers are genuinely involved. As the literature evidence suggests, teachers' voices are a critical element of involvement in decision-making (Allen, 2004; Bezzna, 2008; Danielson, 2006; Leithwood, 2006) and their voices are heard through this involvement in decision -making. Although this study did not explore students' perceptions, some of the literature reviewed suggests that involving the voices of students fosters student learning (Busher 2006, Cradde, 2007; MacBeath,

2006). Clearly, what emerges from this study is that involvement of staff and other stakeholders is an important pre-requisite for distributed leadership.

In addition to involvement of teachers and middle leaders, the findings from this study support the view that accountability is essential for distributed leadership (MacBeath and Dempster 2009; Bush 2006). Essentially that entails holding the teachers accountable but the overall accountability remained with headteachers. The headteachers in the study confirmed this view by emphasising that accountability leads to improved student outcomes because every teacher gets a sense of ownership and is ultimately responsible for the students learning outcomes. It is quite clear from the findings that headteachers perceived distributed leadership as a way of empowering teachers through accountability mechanisms in order to enhance learning outcomes. However, the study found despite the talk of empowerment, real power remained with heads and those in formal leadership positions.

Teachers could exercise some power in their subject areas provided they were not part of the core curriculum. The study found that team work is essential for distributed leadership because teachers become involved and work collaboratively as they work in teams. As the findings reveal, by working in teams, teachers share their skills and expertise and this has potential to contribute to improved learning outcomes. This appears to concur with views from several researchers (Hall, 2001; Muijs and Harris, 2007; Wallace, 2001).

The study also found that distributed leadership is believed to contribute significantly to effective school leadership. This was one of the clear messages from both leaders and teachers.

There are some trends which emerge from this study which indicate how leadership distribution contributes to effective school leadership and how this in turn positively contributes to improved student learning outcomes. This thesis argues that the foregoing trends which have been identified in this study and supported by the literature evidence are inter-related. Firstly, distributed leadership works through empowering teachers. This clearly comes from the findings and the literature (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006; Harris 2004; Harris and Muijs, 2004; Jackson, 2000). The distinct benefits that have been associated with empowering teachers are that teachers get involved in decision-making, get a sense of ownership, teachers are motivated and work towards a common purpose. As stated earlier, the common goal for all schools is improved learning outcomes for students. Secondly, teachers and middle leaders have the power and autonomy to make decisions in their subject areas, to experiment with new methods and to use resources as they see fit. This appears to be the area where teachers can take responsibilities. It is thus associated with emergent approach and opportunistic distribution. This was clearly stated by the majority (7 out of 8) of the teachers in this study. However, despite this perceived power and autonomy which is limited, the heads still retained control of what they believed to be key aspects of the school; namely the curriculum, policy and the budget. The literature evidence from a number of researchers (MacBeath, 2005; PricewaterhouseCoopers 2007; Storey, 2004; Danielson, 2006) indicates that heads of institutions

would want to have control and some even expressed stress (Blasé and Blasé 1996) over loss of control. On the basis of the findings from this study as supported by the literature evidence, it is evident that heads distribute some leadership functions, but there is a limit since they would want some control. Indeed it would appear that the control is necessary to avoid anarchy which Hargreaves and Fink (2006) identify in their continuum of distributed leadership.

Thirdly, the findings highlight that leadership distribution enhances effective school leadership because when teachers are involved they would accept and own changes that are introduced in the school. Teachers make contributions, they work collaboratively in teams and this ensures they work towards a common goal. This view comes through clearly from the findings and the literature evidence supports this (Rutherford, 2000; NRT, 2003; Fullani 2003). It is clear from the findings that teachers work collegially in teams and this has the potential to raise the student outcomes.

Fourthly this study has indicated agreement with Harris (2002) who suggests that building leadership capacity requires distributing leadership to others. It has also highlighted that more distributed forms of leadership in which teachers are encouraged to take a greater role in leadership are the key to better outcomes for student (Frost, 2008). As the findings reveal, all the four headteachers made conscious effort to develop the teachers professionally. Teachers also confirmed that they enjoyed their job as they shared ideas and utilised their expertise and they viewed capacity building as way of developmental process in their career. Although there were similarities with

CPD concepts outlined in the literature (Lindon and King, 2009; Adey, 2004; Carroll, 2009), this study did not find CPD practices and none of the participants mentioned it.

The study also explored how leadership was distributed in schools. To do this, the study compared the findings with two theories of distributed leadership. These were developed by MacBeath (2005) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006). There was widespread agreement among the heads in this study that there was no particular model of distribution that they followed. However what was common to all schools was that leadership distribution was largely based on formal structures. While the leaders stated that there was no theory of distribution followed, findings from this study showed accordance with distribution as formal (MacBeath, 2005) and progressive delegation (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006). It was also clear that none of the schools followed autocratic distribution, (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006) and it would appear that the schools avoided this because they wanted to involve teachers in decision-making in effort to improve the learning outcomes.

Although the study did not find well established models of distributed leadership, the leadership distribution practices at the schools concurred with some stages in both MacBeath's (2005) and Hargreaves and Fink (2006). Perhaps this suggests that distributed leadership, despite the unprecedented growth in literature about it, is still in its infancy in terms of its practice in school. As one headteacher in the study suggested, it takes time for distributed leadership to be fully implemented. In the same vein this thesis argues that it would take time for clear patterns of leadership distribution to be

revealed. However, it was clear from this study that contrary to what the participants saw as the ideal position with regards to distributed leadership, top-down leadership is more dominant than emergent leadership. Therefore there is a need to be clear about what is offered as a basis for empowerment in schools: a model based on the rhetoric of leadership distribution or a model that is akin to delegation. We also need to know the extent of the influence of the emergent bottom-up approach to leadership distribution. Thus further studies are needed to investigate these issues.

### **Implications of the findings to the overall study**

Findings from this study indicate that distributed leadership is perceived to have great potential to raise learning outcomes. It is also evident from the literature and the study that improved student learning outcomes are of paramount importance. Consequently all the participants in the study coupled with literature evidence, acknowledged this. Similarly Rhodes and Brundrett (2010) have argued that learning is central to the mission of educational institutions and that “indeed it is the reason for their existence and leaders in education have no more important role than that of enhancing the learning outcomes of the students in their care” (p.153). Headteachers in this study have sought to achieve this important goal by distributing leadership roles and responsibilities across the school. From the headteachers perspectives, and also as confirmed by research findings cited earlier in this study, leadership distribution has a number of advantages. These include motivating teachers, empowering teachers, involving teachers to work collaboratively and

collegially and affording teachers the opportunity to work in teams where they share their skills and expertise.

The findings to this study and literature also highlight that leadership distribution reduces the workload of headteachers and helps both heads and teachers to improve their work life balance. This thesis would argue that by distributing leadership, headteachers in this study created favourable conditions for learning and empowered teachers and middle leaders to take a direct lead in teaching and learning within a collaborative and trusting environment. In this way, headteachers influence the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Thus the study has also linked leadership distribution to professional learning community and overall school capacity building.

There is evidence from this study that participants believe that leadership distribution to middle leaders and teachers has a positive effect on teacher effectiveness and engagement. Results from this small scale study also suggest that leadership distribution enhances teacher performance through empowerment, motivation and involvement in decision making. These perceptions are also supported by literature findings.

This research adopts an interpretative view and such a view allows the perceptions and experiences of the participants to be explored. The interviewees in this study had different experiences and perceptions about the impact of distributed leadership on teaching and learning and by taking this approach, richness in data is gained. The adoption of a qualitative approach enabled the researcher to gain first hand information from the interviewees. It

was also possible to clarify any issues and make follow up questions during the semi-structured interviews. The researcher was also able to gain insight and knowledge about how distributed leadership was practised and the views of the interviewees on its effects on teaching and learning. All the data collected using this approach builds up to answer the three research questions of this study. By carefully analysing and interpreting the data, the research highlighted the issues that emerge from the study. Consequently, the research could be deemed authentic and reliable. It is also possible to widen knowledge from this study.

As stated earlier, this is a small scale research which is limited to a sample size of eighteen participants; four headteachers, six middle leaders and eight teachers. As such it would not be appropriate to extrapolate from its results. But closed generalisation can be applied to the results. Despite its small size, this study does provide a basis upon which a fuller picture of distributed leadership in action can be gained as the data was collected from practitioners who are directly engaged in leadership distribution. The data collected through the semi-structured interviews provided tentative answers to the research questions posed at the beginning of this study. It has been found that all participants in this study view distributed leadership as having a positive effect on teaching and learning. They also believed that distributed leadership contributed significantly to effective school leadership. While the study did not find theories of distributed leadership as practised in schools there were clear links with some research theories. The study suggests that leadership distribution practices in schools are still developing so it will take time for clear patterns to emerge.

After reviewing the literature and examining the findings to this research, the study concludes that leadership distribution has immense potential to raise teaching standards and student outcomes. This was clearly the perception of all participants in this study. However, it is noted that the effects of leadership distribution on raising learner outcomes is currently unknown. This is largely due to the lack of empirical evidence that links leadership distribution to raising learning outcomes. It is for this reason that the study proposes a comprehensive investigation into this important topic. To this end, the study serves to provide key insights to inform the ongoing research agenda.

### **The contribution of this research**

This study has made several contributions to the body of knowledge on distributed leadership as an approach to school leadership and its effects on teaching and learning. The main contribution of the study is that it is a first attempt to explore and give an insight into the perceptions of headteachers, middle leaders and teachers about the effects of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. The study notes that these are the practitioners in the forefront in schools and their views are useful for understanding how schools can improve; both in terms of leadership and student outcomes. The contributions of this study are outlined as follows:

1. The study provides an important starting point in exploring the whole notion of distributed leadership, its effect on teaching on teaching and learning: real and perceived, its efficacy as a leadership approach and how it is practised.

2. While the perceptions of participants were that distributed leadership has a positive effect on teaching and learning, findings to this study reveal that schools practise it primarily as a rhetorical device. All the interviewees talked of staff motivation, empowerment, involvement in decision-making and participation and this was supported by the majority of the literature reviewed. But analysis of how distributed leadership was practised in the schools reveals that at the moment, it is an ideal to which heads and staff aspire. There appears to be a deep seated desire among participants to practise distributed leadership in a collaborative and collegial way.
3. Given the bureaucratic nature of schools and that power, authority and control of resources remain largely with heads and those in formal leadership positions, leadership practices appear to be at odds with the principles of distributed leadership. In such circumstances the notion of a shared sense of accountability remains an ideal which is yet to be achieved. The evidence from this small study point to this. However, the findings reveal participants' desire and intention to operate within the principles and premise of distributed leadership
4. There remains a lack of empirical work and evidence to support the participants' perceptions about the effect of distributed leadership on teaching and learning. However, some interviewees gave examples like better grades in SATS, improved student behaviour and schools moving to top rank in the area which they directly attributed distributed leadership. But there remains a need to verify this.

5. The study found that there are two principles regarding the practise of distributed leadership. These were devolved and emergent approaches. The findings show the predominance of top-down over bottom-up approaches to distributed leadership. Headteachers devolve roles through holders of formally designated posts and this was akin to top-down approach. While headteachers were happy to devolve responsibilities, they found it difficult to 'let go' of control of power and responsibility, due to concerns about trust and accountability. Teachers voluntarily took responsibilities. This is emergent approach which is associated with bottom-up influence.
  
6. The study offers a useful insight into how leadership is distributed in schools. Leadership distribution was based on task. Remaining with MacBeath's (2005) taxonomy, four types of distribution were identified. First there was formal distribution where heads devolved responsibilities like managerial workload but retained control of finance and the core curriculum. They also made all the major decisions. Second, there was incremental distribution where staff had to prove that they could perform the tasks before they could be given full responsibilities. Third, there was opportunistic distribution where teachers took additional tasks like sports, designing new teaching methods, drama and recycling. These tasks were not considered big enough to come from the top but nevertheless they had to keep senior management informed. Fourth, leadership was assumed and this was akin to cultural distribution.

This small scale study also contributes to the knowledge on how some themes associated with distributed leadership are perceived to contribute to effective school leadership and teaching and learning. From the findings, we can gain information that helps us to understand:

- How leadership distribution is perceived to reduce the workload of headteachers, thereby allowing them to focus on instructional issues which in turn enhances student learning outcomes.
- How through leadership distribution, headteachers create favourable conditions for learning and establish a sense of shared ownership.
- That involving middle leaders and teachers in decision-making is perceived to motivate them to improve their teaching in order to achieve better student outcomes.
- That working collaboratively in teams as a result of leadership distribution is believed to have a positive effect on teaching and learning.
- The ways in which leadership is distributed and how it is perceived to have an effect on teaching and learning as well as effective school leadership.
- How school leadership is believed to influence the quality of teaching and learning by distributing leadership roles.
- Why headteachers distribute leadership in some areas and not others.

## **How the contribution can be applied**

The study identifies three interest groups to whom the contributions can be useful and how these can be applied. These are:

1. Practitioners who constantly seek ways of raising student outcomes.  
They would find results from this study to be of great interest. Although this is a small scale study, the findings can serve to broaden the practitioners' knowledge and understanding of how leadership distribution would contribute to school leadership effectiveness. As outlined in the findings and discussion of the findings, effective school leadership potentially leads to better teaching and learning. The practitioners, in particular, headteachers would find the results from this study useful in providing some insights into how leadership distribution can contribute to achieving their organisational goals of raising teaching and learning standards at their schools.
2. Policy-makers and government agents can benefit from the results of this study by carefully examining the advantages of distributed leadership and making use of them for the benefit of schools. Improved learner outcomes appear to be a major concern for the government as evidenced by the use of league tables. Any initiatives that are likely to improve student outcomes, and distributed leadership is one of them, would be of great interest to policy-makers and government agencies.
3. Researchers can explore new knowledge using this study. The findings from this research can further inform the research agenda and add to the literature on distributed leadership.

### **Limitations of the study**

There were eighteen participants in this study; four headteachers, six middle leaders and eighteen teachers and data was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with each of these participants. All the participating schools were in the West Midlands region of England. The fact that the participants came from the same geographical area, coupled with the small sample size limit the generalizability of the findings. However, as discussed earlier, empirical closed generalisation is applicable to this study. The qualitative approach which emphasizes subjectivity, description and interpretation is also likely to impact on the findings. Although this is an acceptable outcome of this type of research, it may place limitations on the transferability of the findings outside the region or even to other schools within the region. Nevertheless, the study provides useful knowledge and insight into distributed leadership.

Due to the scope of this study, the findings were gained through semi-structured interviews with headteachers, middle leaders and teachers from four selected schools. However it is suggested that an in-depth study that includes other stake holders like students, support staff, parents, governors and government agencies would offer a more balanced view and hence present a better understanding of distributed leadership.

### **Summary and recommendations**

This small-scale study of eighteen practitioners: headteachers, middle leaders and teachers has highlighted the perceptions that distributed leadership has a

positive effect on teaching and learning and can contribute to effective school leadership. With regards to the benefits of distributed leadership, the participants believed that a well managed distributed approach has positive effects on the school as a whole. In particular it was cited that benefits include staff motivation, capacity building for staff, responsiveness to students' learning needs, managerial convenience through distribution of headteachers' workloads and improved teamwork and communication.

The study revealed that distribution of leadership depends on tasks and identified two principle approaches regarding leadership distribution; namely devolved and emergent approaches.

On the basis of the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Distributed leadership can be instrumental for improvement of teaching and learning as well as school improvement in school leadership. This study has made a starting point for further study in this area and these findings can be used for more studies on distributed leadership in schools.
2. Findings from the study may not be generalised to other schools, regions or even nationally due to small size. Hence, there is a need for an in- depth study with a bigger sample in order to enhance the generalisability of the findings.
3. It is further recommended that an in-depth longitudinal study into the effects of distributed leadership on student outcomes be conducted. This study, coupled with literature findings has revealed that there is considerable agreement that distributed leadership can raise student

outcomes. But there is no empirical evidence to support this. In this study it was based on perceptions. The purpose of the recommended longitudinal study would be to gather some empirical evidence to support this view.

4. Furthermore, the study recommends a more inclusive research that involves all stake holders like parents, governors, support staff, students, policy makers and other government agencies. Their views are equally valuable and would contribute to better understanding of distributed leadership.
5. The study illuminated tensions regarding leadership distribution which include devolution and centralised control, accountability mechanisms and emergent approach. These issues emerged as crucial for distributed leadership and they need further investigation. Perhaps, more crucially research must investigate what is to be distributed in terms of power and accountability and how this will impact on the leadership distribution process.

Finally, on the basis of the findings, the study concludes that distributed leadership offers great potential to influence students' learning outcomes and improvement in school leadership. However, that depends on how it is distributed. The findings to this study revealed two principle approaches: devolved leadership associated with top-down influence and emergent leadership associated with bottom-up influence. While the literature on distributed leadership largely promotes the latter, findings from this study point to the former being more significant in terms of how leadership is perceived and enacted within the schools in this study. Resonating with Gronn's (2006)

idea that the time for distributed leadership has come, the study ends on a note that given the benefits identified, it is high time for practitioners, policy-makers and researchers to come together and explore this topic further for the benefit of learners.

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## Appendix 1 Research Interview Consent Form

**Interviewer** .....

**Interviewee** .....

### **Purpose of interview**

This interview is part of my research for the award of EdD at the University of Birmingham.

### **Confidentiality**

Research ethics will be observed at all times in the analysis and use to which the data may be put. The data from the interview will only be available to the staff tutoring on the EdD programme at the University of Birmingham and, possibly, to the External for my thesis. Excerpts from the interview may be included as part of the final thesis, but your name will be excluded, and any identifying characteristics will be removed. The interview may also be used as part of written paper or books, but without your name and excluding any identifying characteristics, and subject to research ethics.

### **Acknowledgement**

Please sign this form to show that we have agreed its content

**Signed (interviewee)** .....

**Signed (Interviewer)** .....

**Date** .....

## **Appendix 2 Interview Schedule**

1. What do you understand by the term distributed leadership?
2. How much power and authority do the middle leaders and teachers have when responsibilities are distributed?
3. How far is leadership distributed in the school?
4. How is leadership distributed in your school? Is there any model that is followed?
5. To what extent would you say distributed leadership enhances capacity building among the staff?
6. What would you say are the benefits of distributing leadership for (a) the head (b) the teachers (c) the pupils?
7. How does distributed leadership contribute to effective school leadership?
8. Do you have examples that distributed leadership is working in the school?
9. Are there any examples of pupil outcomes that you would attribute to distributed leadership?
10. How effective are teams in your school?
11. How far do you involve teachers in change initiatives within the school?
12. Do you have any time set aside for collaboration?
13. What would you say is the overall effect of distributed leadership on teaching and learning?
14. Are there any problems that you have encountered with distributed leadership?

### **Appendix 3 Interview with Headteacher**

**AM –Africa Moyo (interviewer)**

**HT – Headteacher (interviewee)**

AM: What do you understand by the term distributed leadership?

HT: Right ok, distributed leadership is about empowering others to engage in management and leadership of the school. It's about giving them the power to make decisions, it's about giving them the power to implement actions and carry them through. But alongside that is also the notion of accountability because in distributing management and leadership you also distribute the accountability as well. So genuine distributed leadership has two elements to it; giving the power to lead and manage and taking on board the accountability and management and evaluation. So that's my general perception of distributed leadership. But at the end of the day the head is ultimately accountable that's how it is, certainly in the UK, the buck stops with the head but if you distribute responsibilities and people don't have accountability, the probability of then discharging their responsibilities for the outcomes and results is very low. There has to be responsibility and interactions, if it is the budget we ought to be responsible for the outcomes and results. In my view the chances are they are going to discharge their duties more effectively if they have responsibility thrust upon them. But it is an issue heads have to make sure that within distributed leadership they are holding people to be accountable gradually. I am not saying that you are there all the time. I am not saying that you are in their space every time. I am just saying you regularly meet them talking to them and monitoring. If you run a school on your own being accountable for everything then nothing gets done.

AM: How much power and authority do the middle leaders and teachers have when responsibilities are distributed to them?

HT: This is an interesting point in terms of the context of the school, that's an interesting question. I think that one of the issues that I have personally is that perhaps I haven't empowered enough people to be leaders and managers. I haven't let go enough. There are some people like the deputy head who have taken a lot of responsibility and powers. But to think I haven't given enough powers to people at times and partly that is a consequence of the issues of managing things significantly, for example standards of education. I hold that centrally for example it's a six and half million budget so I hold on to that centrally. So it's a hard thing to let go some things as you can see from the size of the budget.

AM: What makes it hard to let go so much?

HT: The reason for that is the point you raise earlier that it takes being so high and the fact that ultimately it's me and the governors actually it's subsequently us who are responsible in particular for the educational outcomes in terms of standards of attainment and increasing pupils' well-being. There is a lot of

work and issues in the UK about missing children and children dropping out of school and things like child protection and that sort of thing you have to be very accountable and very transparent. That to me is perhaps the key barrier. I think it's about the competence of those to whom you distribute the leadership. I think if you are going to let go you have to feel comfortable and confident that those people are able and willing not just to do the job but account for it and that takes time. Its easy for me to say to someone you look after standards in core subjects for example that is a big responsibility, actually it's at the core of the school. These people have to be responsible and confident enough and well remunerated and regarded highly enough to take on that role. It's mainly a combination of the notion of them not wanting to let go but having to be sure that ultimately I am going to let go to a competent and confident enough person to discharge the duties effectively. In particular, holding other people accountable to them. I think sometimes people find it hard to work with other people and to hold them accountable checking their work and to be able to tell them things that they don't want to hear. I think people find that hard if you are going to let go, you should let go to people who are able and willing to do that.

AM: How far is leadership distributed in the school?

HT: There has been some good work going on in the school. People have taken leadership roles in the school in terms of monitoring and evaluation. But in terms of the classroom teacher being empowered to change the environment in which they work, I think that's quite limited as such. But having said that, the classroom teacher in the context of their own classroom their schemes of work, lesson planning they get quite a free rein. We do expect schemes of work to be in place lesson plans to be up to date but within that framework they have a lot of flexibility. We do not prescribe and they are responsible and accountable for what happens in the classroom. In this sense, yes, leadership has been distributed to the classroom teacher. Teachers do take initiative as far as the syllabus is concerned. You think also of the issues I have raised earlier about welfare of children, child protection, learning outcomes and standards etc. you cannot monitor and achieve these without distributing the responsibilities to classroom teachers. That's impossible, yours is to monitor and get regular feedback. So there is a lot of distribution to the classroom teachers; there is a lot going in the classroom and the teachers are in charge, I think the only difference is that they are not in formal positions of leadership like heads of department etc.

AM: How do you distribute leadership to those in formal leadership positions? Is there any model of distribution that you follow?

HT: We do not have any model as such, but I think I need people with the ability to engage with people, the ability to direct people's work not in a strong way but to build teams, engage teams. I identify such people with my senior members then we follow our leadership structure. They need some understanding of monitoring and evaluating, monitoring the work of their colleagues and evaluating. They need to be able to feedback to these colleagues. The sort of the thing that we have asked middle leaders to do, we

have asked them to monitor and review student progress and attainment, they are responsible for managing their budget and spending that budget in terms of resources of curriculum and staffing. But I have to approve first how the money is to be spent. We ask them where appropriate to make interventions where things aren't progressing as they should be. In order to discharge these duties effectively they need qualities like team building, shared accountability etc.

You also need people you can trust. You obviously have different views of different people, some you trust more than others; some discharge their duties more effectively. It is very important to have trust. The difficulties arise if you have a team of middle leaders, to a degree you have to treat fairly and you have equal expectations of them on the surface anyway. Obviously some of these colleagues you are more comfortable with them, you think they are more competent. So you are inclined to let go a little more. But you ultimately want to have a team of people you can trust but that takes time to develop and trust is two way things. They have to trust you as a leader to support you, and then if they have an issue with a colleague they expect you to deal with it in the same way they have to trust you not to undermine them. If you promise them something you have said something is going to happen you must deliver it so trust is important.

AM: To what extent would you say distributed leadership enhances capacity building among the staff?

HT: If you are going to have a school that is sustainable, and when I say sustainable I mean that if it remains effective it is going to continue to develop, move forward and be able to take a board initiative and development whether they are national or local or internal, you have to have self generating sustainable capacity. If that is going to happen you have to create a situation within that organisation where there is distributed leadership, where you engage people in leadership. And also to a degree develop that culture of succession so that when you move on you have people ready to come in, you hope you are building something sustainable, you have a lot of schools where heads have come in and done a good job, they move on and things literally come to a halt. I mean there was no capacity building and no one was ready to take over. I think in a way that's what distributed leadership will achieve in the end, develop capacity involve and engage people in leadership and management, any you won't have a crisis situation when a head moves on. So if you don't build leadership you will have a vacuum at some point in time. You can get a quick fix of coming in and saying I will do this, I will do that but in the long run that's not sustainable you have not built capacity for the future.

AM: What would you say are the benefits of distributed leadership to you and the teachers?

HT: In terms of my work, my work is easier, less stressful. That might give me some capacity to focus on the more enjoyable aspects of the job. In terms of the staff I think if they feel they have no one strong in their job they have a genuine influence, they can innovate they can develop professionally. Actually

maybe I am naïve, I should think people should enjoy their role more, hence more motivated they discharge their duties more effectively. Alongside in terms of this notion of development for a lot of staff they want to develop professionally if they have an opportunity to engage in aspects of leadership and management etc, this gives them an opportunity to take responsibility get variety. And actually I think if people are generally engaged in the process of leadership and management and decision making they develop partnership of the institution, they are more into it and their commitment is possibly enhanced. But some staff are less engaged, they say I am doing my job, I don't want anything and this presents some challenges. But certainly for the majority of the staff engaging them in the process of management and leadership is quite a powerful motivating factor.

I think if a teacher feels part of the institution it pays off because teachers are very powerful role models of the children. Kids do sort of spin off their behaviour. The kids will feel something special to be taught by the teachers who have a high level of enthusiasm, teachers who have been empowered. The kids will see the institution in a positive way. I also think that if you feel good about something you try harder, you become more confident. So I believe through distributed leadership teachers develop a positive attitude and image of the institution. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that it motivates them to work better, become more innovative and resourceful.

AM: How does distributed leadership contribute to effective school leadership?

HT: I think I have partly answered this question when I talked about the benefits of distributed leadership. As I said, my job becomes less stressful because I distribute to others. I have time to concentrate on planning, coordinating and reviewing the progress in terms of teaching and learning. With distributed leadership you have motivated teachers who are willing to do more especially when you involve them in planning the innovations and changes. They will have a sense of ownership. If you develop strong teams and everybody works towards the same goals. I think distributed leadership is the best approach to leadership because everybody contributes and participates although you may have some teachers who are less cooperative. I think this also motivates teachers to teach very well and in the end the kids benefit. So apart from helping to improve management, it also helps to improve the teaching as teachers are motivated.

AM: Do you have any examples that distributed leadership is working in the school?

HT: I think one thing that has happened in the school is that a lot of staff have moved up taking up responsibilities and internal promotions. I had heads of subjects appointed from within the school. I had teachers coming to the school and taking responsibility within a very short space of time. I think it's because I have been able to demonstrate earlier on the ability to take something on. So I think in terms of the staff profile we have lot of young and new staff coming here and working their way up quite quickly as well as established staff, they

have gone up too. I think there has been a quite positive spin off in terms of leadership.

The other thing is that when I first came to the school staff attendance was quite appalling and over the past two years. I have the best attendance rates in our staff. I think one of the reasons is that staff feel part of the institution, they feel that their job is important. They need to be there to discharge their duties. Maybe that's another tangible outcome, a consequence of engagement through distributed leadership. There are lots of interventions going on to ensure that kids are catching up. I think staff feels empowered and they want the best, they show that they can manage, they are taking responsibility.

AM: Are there any examples of pupil outcomes that you would attribute to distributed leadership?

HT: Well standards across the school vary significantly. If you look at some of the curriculum areas, you will find that some teachers really have a grip of their subject areas. They have collegiality good teams, got a grip of the issues and worked hard. If you think of subjects who have improved dramatically over the last three years for example business studies quite an interesting area very well managed very well led. The chap takes a lot of responsibility. You are beginning to see significant improvement in subjects like Maths, performing arts. You have got people that take control, have got the power to lead and manage and putting in place structures to deliver the outcomes. There are areas like humanities where there is need for improvement. The leader is endeavouring to do the right things, he is building teams, he is putting in place resources, and he is supporting staff. For me in terms of pupil performance exam results, if you are going to have improvement in results you are looking at 5-10 years not just 2-3 years, you have got to distribute the leadership, you have got to emit it in every classroom. You have got to have teachers taking responsibility and having the power to try and organise their curriculum to monitor it and assess it. To be able to do those teachers must have the power. As a leader you have to embed it in the culture of the organisation. In my view this is where you will have genuine on going improvement. I am not just talking of exam results; I am talking about the number of kids staying in education and employment reducing the number of teenage pregnancies, you talking about kids leaving school socially able to engage in the society. I know the government puts emphasis on exam results but we are looking at developing an individual who can fit in society equipped with survival skills to face the world.

AM: You have talked of teams how effective are they in the school?

HT: They are variable, we have different examples of teams, some teams are very effective. Some teams have strong leaders and clear processes and systems of accountability; you have other teams which are effective and incredibly collegial for example performing arts. It's very collegial. You get incredibly good results, the kids love the subject. They have a big impact across the school. And similarly you have got Maths another strong team but

slightly different leadership style, more of a systems and process approval. You have teams which are not so strong and slightly dysfunctional, who are not modelling the outcomes as they should. So you got variability within the school just like in any organisation.

I think how they develop as a team is interesting. I think one of the biggest factors is the leader of team and how they engage others, their leadership style, and how they treat others in the team. In general you find yourself involved in other teams than others because some of them are producing the outcomes. You get feedback from kids that teaching is not the best then you have to intervene or send the deputy head to discuss those issues in the schools. And you find that you get more involved in some subjects than others, some seem to run themselves very well, others you have to involve yourself.

AM: Why would you be more involved in some subjects than others?

HT: Because some of them are not producing the outcomes in terms of results. Staffing issues come up to you and so if those things are happening you have to begin to ask questions and start engaging with them to resolve the issues. Its fascinating that I rarely had something to do with some of the departments because they are running themselves, they are producing the outcomes and getting on with their job but others I have to get involved. I had to be involved in the English department quite heavily for example to try and sort out the issues. I think part of that is about leadership and management and part is about quality teaching which is a result of leadership and management and standards which is a big issue in English. That's how I get involved in some subjects.

AM: How far do you involve teachers in change initiatives in the school?

HT: They are very much involved. But sometimes it depends on the nature of the change. For the big changes I have to take the lead because I am ultimately accountable. However, these are discussed in the staff meetings or they are informed by their HODS or senior teachers. We discuss most of the curriculum changes and agree on the way forward. The good thing is once we agree on something, the staff implement it with enthusiasm. They work on the changes in their teams. I think this is where distributed leadership works well because teachers get involved and implement the changes.

AM: Do you have any time set aside for collaboration?

HT: Oh yes. This is embedded in PPA- have you heard of it?-time for planning, preparation and assessment. You distribute responsibilities and teachers work in their teams. Its quite effective but I have to monitor. I have had very good teaching strategies coming from teachers because I have empowered them to collaborate and develop some new teaching methods for the benefit of the kids. As a result teaching is improving though some subjects still need more improvement.

AM: What would you say is the overall effect of distributed leadership on teaching and learning?

HT: I think the overall effect has been to secure some improvements in standards of teaching and learning. I wouldn't even say that's even across the school, that's why I am saying some standards have improved across the school in most areas in terms of measured outcomes. There are exceptions, and the biggest exception being in English. It has gone up a little bit but not enough. Maths and Science are coming up. Arts, Humanities, MFL, Languages and business have general improvements. Attendance is improving, the pastoral leaders can engage with families, the number of children staying in education has increased, student behaviour has improved, I think ultimately improvement during these three years has come about as a result of people having power to do their job. I have got to qualify that and some of it is a result of strong people at the top. I think the real test for this school over the next couple of years is to have self sustenance, all the hard work coming to fruition. We have to develop self sustaining systems, and gradually let go. As I have said before, it is hard to let go, I have to take control. So I would say that distributed leadership has contributed to the improvement of standards and the school environment.

AM: Are there any problems that you have encountered with distributed leadership?

HT: Not really but I would say the biggest challenge is time. Some teachers prefer to focus on their teaching roles than do the distributed roles. In such cases we give the responsibilities to those who are more willing.

A.M.Thank you very much for taking part in my research.Your contributions are very valuable.

## **Appendix 4 Interview with Middle Leader**

**AM –Africa Moyo (Interviewer)**

**ML – Middle Leader (Interviewee)**

AM: What do you understand by the term distributed leadership?

ML: What we have in the school is a staffing structure. This structure is made up of the headteacher, deputy head and the senior management team. The senior management team are a group of people who lead a subject area so they have designated subject areas such as literacy or R.E or mathematics or I.C.T. My role is RE, History and Geography at the moment. What my role in leadership is to be in charge, looking at that subject area across the school, how to develop it across the school, what impact it has on teaching and learning, right down from foundation stage to year 6. All teachers in the school have a different role, they look at the same structure but we are in charge of different areas. The overall picture is that we are a very much passionate about bringing forward teaching and learning, we do it together in all of our roles.

AM: Which leadership roles are distributed to teachers?

ML : Well as senior managers we are involved. We have our subject area, that's the first thing. The second thing we are involved in is behaviour policies, looking at how the school is run leading to something that's called the SIP (School Improvement Plan). So what we do is that we have a document that sees our vision for the school in the next 2 to 3 years. Part of our leadership role is that as leaders of our subjects to actually make a difference in the school so for Gifted and Talent wood, I would support children who are talented in art and sport. So my role would be to oversee that across the school. So that leads to SIP which is an important thing in the school. It helps to have a vision and if something is done, we tick it off on the chart. That is constantly reviewed and then we write new action plans to continue to develop the school. We also have impact in something called the SEF which is like an online document which we have to be sending to Ofsted. They look at it and reassure our skills really, what our results are what our policies are what the running of our school is like. We as leaders have an input into that all the time.

As class teachers we are leaders in key stage 2 or key stage 1. We are responsible for our classes achievements in their subject areas, for behaviour for well being, for the whole child, every child matters, that kind of thing. So that's what we are responsible for in our class, making the child safe, making the child happy, making sure that they learn, they improve and they are continuing to develop in our school.

AM: In distributing these leadership roles, do you have any model or pattern that you follow?

ML : We have SIP and we have our action plans. For example we have our action plan, and we have a time frame but clearly leadership comes from the headteacher. He tells us what he wants done. I don't think the head follows any model. It's mainly giving responsibilities to those who are capable, experienced and trusted. Some people are given small responsibilities and this is monitored until they prove that they can do it then they get more.

We also have something called performance management where the headteacher sets targets for each teacher. There is a time frame given, there is a variety of activities. I have to produce clear evidence that this has worked and it has been achieved. That's another thing that we are measured on.

AM: How has distributed leadership contributed to effective school leadership?

ML: I think when you have motivated staff the school runs smoothly. The head doesn't have to do everything. We all play our part and that makes life easier for the head and the pupils too get the best out of it. As staff we work towards a common goal and we implement whatever has been agreed. Even when the head is away you find the school running smoothly because responsibilities have been distributed.

AM: How is teamwork promoted in the school?

ML; Once the head has distributed these responsibilities, we are expected to work in teams. We have subject teams and year teams and these work together and feed to the school team. I think they help to improve teaching and learning because we support each other. In my RE team we have agreed to promote the subject because not many pupils seem to like it. I think working in teams is good for the teachers and pupils.

AM: What are your perceptions about the effects distributed leadership on teaching and learning.

ML: I do think it has had an effect on teaching and learning, looking from leadership, it has enforced good behaviour, it has enforced a wonderful environment for children to learn in. There is a regular monitoring system where we are observed and from then we are given targets. If the lesson is not good, or is satisfactory, we are given targets to meet the next time they are coming to see us we are expected to improve. That also makes a big effect on teaching and learning. We seek advice from INSET, Staff meeting, going on courses. All those things come under, the umbrella, of making teaching and learning successful and with distribution of leadership, we help each other to do that, in making teaching and learning much more solid, and embedded in our school. I do think that having a happy team in school and working together, agreeing in staff meetings, that this behaviour policy is needed or a marking policy. All of those different things are vital for us all to work together, to move on together. So I think a good working team is very important. We get everybody happy and that motivates staff.

AM: If you want to introduce change in the school, how would you involve teachers?

ML: If a teacher wants to introduce any change, he/she would then speak to the SMT, discuss that with them first and then he has to also go to staff in staff meetings. If a change is to be introduced, it would also go to the governing body who have to agree with it before it can be implemented in the school. If a subject leader wants to change something in subject, then he/she will first discuss with the HOD.

AM: Are there any problems that you have encountered in distributing leadership?

ML: We have not really encountered any, we have had cases where some teachers have not been doing very well in some roles so changes were made. Other more capable teachers were asked to take over those roles. That's the only scenario that has happened. We also had cases where teachers came and said I can not cope; I am finding it extremely difficult to manage this area. I would like to give this responsibility back. Can you find somebody to do it. There is no reason for the headteacher and other teachers not to support that teacher.

A.M: Thank you very much for your time and contribution to my research.

## **Appendix 5 Interview with teacher**

**AM- Africa Moyo (Interviewer)**

**TR –Teacher (Interviewee)**

AM: What do you understand by the term distributed leadership?

TR: In a school I think distributed leadership means the head at the top and there were a few people under her who have different roles and there were other people under them as well. So I would think there was someone at the top who would distribute leadership roles to other members of staff. In this school it is the headteacher, deputy head, head of numeracy, head of literacy, head of special needs. We all work under one of those managers. I am in the humanities department, everyone in the school is assigned to a team and each team has a manager. I do not have any leadership roles but I am part of the humanities team but there is a leader. But I do not have any leadership roles. However, I am in charge of my class and I am allowed some autonomy in the way I manage my class. I can implement changes with my class as long as they I agree with school policy.

AM: How much power and authority do these managers have?

TR: I think they do have power, like specialists in their roles. I think everything has to be agreed by the headteacher. The headteacher has the final say. Like the heads of department and subjects aren't free to do whatever they want. The headteacher has to okay it to make sure its good for the school.

AM: What would you say are some of the barriers to distributed leadership?

TR: I think everyone has to be willing to be part of a team and every one has got to want to work together for a common goal and everything. I think if you have got big differences and personality clashes, that's a big problem. I think people must have similar goals and similar ideas for it to work.

AM: How is leadership distributed in school? Do you think there is any model of leadership distribution that is followed?

TR: I don't think there is any model but, obviously I think they have to be experienced. Those without experience are usually given fewer responsibilities until they prove that they can do it. One has to be confident and quite assertive and be willing to observe other teachers. People have to be able to make constructive criticism and be dedicated as well to spend more time. But in our school we take some responsibilities on our own as long as we tell the head. I have taken sports and drama responsibilities and the head was happy with it. We many do many small other things in the school because leadership is distributed. The head distributes big responsibilities to senior staff.

AM: What do you think are the benefits of distributed or the head, teachers and learners.

TR: The head has a leadership team, they all work together; have staff meetings once a week. They all work together and give feedback. I think it helps because she doesn't have to do everything herself. She has got other people to do different things and take some of the responsibilities and do things and feedback to do. I think it works well because the head couldn't do everything.

I think it works well for teachers too because there is always someone you can approach if there is a problem. So its really good because its not one person in charge and you can approach someone whom you feel happy and confident to approach if you have a problem. I think there is more help because there are many people to approach and you get different opinions as well by different leadership members. Its good to get advice from different people.

I think the pupils benefit as well. They know who is in charge of what. But I think the greatest benefit is that they are taught by teachers who are happy, motivated, well prepared and all working for the same goal.

AM: What about in terms of teaching and learning, what do you think is the effect of distributed leadership?

TR: I think obviously with teaching, we try new ways which we think benefit pupils. We discuss these in our staff meetings and teams. We try the new way in teams and get feedback from others. When we go out to pupils we find that they work better. Some teachers like the literacy coordinator go on training courses and they give us feedback. We all try this and it really improves our teaching. We also enjoy using the new methods.

We also go on various courses which help to improve our teaching.

AM: Do you have any time set aside for collaboration.

TR: We all have PPA time which we usually spend together planning and doing all sorts of things to do with our teaching. Like all the year groups plan together, what lessons to teach and what resources we need. So there is a lot of collaboration between year groups and we spend a lot of time together. And there is time spent in staff meetings, we talk and discuss issues together in these meetings. Then we have training days as well, there is usually a lot of discussion. You know its very structured what we do, there is a lot of time to discuss issues and share ideas.

I think it really works well and contributes to effective learning because we all know what is expected of us, and we know what works and what doesn't. You know we all have the same methods that we are trying to use. So its like a whole school approach, like the whole school working together. Everyone is not doing something different. All the teachers are doing the same thing and when the children move to different classes with different teachers there is continuation. So I think that way it helps teaching and learning.

AM: How are teachers involved in changes in the school?

TR: We have staff meetings. The head teacher will always want to get ideas. We all get together and share ideas and usually make discussions together. The headteacher usually goes with the consensus. With things like budgeting, the heads of department all have their faculty allocated a certain sum of money by the head and deputy. We all as a team talk about what resources we need, as the head of the team usually goes to sort out the budget.

The headteacher is always interested in what we think but she does make the final decision. Things like which year groups we teach the head normally allocates that. But things like school policy and whole school budget, the headteacher wants us to be involved. She doesn't like to do it alone. She couldn't introduce a policy like enjoyment at school without involving us, she would like us all to contribute to that.

We always make suggestions on many things and the head always listens but I think ultimately she decides on what is best for the school.

But I think it's a very fair way of leadership, it's democratic. It's a good way of running a school because all roles are shared. Everyone has a say. We can always talk and say how we feel.

AM: You have mentioned teamwork, how is teamwork promoted in the school.

TR: There is a lot of teamwork, within a year group, obviously we plan together, there is a lot of teamwork like in staff meetings and on training days. There is lots of working together and doing group work. And I think the whole school stands together as a team. Like everyone here is happy to be part of the school team, we all like to associate and identify with the school. It's a happy team. Its nice to be part of a team you can work together and it makes things easy, it helps the workload.

AM: What would you say is the overall effect of distributed leadership on teaching and learning?

TR: I think it's the best structure for the school and children. It makes a happy environment for children and teachers. It's the best environment for children to learn.

A.M: Thank you very much for taking part in my research. Your contributions are very valuable.