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Student Teachers' Interpretation of Leadership in Educational Contexts

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Education in Ireland presents an idiosyncratic context. Study of this lends depth and insight to any international consideration of education, complex as this must be. This paper considers student teachers' perspectives and interpretations of leadership in primary (national) schools in Ireland. It focuses on the findings of research undertaken with two cohorts of student teachers in their final year of study. To contextualise the research findings, the paper begins by charting the development of leadership structures within the Irish primary school system. It moves then to outline briefly the Bachelor of Education programme in the university college where the study was undertaken. In detailing the research findings, the paper highlights the student teachers' experiences of leadership while undertaking school or professional placement, a core component of their university programme. It presents the students' perceptions of their potential to contribute to distributed leadership within schools while completing their final placement and afterwards on appointment to teaching positions. As part of their conclusion, the authors suggest that the extension of this research to include cohorts from each of the teacher education colleges in Ireland could support future policy development in initial teacher education.

Leadership and management in Irish primary schools: historic context

Founded in 1831, Ireland's national (primary) school system was initially intended to be multi-denominational. The system was overseen by a board of commissioners which comprised males of 'high personal character', predominantly though not exclusively clerical (*Copy of letter from the chief secretary of Ireland*, 1831-2).

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It was envisaged that pupils in national schools would attend literacy and numeracy lessons together but would receive doctrinal education separately, depending on each child's religious beliefs (Coolahan, 1981). By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, the schools were being run on denominational lines (O'Donoghue *et al.* 2017). The concept of leadership in education was a concept not widely discussed in educational circles in Ireland at the time. Management was important for the nascent system, however and that was vested in relatively small, homogenous groups. As the majority of people in Ireland adhered to Catholicism, most national schools in Ireland fell under the patronage and trusteeship of that church. Local clergymen managed the schools in their parishes and they assiduously guarded their rights in matters of education, religious and secular. Teachers appointed to a school professed the same religion as the school's manager and were answerable to him. They were also accountable to the board of commissioners. Teachers often found themselves endeavouring to accommodate the demands of manager and board, disparate and conflicting though they sometimes were. Following the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922, national schools came under the aegis of the Department of Education. Teachers in the schools had then to comply with directives from the State in the form of circulars from the Department of Education and they remained subject to the authority of the clerical manager. The principal teacher of a national school fulfilled an administrative role, coupled usually with his role as class teacher and, as Flood (2011) contends, there were 'few avenues of influence open to [him]'.

At the establishment of the system in 1831, some 75% of teachers in national schools were male. By the end of the nineteenth century, the number of males teaching in national schools had decreased to less than 50%. Nevertheless, though there were more female teachers in national schools at the time, most principals were males (*Second Report of the Commissioners*, 1835; *Fifty-seventh Report of the Commissioners*, 1890). The number of male primary teachers continued to decline throughout the twentieth century but there were always more male than female principal teachers in Irish primary schools. This situation pertained until the end of the century

when the numbers of female principals finally nudged ahead of the number of male principals (Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), 2004).

Though teachers were accountable to higher agencies, they were to a greater or lesser degree autonomous within their own classrooms. Here they worked as individuals and rarely collaborated with colleagues. With the publication of the child-centred *Primary School Curriculum* in 1971 the position of principals and class teachers was to change. This 'new' curriculum set out the principal's role with regard to its introduction. On 'him' depended its successful, or otherwise, implementation (Government of Ireland, 1971). 'His' work also stretched to organisation of staff meetings, the evaluation of progress, induction of new members of staff and to encouraging the pooling of opinions, skills and abilities (INTO, 1991). The principal was urged to introduce new concepts and to remain informed regarding innovative educational thought and development. The class teacher meanwhile was expected to work collaboratively with colleagues and was also required to stay abreast of current educational ideas (Government of Ireland, 1971).

Not without its shortcomings, the curriculum of 1971 was nevertheless pioneering, including its interpretation of the leadership roles that might be undertaken by principals and their colleagues. These roles were elucidated and extended in Circular 16/73 which issued from the Department of Education, Primary Branch in May, 1973. This circular also highlighted the role of the manager who was, as theretofore, 'charged with the direct government of the school' (Department of Education, 1973.) The Education Act, 1998 and the *Primary School Curriculum*, published in 1999, clarified and extended further the role of the principal and his/her colleagues. The term 'manager' does not feature in either the Education Act or in the *Primary School Curriculum*. Boards of management were established for primary schools in Ireland in 1975. Thereafter, the duties of the clerical manager were undertaken by the board. A local clergyman or, latterly, clergywoman may become a member and/or chairperson of a school's board of management. However, (s)he could not discharge managerial duties

on his/her own and must consult with the other members of the board before acting on the school's or board's behalf. Albeit slowly on occasions, leadership and management in Irish primary schools progressed from the prerogative of one person, a clerical male manager, to allowing parents, teachers and community members generally have some say in how their local school operated.

The term 'distributed leadership' is not used explicitly in the Education Act. Nevertheless, the Act's explication of the roles of principal and class teachers suggests that distributed leadership is what is envisaged for Irish schools in the twenty-first century (Government of Ireland, 1998, Part 5). The distributed leadership model admittedly may not suit, or be accepted in, all schools. Nevertheless, disparate publications attest to its possibilities and there is consensus that it encompasses democratic, delegated, shared and collaborative leadership. Humphreys (2010) acknowledges the multitude of interchangeable features of distributed leadership. Woods and Roberts (2013) contend that leadership is inherently 'a distributed phenomenon', regardless of the positive or negative actions of acknowledged leaders in a school. According to them, the challenge for accredited school leaders is not to distribute leadership but to harness this 'distributed phenomenon' for the pupils' and school's best interests. Given the ever-increasing demands made on leaders within the educational setting, distributed leadership may be considered appropriate for tackling the exigencies, and addressing the needs, of children, schools generally and school related activities. Indeed Spillane (2006), who has contributed to the debate on distributed leadership, considers that school leadership involves multiple leaders, including administrators and teacher leaders. The concept of multiple leaders confirms the demanding task of leadership and offers potential within the school setting to enrich the educational experience for children. It can also allow school personnel to fulfil career ambitions, extend their abilities and interests and use skills and capabilities in the interests of the school and, most importantly, of the children in their care. Youngs (2007) promotes a view of distributed leadership that empowers an entire school community, pupils, parents and staff included. Distributed, democratic

leadership enables people to assume responsibility rather than have tasks delegated to them. 'People in formally designated positions and those without any such designations can and do take responsibility for leading and managing in the schoolhouse' (Spillane and Diamond, 2007, p.7). When principals move from exclusive power structures to empowering the whole school community, meaningful leadership can exist.

Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality framework for Primary Schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2016) seeks to illustrate effective practice for schools. With a view to supporting self-evaluation for schools, the framework is constructed around the areas of (i) teaching and learning and (ii) leadership and management as these affect pupil's learning outcomes and experiences directly. The framework provides a set of standards for each of the two areas. It considers leadership and management under four headings or domains: (i) leading learning and teaching (ii) managing the organisation (iii) leading school development and (iv) developing leadership capacity. The framework views leadership and management as indivisible. Both affect the school's core purpose, learning and teaching. The framework refers to those who have undertaken formal leadership roles be they school patrons, members of boards of management, principals, deputy principals or teachers with posts of responsibility. However, the framework also recognises that others can, and do, play a leadership role within a school. It considers the empowerment of teachers 'to take on leadership roles and to lead learning, through the effective use of distributed leadership models' as 'highly effective practice'. Importantly, it identifies the necessity to 'promote and facilitate the development of pupil voice and pupil leadership'. The framework notes that a school that ensures the democratic election of a representative pupil council and recognises it as 'a catalyst for change, with an active role in decision-making and policy development' is similarly displaying 'highly effective practice' (Department of Education and Skills, 2016, pp. 28, 29). As the potential of distributed leadership becomes apparent, the involvement of all members of a school's staff and the facilitation

of children's contribution to their own place of learning is being enhanced in many schools.

Teacher Leadership within the Bachelor of Education Programme

Teacher leadership is an aspect of distributed leadership that allows different teachers to emerge as leaders at different times during the school year and during the teachers' careers.

Within the relatively recent past, due to influences within and outside the country, teacher education in Ireland has changed (O'Donoghue *et al*. 2017). Currently, four Irish universities offer Bachelor of Education (B. Ed.) programmes to those wishing ultimately to teach in primary schools. All of these teacher education programmes run over four years and school or professional placement is a core component of each. Though the organisation of placements may vary, Teaching Council regulations ensure that the length of professional placements undertaken by all students is comparable (Teaching Council, 2017).

The B. Ed. programme in the university college where this research was undertaken has, like its counterparts in other universities, been reconceptualised in recent years. Moving from three to four years, the programme has increased its focus on policy development. Concepts of leadership are addressed in several of the modules undertaken by students. For example, when developing a specialism in a chosen area, students are supported in honing the skills and understanding necessary to lead a subject area in a school. A focal point for final year students in the university college where this research was undertaken is now the Policy and Leadership in Education module. This module challenges students (a) to interrogate current and recent educational policy, from national and international perspective and (b) to consider how they might, in the future, become policy and curriculum leaders within their schools. The module content aims at enabling students to identify and critically evaluate leadership practices and forms and to appreciate

the complexity of leadership in education. Models of leadership presented include distributed leadership, teacher as leader and the domains and standards of leadership outlined in aforementioned *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality framework for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). The assignment for the module includes a focus on both the policy and leadership component of the module. Graduates of the college have, therefore, the capacity to lead programme and policy initiatives at school level. (O'Shea, 2016).

In Spring 2016, the first cohort of students to undertake the four-year B.Ed. programme at the university college where this research was undertaken began their last semester there. In Spring 2017, a second cohort began their final semester in the college. Each cohort had just completed an extended school or professional placement, during which students had undertaken a 'curriculum focus'. This was essentially an opportunity to interact, for the duration of the placement, with school personnel and with children from disparate class levels on an area of the curriculum in which students had already undertaken some specialism modules and/or were particularly interested. Alternatively, a student's curriculum focus may have been in response to a request from a school. While some students worked in partnership with colleagues, others led the projects in their schools. During the placement, students were also given the opportunity to experience aspects of school life outside of the mainstream classroom. Students typically spent time observing and collaborating with the Special Education teachers in the school and working with children with a variety of learning and behavioural needs. Students were also afforded the opportunity to participate in any 'team teaching' initiatives underway in the school whereby a number of teachers worked together in one classroom, usually in the area of literacy or numeracy, and children worked with teachers in small groups on particular components of the relevant subject area. Students were also allowed an important opportunity to observe the leadership roles played by principals, deputy principals and others in the school community. While students were completing such tasks in the school, they were required to engage in a number of reflective exercises. These

exercises provided students with an opportunity to consider what leadership roles they had observed in the school and in what ways, if any, their curriculum focus and contribution supported the leadership structures evident in the school. The students thereby had a further opportunity to engage in discussion and reflection on this area of their work with the tutor assigned to them for the professional placement.

The Current Study

Prior clearance for this study was sought from, and granted by, the Research and Graduate School Ethics Committee of the university college in question. Students from the two cohorts referred to above were invited to take part in research regarding leadership in education. The focus of this research was the students' interpretation of their potential to contribute to leadership, arising from their recent experiences during professional placement. Involvement comprised the voluntary completion of a survey/questionnaire wherein a concurrent embedded mixed-methods approach was employed. The primary method used was a quantitative approach. Students were required to answer closed and/or fixed questions and to complete rating scales, for example. A secondary qualitative method, embedded within the quantitative approach, was also used. Here students were required to respond to open-ended questions which invited elaboration and explanation of meaning and/or experience. At the end of a large lecture class, students were presented with a participant information sheet. This outlined the purpose of the study and stressed that participation was voluntary and that students were free to leave at any time. Anonymity was assured and strictly maintained. A consent form was provided to students. Those who opted to take part signed this. A hard-copy questionnaire was then distributed to the participating students. This questionnaire was specifically designed for the current study. In this questionnaire, students were encouraged to reflect on leadership in educational contexts. The opening section of the questionnaire asked students to record the type and category of school they had worked in and whether the principal of the school

had teaching duties or was solely in an administrative position. The next section of the questionnaire prompted students to reflect on their perceptions of the importance of the leadership provided by the principal in the school and whether anyone else in the school, for example class teachers, had exemplified leadership. Following on from the closed question types, a series of open-ended questions were posed. These allowed students to elaborate on their experiences of leadership during professional placement and the leadership roles they had undertaken. Students were also asked to envisage what leadership roles they might fulfill, or be willing to undertake, on appointment to a teaching position. In the questionnaire, students were also prompted to consider experiences of leadership pertinent to other areas of the B.Ed. programme, including the curriculum focus they had undertaken and during Alternative Education Experience, another module of the B.Ed. programme.

As this was a mixed methods design, both inductive and deductive analysis were employed. The quantitative questions were analysed by the researchers. Responses to each question were categorised and counted from the two cohorts of students. The qualitative data was analysed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's six-step framework, outlined in Table 1 below.

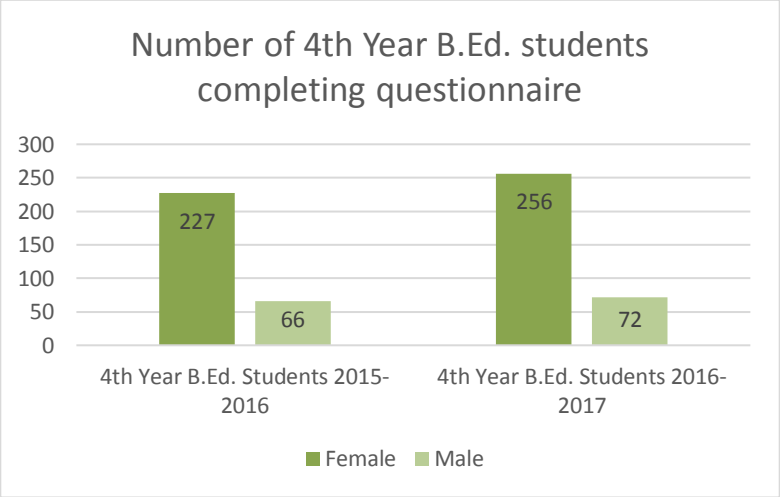
Table 1: Braun and Clarke's Framework for Thematic Analysis

Step 1: Become familiar with the data	Step 4: Review themes
Step 2: Generate initial codes	Step 5: Define themes
Step 3: Search for themes	Step 6: Write-up

Initial findings suggested that student teachers consider that the structure of B.Ed. programme in the college in which the research was undertaken supports them as they undertake leadership roles in schools. Data also suggested that, in the opinion of these students, there is much potential for newly qualified teachers to contribute to distributed leadership in the educational context.

In all, 293 B.Ed. students from the 4th year cohort in 2015-2016 completed the questionnaire as did 328 students from the 2016-2017 cohort. Figure 1 details the numbers of male and female students who took part. As the breakdown of students indicates, the number of females undertaking the Bachelor of Education is significantly higher than the number of males.

Figure 1. Number of male and female students who completed the questionnaire



The college in which the research was undertaken generally requires students themselves to source the school and class for their final professional placement. The data collected *via* the questionnaire provided information about the schools that accommodated students for this final placement. These details included the general location of the school (rural or urban), the range of class levels within the school and the gender of the pupils. The majority of students in each of the cohorts indicated that they had undertaken the placement in an urban setting, as illustrated in Figure 2. These schools may have been in cities or larger towns. Typically, urban schools have larger numbers of pupils and can employ higher numbers of teachers. In an urban school, therefore,

there are few multi-grade classes, with each grade being accommodated in a separate classroom. In rural schools, meanwhile, two to four class groups may be taught together in one classroom by one teacher. In sourcing classes in urban schools, students may have been considering the planning requirements of the extended professional placement and may have opted for what appeared to them the more attractive option. The children and staffs of rural schools are thereby denied the opportunity to benefit from having enthusiastic additional personnel to support teaching and learning across the school.

Figure 2. School location

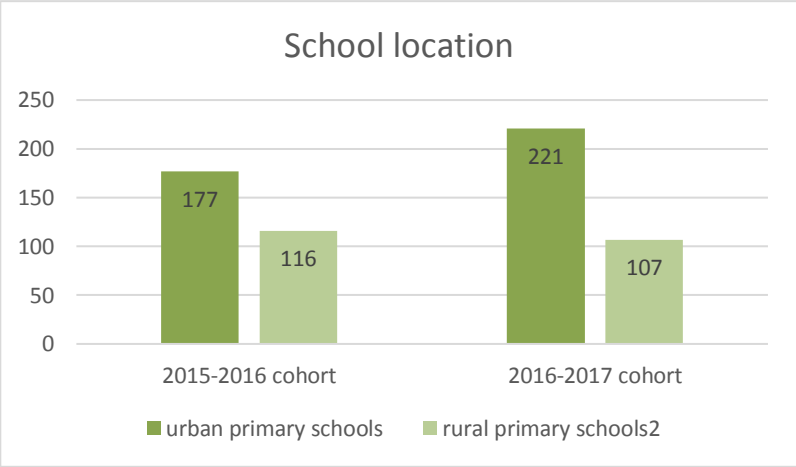
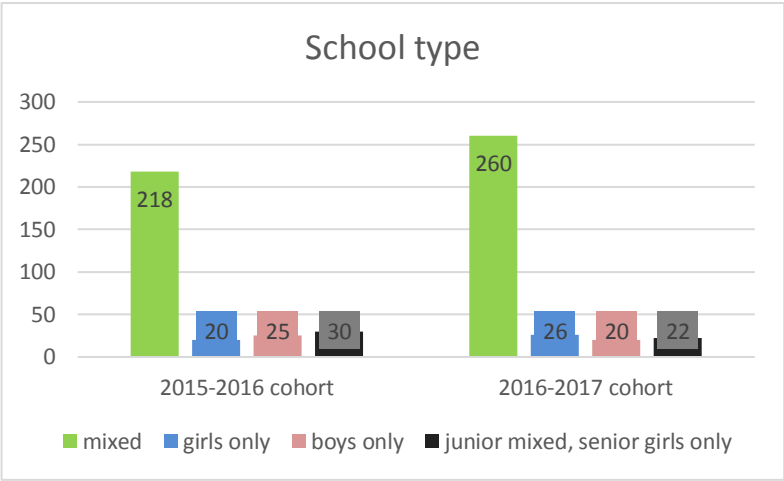


Figure 3 illustrates the diversity of schools in which students undertook the extended placement. These included schools attended by boys and girls, from Junior Infants to Sixth class. These are known as 'mixed' schools. They also taught in schools that accommodated either boys or girls only and schools that accommodated boys and girls for junior classes, and girls only from senior classes. In these latter schools, boys often move to a nearby boys only school. As can been seen from the table, the majority of students undertook the placement in 'mixed' primary schools.

Figure 3. School type



The medium of instruction in primary schools in Ireland can be either the English or Irish language. As can be seen from Figure 4, the majority of students completed the placement in schools that employ the English language as the medium of instruction. Students were not asked to comment on this choice. It is possible that they perceive teaching in an English medium school as the easier option. Perhaps they recognise that in many cases resources in English are more easily sourced than comparable resources in Irish and consider the increased workload this might engender in preparing for classroom work. Maybe some students have reduced confidence in their ability to facilitate children's learning through the medium of Irish. All of this is conjecture that might be tested by further research in this area. Similarly, students' choice of school location and type might also be further interrogated.

Figure 4. Medium of instruction

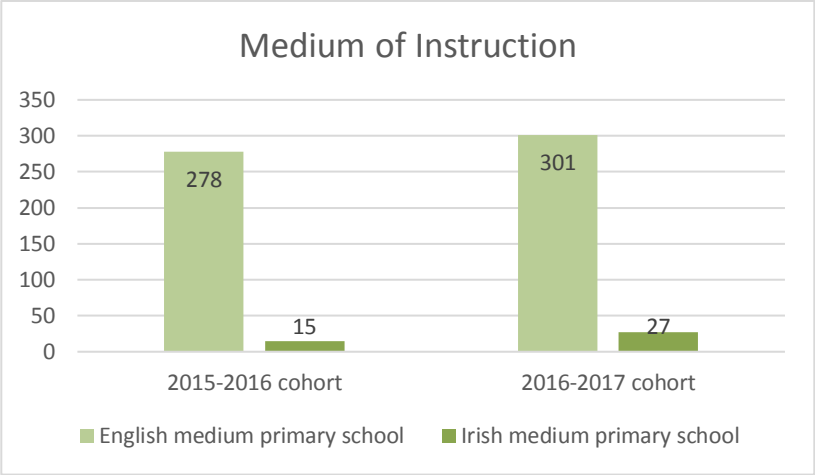
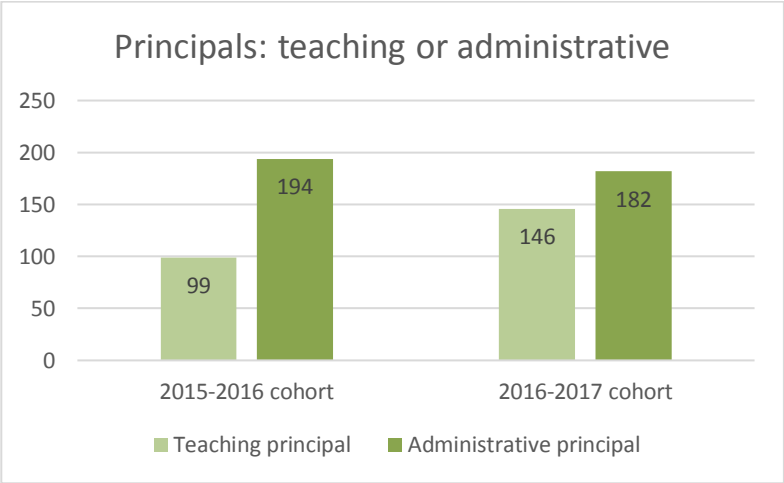


Figure 5 outlines whether the principal of the school in which students undertook their final professional placement was 'administrative' or 'teaching'. Administrative principals work in larger schools with larger pupil enrolments and larger numbers of teachers. They do not teach a class but undertake leadership and management duties alone. It can be seen that, in the majority of cases, the principals of the schools in which students undertook their final professional placement were administrative. This tallies with the findings illustrated in Figure 2 above as schools in urban settings tend to be larger than those in rural areas. Like their forebears in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland, principals currently serving in schools may undertake leadership and management duties while also teaching a class. These principals are known as teaching principals. Almost two-thirds of all primary school principals in Ireland are teaching principals (Department of Education and Skills website). These principals work usually in schools with a smaller pupil intake and with a lower number of class teachers. Such principal teachers are entitled to a sanctioned number of release days when they are not required to teach their classes but may focus instead on the leadership and management duties of the role. Students are opting to complete their

extended professional placement in larger schools and are, of course, learning from the administrative principals in those schools. However, they are forgoing the chance of working with, and benefiting from the knowledge and experience of, teaching principals. Furthermore, the students are missing out on the experience of teaching two or more classes simultaneously.

Figure 5. Principalship in the primary schools where students completed placement



Experience of leadership during professional placement

Once students had set the scene with regard to school location, type, medium of instruction and principal's role, they were then asked to elaborate on the leadership traits and characteristics they had observed during their extended school or professional placement.

Student responses were analysed across the two cohorts. The trait most often referred to by students was the organisational skills displayed by principals. One commented, 'The principal organised and co-ordinated events in the school and highlighted training and courses available'.

The motivational role of the principal and his/her presence in the school was another trait noted by students. They wrote of the principal 'taking control of activities, [his/her] strong presence, confidence' and him/her being 'well organised, motivating and consistent'. The role of the principal in supporting and/or 'establishing a healthy learning and working environment' was another theme identified by students. They also outlined the support the principal provided to them while they were undertaking the professional placement and wrote of him/her 'motivating me as a student to improve my teaching'.

Encouragingly, students recognised that people in the school community, other than the principal, exemplified leadership traits. One student wrote, 'The principal and deputy principal provided leadership in the school' while another stated *'*I was in a three-teacher school so all of the teachers were very much involved*'*. The students also highlighted the demands placed on principals who were teaching and leading. One noted, 'The principal was in his second year and was teaching fifth and sixth as well…found it difficult to balance both'.

A further question asked the students to identify three of the most important characteristics a leader of a school should exhibit. Students listed a variety of characteristics including motivation, delegation, charisma and determination. However, the three characteristics identified repeatedly by students were (i) organisational skills, (ii) confidence and (iii) communication skills.

Leadership roles undertaken during professional placement

The students were asked in the questionnaire to outline the leadership roles they had undertaken in schools as they completed their extended placement. Student responses tended to focus on whatever leadership roles they had undertaken during their curriculum focus and strand work. As outlined above, strand work provides the students with opportunities to learn about life in a

school beyond the environment of the mainstream classroom while curriculum focus allows students to develop a schoolwide project, connected to the curriculum or to a curricular area. This project may be specified by the school or may be based on a particular interest or talent of the student.

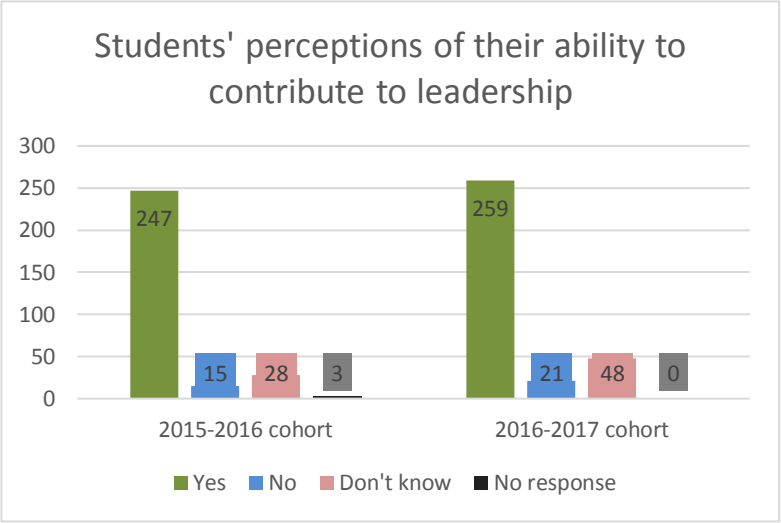
Student responses highlighted the chances that both strand work and their curriculum focus gave them to undertake leadership while on professional placement. One student explained, 'I converted an old art room into a studio for my curriculum focus and integrated two large scale art projects within the school'. Another noted, 'I produced my own musical'. That was difficult, but I loved the creativity it allowed'. Several students mentioned training teams for various sports.

Not surprisingly for teachers at the beginning of their careers, some appeared not to have undertaken leadership roles while on professional placement to any great degree. Responses from these students focussed instead on the supporting role they had played while helping out with ceremonies, events (at the beginning of the school year and in the lead up to Christmas) and project work being undertaken by the school, reviewing and developing school policies and generally being flexible and co-operative within the school.

Students' opinion on their ability to contribute to leadership on appointment to a school

Students were asked whether or not they felt they had the potential to contribute to leadership within a school, once appointed to a teaching position. Figure 6 illustrates their responses. Overwhelmingly, the majority of students from the two cohorts felt that they were. A small number of students indicated that they considered they did not have leadership potential or 'did not know' whether or not they had the potential. The results are outlined in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6. Students' perception of their ability to contribute to the leadership on appointment to a teaching position



Students' opinion on the types of leadership they might undertake on appointment to a school

The final question prompted students to outline the types of leadership roles they might undertake on appointment to a school. The responses generally reflected the kinds of leadership students had undertaken during the extended placement. Some focussed on curricular initiatives. As many students undertake a 'specialism' in an area of the curriculum while completing the B.Ed. undergraduate programme, they suggested they might contribute to leadership through that particular specialism. One noted, 'I have a specialism in language and literacy and I would love to lead literacy initiatives in the school'. Another wrote about 'bringing in new technologies and methodologies to the school'. Students highlighted their potential to contribute to leadership through extra-curricular activities, one writing, 'I would lead sports and artistic initiatives within the school and contribute to the school in a positive manner'.

Others commented that they would accompany children to sporting events and matches. Students felt they had potential to contribute to leadership within a school by supporting the planning process. One responded, 'I feel that I could take on roles of curriculum and school plan development'. Interestingly, given that these students are at the very beginning of their careers, many noted that they would support formal leadership within the school community by becoming members of the school's board of management. One recorded, 'I would volunteer to become the teacher representative on the board of management'.

Conclusion

Historically, leadership and management in primary schools in Ireland was neither inclusive, diverse nor democratic. This situation pertained both before and after the founding of the Irish Free State in 1922. The board of commissioners had included, by rule, 'persons professing different religious opinions' (*Copy of letter from the chief secretary of Ireland*, 1831-2). However, a woman was never appointed as commissioner at any time in the ninety-one years of the board's existence. The majority of primary schools in Ireland were managed by a single, clerical Catholic manager, always a male. It was not until 1971 that the work of the principal teacher began to comprise more than administrative tasks at the behest of the manager but rather an extended leadership role within the school. Only with the introduction of boards of management for primary schools in 1975 was parents' direct involvement in running of the schools attended by their children finally countenanced. Until the dawn of the twenty-first century, the percentage of female primary teachers was not mirrored by the percentage of female primary school principals.

Issues of gender equity, in society generally or in primary education particularly, were not a concern for Victorian Ireland which expected and accepted that most primary school teachers would be male. However, the low number of males entering the teaching profession currently (see Figure 1 above) is recognised as a

'phenomenon' in most developed countries, Ireland included (Department of Education, 2006). Slightly in excess of 86% of primary teachers in Ireland are women (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2018). This raises concerns regarding the status of a profession dominated by one gender. Further concerns exist about diversity within the teaching profession and, consequently, within leadership in primary schools. The latter is predicated on the former. Both are predicated on diversity in intake to colleges of education (Heinz and Keane, 2018).

The extended professional placement is a feature of the reconceptualised B.Ed. programme. As a core component, the placement supports student teachers as they prepare for teaching in a classroom setting and for many aspects of school life, including special education provision, team teaching, after-school initiatives, sporting activities and the many other events and occasions that promote young children's learning. Most importantly, the extended placement as it is now configured assists student teachers in developing their leadership skills. Pivotal in this regard is the requirement to develop and implement a curriculum focus, as reported by the students themselves in their responses to this research. Circular 0063/2017 'Leadership and Management in Primary Schools', issued by the Department of Education and Skills, recognises that 'leadership is distributed throughout the school as a key support for pupil learning' (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p.4). While student teachers learn the theory of distributed leadership, their experience of contributing to the 'phenomenon' gives them a deeper understanding of how they might contribute to many aspects of school life, intra- and extra-curricular (Woods and Roberts 2013; Woods and Roberts, 2018; Woods and Roberts, 2018a).

While it is recognised that 'every teacher has a leadership role within the school community and in relation to pupil learning (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p.6), designated leadership roles such as principal, deputy- and assistant-principal exist within the primary school structure. These are position of

strategic importance in the leadership, management and administration of the school. Traditionally, in Irish primary schools, these posts were often allocated based on a teacher's seniority in a school. However, this is no longer the case and many 'new' teachers have much to offer formal leadership positions. The leadership model advocated by the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland recommends that responsibilities should align with the identified needs and priorities of the school. In this respect, graduates of a Bachelor of Education programme with a 'specialism' in a particular subject area have much to offer to evolving needs within a school. Given that all temporary and permanent teachers serving in a recognised primary school are eligible to apply for an assistant principal post, the leadership experience gained while on extended placement may encourage young teachers to apply for formal leadership positions. It may even be argued that the beginning of a teacher's career is the optimum time to foster his/her enthusiasm and interest with regards to leadership.

Student responses throughout this research indicate that they consider they have the potential to contribute to all domains of the leadership framework as detailed in *Looking At Our Schools 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools* (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). Domain 1 of the framework, 'Leading Learning and Teaching' is, perhaps understandably, where students at the entry point to the teaching career perceive that they have the most to contribute to school life. The completion of a specialism and a curriculum focus certainly support them in this. Students engaged in this research also commented on their potential to contribute to the second domain of the leadership framework 'Managing the Organisation'. Students elaborate on their potential to support a 'secure and healthy learning environment' through both curricular and extra-curricular activities. By indicating a willingness to undertake such responsibilities as managing school choirs and sitting on the school's board of management, students demonstrate how they might contribute to this domain. The third domain of the framework, 'Leading School Development' is a domain that newly-qualified teachers may also be able to contribute

to, as indicated by their responses to the questionnaire. Motivated graduates, with innovative teaching ideas and methodologies, are enabled to support schools in responding to evolving needs and changes in education. The fourth and final domain of the framework, 'Developing Leadership Capacity' is a domain that the student respondents have already experienced at first hand. They will continue to develop leadership capacity as they become involved in the life of the school. The high percentage of students across the two cohorts who felt they had potential to contribute to leadership on appointment to a school suggests that newly qualified teachers are indeed able, willing and eager to develop as leaders in the school environment.

The current study was undertaken with two cohorts of students in one teacher education college in Ireland. The authors thank in particular the more than 600 students who assisted in the research. They also extend their gratitude to the colleagues who facilitated the data gathering element of this work. This research project set out to uncover student teachers' interpretation of leadership in educational contexts. Leadership was, therefore, the premier focus of this study. Nevertheless, the authors consider, and analysis of responses certainly suggests, that students might have been given some latitude to elucidate their choices regarding, for example, the location, medium of instruction and type of the schools wherein they completed their extended placements. This would allow a more complete picture of students' opinions to emerge. It appears from student responses that they feel enabled to develop leadership capacities through the structure of the college's B.Ed. programme and, in particular, the through the structure of the extended professional placement, comprising as it does opportunities to complete strand work and a curriculum focus.

At the direction of the Teaching Council, extended professional placement is currently a feature of the B.Ed. programmes offered by all colleges of education in Ireland. It would be worthwhile to extend this study beyond the college of education where it was completed, and invite students in the final year of the various college programmes to complete the survey. This would certainly

give insights as to how the structure and format of the various B.Ed. programmes support leadership potential. The colleges of education are, of course, diverse in their approach to professional placement requirements. Analysis of the opportunities that really support leadership capacity and development among the student cohort may well prove beneficial in terms of future policy development in initial teacher education.

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