Distributed Leadership and Social Justice

A case study investigation of distributed leadership and the extent to which it promotes social justice and democratic practices

FINAL REPORT
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Executive summary

The aim of the research study is to investigate distributed leadership (DL) and perceptions of whether and in what ways it promotes or otherwise social justice and democratic practices. The study examines this in the context of one case study (secondary) school where our main interest is to explore the meanings which participants make of aspects of leadership policy and practice within the school. Data generation draws from the following approaches: narrative enquiry, arts-based research, informal interviews, and respondent validation through a ‘data feedback’ seminar. For purposes of reporting data, we have given the case study school the fictitious name of Heathvale School.

We have achieved our aim of involving participants from four groups within the case study school: six teaching staff; four non-teaching staff; four senior leaders; and 15 students (aged between 11 and 19) - a total of 29 participants. Data generation was carried out over two consecutive days in July 2013 at the school. Each participant, in a group setting, created a collage which illustrates their sense of leadership policy and practice within the school, and then shared with the researchers and the rest of the group their explanation of their collage. All staff participants were subsequently interviewed in pairs. Creation of the collages was video’d and audio recorded. Discussion following collage creation in the staff groups was audio recorded. In the student groups, students’ explanation of their collages was audio recorded whilst their collage was simultaneously video’d. Paired interviews were audio recorded. The ‘data feedback’ seminar is scheduled for later in the year.

Participants in the case study put forward the images and meanings of leadership in Heathvale School that they most wanted to communicate. They were not asked to attempt to produce a comprehensive ‘picture’ of leadership in the school. They chose to highlight a certain aspect or aspects of leadership important in their minds and their feelings as they created their collage. Some, especially students, featured a hierarchical image, thus emphasising the location of power and authority at senior levels. Others featured more holarchic images which tend to be more circular and fluid. Hierarchical and holarchic depictions are not necessarily mutually exclusive perspectives of leadership practice in the school. They each bring to the fore different elements. They perhaps constitute plural framings of leadership practice, each expressing aspects of leadership that operate simultaneously and interchangeably in the flow of practice. The holarchic aspect of leadership appears to be the most prominent in the staff discourse around leadership. This is the aspect that encourages and facilitates pro-active agency - valuing initiative, enterprise and innovation as well as collaboratively working with others in doing this. This is a more fluid organisational environment than bureaucratic hierarchy. The metaphors of ‘water’ and ‘flow’ therefore strike a chord, which one of the participants expressed through an image of a waterfall cascading down into a pool whirling with ideas.

The plurality of leadership and its distributive character is articulated conceptually in the idea of multiple distributions that we put forward in our interpretative account of the data. The concept of multiple distributions attempts to convey an important understanding of those within the school’s DL culture, that some aspects are distributed more or differently than others. The idea of multiple distributions leads us into some of the limitations and difficulties of DL. Differences in opportunity and experience are not necessarily distributed fairly or in ways that best benefit the learning of all.
The main findings of the study are that -

i) concerning perceptions and meanings of leadership in the school:
- distributed leadership is felt to be real within the school, and is meaningful in a positive sense for many of the staff
- the idea of multiple distributions helps us to understand the nature of leadership as a distributed phenomenon in the school
- opportunities to exercise ‘influence and initiative’ are felt to be distributed, as well as ‘respect’, whilst ‘authority’ and ‘accountability’ are not seen as being distributed in the same wide sense
- the dominant view of distributed leadership is therefore one that sees it as the exercise of pro-active agency, creating and taking initiatives to lead change and innovation
- cohesive culture, trust, co-ordination and planning, and capacity (factors identified in the research literature on distributed leadership) are seen as important factors for the effective working of distributed leadership in the school
- specific features of these factors include a sense of shared vision and clear purpose, the feeling of support and protection, the long-term approach taken to developing a DL culture, and structural opportunities such as teacher-led development projects and learning forums.

ii) concerning distributed leadership and social justice:
- distribution of opportunities is a pronounced feature of the school leadership culture: there were strong positive expressions affirming the distribution of opportunities to create and take initiatives to lead change and to have a say, with examples of leadership and development opportunities in all groups within the school - senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, support staff and students
- distributed leadership, nevertheless, does not necessarily involve all equally: views expressed suggest it is strongest amongst senior and middle leaders and weakest amongst support staff and students
- exercising ‘influence and initiative’ and experience of respect varies according to individual and structural variables: these include a person’s motivations, interests, how they are responded to by individuals, a person’s networks within the school, students’ peer group influences, maturity towards self-leadership, perceptions of status, and so on
- the scope of exercising ‘influence and initiative’ tends to be restricted to the means of achieving given ends, rather than including opportunities to consider questions of the school’s educational purpose and goals
- distributed leadership is generally seen as to a degree democratic, in so far as it enables staff and students to be consulted, have a say (about means if not ends) and exercise opportunities for leadership.

We draw on some of what we have learnt from this case study to formulate five requirements which we suggest it would be helpful for policy-makers wanting to develop school leadership to reflect upon.

Firstly, advancing the quality of school leadership requires developing the leadership capabilities of everyone in the school - both those who are in designated leadership positions and those (such as many teachers, support staff and students) who are not.

Secondly, developing the leadership capabilities of all requires the development of school cultures and structures that provide the social, professional and institutional support neces-
sary to create environments that facilitate individual initiative and collaborative working and learning.

Thirdly, the development and sustaining of such school cultures and structures requires long-term investment by schools and by the governments and other agencies that support schools.

Fourthly, distributed leadership requires respect for both autonomy (individual views, professionalism, creativity and needs) and authority (school purpose, goals, values and structures), which means school members helping to shape schools’ educational purpose, values, etc. as well as working within these.

Fifthly, helping distributed leadership to be fair and of benefit to the learning of all requires it to be guided by a broad concept of social justice that encourages schools to ask critical questions about involvement (participative justice), respect (cultural justice), learning (developmental justice) and resources (distributive justice).
1. Rationale, aims and research questions

The concept of distributed leadership has come to have increasing influence in the last decade or so, attracting much scholarly exploration and research (Gronn 2002, 2009, MacBeath et al., 2004a/b, Raelin 2011, Woods 2013, Woods et al 2004), generating diverse definitions and understandings (Bolden 2011, Bennett et al 2003). The theoretical perspective taken for the purposes of this study is that leadership is emergent and that it arises through complex, interactive processes and is not the preserve of senior roles designated with leadership authority. The basic claim of this perspective is that it offers a more valid analytical lens by which to understand actual leadership practice.

The UK review of distributed leadership and social justice (Woods and Roberts 2013) provides a foundation for the case study reported in this report. The review makes five points:

Firstly, the most important and radical understanding of DL is the view that leadership is emergent - the theoretical perspective just alluded to.

Secondly, applied DL (see the fourth point below) is often, typically, combined with hierarchically distributed leadership authority, though the steepness of hierarchy and the extent of centralised leadership power varies between organisational settings. It is important to recognise that DL takes different forms and is shaped by context, and these variables influence any effects of DL on learning.

Thirdly, there is considerable scope to extend methods of researching DL to include more arts-based methods. The latter can offer insights and understanding that cognitive methods are less able to generate.

Fourthly, a working definition of applied DL, which represents the understanding of DL that tends to be followed or advocated in much contemporary policy, can be expressed as follows:

- a *culture* that
  - views leadership as emerging from ongoing flows of interactions across the organisation and its hierarchy, not simply the actions of the single leader or small leadership elite
  - values leadership contributions from across the organisation and its hierarchy
  - recognises that this view of leadership can be deployed in order to improve organisational effectiveness
- accompanied by
- an *institutional structure* that
  - spreads leadership opportunities beyond formal senior roles to enable different sources of expertise and perspectives to influence the organisation’s work, development and innovative changes
  - facilitates flexible, collaborative working relationships across traditional boundaries and hierarchies
  - tends towards the creation of flatter hierarchies.

(Woods and Woods 2013b)

Fifthly, it is important to deepen DL as the above definition itself leaves a need to provide content to the kind of values and learning that guide the practice of DL. Research is needed that investigates what forms of DL can help in promoting social justice in broader senses than closing gaps in attainment, including issues concerning participative and cultural social justice. Work on examining DL from a democratic perspective, using a degrees of democracy framework based on holistic democracy, offers a way of researching the possibilities...
and practice of deepening distributed leadership (Woods 2013a, Woods and Woods 2013, forthcoming). The review showed the connections between social justice and holistic democracy (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Social justice and holistic democracy
(This figure is in development.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>social justice</th>
<th>holistic democracy</th>
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<tr>
<td>participative justice (absence of patterns of association which prevent some people from participating fully in decisions which affect them)</td>
<td>power sharing (inclusive involvement in and shared responsibility for decision-making, providing opportunities for co-leadership)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cultural justice (absence of cultural domination, non-recognition &amp; disrespect)</td>
<td>transforming dialogue (respect, freedom to share views, mutual understanding and working to overcome difference, and participation as whole persons with all their faculties and senses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distributive justice (absence of unjustified socio-economic inequalities &amp; deprivation)</td>
<td>holistic meaning (learning by integrating human capabilities - spiritual, intuitive, ethical, intellectual, emotional - and seeking purpose guided by higher values and inner knowing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developmental justice (absence of inequalities in obstacles to the development of people’s full capabilities)</td>
<td>holistic well-being (connectiveness - socially (sense of belonging), spiritually (oneness), ecologically (with nature), combined with confidence to be independent minded)</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The aim of the research study is to investigate distributed leadership and perceptions of whether and in what ways it promotes or otherwise social justice and democratic practices. The study explores this in the context of one case study (secondary) school. Recognising the distributed nature of leadership does not necessarily mean that social justice will be promoted or that leadership practices will be more democratic. Instead, the need to comply with nationally-ordained policies can restrict distributed leadership practice and confine professional autonomy. To the extent that distributed leadership is assimilated into marketising and performative policy agendas (Hall 2012), its social justice perspective is narrowed. Indeed, distributed leadership has also been found, in some circumstances, to generate or widen power disparities (for example, Scribner and Bradley-Levine 2010).

It has been argued that distributed leadership is capable of being developed and applied so that it is more holistic and democratic, addressing issues of purpose and power and making explicit the fuller conception of the person that should ground leadership and learning, based in a model of ho-

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1 The Figure shows the four aspects of social justice and indicates where the links occur with the four dimensions of holistic democracy. It shows that holistic democracy understands developmental justice to be about creating opportunities for holistic growth that gives meaning and promotes well-being, and that power sharing and transforming dialogue encompass aspects of participative and cultural justice (Woods 2005, 2011, Woods and Woods 2013b). The dotted line connecting distributive justice to the latter dimensions indicates the importance of recognising distributive inequalities and the need to tackle these in aspiring to holistic democracy as a model to deepen distributed leadership.
Listic democracy (Woods 2011, Woods and Woods 2012, 2013a/b). We intend in this research study to explore the ways in which holistic democracy can push further the boundaries of distributed leadership.

The following sub-questions arise from our research aim:

• What meaning do participants ascribe to the concepts of (a) distributed leadership and (b) social justice?
• What influences this meaning-making?
• To what extent do participants perceive distributed leadership to be a feature of the school’s leadership philosophy and practices?
• What is the perceived impact of leadership as a distributed phenomenon on (a) policy and practice which support justice and democratic practices, and (b) development of successful learners, as defined in the school’s curriculum policy?
• To what extent is there evidence of deepening distributed leadership in ways that are characteristic of the model of holistic democracy?
• What factors, including government policy, support or hinder distributed leadership in the school?
2. Research design

Methodological stance

The methodological stance underpinning this research is neither to see the phenomenon under study as objectively given and capable of being positivistically revealed, nor as entirely subjective and reducible to individualistic interpretations (by participants and researchers). Rather, we drew upon a blend of methods in order to overcome the potentially unhelpful dualism of traditional objectivity and subjectivity (Anderson 2004, Parry and Boyle 2009, Rhodes and Pullen 2009). Through this approach we sought to provide participants with various opportunities to deepen their understanding of their world (Barone and Eisner, 2012) together with a stimulus for discussion with us as researchers.

We sought to undertake a case study of the research school. This choice was based not merely on the convenience of a presentational device but on the alignment of the philosophical grounding of case studies and that of our research. We are interested in learning about individuals’ conceptions of leadership in their school through the use of an inductive, intuitive approach to analysing and interpreting the data gathered, as a balance to more overtly positivist analytical approaches (Anderson, 2004). We were therefore influenced by the efficacy of cases studies in promoting deep learning about a particular case (Stake, 1995) whilst simultaneously supporting the development of a broader theoretical perspective (Cohen et al., 2007).

Given our wider research interest in democracy and democratic practices, we were concerned to find a collaborative research strategy which would allow participants a degree of agency. A research process which involved the capacity to tell stories through words and images appeared to fulfil this to some degree (Bruner, 1991, Barone and Eisner, 2012). Narrative and image-based research approaches are naturally collaborative, both having the capacity to break down barriers between researcher and researched (Clandinin et al., 2009, Gourlay, 2009). Indeed, Gale and Wyatt (2006) point to the emancipatory nature of the co-creation of researcher and researched in such approaches for both participants. In addition, we also shared our analysis of the data through a seminar [still to take place at the time of writing] in which participants were invited to comment on our developing understanding, in the hope that this would support us in continuing to foreground participants’ voices.

We discuss below each of the dimensions of our approach to data generation: narrative enquiry, image-based research, informal interviews, and the ‘data feedback’ seminar.

Narrative enquiry

We used narrative enquiry as a data-generation approach from which to develop the case study. We believed narratives would support us in understanding the sense which individuals make of leadership policy and practice within their school, providing us with ‘a window into people’s beliefs and experiences’ (Bell, 2002:209), whilst allowing the potential for theorising (Silverman, 1998). Narratives can be told on a grand scale; they can narrate the history of countries or societies. However, we sought to adopt a ‘small stories’ approach which sensitises researchers to the value of diverse stories that arise in different settings and times and may emerge through and be characterised by ‘fleeting, contingent, fragmented and multiple selves’ (Georgakopoulou 2006: 4). Story’s ability to honour different realities (Bruner, 1991, Polkinghorne, 1988) and to raise new questions and new inquiries rather than to provide evidence of fixed truths (Clandinin and Connolly, 2000) recommended it to us as a research methodology.
Image-based research

Narratives do not necessarily have to be written. Many different kinds of symbols can tell a story, with visual texts also having narrative potential. Given that views on leadership can become entrenched and indiscriminate within an organisation, we wished to use a research method which had the potential to reveal and disrupt set ways of thinking. Arts-based research seems to offer this potential, whilst also affording us the opportunity to make sense of diverse views (Eisner, 1995).

Pure arts-based research can be defined as the actual making of artistic expressions as a primary way of understanding experience (McNiff, 2008, in Knowles and Cole, 2008). As visual methodologies formed only part of our research strategy, it is more accurate to describe this research as drawing on arts-based approaches. The focus of such approaches is on exploration, allowing both participants and researchers to discover ways forward through deepening understandings of their world (Barone and Eisner, 2012, Leitch, 2006).

We were interested in exploring the meaning which participants made of the leadership within their school. In attempting to convey such meanings there are often points where words fail (Frosh, 2002, cited in Leitch, 2006), where it is difficult to express the most profound understandings in propositional form. Images give participants the opportunity to explore the subtleties of their experience in creative, non-linear ways (Loads, 2009, Spouse, 2000, Leitch, 2006, Black, 2002). A new dimension to the use of images in research comes through Eisner’s (1993) suggestion that art is not simply an alternative way of representing knowledge, rather a way of releasing different forms of understanding. Weber and Mitchell (1996) build on this, underlining the efficacy of images in uncovering hidden or unconscious aspects of experience, whilst for Gourlay (2009), the use of imagery has the additional benefit of allowing not only the release but the expression of complex experiences in a non-threatening way. Critical arts-based research aims to bring to the surface social inequities and injustices embedded in the status quo (Bagley and Castro-Salazar 2012). Such potential was key to research which is underpinned by principles of democracy and freedom of expression.

Within the wider sphere of arts-based research we were particularly interested in the use of collage. There were two main reasons for this choice. Firstly, we wished to free participants from the challenge of drawing, which often evokes previous success or failure in artistic representation as a school student. Instead, we wished to use an arts-based approach to free up thoughts and feelings and to allow these to be made manifest in a tangible way which did not rely on perceived artistic ability. Secondly, we believed that the development of a representation of leadership would help participants to more fully understand the practice of leadership as it manifested itself in their school (Dormer, 1997). Thus collage offered participants the potential to try things out, to move pieces around and thus to create a new way of expressing either original thoughts or new ways of seeing, stimulated through the making process itself (Gauntlett, 2011).

Informal interviews

We had a dual imperative in gathering our research data: to support the agency of our participants in constructing their own authentic narratives and to ensure that we collected data which effectively illuminates our research questions. We were aware that, in order to understand participants’ stories, we needed to ask them to explore their collages with us. The need for a flexible, unstructured approach to eliciting this commentary was paramount. The format and roles implicit in traditional interviews did not fit our aims. Rather than a one-way information channel, effectively controlled by the interviewer, we wanted to create more of an opportunity for dialogue. The informal conversational interview (Patton, 2002), otherwise termed the unstructured interview (Fon-
tana and Frey, 2003), was a useful method for developing a collaborative, non-hierarchical re-
search process.

Data feedback seminar

The purpose of the data feedback seminar is to ensure that we are capturing the particular in a
recognisable way, portraying the essence of leadership within the school so that others can relate
to it. The event will be interactive and is intended to test and refine the trustworthiness of the
case study and to enrich findings through shared reflection with participants. Generalisability will
thus be facilitated through the presentation of a recognisable insight, albeit located in the particu-
larity of one case (Simons 2009). Research participants’ comments made during the seminar will
be used as data to refine the draft into a final case study.

Data generation

A team approach was taken to facilitating collage creation, the explanation by the participants of
the meanings of their creation and the conduct of the informal interviews. We worked together dur-
ding the two days that data generation took place. We see this as an important feature of the re-
search method. For example, it was practically helpful in organising groups of participants and en-
abling successive participants’ groups to follow on from each other; it enabled tasks to be shared
during the day in response to how the collage creation and discussion evolved; it allowed one of
the team to take the lead (e.g. in informal interviews) at certain times whilst the other listened
and attended to the equipment (e.g. recorders, collage materials) used; it facilitated both researchers
sharing the experience of collage creation, accompanying discussions by participants, informal in-
terviews and other interactions, enabling them both to be fully immersed in the data which was val-
uable for later analytical discussion and triangulation from two researcher perspectives.

The data generation took place in a school building in the school grounds, separate from the main
building, on 18th and 19th September 2013.

Our aim was to involve participants from four groups within the school: teaching staff; non-teaching
staff; senior leaders; and students (aged between 11 and 19). This was achieved. The numbers of
participants are shown in the table, which also shows the groups that they were in when creating
and explaining about their collage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>number of participants</th>
<th>group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teaching staff</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>non-teaching staff</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>senior leaders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>students</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>D, E, F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

In summary, this was the process followed:

- Participants came in their respective group (as in the above table) at an appointed time:
groups A, B and C on Day 1, groups D, E and F on day 2. An hour was allowed for the fol-
lowing.

  -
o Each group was given a briefing to explain the purpose of the research and what they were being asked to do.

o All the participants in the group were invited to create individually a collage which illustrates their sense of leadership policy and practice within the school.

o After all the collages were completed, each participant shared with the researchers and the rest of the group their explanation of their own collage - explaining what different aspects of the collage meant or symbolised. There was usually some discussion, and often light-hearted banter, between participants during and after the collage creation.

- Paired staff interviews (with two staff) were conducted at different times during the two days, after the staff had undertaken their collage creation in their groups. Paired interviewees were drawn from the same group. Interviews were guided by the following questions:

  o To what extent do you feel distributed leadership is a feature of the school’s leadership philosophy and practices?
  o How do you define social justice in a school context?
  o To what extent do you feel distributed leadership in the school
    - supports social justice (If so, how?)
    - is democratic? (If so, how?)
  o What factors in the school’s external environment (including government policy) support or hinder distributed leadership in the school?

- Creation of the collages was video’d and audio recorded. Discussion following collage creation in the staff groups was audio recorded. In the student groups, students’ explanation of their collages was audio recorded whilst their collage was simultaneously video’d. Paired interviews were audio recorded.

- A seminar is to be held [yet to be arranged] to which all research participants will be invited to discuss the draft case study.
3. Background of case study school

The case study school, which we have given the fictitious name of Heathvale, is one of five secondary schools which serve the inhabitants of a town of approximately 38,000 residents, situated in the East of England. The school is an 11-19 co-educational Academy, a publicly-funded independent school, with 1,400 students on roll. In May 2010, the school was judged by Ofsted, the government department which inspects schools in England, to be a good school.

The strategic intent of Heathvale School is to provide outstanding educational opportunities for all and to be a great school. GCSE examination results, the public examinations taken by students at age 16, have improved steadily year-on-year. In 2012 this achievement was recognised by Ofsted and the Department for Education which awarded the school the Top 100 most improved schools award.

The majority of students in Heathvale School stay into the Sixth Form, to study post-16. They study predominantly A-Level subjects with the intention to apply for a university place. In 2013, all students passed their A-Levels with 56% of students achieving A*-B grades (34% A/A*).

The school seeks to support students not only in attaining strong academic qualifications but also in becoming well-rounded individuals with a sense of responsibility and a willingness to contribute to both the economy and society in general. This is partially achieved, according to details on the school’s website, through a finely distributed leadership culture.

This leadership culture has been strategically developed over time. Members of the school community share a common moral imperative, that is, to do the best for their students. Grounded in this imperative, a vision for the school has been developed in consultation with the whole school community. This shared view of the direction for the school allows for the confident distribution of leadership.

Such distribution is similarly supported by the development of whole-school capacity for leadership through the promotion of a non-positional teacher leadership approach to school improvement. All teachers are seen to have the potential to be agents of change in the school and to create shared knowledge about practice. Students are also increasingly involved in exercising leadership.
4. Process of Data Analysis

In the process of analysis we aimed to combine two approaches: analytical processes that involve methodical procedures which identify patterns and codes and break up the data into pieces for labelling, collation, comparison and so on, as well as empathetic understanding - that is, creative reflection on data which encourages affective understanding, i.e. non-cognitive awareness which gives a 'feel' for the data, participants, experiences, culture, organisation and leadership. In addition, we are using images in our presentation of what we have learned. Images are often used in research as secondary to text, in an illustrative role (Prosser, 1998). In this report, our intention is that images are used instead as a conveyer of meaning, as an alternative way of presenting participants’ understandings.

The attempt to combine analytical processes and empathetic understanding, and to attend to the images as images, is reflected in the way in which we have proceeded with the analysis. For example, in addition to engaging with the exploration of individual stories by listening to the accounts of each collage given by its maker, we took up the possibility of reading across collages to get the essence of the experience they were collectively representing (Butler-Kisber, 2008).

Our initial activity of analysis as a team involved a number of deliberate steps: In order to understand what we were learning from the images we spread all of the collages out on the floor and talked about them. Such a dialogic approach to making meaning is not much discussed in the literature yet remains a legitimate, three-dimensional approach to gaining understanding of artistic forms (Bresler, 2006). We looked across all the images (staff and students) and made selections of collages that appeared to suggest the shapes or ideas - such as different structures - and noted the use of materials, shapes, colours and so on. We then arranged the images into groups and considered what, if any, patterns suggested themselves within the groups.

Viewing the images and comparing them across the groups raised the question of the significance of differing shapes that featured in some collages - for example, pyramid/hierarchy shapes; the headteacher as a crown; the headteacher as a figure on their own at the top; barriers of various kinds; a network shape (contrasting with the hierarchy shape); layers designed into the collage; images that suggest ‘holding’; ‘scary’ images like jagged edges; leadership as an ‘arising’ phenomenon; images of distribution such as ideas coming down a waterfall, water, ideas rising up; and showing groups within and groups outside leadership. Viewing the images also raised the question of what significance there might be in choices of materials - for example in selecting feathers to represent certain things.

Looking at the images of the collages in their groups led to certain impressions. For example, some appeared more lively and vibrant than others. The collages of Groups B, C and D stood out as more active, vibrant and colourful as compared with Groups A and F, whilst Group E showed a mixture. We noted that the collages of Group F particularly were less vibrant and more representational, and wondered if that might be related to their being done at the end of the day. The collages were divided and arranged on the floor according to gender. We found no discernible pattern of difference between them related to gender. The results of this and further analysis of the images is discussed in the following section.

The team analysis activity was followed by each researcher taking one set of participants’ data (one taking the staff, one the students) and using a template to construct a commentary on each collage and its associated explanation and interview. The latter process involved - in relation to each collage - viewing videos, listening to the audio tapes, selecting quotes from the explanations and interviews that illuminate the participant’s meaning and description, and making researcher
notes on possible concepts and themes that helped to begin the interpretation. Notes of the analysis were structured under the headings of:
  • description (of the image and its meanings)
  • leadership
  • social justice
  • contextual factors
In practice there was much overlap between the analytical notes under ‘description’ and ‘leadership’.

Summaries of the commentary on each collage and its associated explanation and interview, as well as a photo of each collage, are given in Appendix 1.
5. Interpretative account

In this section we give an interpretative account of the perceptions of leadership in Heathvale School, based on our analysis and drawing on the data summarised in Appendix 1. The first part discusses perceptions and meanings of distributed leadership in the school. This opens with a discussion of the images in the collages (Stories of leadership…) in order to put to the fore meanings conveyed through these non-propositional, non-verbal forms of expression, followed by an analytical discussion identifying themes and concepts to help in understanding the perceptions and meanings (Analytical discussion).

The second part discusses perceptions of distributed leadership and social justice.

i) Perceptions and meanings of distributed leadership in Heathvale School

STORIES OF LEADERSHIP…

Narratives do not necessarily have to be written. Many types of symbol can tell a story. In this research, teachers, support staff and students were asked to produce collages which represented their perceptions of leadership in their school. They then used these images, shown together above, as a stimulus to individual commentaries on their collage and to a group discussion. In this sub-section, we acknowledge the importance of the visual images created by our participants by focusing on the choice and placing of symbols and the meaning participants attributed to these. Symbols which resonate across a number of collages are used here to group the collages. This allows for a discussion of the attribution of multiple and complex meanings to the images and provides us with a fascinating ‘window into people’s beliefs and experiences’ (Bell, 2002: 209).

We are developing, as one of the outputs of this study, a video presenting an analysis of the collages. The version as it stands at the time of writing, which is in development, is available with this report (see Appendix 2). The interpretation is based on the researchers’ impressions of the images and should therefore be viewed alongside this report in which the participants’ own explanation of meanings are given.
**Stories of hierarchy**

We begin with images which tell stories of hierarchies. Such stories do not dominate the collages but are strongly represented, particularly in collages created by students.

The middle collage in the group below was created by a member of staff. The two outside collages were created by students.

Hierarchical images are often presented in a triangular shape, described by the creator of the middle collage as ‘*a pyramid of power*’ (B3). Power emanates from the top of the pyramid, marked by an image representing the headteacher, and slowly diminishes from this point down.

Despite seeing power as unequally distributed, creators of these collages did not indicate that this was a source of dissatisfaction.

“There are the sequins, they are our shining stars” (B3)

There is a differing portrayal of individuals in images which tell a story of hierarchy. Students are variously represented as sequins, as beads and as pawns on a chessboard. Adults in the pyramid are represented by numerous differing shapes and materials. The nature of these shapes and materials was not commented on by the collage creators who were generally more interested in their positioning. The linkages between different groups of people was also of central interest to collage creators.

**Stories of holarchy**

Holarchic images also feature strongly in the collages. By this we mean images that constitute a more rounded appearance or give the impression of a network, rather than a hierarchy. In these collages, leadership is seen as distributed throughout the school in a more organic manner, rather than wholly through the exercise of power gained through positional roles.

The shape of holarchic images tends to be more circular and fluid than in those images which represent a hierarchical view of leadership. Despite this, there is a structure to the holarchic images.

The creator of the collage at the top left below talked of a spiral which moved from the outside community inwards through the students and then to the teachers. Difference is valued in this holarchical view of leadership.
The middle collage again illustrates a circular holarchic shape. The majority of staff and students in the school are clustered together in the central portion of the image where they can exercise leadership to different degrees within the school.

The collage on the bottom right above focuses on the inter-connectedness of staff within the school. The straws are used as symbols of connectivity and are prominent in the collage design.

The patterns of interaction between hierarchical and holarchic collages is more complex than this clear, linear division suggests however. There are often elements of hierarchy exhibited in the holarchic images and vice versa. Supportive structures are a key feature of holarchic images, whilst hierarchies nevertheless have room for individual expressions of leadership within a clear pattern of roles and responsibilities evidenced in multiple distributed systems. It is perhaps the dominant impression given by leadership policy and practices within the school which has been illustrated in the collages rather than the suggestion that views of these practices are wholly oppositional.

ʻHoldingʼ images

ʻHoldingʼ images - that is, images which indicate a degree of protection - are an interesting feature of some of the holarchic collages.

The purple paper at the base of this collage has been used to symbolise a ‘blanket cover of protectionʼ (C2). The collage creator uses this symbol to emphasise the ‘protective underlay to the whole school – its physical and metaphysical structureʼ (C2).

The image of the red net at the bottom of this collage surrounds the students in the school. This net is held by the teachers who support the student body and give them opportunities to ‘contribute towards leadershipʼ (D4).
Images of barriers

Images of barriers feature in a number of collages. Materials used to represent these barriers vary and include brightly coloured paper, black paper and coloured straws.

The meaning attributed to barriers is significant.

In the top left collage, the orange and black barriers are indicators not of barriers to leadership activity but to the school community’s understanding of what those in leadership positions do on a day to day basis.

The blue barrier of straws in the bottom left collage represents a ‘wall’ which sometimes exists between students and those in authority.

“They don’t actually listen to us. We have a Student Council but I don’t feel they listen to us” (A3)

On some occasions, however, apparent barriers in fact have a very different meaning to the collage creator. The top right collage appears to have a network of straws which work together as strong barriers to leadership activity. The collage creator in fact has used these long straws to indicate not barriers but teams of people who work together harmoniously. Similarly, the apparent barriers in the bottom left collage in fact indicate the strong backbone of the headteacher behind a way of working as a school which has solid features of shared leadership.

Images of leadership flow

The fluidity represented by water chosen by some collage creators symbolises a different facet of the leadership practice within the school. In contrast to the barrier images, images of water have been used to symbolise the free movement of leadership opportunities in the school.
The collage at bottom right represents a ‘leadership waterfall and at the bottom there is a pool which goes round and round and anyone can take the journey from having an idea about leadership and going through whatever process’ (C3). A lack of barriers is emphasised by this participant, with the image of question marks outside of the box indicating an openness to novel ideas.

“If you want to lead there are opportunities here and you are not restricted to being in the box” (A3)

The collage at the top left similarly symbolises flow. However, the imagery has been used for a different purpose here. Here the collage creator sees herself as the big green fish in a pool of protective water, provided by the senior leaders in the school. However, the dark shape in the lower left hand corner of this collage symbolises the more uncomfortable aspects of this generally contented picture, situations where the collage creator feels that she has not been respectfully treated and issues which challenge the general direction of flow have needed to be addressed.

**Stories of layers of leadership**

In some collages, layers of leadership are immediately apparent. The metaphor of layers can be differently applied however, as exemplified below.

The creator of this collage designed the central section to be three-dimensional, with the more visible leadership activities being ‘backed up by’ those in less visible leadership roles behind them. Different materials are used to symbolise the various populations in the school community.

The creator of this collage used layers to show the fluidity of power in the school. He sees leadership as having little structure; he believes this is due to the particular nature of his role in the school. This perceived lack of structure is symbolised by the ‘chaotic’ nature of the collage.
The representation of individual and group identities

The creators of the collages chose some provocative symbols to represent the identity of particular groups or individuals within their school.

Representations of the headteacher

Many students began their commentary on their collage with an explanation of their representation of the school's headteacher.

The headteacher is represented by a number of students as a star and by another as a crown, showing his position as … the king of the school (E1).

This power positioning is underlined in the image of the star placed on a blue cup which raises the headteacher over the rest of the school to a position where he could ‘look out over the school’ (F1).

These symbols are positioned at the top of each collage, suggesting the headteacher’s position of power. The commentaries confirm the use of this power for good however.

The representation of the headteacher as a fire-breathing dinosaur is particularly interesting. The creator of this collage chose this symbol to represent the headteacher as

– courageous and strong, like a Tyrannosaurus Rex. (D5)

The image of the headteacher as protector is emphasised here. In collages produced by staff the image of the headteacher is generally not differentiated from other members of the leadership team although one teacher represented him as a star.

Representations of students

A range of symbols were used by participants to represent students. The choice of materials is particularly interesting in these representations.
Students are often represented as a mass to demonstrate their dominant numbers in the school. However, their uniqueness is underlined by the choice of a mixture of materials to represent individual students within this student body.

Materials vary from coloured straws to wooden discs to shiny, sparkly beads and sequins. The choice of these materials is relevant and sometimes evocative of the moral imperative which underlines teaching for the participant. One collage creator, for example, chose to represent students as wooden discs because ‘they can be shaped’ (A3). For another, his choice of wooden ‘tokens’ was driven by the tokenism he sees as underlying the practice of involving students as leaders within the school (A2). For another, the representation of students by sequins recognises their position as ‘our shining stars’ (B3).

Stories of emerging identities

For some participants, the ability to indicate a developmental, emerging student identity was important.

In this example, the collage creator has used the image of a watch to indicate the passing of time. The changing nature of the individual student is then symbolised by different materials from left to right across the collage. The yellow and orange sticks above the young student symbolise strong external leadership by others, with the peg suggesting that friends can sometimes ‘peg you back. That’s the opposite of leadership’ (E2). Feathers represent a move towards individual, self-leadership which is based on imagination rather than being wholly rules-bound.

ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION

An important way of understanding how participants expressed their perceptions of leadership is through a concept that we came to call multiple distributions. In looking at the collages, it was important to understand what organisational or leadership characteristic the shape of the images was representing. For example, one of the participants (a senior leader - A1) who created a holar-chic shape explained that he was expressing through this his vision of the spread of leadership agency and initiative: at the same time, he affirmed in his commentary that he recognised that ultimate authority and accountability were not dispersed through the school. A positive view that opportunities were available to exercise initiative and lead change was apparent amongst the senior
leaders (A1-4) and the teaching staff and middle leaders (C1-6). A middle leader (C5) for example considered that there was a great deal of support for middle leaders to lead change, as long this is aligned with the goals affirmed by the headteacher. Other participants (support staff B1 and B4, teacher C2 and senior leader A4), as they explained about leadership in the school, highlighted the importance of respect being given to all - respect for the person, for their active contribution and for their potential to develop further. Respect therefore appeared to be another characteristic related to leadership that could be distributed widely or not, and which individuals could experience in variable ways at different times and with different people. One of the support staff (B4) said that ‘I feel people are respected, I feel very respected in the school’, but also gave an example of being shocked when a senior member of staff did not see her as a member of the team.

Robinson (2008) has distinguished between the distribution of tasks and the distribution of influence. The distributions that participants in Heathvale School referred to are summarised in Figure 3. Emphasis was given not so much to distribution of tasks, but rather to the availability of opportunities to take initiatives and exercise leadership that brings about changes in the school (influence and initiative). The emphasis given to respect by some participants suggested that we should explicitly recognise the significance of the distribution of respect (which links with the importance of trust and other relational factors identified in the research literature). Participants distinguished between these factors and the distribution of authority and accountability which were more centralised in the school. An example of a small measure of distribution of authority is the process for choosing a staff governor, who is elected by the staff. This process was referred to by middle leader C3.

**Figure 3: Multiple distributions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>organisational/leadership features that may be more or less distributed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>influence and initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accountability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The picture that emerges from the participants in this case study is one in which it is understood that the school values a pro-active agency amongst all staff and students (i.e. distributed influence and initiative). A Group D student gives expression to this ‘opportunity culture’: ‘The more you engage, the more you tend to enjoy because you are more open to opportunities and if you are not open to opportunities how do you know if it is going to be a good one?’ Amongst staff, one of the features highlighted was the number and value of teacher-led development projects. A middle leader (C3) for example explained that there are many such projects in the school, and that these are part of a culture that encourages thinking creatively and collaboratively. C3 said that ‘you feel valued, that you can express something’, and explained about his collage, which featured a waterfall (of ideas), a pool and balloon rides: ‘if you have an idea or want to take on a leadership role, in my view at [this school] you go through a process, whether that's speaking to people, line manager etc, then you come into the pool and then when you’ve got an idea and it’s talked through then you jump onto the ballon ride and it can go, but you collaborate with others, so you’re not on your own’.
There is consequently a diversity of leadership activities, many of which are not defined or implied by a person’s role or job title. Whilst some or many may be new opportunities, a distributed leadership culture is likely also to encourage identification of existing activities as ones that involve leadership. One of the senior leaders (A4) was concerned to emphasise that some staff who have what might be seen as quite minor roles in fact have an important leadership role. She gave as an example a support staff member who leads on making sure the school has got provisions in and making sure there is tea and coffee available in the morning and who, even though she is a very low paid member of staff, ‘in her own way she’s a leader’. From a student perspective, D3 was of the view that individual students have the potential to exercise leadership, without the benefit of a leadership position or role, and D4 believed that teachers help students ‘contribute towards leadership’.

Equally, students were more likely to show a hierarchical image of leadership, as noted in the discussion above on the collage images. Student D1 for example viewed leadership in the school as essentially hierarchical, showing the seat of power centrally located and using power as a key organising principle in their collage. The head teacher was often represented as a dominant figure - for example student E1 as ‘the king of the school’, who also represented the teachers shields and swords, showing that they ‘have power over the students’.

A teacher (C4) put it this way: day-to-day leadership is very distributed, but this takes place within a more centralised ‘overt leadership’ which provides the purpose for the school and is set by the senior leadership. The latter point draws attention to the importance of the clear structure and shared vision within which distribution takes place. The importance for effective distributed leadership of a cohesive culture and co-ordination and planning, and of firm framing for democratic practice, are given prominence in the research literature (Woods and Woods 2013b, Woods 2005), as noted in the UK National Review (Woods and Roberts 2013). The kinds of factors found to be significant include shared goals and values, trust and the co-ordination and planning of roles, expectations and ways of working collaboratively (Day et al 2009, Leithwood et al 2006, Louis et al 2010: 61). One of the senior leaders (A2) encapsulated his view of the school’s leadership, when he explained that senior leaders set direction and make some decisions - but went on to say that by and large ‘we’ (senior leaders) have conversations with middle leaders in which they tell us what they have done rather than ask what they can do. Another senior leader (A1) explained that ‘we have clear structures’ but freedom within those, and that they have taken time to develop the corporate vision and to bring everyone ‘on board’ to agree with it. A member of the support staff (B4) takes the view that teamwork is a feature of the school, and that ‘there are different levels of teamwork’, but also acknowledges that there ‘has to be people in charge, there has to be people who ultimately make those decisions’. Staff are encouraged to bring ideas forward, but as a middle leader (C3) put it, these in the end need to align with the school’s vision and its strategic intent and objective. The school’s staff structure was described, by A1, as being both fluid and as having demarcated roles (as between senior and middle leadership for example). As one middle leader put it (C6), there is structure and hierarchy, but these are also flexible and changeable according to need, and this is a ‘real strength’.

Examples of structural supports for leadership and initiatives, and the sharing of these, were apparent in participants’ discussions. Particularly noteworthy was the opportunity to undertake teacher-led development projects which were mentioned by several staff. Another is the learning forums for sharing findings with the whole school, highlighted by middle leader C5.

A further feature of the school which provides a ‘firm framing’ is the security and protective feel of the culture. This was mentioned by a teacher (C2) who showed in her collage a ‘blanket cover of protection’ for the whole school which is ‘holding us together’, a middle leader (C6) who talked of the school feeling a safe and secure place within which leadership could be expressed, as well as a member of the support staff (B1) who liked the feeling of protection. These perceptions point to
the significance of a sense of belonging and self-esteem in a community, which is part of the ‘holis-
tic well-being’ that makes up a broad kind of democratic community (Woods 2011). There are other
aspects to holistic well-being, however, which include independent-mindedness. The middle leader
(C6) who praised the safe and secure feeling also wondered if at the same time the school was too
insular and inward-looking, suggesting it might be helpful to reflect critically on the nature of bel-
longing and protection that many see as characterising the school.

The distributed leadership culture in the school was associated by several participants with learn-
ing - both students’ learning and staff development. For example, a senior leader (A2) empha-
sised how the clear intent of the school was crucial for understanding the distributed leadership
culture. The intent is to be an excellent school creating opportunities and improved outcomes for all
students, which he felt had been discussed with staff and all had agreed to. A2 explained that edu-
cational opportunities were not only about achieving the performance targets laid down by central
government and inspected on by the national inspection agency (Ofsted), but important too was a
broader view of learning that included school trips and other extra-curricular activities. Internal
school targets generated by middle leaders, for achieving the latter kind of opportunities, was one
way of ensuring that such opportunities had a priority. Teachers (C3 and C4) considered that ena-
bling students to exercise leadership in the classroom (e.g. by leading teaching and giving feed-
back on teaching) supported the students’ learning.

Staff generally considered that opportunities to develop were available and supported by the
school. For example, a middle leader (C3) explained that the school has a talent management pro-
gramme through which the senior leadership support staff that are seen as having potential in cer-
tain areas to develop; but also that it is open to any member of staff to seek support initiate a
teacher-led development project or some other form of development - and that includes both full-
time and part-time staff, as well as support staff. For their part, support staff (B2, B3, B4) felt sup-
ported by the school in their professional development, including B2 who joined the school as an
apprentice and is now benefiting from courses that the school supports him in attending.

Some comments alluded to the issue of the capacity of staff in relation to distributed leadership. A
senior leader (A1), as noted above, felt that they had taken time to develop the corporate vision
and that the bulk of the staff were ‘signed up’ for the journey ‘from good to great’, which is the
school’s aim. He explained that creating a distributed culture takes time, as capacity has to be built
up first, and consequently there had been a focus on recruitment and retention. Having a stable
senior leadership team over time was also an important factor in developing a distributed leader-
ship culture, according to A1. A middle leader (C6) emphasised that ‘you have to have the right
people’ to lead and that, if the ‘wrong people’ were involved with teacher-led development projects
for example, these would fail.

From the discussion to this point, it is possible to suggest that:
- distributed leadership is felt to be real within the school, and is meaningful in a positive
  sense for many of the staff
- the idea of multiple distributions helps us to understand the nature of leadership as a dis-
  tributed phenomenon in the school
- opportunities to exercise ‘influence and initiative’ are felt to be distributed, as well as ‘re-
  spect’, whilst ‘authority’ and ‘accountability’ are not seen as being distributed in the same
  wide sense
- the dominant view of distributed leadership is therefore one that sees it as the exercise of
  pro-active agency, creating and taking initiatives to lead change and innovation
- cohesive culture, trust, co-ordination and planning, and capacity (factors identified in the research literature on distributed leadership) are seen as important factors for the effective working of distributed leadership in the school.

- specific features of these factors include a sense of shared vision and clear purpose, the feeling of support and protection, the long-term approach taken to developing a DL culture, and structural opportunities such as teacher-led development projects and learning forums.
ii) Distributed leadership and social justice

The creation of the collages and the discussions around them showed some of the differences and problems that were also associated with leadership in the school. Some participants felt that, despite the distribution of leadership, there are significant buffers and divides - between the senior leadership team and other staff for example. This was not necessarily seen as negative. As noted in the previous section, there was a view that the senior leadership need to set the direction, with staff having a say in the means to achieving that. Support staff (B1 and B2) recognised the reality of an organisational division between the senior leadership and others in the school. B1 felt that they are ‘not a clique’ but ‘there’s a club’ (description suggested by B2) - they are a ‘team of people, they all know each other, they all have meetings together, so they’re going to stick together’.

In line with the encouragement of opportunities to exercise initiative and leadership, there is a tendency to see social justice in terms of availability of opportunities.

Turning first to participative justice (Figure 1, Section 1), there were strong positive expressions of distributed opportunity. A middle leader (C5) for example considered that there is social justice in the school in that anybody who wants to lead on anything has the opportunity to suggest it and talk it through with somebody. C5 felt that everybody in the faculty has a voice, though whether they take that opportunity is another matter. Another teacher (C2) explained that as a part-time teacher she contributed to meetings and events fully and feels she has a voice. There were expressions too that students too were strongly involved. A middle leader (C3) gave a figure for the student participation in leadership. In his Year Group, over 183 students took part in leadership out of 240, whether on student council or through other activities. One of the student groups (Group D) felt that all students had the opportunity to lead in school, though not all - because of lack of confidence or an unwillingness to commit to the responsibilities of leadership - would take these opportunities. This group also felt that students’ voices are heard within the school, and that being given a voice and having their views heard had a positive impact on both personal development and on the enjoyment of education.

Critical questioning, recognising deficiencies in the actual spread of leadership activity was evident. A student (E4) questioned the legitimacy and authenticity of the leadership roles offered to students and which only a minority of students held: ‘They just made them up. They are trying to give people roles and stuff but they don’t really have any substance’. The view of a senior leader (A2) was that leadership opportunities and impact are strong for the senior leadership team and middle leaders, weaker for teachers, and weakest for students and support staff. A teacher (C1) pointed to some of the variables that affect actual participation and voice, which include - to use a concept from research literature - access to social capital. Asked about social justice, C1 reflected that they think there is a culture of DL in the school on a number of different levels, through lots of different groups and teams: some, however, are better placed to know the right channels through which to get those ideas to come to fruition. For example, C1 explained, some staff because of the nature of their post may have more opportunities to speak with members of the senior leadership team which makes important decisions. It may also be that everybody is not aware of the opportunities for leadership. Some may not want to be involved in leadership. The same observation on variable access to influence and opportunities emerged from the discussion by Group D students. The view was expressed in that discussion that the more access a person has to the senior leadership team, the more power they have as that person will have more chance of being listened to. The ability to gain attention is seen as key as this enables students to obtain access to the leader-

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2 Little appears in the data that relates to distributive justice (Figure 1). Discussion here is therefore concentrated mainly on the other aspects of social justice, with reference being made within the discussion to social capital as an aspect of distributive justice.
ship team, and such ability is seen to be gained through age and maturity. Student E6 conceptualised leadership as voice and access – whether someone has the right to talk and who they have access to in order to be heard.

These reflections on differences are highlighting one aspect of distributive justice - namely, variable access to the resource of social capital - which can lead to inequalities in participation (and perhaps respect (cultural justice) and learning (developmental justice) too).

Teacher C1 also spoke about student leadership. He explained that the aim is to grow a culture of student leadership but that it tends to be only certain students who are involved in that leadership: it tends to be who those who are already confident, have status in the school and who are perhaps the academic ones. According to student E2, students’ peers are an important influence on taking leadership opportunities and the rate at which a student develops their level self-leadership. Maturing over time is an important factor in E2's view, moving towards self-leadership at Sixth Form level where the student becomes more able to make choices in line with their own values and beliefs. A member of the support staff (B3) explained that the students are deliberately outside the pyramid in her collage because that is a pyramid of leadership, though she recognises that students do have an influence and have leadership positions - but in her view this is not the same as being inside the pyramid. Student D4 considered that more needed to be done: 'I think we need to work together as a community to get a whole leadership system throughout the school'.

In a number of the student collages across the student groups, the point was made that there are some students who do not want to become involved in leadership opportunities. This may suggest a greater reluctance towards leadership amongst students than staff. A more fundamental question is whether unwillingness (by students or staff) should be seen necessarily as a problem to be solved. A distributed leadership culture will tend to expect school members (staff and students) to be, or to develop towards being, leaders. In other words, it advocates a certain identity as a leader engaged in pro-active agency (albeit in diverse ways). This may not be appropriate for all. There is a balance to be struck between appropriate autonomy (the rights and needs of the individual) and collective expectations (which seek to expand opportunity, agency and learning through a certain set of values and ways of working). Getting this balance right involves posing critical questions to do with different aspects of social justice, the answers to which may not all point in the same direction. These different aspects include democratic principles and rights to be involved or to choose not to be involved (participative justice), the importance of respect (cultural justice), and the imperative to give everyone opportunities to develop their full capabilities (developmental justice).

A member of the support staff (B4) expressed the view, 'I do believe I have a voice. I do believe that I can voice things that I feel particularly concerned about. There are people I can go to. I wouldn't say that I feel particularly heard... I don't think everything's heard and taken on board. But that possibly is the right of the leadership', since the senior leadership have the power and access to a lot more information. Senior leaders A1 and A2 considered that support staff were not involved in exercising voice and leadership as much as they could be. A2 felt that there was a huge potential, but that the support staff work according to tighter rules and so had less freedom to innovate. In the discussion between A1 and A2, a complex picture emerges of both progress and restrictions in distributed leadership. A1 recognises the impact of a graduate teaching force on the problem of involving support staff: at the same time the staff in the canteen set their own objectives and have been told that their role - providing good meals - is important for learning. According to A2, they feel hugely empowered. This is part of an approach in which the performance management scheme in the school is not applied in a uniform way but tailors or personalises objectives for particular posts. A1 acknowledges that some support staff just want to come into school, do their job and return home. For A2, innovation and getting support to feel they can innovate are the important things. A1 adds that respect also is the thing and expresses the view that the school is very good
at being non-hierarchical - using first names and giving respect - and in picking up non-respect. This leads us into the issue of cultural justice.

**Cultural justice** (Figure 1, Section 1) links with cohesive culture and trust, factors which encourage feelings of respect. Strong expressions of feeling valued and being respected have been acknowledged in the previous sub-section on perceptions of leadership, and the experience of belonging that contributes to feelings of holistic well-being. Nevertheless, respect is not necessarily equally experienced or practiced. A student (D2) explained that the size of the spaces between teams and individuals in her collage indicated the levels of respect shown to different groups within the school, and that these vary in terms of progress ‘up’ the school: ‘Teachers have a lot and sixth formers have quite a lot and compared to the other years - it’s just way more’. Examples of lack of respect and hurt were given during some of the staff’s discussions about their collages. A member of the support staff (B1), who was keen to say that she felt valued and protected, also described more problematic experiences. She felt that she tended to be positioned by others in a way that made assumptions that she would not be the kind of person interested in developing; but there is ‘more to me’ and ‘I feel I’m constantly fighting against it all the time’. B1 explained that there had been a couple of situations where ‘I’ve had remarks’, so there was a part of her that wanted to represent hurt as well positive feelings in the collage. Another support staff member (B3) felt she was at the bottom of the ‘pyramid of power’ as she described it in her collage, suggesting some negative issues. B3 explained that the rules meant that she was not in senior support staff meetings. Equally, she considered that the school had been transformed under the current head teacher, that more people were involved in leadership and that she felt involved in the leadership ‘in my own little world’ where she managed one of the school-wide schemes. A2 (senior leader) considered that support staff see themselves as ‘second class citizens’, a situation that he did not like.

**Developmental justice** (see Figure 1, Section 1) refers to equality in relation to development of personal growth and capabilities. It is therefore concerned with student learning and staff development. In the previous sub-section on perceptions of leadership, it was explained that several participants positively associated DL with student learning and that staff generally considered that opportunities to develop were available and supported by the school. The middle leader (C5) who, as noted above, felt that everybody in the faculty has a voice, also considered that everybody in the faculty has opportunities to develop and learn, and that included students. C5 felt that the school has been successful in raising student aspirations. Another middle leader (C6) considered that the school was aware of most disadvantaged, but wondered if there may be a problem in giving sufficient attention to the ‘hidden child’, the ‘middling child’, the ‘introverted child’ - ‘I don’t know that DL does anything to address that’. A similar concern about the ‘middling child’ was raised by A3 (a senior leader)

Participants were asked if they felt the distributed leadership approach in Heathvale School was democratic. Responses were various. Some said that it was ‘to a point’, ‘partly’ or that the answer was ‘yes and no’ (A1, senior leader; B3 and B4, support staff; C3, C5 middle leaders). Democracy in this context was not associated with voting on decisions. Teachers C1 and C2 said so explicitly, though it was recognised that there are some matters on which staff do vote (C1), often relatively minor but also including electing the staff governor (middle leader C3). Consultation and being heard were themes associated with democracy and that it was felt were part of the leadership of the school. A1 (senior leader) explained that they consult whenever possible, and others such as C1 (teacher) and C6 (middle leader) affirmed that there was consultation. Being listened to was emphasised by C4 (teacher) and C5 (middle leader). C5, echoing the recognition above of the importance of structure, firm framing and multiple distributions, felt that, leadership is ‘partly’ democratic ‘but not always completely. But then it can’t always be… because in the end the head and the governors are responsible for the school, so there has to be him making the final decision, and he will listen to our reasons, he will listen to what we want to do, and if it is reasonable and ac-
ceptable and we can ague our case enough and he can see the value of it, then he will take on board our views'.

Group E students in their discussion were interested in the notion of a school as a democracy. Generally they felt that it was not a true democracy but that there were routes to get their voices heard and that these voices are ‘counted’ as important. Not all students would agree with this. Student F1 for example felt that ‘They don’t actually listen to us. We have a Student Council but I don’t feel that they listen to us’. In Group F students’ discussion it appeared that students in the main feel that they do have a voice, in that there are systems which allow them to put their views forward, but that there is a problem arising from a lack of understanding of the reasons for decisions made at higher levels and then fed back to students.

Democracy as opportunity to exercise leadership - the pro-active agency and chance to exercise initiative referred to in the previous sub-section - was a connection that several participants made. A member of the support staff (B4) felt that leadership was generally democratic, but that some people do not like change and prefer sticking to how things have always been done. This view associates democracy with openness to change, innovation and improvement. The middle leader, C3, spoke about opportunities to lead being open to all in response to the question about leadership being democratic, as did C2 (teacher). The response of senior leader, A3, was that leadership in the school is democratic because it is meritocratic.

From the discussion in this section on social justice, it is possible to suggest that:

- distribution of opportunities is a pronounced feature of the school leadership culture: there were strong positive expressions affirming the distribution of opportunities to create and take initiatives to lead change and to have a say, with examples of leadership and development opportunities in all groups within the school - senior leaders, middle leaders, teachers, support staff and students

- distributed leadership, nevertheless, does not necessarily involve all equally: views expressed suggest it is strongest amongst senior and middle leaders and weakest amongst support staff and students

- exercising ‘influence and initiative’ and experience of respect varies according to individual and structural variables: these include a person’s motivations, interests, how they are responded to by individuals, a person’s networks within the school, students’ peer group influences, maturity towards self-leadership, perceptions of status, and so on

- the scope of exercising ‘influence and initiative’ tends to be restricted to the means of achieving given ends, rather than including opportunities to consider questions of the school’s educational purpose and goals

- distributed leadership is generally seen as to a degree democratic, in so far as it enables staff and students to be consulted, have a say (about means if not ends) and exercise opportunities for leadership.
6. Conclusions

Participants in the case study put forward the images and meanings of leadership in Heathvale School that they most wanted to communicate. They were not asked to attempt to produce a comprehensive ‘picture’ of leadership in the school. They chose to highlight a certain aspect or aspects of leadership important in their minds and their feelings as they created their collage. Some, especially students, featured a hierarchical image, thus emphasising the location of power and authority at senior levels. Others featured more holarchic images which tend to be more circular and fluid. Hierarchical and holarchic depictions are not necessarily mutually exclusive perspectives of leadership practice in the school. They each bring to the fore different elements, as explained in the discussion of ‘Stories of leadership…’ in Section 5. They perhaps constitute plural framings of leadership practice, each expressing aspects of leadership that operate simultaneously and interchangeably in the flow of practice. The holarchic aspect of leadership appears to be the most prominent in the staff discourse around leadership. This is the aspect that encourages and facilitates pro-active agency - valuing initiative, enterprise and innovation as well as collaboratively working with others in doing this. This is a more fluid organisational environment than bureaucratic hierarchy. The metaphors of ‘water’ and ‘flow’ therefore strike a chord, which one of the participants expressed through an image of a waterfall cascading down into a pool whirling with ideas.

The plurality of leadership and its distributive character is articulated conceptually in the idea of multiple distributions. This attempts to convey an important understanding of those within the school’s DL culture that some aspects are distributed more or differently than others. The idea of multiple distributions leads us into some of the limitations and difficulties of DL. Differences in opportunity and experience are not necessarily distributed fairly or in ways that best benefit the learning of all.

To conclude this report we draw on some of what we have learnt from this case study to formulate five requirements which we suggest it would be helpful for policy-makers wanting to develop school leadership to reflect upon.

Firstly, advancing the quality of school leadership requires developing the leadership capabilities of everyone in the school - both those who are in designated leadership positions and those (such as many teachers, support staff and students) who are not.

Secondly, developing the leadership capabilities of all requires the development of school cultures and structures that provide the social, professional and institutional support necessary to create environments that facilitate individual initiative and collaborative working and learning.

Thirdly, the development and sustaining of such school cultures and structures requires long-term investment by schools and by the governments and other agencies that support schools.

Fourthly, distributed leadership requires respect for both autonomy (individual views, professionalism, creativity and needs) and authority (school purpose, goals, values and structures), which means school members helping to shape schools’ educational purposes, values, etc. as well as working within these.

Fifthly, helping distributed leadership to be fair and of benefit to the learning of all requires it to be guided by a broad concept of social justice that encourages schools to ask critical questions about involvement (participative justice), respect (cultural justice), learning (developmental justice) and resources (distributive justice).
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1: Collages and summer accounts of discussions and interviews

Staff

Below are notes based on the discussions, interviews and each staff participant's explanation of their collage.

Analysis of Group A

Group A consisted of four senior leaders.

Description and leadership. The shape of the collage by A1, a senior leader, is holarchic. A1’s main emphasis could be interpreted as dissolving distinctions and boundaries: he does not want to show distinctions between teaching/support staff, middle/senior leaders. A1 also emphasises the vision that stands above the leadership and gives direction to all.

The collage comprises a balloon standing vertically above scattered small pieces on the sheet. The randomly sorted pieces that were ‘chucked onto the paper’ - they are people in the school. A1 didn’t distinguish between teaching and support staff. He explained that he randomly sorted them, and then the straws represent there being lots of links between these people. There’s a formal structure but it’s quite informal too. People network. The relevance of intellectual and social capital is mentioned. Most of our staff, A1 explains, are pretty well networked and cohesive. There are a few ‘dinosaurs’, but not many. They annoy us, A1 explains. Deliberately, no distinction is made between middle and senior leaders. A minority are dysfunctional, and these are shown as being on their sides. We have capacity to deal with them, A1 explains. Each of us gets on, but we have clear demarked roles. Fluid and separate. The balloon represents the corporate vision. They have taken time on this. A1 explains that he thinks that the bulk of our staff know where we are going, being signed up to this ‘good to great journey’.

A1 says you can distribute leadership but not accountability. It is good to see ‘risks’ being taken, but if anything went pear-shaped it would quickly come back to you (the head). ‘We have clear structures but within that freedom’ A1 refers also to the best schools having very tight structures (clear systems) but within that everyone’s free to explore. Creating distributed leadership culture takes time. Got to build capacity first. So focus on recruitment and retention. A1 elaborates on this in the paired interview, including stable senior leadership team.
Asked about distributed leadership being democratic, A1 says Yes and no. Some think we have the final say. Time is an issue. Consult when possible. A2, in the paired interview with A1, says we're a lot more political - have informal conversations, don't claim we're consulting when we're not.

**Social justice.** We walk around a lot and have let go, but others in the active roles ‘may see it differently.’ A1 recognises impact of graduate teaching force on problem of involving support staff (in response to A2's comments below). At the same time, the ladies in the canteen set their own objectives. They have been told that what they do is important for learning. A2, in the paired interview with A1, agrees and says they feel hugely empowered. A1 acknowledges some want to come in and go home. A2 responds that innovation is the great thing. Getting them to feel they can innovate. A1 says respect is the thing. I think we are very good at being non-hierarchical - using 1st names, giving respect, and non-respect is picked up.

**Contextual factors.** A problem for schools in special measures - unlike Heathvale School - is that they are always into quick fixes. They don’t have the time to refine things. Our imperative, explains A1, is more than just what Ofsted [the national inspectorate] says.

**Description and leadership.** The shape of the collage by A2, a senior leader, is holarchic. In summary, A2's view is that leadership opportunities and impact are strong for the senior leadership team and middle leaders, weaker for teachers, and weakest for students and support staff. Nevertheless there is a strong bond (a bridge) between the senior leadership team and teaching/support staff, and overall the structure should be seen as quite flat.

The collage is flat, representing for A2 quite a flat structure across the school. ‘These things here’ represent the students. The tokens represent tokenism, says A2. The paper is the school. The red underneath represents teachers in school; but A2 says he doesn't know how impactful the teachers' leadership is. Some teachers do leadership in the community - that’s the bit over the edge in the collage.

‘Blue is middle leaders, and they have biggest impact’. They are ‘hugely empowered’. Middle leadership have opportunities to really lead across the school - I think we've worked quite hard to make that happen, A2 explains - again some in the community. A2 confirmed this in paired interview: the 'shift started 3 years ago, to shift leadership to the middle. Goes back to Prussian general in 18th century, aiming to create leaders who can respond to what's in front of them but in line with the same intent across leaders. This is from the business literature. Get away from organisational friction. Distribute leadership so that they can work out how to get to the same intent. Reviewed it recently. Getting embedded. We're going to have to get used to letting go.’ A2 emphasised the latter point.

The senior leadership team is hugely important. Sets direction. Great clarity. The senior leadership team is shown as shiny and bright - small group. Senior leaders set direction and make some decisions, but by and large we have conversations with middle leaders in which they tell us what they've done rather than ask us what they can do. Later A2 (responding to A3) says we rely on middle leaders to disperse the message. We believe if they’re to be empowered to do the job, they
also need to deliver the message. But it’s not always delivered in the way it should be - we must enable them to be clearer, more precise and confident in the message.

The school governors are represented - but as an afterthought, as A2 doesn’t think they offer a great deal of leadership: governors are ‘thin’ and not particularly impactful.

Here is our support staff: if you unfolded this it would be huge but it is deliberately folded. Tried to measure it very much into a square because I think they live by very tight rules, and I don’t think they have the freedoms we have over here.

There’s a bridge here that is quite strong, A2 explains - it is difficult, A2 says to represent - I think there is one whole team. The bridge represents that there isn’t separation between senior leadership and support staff and teaching staff. I think there’s a really strong bond there - hard to represent that. Don’t have spread of impact that they could have. A2 explains that he believes leadership is quite a flat structure, not massively hierarchical, though it may be in some people’s eyes. A2 explained in discussion that middle leadership, and then finding the tokens to represent tokenism of leadership for many, were the first things that developed in doing the collage.

A2 emphasises towards the end of the discussion the importance of aligning to intent, not to structures. How you get there is not so important. A2 talks about the school’s intent in the paired interview. How they talk about this, the words they use, are important. Not just about what Ofsted want. Eg it’s about creating opportunities for all students, and creating an opportunity doesn’t mean it will happen. ‘Intent is to be excellent school, outstanding, opportunities for all, improve student outcomes, improve teacher input, economy and efficiency. All discussed with staff and agreed to. Enables people to be clear about what they do. Have set metrics for seeing how far the school has reached these, built up from middle leaders who say what they think the targets should be. Eg targets for trips, extra curricular - middle leaders wanted 100% target, for sake of equal opportunities. Ground-up metrics, aggregating targets upwards.’

Students enact leadership with teachers in lessons, but that’s a small minority.

**Social justice.** To a certain extent I saw student representations almost as tokens, A2 explains, because sometimes I think it’s tokenism leadership - it’s not actually embedded in any way shape or form, it’s not really explained to them about why they are a leader or what leadership represents and how they can impact upon that.

Asked about distributed leadership and social justice: A2 says distributed leadership does help social justice because all staff have the intent. I think where it doesn’t is with support staff. The school has based support staff’s performance objectives on their jobs, not made them uniform with teaching staff. So they have personalised things for support staff, but the school could do more - e.g. support staff ask to do things. I think they see themselves as 2nd class citizens, A2 explains. it’s about respect. I don’t like that they feel like that. ‘Need to involve them in staff days etc. some just want to do job and go home. Problem involving them. They see themselves as 2nd class citizens. But right to be involved and follow good idea is for everyone.’

**Contextual factors.** Asked about the impact of policies external to the school, A2 says, and A1 agrees but has to go, ‘We ignore a lot of it. Leadership distributed to us as an academy, so we take this and pass this down the system. On EBacc chose not to follow this for all students. Make it available on grounds of choice for those who want it. Accepted by the community. You’ve given us the freedom, we’ll take it. Integrity in what we do. A2 says other schools much more bureaucratic and hierarchical.
**Description and leadership.** Collage A3 is also that of a senior leader. Its shape is holarchic. In summary, A3 was concerned to recognise that there is structure but did not want to represent this vertically; and he took the view that there was a buffer between the senior leadership team and the rest, and more could be done to explain what it was doing. A further notable theme was that of 'jewels' in the 'dinosaurs' and some students - that is, the importance of recognising potential. Uniformity of vision is more apparent amongst middle leaders than teachers, according to A3.

A3 explains that he didn't want to do vertical but still there is a structure. He didn’t want to show a vertical hierarchy. I don’t see the school as a vertical hierarchy at all, A3 explains - I wanted to go outward like that, but still retaining a sense of structure. Outside is community. Then the students we serve, shown as blocks of wood showing that they can be shaped. Then working inwards into the senior leadership team and middle leaders and teachers. Some dinosaurs, but A3 has a jewel in these because they can still have something to contribute. With regard to the senior leadership team, there is still a buffer between it and teachers. The senior leadership team could do more to explain. A3 says you also have in students the 'diamonds in the rough'.

There is space in the collage - A3 wanted to get over the point overall that whilst there is hierarchy, there is also communication to go on and through. Then in the middle A3 didn’t differentiate between teachers, senior leadership, support staff. That’s the senior leadership there. The vision is shared with middle leaders and they in turn... They’re not all shapes and sizes - there is more regularity of vision in those middle leaders. The teachers are all shapes & sizes - one dinosaur, and that says more about me, says A3. That dinosaur has a jewel in it. They can still contribute. There’s lots of jewels there. As a school we survive and grow because everyone’s different, and that has an impact on students.

Whilst it is a circle, there is a little bit of a buffer zone between the senior leadership team and the teachers. There could be work to be done on the senior leadership team explaining its reasoning to teachers. I think middle leaders understand it. Middle leaders could share more about why these decisions have been made so we can get more out of these jewels.

The sparkly stuff everywhere is the community which can’t have a set pattern. School is messy. Can cause tension when community uses school resources.

Asked about distributed leadership being democratic, A3 responds that from staff perspective, it is meritocratic. Regarding students, there is a requirement for some positions for applications. For some students, we will say you should just do this.

**Social justice.** This doesn't come up according to A3 - no issues with race and gender - 'it's a meritocracy. For some staff maybe, because they haven't caught the vision, issues arise - e.g. access to car park which is an issue for some, e.g. when the car park is being used by the community. Asked about social justice for students, A3 says that they will push some students with poor economic backgrounds to be in leadership positions. The issue is to balance that with more advantaged. There is always a quiet middle. Are we being just with them? There will be hidden gems in them.

**Contextual factors.** Asked about the impact of policies external to the school, A3 says he leaves the headteacher to filter what's relevant. A4 agrees. A3 says there is respect for the headteacher
regarding this. A4 cites pay policy. A3 says there is a lot of work by the senior leadership team to protect staff. Having been on the senior leadership team he appreciates their work.

Description and leadership. The shape of the collage by A4, also a senior leader, is hierarchical. In summary, A4 sees the structure as hierarchical, with decisions clearly coming from the senior leadership team at the top, though she also gives examples of leadership agency lower down the hierarchy.

These are the governors, A4 explains - dinosaurs, not all of them - the governors a bit detached. We tell them and they go along with it. This is the senior leadership team and they are at the top. The senior leadership team is shown as separate in the collage because this is where the decisions come out, though the rest of the staff are informed in a very good way. It is still the senior leadership team that are making those decisions feeding down to middle leaders. A4 didn’t differentiate support staff and didn’t include students. The different colours (of the paper) are irrelevant.

A4 makes the point that some who have what they see as quite a minor role in fact have an important leadership role. She gives an example of a member of the support staff - actually, explains A4, she leads on making sure we’ve got provisions in, making sure there’s tea and coffee available in the morning: even though she’s a very low paid member of staff, ‘in her own way she’s a leader’.

Social justice. A4 responds by saying that all have access to professional development - professional development opportunities have been extended to support staff. The well-being ‘suggestion box’ provides an opportunity for staff to provide solutions with the problems they raise. A4 also says that the senior leadership team respects all.

Analysis of Group B

Group B comprised four members of the support staff.

Description and leadership. B1 explains the Big fish is me as this is about how I feel about it. I feel that I'm very protected as a member of staff with the senior leadership team (SLT). Probably because of my personality. But, B1 explains, there’s a lot more to me. So I feel like I’m constantly having to battle with that, because I’m having to prove all the time. Same with most of the people up here. This is like a chamber - I feel I’m closed in. So the collage shows I’m protected, seen in a nice way, it’s all sunny, fluffy, but there’s this little area that I’m really not happy with, couldn’t make
it darker, and that's happened in last couple of months. I was trying to get something to represent not being taken seriously, but couldn't quite find it. There's been a couple of situations where I've had remarks. The incidents have been addressed, B1 explains. There's also part of me that wanted to represent hurt as well. As long as they're doing something about the situation, that's all you can ask. I like it perfect... B1 says in any job today, so much more is expected of you. I think without giving the politician's answer, there's always good and bad. I personally see a lot more good in relation my job, 'I feel like I'm looked after, personally. I think I'm probably that sort of person that people feel that they can look after.' Very happy with this. The majority of SLT show me a great deal of respect. Re SLT if you show respect to them and you're doing the best you can, they know... You have to earn respect. I do respect them. On the whole we're pretty lucky here. I think personally they're not a clique, but.. [pause]. (B2 interjects, there's a club) Yes. They're team of people, they all know each other, they all have meetings together, so they're going to stick together. They are open to ideas but I don't think anyone could be in the club. B1 explains how she's made progress in her job, extending what she does. There's this gap, if they think your here in the pyramid [low down] they think you're far less intelligent and you've got less... it depends on the individuals. They're not all like that [having assumptions about those lower in pyramid]. Can't praise head enough. He's always grateful for what you do.

**Social justice.** As far as SLT is concerned, B1 says, they forget they're people and we're people and we're all the same, may be get paid more or whatever. As long as you've got respect for people and they have for you. B1 knows of a different school in special measures which has a poor SLT. At Heathvale, the structure and everything is about right. I like what I'm doing but I feel like I'm worth more. I do feel they realise that. I feel valued, I do feel valued. Asked if the leadership is democratic, B1 says we understand that it cannot be, we go with that. We're support staff and play big role. But there are some who don't go with that and put a spanner in the works. The majority are happy, but you get small group of moaners. They don't appreciate what they have in this school.

**Contextual factors.** Don't hear about external policy. Only occasionally.

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**Description and leadership.** C B2 says his collage is not structured like B3's at all. This is SLT and then the rest move around. People move up and down according to his job. He gets around as a technician. Depends on who B2 is catering to. For me, says B2, there's only a few set people who have influence; other than that everyone else doesn't really know what I do. I just fix their problems and that's it. (Others in the group praise him for his work.) There's no structure in it amongst the great mass. B2 explains that he did the collage from his point of view, rather than from how the structure of the school is laid out. B3's is more accurate, says B2 - more like the theoretical way it should be. But life isn't like that. People at the top are like shadows.

**Social justice.** B2 says I think that DL does aid social justice. He came as an apprentice, now they're bringing in a new apprentice, and and he's going on courses the school's paid for. 'They've obviously seen I'm willing to work hard'. Regarding voice, B2 explains that he works in tight team and line manager will take things up and say things. Other people in the school don't have same experience. See himself as lucky. In his view all the students have the same chance but depends on the teacher and the student. Asked if the leadership is democratic, B2 says it is not democratic,
it's tyrannical. It's half and half - the club at the top meet and that's done. but you couldn't really run it in a different way, you can’t have it democratic for a whole school 

**Contextual factors.** The information is there if we want it, but it doesn’t apply to us.

**Description and leadership.** B3 describes the collage as a ‘pyramid of power’. At the top are the governors. Then we have the head. Then the three pieces just below are the deputy heads, one slightly larger than the other because ‘I believe’ they have more influence on the school. The assistant heads; then the teachers including senior teachers; then ‘we have the perception of senior support staff’, then ‘we have the support staff at the bottom’; and the sequins around are the students. They are sequins because there’s lots of them. B3 explains that the students (the sequins) are deliberately outside the pyramid because that is a pyramid of leadership, though she recognises that students do have an influence. B3 acknowledges that students do have leadership positions when this is suggested, but it’s not the same as inside the pyramid. ‘And to be honest with you, I don’t know who they [students in leadership positions] are.’ They don’t have power. B3 (and others in the group) view the head teacher as having a lot of power. Asked about connections between people, B3 explains that the connections are up and down. The governors are at the top because they have ultimate control by law. B3 says ‘I’m here, I feel down here’ in the pyramid. B3 also believes that the school been transformed since new head. She been here long time, over 14 years. Sees more people involved in leadership. Student intake gone up. Although at the bottom of the pyramid, B3 feels more involved in leadership ‘in my own little world’ because she manages a whole school scheme. Senior support staff meet, but not support staff who don’t line manage. B3 liaises with teachers a lot. I was encouraged to do this through a teacher-led development project.

**Social justice.** B3 feels that through the teacher-led development project she has been given an equal chance to develop and learn, and hopes the research she has carried out is taken on board. Her research been included on the school website. Asked if the leadership is democratic, B3 says to a point. Don’t think we’d be here if we weren't happy.

**Description and leadership.** B4 explains that there is an ivory tower. There is a perception of an ivory tower. The headteacher is the ‘shining star’ at the top; because, B4 says, he is a star. The SLT is portrayed as stars. What they do, what they try to do is no mean feat. However, this is a little bit of a barrier - a fence - and sometimes I sit on it. The ‘feathers represent a little bit of fluffiness every now and again because I think there are inconsistencies’. Not necessarily a lot of consisten-
cy across the board. Not a bad thing because everybody’s meant to be different. The fish underneath are the students. Then there are pockets of information that aren’t necessarily available to everybody. But that’s not a bad thing, it’s not represented as something that’s negative - which is why I’ve got a big yellow balloon. It’s meant to show it’s all a teamwork effort - but ‘there are different levels of teamwork’, and we’re all here as little cogs in a big wheel. ‘There has to be people in charge, there has to be people who ultimately make those decisions.’ There always has to be some kind of structure. This is the net I sometimes get caught in - some decisions I don’t necessarily agree with, because the other part of my role is as a parent with children at the school. Sometimes caught (in the net) between rock and hard place. Nothing serious or bad. The students are represented as fish because they’re all swimming around and because of the inconsistencies sometimes; I think sometimes they’re a little bit ‘lost in the water’. Should have shown some in the opposite direction because there are some students who are swimming against the tide and need support in different ways. Recently a senior leader said to me that I’m not part of a team - he actually said that out loud and I was quite shocked by that. I believe I’m part of a small team, but I’m part of a bigger team as well. B4 says ‘I do believe I have a voice. I do believe that I can voice things that I feel particularly concerned about. There are people I can go to. I wouldn’t say that I feel particularly heard... I don’t think everything’s heard and taken on board. But that possibly is the right of the leadership’ - they’ve got power and access to a lot more information that I’ve got. B4 talks about performance management: ‘It’s an appraisal system. I look at it with my line manager. Because B4 work for different people, she contacts all of them for feedback on her strengths and weaknesses, and considers if she agree with them. She feels in charge because B4 knows she can say to them, what do you think I’ve done good this year, what do you think I’m bad at. I’ve made sure that I’ve done work on things I need to work at - no-one else has done it for me. You revisit it, monitor, to check you’ve achieved targets. Everyone in school is part of performance management system. You set the targets in discussion with your line manager - the areas you want to do better at.

B4 says that ‘they do give a lot of responsibility to the children, to encourage their leadership, to encourage them to lead other students and I think that is a very good that [the school] is very good at.’

**Social justice.** B4 agrees with B3 regarding social justice. B4 sees a spectrum of students in her role from the very difficult to the very nice. There is a massive group of students inbetween who do what they’re meant to every day. B4 has signed up to an OU course and has been supported in that in the sense of being encouraged and asked how’s it going. School is good at having that chance to develop. Performance management is a very good process compared with appraisal B4 has experienced in other companies. It’s very much ‘a process you’re in charge of’. ‘I feel people are respected, I feel very respected in the school’.

B4 believes school gives students’ access to opportunities to develop and learn, encouraging all. B4 has children in the school. Her child has a great education and experience of education here. Asked if the leadership is democratic, B4 agrees with B3 that it is to a point. B4 says she would say that there are some people set in their ways. (B3 agrees.) B4 goes on: whilst it is generally democratic, some people just don’t like change. Not necessarily hierarchical, just more of a case this is how it’s been done so this is how we are going to do it., rather than a case of could we change it to make it better.

**Contextual factors.** B4 says she doesn’t think it [external policy] helps at all. And also I think we’re screened from that by the leadership. education shouldn’t be government led. You can’t keep changing things. It’s hard on young people. There’s enough pressure already. I think it makes SLT slightly wary of making long term decisions. All about struggle for power.
Analysis of Group C

Group C comprises 6 teachers and middle leaders.

Description and leadership. C1, a teacher, explains about a student leadership group, from across the school. Initially about observing teachers and giving feedback, the last couple of years it has extended to teachers and students working together. It's evolving. Re collage, started off with hierarchy in mind, but changed his mind. Had instead different bits, overlapping. C1 wanted to show there is structure outside there student leadership group structure outside of it. Not rigid, It does change. The plane, car and dinosaur are about the different speed that things happen - thinking about leadership initiatives. At every level there are things that are happening, but some things make more impact more quickly. Eg a teacher-led development projects comes in, makes impact then goes. Then the car - slower moving - from middle leadership, students, the top - the student leadership group might be like that. The dinosaur, - these are leadership ideas that are stuck. Eg student leadership has grown enormously but there are still significant leaders at certain points that perhaps are resistant slightly to amount of student leadership. C1 thinks there is a culture of DL in the school on a number of different levels - lots of different groups. Some have more of a platform or knowing the right channels through which to get those ideas to come to fruition; and perhaps everybody isn't aware of opportunities for leadership. C1 encourage students to be leaders of their own learning in the classroom.

Social justice. C1 agrees with C4 - in a sense if DL is working effectively and It's more than just a label, which I think it is certainly here, then it should lead to greater social justice. We are trying to grow a culture but it's only certain students who are going to be involved in that leadership. It tends to be who are already confident, have status in the school who are perhaps academic ones. C1 worries that it's students that represent a certain type of student. In a way it's a microcosm of the staff as well - some don't want to get involved. C1 did a teacher-led development project on student leadership in classroom. Shared it with others. That's the thing with structures, C1 explains. You have to foster the right classroom. Some may be nervous about it. Asked if the leadership is democratic, C1 says this is an interesting question. Listening to what the majority want doesn’t necessarily come about. Following C4, C1 says another example of vote was on Monday morning meetings. But how important are these in the grand scheme of things? We don't have a vote on, say, a couple of lessons from English to going to technology, says C4. Yes says C1. Perhaps there could be greater scope. C1 says it is important to have a response to concerns or ideas that are put forward. You feel involved if you're told enough to have some understanding of reasons for something. The situation differs between faculties. Some give everyone a chance to say what they would like regarding timetabling - you can't all get what you want, but you can have the chance to express a view.

Contextual factors. C1 says we're shielded from this.
**Description and leadership.** C2, a teacher, explained she was attracted to purple - a ‘blanket cover of protection’. There’s a protective underlay to the whole school - to its physical and metaphysical structure. Navaho feathers represent the chiefs if you like, but they’re also down here and the straws are interconnecting, so there’s movement between and transparency often, mostly - if I have a problem with someone I go and speak to somebody, explains C2. I’m quite open. Twinkly beads and sequins represents students, teachers, everybody, we’re all interconnected. This is probably B1 here - she makes the coffee - if she’s not in school, everyone notices - no cover for her if she’s not here - she’s a real hub. The layers of netting are the layers of leadership - either students or line managers. Straws show there’s cross-over and interconnecting. If you have an idea, as C3 says, or want a ‘chiefy feather’ for a bit, then you can - for example, my teacher-led development project was taken on board - ‘you feel valued, that you can express something’ Although chiefs are up here, there are ‘opportunities for chiefs in all directions’. ‘Twinkly iridescent archway’ - C2 explains she would have liked it larger but couldn’t - ‘it’s adding to the comfort of the metaphysical holding us together’. We’ve got the ‘archway of seniority and all the rest of it, the structure that can’t disappear in terms of just practicalities, but we are able to access it I think in different ways.’ The film project is an example - the students were in control. The ‘physical’ protection is the physical protection of the building; the ‘metaphysical’ is if I have a problem I can go and talk to [name] about it. I know it’s there - it’s an emotional holding. A lot of things have happened recently. We’ll talk to each other as a staff. They’ll hold you. (Others agree.) C3 gives example of non-transparency in advertising a post. But this has been dealt with. Overall C2 and C3 agree school is transparent.

**Social justice.** Asked if the leadership is democratic, C2 says it's not a voting thing but it means that it (the chance to take the initiative) is available if you want it. I do feel that I am respected. As a part-time teacher, I contribute to meetings and events fully. I feel I have a voice, and there are professional development opportunities. The assistant head is very good at promoting that. C2 did teacher-led development project last year and ended leading a staff workshop on it, with at least three ideas things taken up by SLT. The student voice is very strong, School Council. Whether students take up opportunities to lead is another matter. I love the Head Boy & Girl system. - it gives them opportunity to develop.

**Contextual factors.** C2 does not agree with lot of educational policy coming out. Asked directly if DL is constrained by policy external to the school, both C2 & C3 firmly say no. I think the only thing I find frustrating, explains C2, are the target levels in the lower school, KS3. Sometimes they suddenly change. Gives example, but not sure of this is policy issue.
**Description and leadership.** C3, a middle leader, explains that the collage shows a leadership waterfall and at the bottom there is a pool which goes round and round, and anyone can take the journey from having an idea about leadership and then going through the process. The straws represent their different heights and levels, the tallest one being the SLT, governors, moving on to middle managers; smaller ones may be students. Basically, ‘if you have an idea or want to take on a leadership role, in my view at [this school] you go through a process, whether that’s speaking to people, line manager etc, then you come into the pool and then when you’ve got an idea and it’s talked through then you jump onto the balloon ride and it can go, but you collaborate with others, so you’re not on your own.’ That’s why there is more than one person in the basket. The box represents that you very much think ‘in the box’ but the question marks are outside, so you are asked to step outside box. There are so many teacher-led development projects here, explains C3 - thinking creatively and collaboratively. If you want to lead, there are opportunities here, and you’re not restricted to being the box. The balloon ride represents projects. The pool is the swirl of ideas. The different lengths of straws represent that, wherever they start from (however high), they all end up in the pool. There is structure, we know that, but this collage is not looking at the [authority] structure. C3 says there is a huge difference between student leadership now and 7 yrs ago. We set a target: 25% or 30% of students to be involved in leadership - being sports leaders etc. - 350 or so students. We hit that target. The target is in School Development Plan, and every Year Group has a target. C3 thinks DL happens as a matter of course.

**Social justice.** C3 believes that everyone has a voice, to put across things to their line manager and other staff. Having being heard, it has to be aligned to the establishment vision. We have staff with great ideas but that might not always align with our vision, our strategic intent and objective. Maybe staff who don’t feel they have voice or being listened to, feel this because their idea is not taken on board. C3 believes the School Council is getting to the ‘nitty gritty’, not just length of girls’ skirts. Students led questioning in a job interview for deputy head, led by the Chair of School Council. You see it in the classroom too, from ‘gifted & talented’ students to students with statements. C3 thinks that DL helps student learning across all students. Students in his group delivered a lesson, and fed back their experience (it was maths) - they said they didn’t understand previously the amount of preparation by the teacher, the marking - so maybe they will give more respect in the lessons in future.

Asked if the leadership is democratic, C3 says that he thinks in any organisation you’re going to get an element of democratic opportunity but there’s also going to be the ‘guided side’. He gives the example of the school’s talent management programme where SLT will see something in someone and they will develop it. But if you want to do a teacher-led development project or something, it’s open to all, including support staff, full-time and part-time staff. Some things like the staff governor are democratically elected. We have balance between SLT and democratic side - people taking initiative to do something. Some want to move faster than others.

**Contextual factors.** C3 believes that ‘Most policies are not user-friendly when they’re created’. ‘The leadership here are very good at sifting out what they need to know and going through it and sifting out want we need to know.’ Then we as MLs can distribute what people below need to know. Asked directly if DL is constrained by policy external to the school, both C2 & C3 firmly say no.

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Description and leadership. C4, a teacher, explains that the balloon represents a hot air balloon, where we are going. The head teacher and SLT articulate this fairly clearly, in terms of expectations, aspirations. Arrows going up to the balloon represent ideas, driving forces, to achieve what we’re aiming for. Some arrows will go straight up, one leads to a question mark - not sure where it will go; some to a medal; some go up and fall back. Then we have groups of staff, students about how we’re going to get there. This one represents our Faculty - we talk things round and round. C4 suggests there are different types of group:

1. This one a Faculty or groups of students with a clear path of where they want to go.
2. Then there are groups with one strong person in them and the group follows them.
3. Feathers represent groups of people who have ideas but they don’t go anywhere, a bit fluffy, with broken line of communication.

So there are varied experiences of leadership, according to C4. It differs where you are in the school, e.g. faculties differ. C4 goes on to say that there are two aspects of leadership. There’s overt leadership. SLT, head - speaking to the staff etc. This is done in a way that avoids any confusion. Then there’s the day-to-day leadership which C4 feels is very distributed. Overt is centralised, all singing from the same hymn sheet.

Social justice. Asked if the leadership is democratic, there is a pause. How we going to define democratic? Not the House of Commons democratic, because we don’t choose our leaders, says C4. It links back to the headteacher and senior leaders - they give a very clear message, they give a message of being prepared to listen and in my experience they all will listen - the head teacher is happy to be e-mailed, or bumped into and spare 5 minutes. I can’t expect everything I ask for to be granted, explains C4, but I do expect to be listened to and I have been. We did vote on the staff levy - the headteacher decided we should. Another example of vote was on Monday morning meetings, C1 adds.

C4 believes that DL does help social justice. He can’t think of a case where you’d say no to that. Is it happening here? I think it is. As governor we tend to hear the gripes and groans rather than I’m having a lovely time. But it does make me think what’s going on in other faculties I’m not a part of. Is good DL going on there or not? I can only speak from my faculty. Reflecting on his earlier statement on DL being good for social justice, C4 says that if you have DL at the cost of clear leadership and direction, an abdication of authority, then you could have great social injustice. C4 did a project recently on student leadership in the classroom, students teaching rest of the group. It worked well and has encouraged another teacher to try it.

Contextual factors. C4 explains that the headteacher makes sure they don’t get distracted so isn’t sure he can say much on that, but says ‘I can’t think of anything I’ve read about where I’ve thought that’s going to help how we run the school internally.’
**Description and leadership.** C5, a middle leader, found a triangle and that represents the headteacher coming down. Feathers represent the ‘softly, softly that I think happens in the school’. We discuss things and we think it’s ‘quite a shared leadership’ from my point view. The ‘straws represent the strong backbone behind it’. ‘If we discuss things and it’s not quite what [the head] wants, somehow we end up doing what [the head] wants.’ We do have say in how what happens, C5 explains. People are shown as dots because everybody has a say at the school, whether it’s the children, staff, middle leaders, governors, the headteacher. So that’s why I put the different layers to show the different layers in the school. Governors are shown behind because sometimes we don’t know what they do, I’m sure they do lots and make decisions. We operate with the headteacher. C5 says as far as my leadership is concerned, I think they are very willing for middle managers to lead, and cos they are very willing, the more you lead and show yourself to be leading, the more support you get and the less autocratic it becomes. C5 agrees with C6 about teacher-led development projects being empowering - the Learning Forums we have give us the opportunity for sharing with whole school. People choose their own topic, regarding their classroom practice. C5 agrees that DL is part of the philosophy and practice of the school - ‘It’s distributed but not the point where [the head] would let it go off to the wrong way’.

We’ve taken over the monitoring. Three years ago it was SLT saying they were going to come in and monitor our lessons; sometimes happens, but now they’re coming in to visit not monitor.

**Social justice.** C5 says ‘There is social justice in that anybody that wants to lead on anything has the opportunity to suggest it’ and talk it through with somebody. Students are given the opportunity and can be part of the School Council. There is social justice to some extent in that respect. I’m not sure there can be complete social justice and equality across, says C5, because there’s always some who might benefit doing leadership that shy away and don’t want to do anything. I would say there is social justice across the faculty. Everybody in the faculty has a voice and the opportunity to develop and learn - whether they take it is another matter. Students also. The school has got better at respect since I’ve been here, says C5. And students are more willing to aim higher; there used to be a culture where it was bad to visit a ‘boff’.

Asked if the leadership is democratic, C5 says ‘partly, but not always completely. But then it can’t always be’. ‘Because in the end the head and the governors are responsible for the school, so there has to be him making the final decision, and he will listen to our reasons, he will listen to what we want to do, and if it is reasonable and acceptable and we can argue our case enough and he can see the value of it, then he will take on board our views’.

**Contextual factors.** C5 says the SLT have been very good at shielding us from all the ideas and announcements that the previous and present governments have imposed. Over the last 3 years we have had the same focus, and ‘that focus has been determined by the school’. It’s along the same lines as government wants. Ofsted want us to be outstanding, we actually want to be a great school - doing it by looking at our lesson planning, delivery, marking, assessment for learning - all building on each other.
Description and leadership. C6, a middle leader, explained that they struggled massively with the collage. They would have been happier painting. At the top it’s flat - for me it’s not so much like a pyramid - more like the step pyramid of Saqqara - it’s a flatter, distributed leadership. What lies beneath are the four school Houses. They do overlap. Huge progress but not fully integrated. Don’t know what the straws are - perhaps middle leaders - they shouldn’t be here, but should be flatter on the ground. Whilst middle leaders are important C6 doesn’t feel there is oneupmanship. People do aspire to leadership, he feels. The fact that it’s encased, I think it’s the kind of the security of it - a safe place. I wonder if in terms of leadership sometimes we are quite insular. (Other says we’ve got better at going out.) It’s a big world out. C6 wonders if students are aware of world issues. Leadership is at all levels. Leadership is an attitude, a behaviour rather than a role & a title. Teacher-led development projects have a massive impact on that in terms of empowering teachers, not just younger teachers. Don’t need to have that title and role to lead. C6 agrees that DL is part of the philosophy and practice of the school. Yes, wholeheartedly. - across all levels from students, teachers, to anyone, They are actively encouraged. Have to have right people to lead. With teacher-led development projects, if you had the wrong people leading that, it would fail. Have structure and hierarchy, but it is flexible and changeable - according to need - that’s a ‘real strength’.

Social justice. C6 says that you can find examples where this is not the case, but this is not necessarily typical. Asked if DL helps students and staff to develop and learn, there is a pause. It certainly doesn’t hinder it, says C6. Great question. All can’t be equal. There may be opportunities, but backgrounds are different. We area ware of most disadvantaged (C5 interjects - may be it’s the middling ones that require...) Maybe in education we have a problem with the hidden child - the middling child, the introverted child. I don’t know that DL does anything to address that. I don’t think it’s on our radar. C6 is interested in the respect aspect. In any organisation it will be said that of course everyone is respected - whether it feels everyone is respected is another matter. C6 cites the school sports day, just yesterday - very inclusive, showing respect from students to other students.

Asked if the leadership is democratic, C6 says there is a process of consultation. Decisions may be not to everyone’s liking or expected outcome, but there is consultation. Decisions are not down to one person, but are SLT’s. Staff generally talk about not what the headteacher is doing but SLT. (C5 agrees. We have some strong deputies.)

You have an agenda and everyone aligned to it, so you’re not surprised by what’s happening. There is transparency. You must have this to have sustainable DL.

Contextual factors. C6 says SLT protect us; we do our job & they’ll do theirs. SLT get middle leaders to pass on information.
Students

Analysis of Group D

Group D consisted of five students, two from Year 12, two from Year 10 and one from Year 9. These students are members of a student group who observe lessons in order to work alongside them to develop learning and teaching. A summary account from the individual participants’ commentaries on their collages is given below. Students went on to discuss the issue of distributed leadership and social justice more generally in a group. An analysis of the group discussion follows the individual commentaries.

Individual student commentaries

D1

Description and leadership

This image shows a network of power. The view of leadership in the school is essentially hierarchical, with the seat of power centrally located however. Power is used as an important organising principle in the collage as a whole.

D1 – The yellow sticks represent the amount of power they have towards the leadership.

The headteacher is pictured at the centre of the collage, indicating that he has the most power, demonstrated through his power to make decisions.

Power is also equated to being listened to however – the more access you have to the senior leadership team, the more power you have as you have more chance of being listened to. Students are seen to gain access to the leadership team though this ability to gain attention. Such ability is seen to be gained through age and maturity and through the development of ideas which would help the school to develop.

Social justice

In contrast to the other students in this group, this student begins her description at the bottom of the collage, with the ‘general students’. These students are not seen to have much power. However, this appears not to be attributable to any unjust systems but to the students’ willingness themselves to participate and to become agential.
They don’t really participate enough to be able to make a difference.

Description and leadership

This collage appears to have a network of strong barriers which could be seen as constraints to distributed leadership activity. However, the commentary on the collage provided by the student who made it shows that some of the supposed barriers are in fact teams, represented by long straws to show their harmonious working. The hierarchical nature of leadership suggested by the patterns of the collage is confirmed by the student however. This hierarchy is characterised in terms of height – the higher up you are in the picture, the greater your leadership role in the school. The headteacher is shown at the top, supported by his senior leadership team. This is a common feature of this group of students’ collages. Other teachers have clearly understood ‘places’ in the hierarchy. There is a strong emphasis in this collage on positional leadership then, which extends to students – the Head Boy and Girl and members of the Student Council are mentioned as having specific leadership roles.

Social justice

Only those with specific leadership roles are represented in the collage. There is no indication that appointment to such roles is restricted, although an absence of discussion of ways in which the mass of the population of the school are enabled to exercise leadership is interesting. The size of the spaces between teams and individuals in this collage are indicative of the levels of respect shown to different groups within the school. This is seen to vary in terms of progress ‘up’ the school.

Teachers have a lot and sixth formers have quite a lot and compared to the other years it’s just way more.

Description and leadership
This student overtly points to the hierarchical nature of this collage:

**D3** – *Mine is essentially a hierarchy.*

Leadership is again linked strongly to both voice and participation:

**D3** – *Then there are the senior teachers are listened to more and participate more in leadership.*

**D3** - *The ordinary teachers vary a bit depending on how much they participate.*

Parents are mentioned by this student as having leadership capacity, again dependent on the degree to which they choose to engage with the school. Students generally vary in the amount of 'power' they have. To some degree this is associated with year groups and age but there are also individual students who seek to lead the development of their school.

**Social justice**

Despite naming his collage a hierarchy, this student does acknowledge that individual students do have the potential to exercise leadership, without the benefit of a leadership position or role.

**D4**

**Description and leadership**

This collage appears to represent a much more holarchical view of leadership within the school. The majority of students are represented by the smaller straws in the central frame of the collage, with the longer straws representing those who participate more in activities and thus contribute more to the leadership of the school. Such leadership is generally linked to role. The linking of participation and leadership is again noteworthy. The image of the red net, surrounding the members of the school, represents the teachers who help students ‘contribute towards leadership’. Thus student leadership is seen to be overtly reliant on teachers opening up leadership opportunities for them.

**Social justice**

The torch at the centre of the collage represents a push towards democratic leadership.

**D4** – *I think we need to work together as a community to get a whole leadership system throughout the school.*
Description and leadership

At first glance this image appears holarchic. However, the student’s explanation of the collage surfaces the hierarchies which are apparent in their view of leadership within their school. The balloons in the collage represent the house system which is made up of four houses, named Red, Yellow, Blue and Green. They are in the corners as they are directive of much of the leadership activity in the school from the students’ point of view.

D5: A lot of our leadership is based around the house system.

Echoing student D1, the placing of the material representing staff and students in this collage is described in hierarchical terms. It is interesting to note the focus on space – the headteacher is not only positioned at the top of the collage but is described by the student as ‘over everyone’. However, the student also demonstrates an understanding of the multiple distributions of leadership. Students who have classroom responsibilities are mentioned as an example of the reach of leadership opportunities within the school.

The choice of material to represent various leaders is interesting. The headteacher is represented as a dinosaur, not because he is backward-looking but because he is:

D5: ...courageous and strong, like a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

Social justice

This collage appears to support an inclusive view of leadership activity within the school, despite its focus on the positional nature of leadership.

Group discussion

The group discussion began with a reflection on the extent to which opportunities to contribute and take initiative are spread throughout the school. This focused particularly on the role of students in observing lessons and feeding back to teachers. Students apply for this role. Students felt that this initiative allowed the individuals involved in it – both students and teachers – to develop closer leadership relationships within the school. This was particularly important as students and teachers are working together to improve learning and teaching in the school. The student observation initiative was seen as unusual in terms of who was leading the development process. Teachers invite students into their classroom, so in this way set the agenda, yet students are enabled to comment on how best to support learning. The challenges which students are enabled to pose in such a situation are seen as valuable, offering a different perspective on learning, and unusual in terms of a shifting power balance.

Students perceive themselves to be offered multiple opportunities through this lesson observation programme. These are both personal in nature, for example, developing a skill set which will be impressive on a CV, but also collegial, in that students are given the opportunity to influence learn-
ing in their school. Students thus see themselves as leading the development of learning in their school.

Students moved on to discuss how social justice and equity is shown in schools, that is, whether everyone in school has an equal opportunity to develop and learn in school. The students felt that all students had the opportunity to lead in school. Some students felt that not all students would take these opportunities however. People who are less confident may well not take up opportunities or people who may not wish to commit to the responsibilities of leadership. The effort involved in taking responsibility is off-putting for those who wish to simply get through school with the minimum personal input. Such students may well not be interested in contributing to school improvement.

The experience of school would be different if more leadership opportunities were taken up, students feel. The students in Group D felt that students’ voices are heard within the school. They felt being given a voice and having their views heard had a positive impact on both personal development and on the enjoyment of education.

Group D student, speaking in the group discussion:

The more you engage, the more you tend to enjoy because you are more open to opportunities and if you are not open to opportunities how do you know if it is going to be a good one?

The issue that leadership opportunities are taken up by the most confident is challenging. Students are clear that the Leadership Team make every effort to hear the voices of all in formal meetings such as the School Council. However, although opportunities are in theory open to all, in practice students’ current sense of self-belief tends to mitigate against some taking up leadership opportunities offered.

Students were aware of the impact of government on the school in terms of issues of changes to examination syllabi and timing of re-sits.

Analysis of Group E

Group E consisted of six students, all from Year 12. A summary account from the individual participants’ commentaries on their collages is given below. Students went on to discuss the issue of distributed leadership and social justice more generally in a group. An analysis of the group discussion follows the individual commentaries.

Individual student commentaries

Description and leadership
This is a hierarchical image representing a chessboard, with the pawns at the bottom indicating the mass of students within the school. The castle pieces represent students with more positional power such as sports leaders, head boy and girl and prefects. The teachers are represented by the shields and swords, showing that they ‘have power over the students’. The deputy headteachers, heads of year and heads of faculty are then represented above the teachers. The orange and black barriers demonstrate the lack of full knowledge by students as to what those in these leadership positions do. The straws in the collage are used to highlight the hierarchical nature of the leadership patterns within the school, as perceived by this student. The headteacher is represented by the crown, showing his position as:

E1- the king of the school.

Social justice

There was no indication by this student that anyone was unhappy with their place in this hierarchy.

Description and leadership

This collage represents a linear timeline of students’ development in terms of leadership through their school career. Leadership begins as the prerogative of others, with teachers leading student learning, and then develops through more opportunities for self-leadership as the student moves up the school. The influence of friends can be inimical to this freedom for self-development at times however.

E2 - Your friends can peg you back. That is the opposite of leadership.

Peers are therefore seen as more important than school structures in determining the level of development through self-leadership in the middle stages of the students’ school career.

The choice of colour and material is particularly important in this collage. For example, the straight yellow and orange sticks above the second stick man are termed as ‘hostile colours’. The student explains this further:

E2 – It’s not aggressive but … you are being led in a way … you don’t choose, you just do what you are told. They are straight so you can go on the right path. The choice of feather to represent the next stage of student leadership has been chosen to represent the ‘choice and flair’ of individual choice rather than the comparative mindlessness of following rules set by others.

Social justice

This student sees the focus of leadership as changing as a student moves through the years of schooling. At first focused on the leadership of learning, with teachers in a clear position of power, the emphasis changes to self-leadership not only of learning but also of thinking and ways of being
at Sixth Form level. Students also have more choice of ‘who leads you’ at this stage of their development. These opportunities for self-actualisation and identity development are seen as offered to all.

Time is seen as very important in this collage, where it is used as a metaphor for the development of maturity. Students in the lower years are seen to be more open to the influence of others, whereas as time moves on they are more likely to make choices which are more in line with their own values and beliefs.

**E3**

**Description and leadership**

This collage is bounded by a thin but important line. This line indicates that the school is an entity, that is has a wholeness to it, despite being made up of individual groups. Within this vision of the school, leadership is represented as generally hierarchical. Thus the headteacher is represented by the yellow star at the top of the collage, with those who ‘help the headteacher’ represented by the descending triangle containing individuals, each with designated leadership roles. Student leaders are represented by the individual beads within circles at the bottom of the collage. However, the student making this collage is unsure of the exact nature of the leadership structures here, hence the question marks. Others with less visible leadership roles are represented by the red beads in the circles nearer the top of the collage. The extent of their contribution to the working of the school, although acknowledged as important, also remains unclear.

E3 – *These are like people who work within the schools like cleaners and maybe without them this (pointing to the central triangle) wouldn’t be able to function. That is why it is a question mark as to where they fit along that scale, it is kind of unknown, because they need them in order to be able to do their job. They also need teachers as well.*

**Social justice**

The idea that everyone has their place in the leadership pattern of the school is strong here. This is not to suggest however that one role is more valuable than others. Despite the hierarchical visual imagery, the students’ verbal explanation in fact alludes to the importance of all in terms of the effective working of the school.
Description and leadership

The student making this collage imagined leadership within the school as represented by two triangles. The top triangle represents a hierarchy of leaders within the school, leading down to the second triangle, dominated by the yellow balloon, which represents the body of students who do not have overt leadership roles. These are seen as the majority of students in the school.

There is relevance to the type of materials chosen to represent different manifestations of leadership within the school. The feathers represent the nature of students' understanding of the role of senior leaders. The more solid, straight piece of plastic which cuts across the centre of the collage represents the teachers and the solidity of the students' understanding of the teacher role. The authority emanating from the senior leaders in the school is represented by the cascading ribbon which demonstrates that:

E4 – even though we don’t know what they do they still reign over us.

Social justice

The legitimacy and authenticity of the leadership roles offered to students are questioned by this student.

E4 – They just made them up. They are trying to give people roles and stuff but they don’t really have any substance.

Leadership is seen as legitimised not by named role but by valued action.

Description and leadership

This student chose to focus on the perspective of a new student to the school, having moved to Heathvale School to undertake her Sixth Form studies. This collage divides into two large groups of students, with a small number of students with specific leadership positions being positioned outside of the main groups. The role of leadership in this collage is articulated as predominantly to provide support for students having difficulties.
E5 – *If you are not really doing well or you have any problems, obviously you have the Head Boy and Head Girl but also you can count on everyone in Sixth Form or in school – it’s not just the leadership team but the whole school basically.*

Leadership in terms of support is therefore seen as the responsibility of all, regardless of formal leadership position.

**Social justice**

This collage suggests the ‘holding’ role of leadership in the school. Anyone with a problem or issue has the opportunity to be equally supported by the leadership structures and those with leadership positions in the school. However, it is clear that, as human beings and regardless of the designation of formal leadership positions, it is the responsibility of all within the school to support members of their community who are new to the community or experiencing difficulty.

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**E6**

![Image](image.png)

**Description and leadership**

Leadership here is initially conceptualised as voice and access – whether someone has the right to talk and who they access in order to be heard. The body of students is represented by the coloured straws and beads at the right of the collage, with those students with named leadership roles such as year council members represented by the wooden discs to their right. These students have some access to the headteacher of the school, demonstrated by the arrows. This metaphor is also used for teacher access to the headteacher, although the question mark indicates the uncertainty of this access.

The central portion of the collage is three-dimensional, with the heads of year being the most visible leadership role, backed up by the teachers behind them. The students are represented here also, as behind the teachers, as their voice is filtered through them.

The deputy headteachers are represented by jagged lines to represent that younger students often see them as ‘scary’. The head boy and head girl are represented separately and these, together with the deputy headteachers, have a bridge which enables them to talk directly to the headteacher. All leadership within the school is seen as ultimately passing through the headteacher. The governors have the closest links to the headteacher, being represented by the red and orange circles above him.

However, this view is mediated by a consideration of the position of the students as the ‘backbone of the school’ and as potential change agents.

E6 – *At the end of the day you can’t have the school without students. Even though they don’t run the school they do play a big part in what goes on and how to change it.*

**Social justice**
All students and teachers are seen as having a legitimate voice within the school. However, to be heard requires going through a number of mediators who will carry your opinion up the hierarchy. Direct access to the headteacher is seen as limited. However, students are still regarded as the most important people in the school in terms of their role as giving legitimacy to the purpose of the school and their role in both evaluating and changing current practice.

**Group discussion**

The group discussion began with a discussion of the reality of the leadership roles of students within the school. Some students question if leadership responsibilities have been created for students in order to give them the feeling of being involved without any real delegation of power from adults to young people.

A difference was made between students as having legitimate leadership roles with the power to take decisions as opposed to a representational role. Some students in the discussion group saw students as empowered as leaders whilst others saw their role as limited to representing the views of others. This might require advocacy - for example, the head boy and head girl may seek to persuade the governors of the effectiveness of the Sixth Form in terms of student learning. However, such activity was viewed as qualitatively different to leading change.

Students feel that the degree to which they are heard depends on the position of the person listening. Teachers are seen as responsive to students’ suggestions regarding teaching methodology for example. Those in positions of higher responsibility are seen to have ‘more people to please’ so individuals are less likely to be listened to.

Students see a clear connection between leadership structures and their learning. Teachers are seen as teaching students not only about their subject but nurturing them as a person, supporting students to develop the capabilities of self-leadership which they would use as more mature students later in their school careers but also in wider life. Such self-leadership abilities could also develop into the ability to lead others for some. However, not all students saw student leadership as overtly linked to learning. Some viewed student leadership as more focused on influencing issues to do with the school as a community and students’ happiness in school.

Students were interested in the notion of a school as a democracy. Elections are held for certain positions in the school but some students doubted the integrity of this process. Generally they felt that it was not a true democracy but that there were routes to get their voices heard and that these voices are ‘counted’ as important.

With regard to social justice and equity, students felt that all students within the school initially have an equal chance to learn. Teachers go out of their way to support students with special needs. However, students could ‘ruin this for themselves’ through poor behaviour or lack of effort which would inevitably mean that teachers would be less disposed to support these students in an equal way.

Students generally did not feel the pressure of Government policy on educational policy within the school. An exception was Core futures, an additional subject introduced in Year 11 due to OfSTED requirements. Students saw this as influencing individual students who felt the pressure to give time to a subject they did not value.

Student leadership opportunities were seen to develop as students moved through the school. Student confidence was seen to develop as students moved through the school and thus to en-
hance the potential for student leadership. The house system was not seen as particularly effective in creating loyalty to a school organization.

Students see their headteacher as a very effective leader in terms of changing the way in which people think, both in and about the school.

**Analysis of Group F**

Group F consisted of four students, two from Year 7 and two from Year 10. A summary account from the individual participants’ commentaries on their collages is given below. Students went on to discuss the issue of distributed leadership and social justice more generally in a group. An analysis of the group discussion follows the individual commentaries.

**Individual student commentaries**

**F1**

Description and leadership

This collage shows a headteacher who is large and looks out over the whole school. He is supported by two deputies. The student has indicated a ‘bit of a block’ by the line of blue straws. This is suggesting the difficulty the student sees between students giving suggestions and the action which is then taken by teachers or others in formal positions of leadership.

F1 – *They don’t actually listen to us. We have a Student Council but I don’t feel that they listen to us. We have been asking for short skirts … I don’t even know why …. if they fully explained why then maybe I would understand.*

There are ways through the wall, yet these do not seem effective. This student comments on the ability of students to attempt to break down this wall. However, such attempts are seen as unsuccessful.

F1 – *Every time we attack the wall it doesn’t really do anything.*

Students and teachers are shown grouped together in subject areas at the bottom of the collage.

**Social justice**

The issue of ‘being heard’ is clearly raised by this student. The procedures by which students’ views are passed on within the school are transparent and understood. However, the perceived lack of information about reasons for decisions is difficult for some students to understand.
This collage presents a hierarchical view of leadership within the school. The students are represented at the bottom of the collage followed by the teachers, the heads of year and heads of faculty. The deputy heads and headteacher follow. The arrows going both ways indicate the multi-way communication systems within the school.

The house system is the most dominant feature of this collage. This student saw the leadership within the school as being centered on this system. The shape in the middle of the collage is the beginning of a representation of the school badge.
This collage shows a section of leadership within the school. It shows the competition between houses. Students have leadership responsibilities within the houses. The sports leaders were focused on by this student. These leaders have a responsibility for organizing student teams.

**Group discussion**

Student leadership was described by students in this group initially through formal leadership roles such as form representatives and sports representatives. The house system is seen as dividing the school into a system of organised competition which both supports students in engaging in individual learning and shores up the community spirit of the school.

Leadership in lessons is generally seen to be provided by the teacher. There are exceptions to this however, as when teachers invite students to lead a part of the lesson. Interactive lessons are also seen as offering students the opportunity to lead their own learning, rather than relying solely on teacher input.

In terms of social justice and equity issues, some students feel that all students in their school have an equal chance to learn. The setting system within subjects is seen as offering support for students at appropriate levels for individuals. For others, poor student behaviour in some classes provides a distraction which means that others in the class are denied an equal chance to learn. This is seen as being dealt with but in the meantime student learning time is lost.

The issue of having a voice and being heard, begun in the discussion of the individual collages, was elaborated on in this more general discussion. Students in the main feel that they do have a voice, in that there are systems which allow them to put their views forward. However, a lack of understanding of the reasons for decisions made at higher levels and then fed back to students is an issue. To some degree this appears to be a function of a lack of clarity over where decisions are taken. Students felt that schools can be democratic – form representatives are elected in a democratic way, for example.

Students in this group felt that changes at government level did impact on them personally. They feel that there is rising pressure on students to get things right in terms of examinations. There was a general sense of uncertainty in the Year 10 students as they feel that there have been so many changes in education policy that not everyone has a sound grasp of what is required of them.
APPENDIX 2: ‘Stories of Leadership...’ video in development

We are developing, as one of the outputs of this study, a video presenting an analysis of the collages. The version as it stands at the time of writing, which is in development, is available as an appendix to this report at http://www.schoolleadership.eu/internal-collaborative-area/folder/final-reports.

Please note that there is no soundtrack to the video at present.

The interpretation in the video is based on the researchers’ impressions of the images and should therefore be viewed alongside this report in which the participants’ own explanation of meanings are given.