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Difficult dilemmas: How are they resolved by secondary school middle managers?

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Abstract

Resolving difficult dilemmas is an inescapable component of teaching. If teachers progress into positions of responsibility, middle management positions, the situations they are required to resolve become more complex, requiring a greater range of skills to effectively resolve.

Little research has been undertaken to identify the factors influencing middle managers' resolution of difficult dilemmas. Given that such situations occur frequently in teaching it is a gap in the knowledge base of the profession. This study began to fill that void by identifying the types of dilemmas arising most frequently in the work of secondary school middle managers and identifying the strategies employed when they resolve these dilemmas. Of particular interest was identifying the extent to which the example of the principal is an influencing factor as this is heavily intoned in much educational leadership literature.

A qualitative study was dictated and an inductive approach utilising thematic analysis was employed to examine the personal accounts describing the resolution of dilemmas. Semi-structured interviews were used to elicit narratives describing occasions in which middle managers or their colleagues had resolved difficult dilemmas. Narrative analysis revealed that the multifaceted and busy nature of middle managers' positions, and the constraints and obstacles existent in schools, are not conducive to considered and reflective resolutions to the difficult problems and dilemmas encountered.

Middle managers take seriously their role in resolving the problems and dilemmas arising in their work. However little guidance is available to help them, or in their preparation for promotion into such positions. It was expected the example of the principal would exert a strong influence. However, this was not supported by data. Greater preparation for all teachers to assist them in recognising the values conflicting in challenging dilemma situations is essential so they are better placed to comprehend their moral duty in resolving such situations and can propose appropriate resolutions. The principal can play a significant role in developing this capacity.

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Chapter One – Introduction

Why Middle Management Dilemma Resolution?

According to their formal structures, schools are hierarchical institutions within which principals and senior managers occupy the highest positions, and classroom teachers the lowest. Wedged between these two layers are middle managers, classroom teachers with specific responsibility for curriculum management and pastoral support. According to another view, schools are moral institutions charged with preparing future generations to take their place as citizens. Within schools, edicts in the form of government education policy, societal and parental expectations, school leaders and teachers' personal beliefs, institutional culture and norms, and the needs and expectations of students, compete. Working to promote the best interests of students within this complex situation is fundamental to the moral imperative driving school leadership.

Morality, in this sense, refers to the manner in which one's behaviour and decision making reflects their beliefs about what is important, valuable (Starratt, 2004) or the 'right' thing to do in a particular set of circumstances so the best needs of students are advanced. Dilemmas, situations in which the 'right' course of action is not always obvious, or where choices might involve relinquishing a cherished value or belief, arise frequently (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002), a consequence of the competing demands upon schools and teachers. Therefore, moral and ethical decision making is an inescapable component of middle managers' work and today they "are frequently confronted by ethical choices in decisions that did not arise, or were relatively unproblematic for their counterparts, 30 years ago" (Hall, 2001, p.1).

The researchers' interest in this study stems from their personal and professional experience. The moral components of teaching and leadership have gained prominence in educational leadership discourse and have been encountered frequently through tertiary study and professional learning. A common refrain in the discourse has been the importance of the moral example from the top in a school hierarchy (Coleman, 2011; Southworth, 2011). This study investigated the processes middle managers employed in resolving

difficult dilemmas. Of particular personal interest at the outset was the extent to which the example of the principal influences the resolution of difficult dilemmas. Middle managers oversee a multitude of pastoral and academic matters and it is therefore appropriate they were the focus of this inquiry.

This study illuminated the dilemmas middle managers were most frequently called upon to resolve and identified the factors shaping their resolution attempts. Understanding the circumstances from the perspective of the participants was vital given the deeply personal nature of moral decision making and the influence personal values and beliefs exert on the process. Gaining insight into the resolution of difficult dilemmas provided the opportunity to evaluate the extent to which philosophical theory and pragmatic models were applied by middle managers and for the appropriateness of resolutions to be evaluated. This study has implications in terms of how well prepared teachers are to resolve dilemmas. The role of the principal in developing teacher capacity for moral decision making is significant, although whether it was being effectively fulfilled was unknown.

Outline of the Study

Chapter two discusses theoretical and applied models of moral decision making, with a particular emphasis on how these relate to schools. The Code of Ethics for Registered Teachers was considered as a likely source of guidance for teachers facing morally challenging situations. As with much moral theory and philosophical frameworks there is a disjuncture between the theory and its application to actual dilemma resolution, a void often leaving middle managers bereft of tangible guidance. The roles of teachers and middle managers are defined, with middle managers identified as teachers with additional specified responsibilities. The separation of the work of schools and teachers into two distinct spheres, academic and pastoral, is described as this has implications for the allocation of middle management responsibilities. Previous research into moral decision making in education is discussed and links are made to what is consequently unknown. It is the unknown elements, the gaps in previous studies, which generated the focus of this particular

research project; how do secondary school middle managers resolve difficult dilemmas?

Chapter three examines the theoretical perspectives applicable to research of this nature. A range of research methods, informed through consideration of similar previous studies, were evaluated. Given the exploratory nature of this study it was argued a grounded theory approach was fitting. However, this did not prove successful and a more general inductive approach using thematic analysis was applied. A narrative methodology, employing semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool, was justified as appropriate in investigating behaviour strongly influenced by the subjectivity of personal beliefs and values. The methodology is described in the context of the research that transpired. The relevant ethical concerns and the strategies employed in mitigation are described. The strengths and weaknesses of the research methods were examined so an accurate appraisal of the validity of this project, and its conclusions, was achieved. Concerns relating to narrative analysis were identified. Differing methods of transcription were evaluated before it was argued 'clean' transcriptions are appropriate for this study. Utilising computer software to assist analysis in sorting the mass of accumulated data was evaluated, and it is argued that this adds rigour to the process.

The main themes identified through the narrative analysis process are discussed in chapter four. This is organised, to the extent possible, into separate discussion of dilemma causes and the decision making process in resolving them. The research findings are presented thematically, a consequence of the volume of data compiled in relation to each of the research questions and the manner in which the themes emerged during analysis. Many narratives highlighted the importance middle managers place on gaining as full an understanding as possible of the context and facts of a situation before attempting a resolution. Problems and dilemmas associated with relationships, especially between teacher and student, were the most common narrative theme. Relationship difficulties between teachers or between middle managers and senior managers proved the most difficult to resolve. From an academic middle managers' perspective, considerable time pressure has resulted from the alignment of NCEA standards. This process has also created a large

number of problems and dilemmas as Heads of Departments battle to overcome the obstacles and constraints preventing them from creating courses of study they feel best meet student needs. Participant voices contribute pertinently, illustrating the nature of the difficult problems and dilemmas confronting secondary school middle managers and their attempts to resolve them.

Chapter five links the findings from the data analysis to the theoretical and applied approaches to resolving difficult dilemmas discussed in chapter two. In doing so the degree to which the derived conclusions complement and contradict existing knowledge was examined and discussed. The complicated nature of schools, and in particular the roles of middle managers, make measured and reflective approaches to dilemma resolution difficult.

The final section, chapter six, draws together the conclusions of this study and places them in the context of how they relate to previous research and the possibilities for future studies. Implications and suggestions for practice emerging from the research are also included. In particular, consideration was given to how principals might exert greater influence on the moral decision making of teachers and middle managers. Concerns as to the validity of the results were considered and the strengths and limitations of the narrative methodology evaluated.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

Overview of Chapter

This chapter provides an overview of the literature devoted to resolving difficult dilemmas from a moral perspective, examining theoretical and applied approaches. Meanings of key terms – values, ethics and morals – and how they apply to moral decision making are discussed. Moral theories and the philosophical frameworks behind the process of moral decision making are identified. How these frameworks might be applied in practical settings was considered alongside the importance of reflection in the process of resolving difficult dilemmas. The degree to which the New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC) Code of Ethics for Registered Teachers (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2004) exerts an influence is deliberated as this has educational specific implications. Middle management is a practical activity and the actions middle managers take and the types of difficult dilemmas they have to resolve are considered. There is little research specifically addressing this area. Therefore, more generalised approaches for moral decision making in education are worthy of consideration. Finally, some of the gaps in the existing research are described, as this leads towards identifying the questions that were to be answered through this study.

Terminology

The terms values, morals and ethics permeate much educational literature and discussion, and, while often used interchangeably, are different concepts. However, “in the school leadership literature there is a pronounced tendency to adopt the word ethics or moral as an umbrella term for anything values-related...In contrast, other scholars...reserve the term ethic or principles for a particular and very special category of transactional values and employ the word values as an umbrella term for all ‘conceptions of the desirable’.” (Begley, 2003, p.4 cited in Haydon, 2007, p.8).

Values incorporate all influences, conscious or unconscious (Begley, 2004), explicit or implicit, upon the attitudes and behaviours exhibited when people seek to maximise their access to, and use of, the resources available to them

(Kluckhohn, in Haydon, 2007). Values are the beliefs important to individuals and which give their lives meaning (Winch & Gingell, 2004).

Ethics are the beliefs and assumptions underpinning a moral way of life (Starratt, 2004), with a particular focus on relationships (Singer, 1993; 1994 in Ehrich, Kimber, Millwater, & Cranston, 2011) and concern the question “How shall we live well together?” (Strike, 2007, p.19). In examining how to live together, considering relationships and acting ethically, requiring “one to be sensitive and responsive to the other person within the circumstances and the context” (Starratt, 2012, p.26), is important. Normative social ethics, the ideas or codes of conduct that guide and define behaviour, are developed through cultural experiences (Begley, 2004). Ethics, in essence, is about prescribing what one ought to, or ought not, do in particular circumstances, prompting reference to ethics as a “philosophy of morality” (Mahony, 2009, p.983, in Ehrich, et al., 2011). Acting ethically is the result of conscious autonomous decision making, not simply the unreflective enactment of prescribed routines (Starratt, 2012).

Three ethics are identified as necessary for educational leadership: authenticity (integrity in interactions); presence (open and engaging relationships), and; responsibility (personal and corporate accountability) (Starratt, 2004). The importance of these ethics is recognised by Bezzina who made them the foundations of the ‘Leaders Transforming Learning and Learners’ project (Bezzina, 2012). There is a strong link between ethics and values, as if values influence behaviour by identifying ‘concepts of the desirable’, ethics can therefore be considered as the manner in which these values are lived out (Bezzina, 2012).

Morality is the process in which individuals exercise their ethical beliefs through their daily actions and decisions (Starratt, 2004). Morals are a context-specific form of values, with individual values determining moral actions, and consequently morals can be thought of as values in an applied form (Begley, 2004). Through examining moral issues one seeks to identify what constitutes fair and just treatment and what one’s individual rights are (Strike, Haller, & Soltis, 2005), with an emphasis on how individuals treat each other. The line

between ethics and morals, as explained by Noddings (1984), is a fine one, and while she uses 'ethical' more frequently than 'moral', she assumes ethical behaviour to be guided by morals.

Values, morals and ethics are different, but complementary concepts. Personal values, morals and ethics influence individual behaviour and decision making. Inevitably schools will reflect the collective perspectives and interpretations of the values, ethics and morals of the particular communities within which they are located (Curren, 1998; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Winch & Gingell, 2004). These concepts are linked to education as the "values behind any choice concerning curriculum, management strategies or discipline procedures will necessarily affect the way other people think and behave" and consequently "moral concerns are...central to the school" (Bottery, 1990, p.2).

Ethical Theories

Ethicists traditionally utilise a framework comprising three theories; teleological, deontological and virtue ethics. More recently ethicists arguing from a feminist perspective have included a fourth theory, that of care ethics (Tuana, 2007).

Teleology stresses consideration of the consequences of actions and therefore is also referred to as consequentialist theory (Samier, 2003). Identifying which courses of action will produce the greatest good, or cause the greatest harm, is important in this approach (Clark, 2005). In education this often transpires to action from utilitarian principles, pursuit of the 'greatest good for the greatest number' (Noddings, 2012; Owings & Kaplan, 2012), also termed "benefit maximisation" (Strike, et al., 2005, p.17). A weakness is that exactly what constitutes a benefit or good is not always immediately obvious (Strike, et al., 2005). This theory appeals as a practical approach. However, weighing the magnitude of any negatives is crucial; is it ethically and morally right to harm or disadvantage any student, even if it is just one, in order to achieve an educational 'good' for a greater number? Utilitarianism is not a strategy for measuring the relative happiness or pain generated through a particular course of action, it is an attempt to explain what makes actions right or wrong (Barrow, 1982). An important outcome of considering utilitarian principles is identifying what is to be considered if one wishes to do what is right.

A pragmatic and consequentialist theory emphasising the responsibilities of individuals and institutions was proposed by Dewey (Noddings, 2012), indicating the primary criterion of ethical behaviour is one's willingness to accept responsibility for the full range of anticipated outcomes, creating an imperative for every possible outcome to be considered. Dewey insisted outcomes be acceptable, or at least more acceptable than the alternatives, for those involved. This approach does not distinguish between facts and values, or moral values and non-moral values; for example, does greater emphasis deserve to be placed on the financial or human consequences of an act?

The second theory is deontology, where actions are governed by moral rules and duties, with little relevancy given to the consequences of decisions. Some actions are simply deemed 'right' and are obliged to be followed regardless of the consequences (Barrow, 1982; Clark, 2005; Rachels & Rachels, 2010). Deontology is non-consequentialist and grounded in the philosophies of Kant, who believed moral laws are binding on all people in every situation (Clark, 1997). Consequently certain truths, such as 'never lie' and 'always tell the truth', cannot be questioned. It is necessary they be applied even in situations where telling the truth, or not lying, may result in harm to another, thus breaking another of deontology's norms, never harm another person.

Recognising these ideological confictions a further theory emerged where actions are governed by 'duties' as opposed to rules (Samier, 2003). A duty is never absolute and can only be applied if it does not clash with another duty (Noddings, 2012). Where duties clash, the 'higher' duty is to be determined and followed. Aligned with the concept of duty is that of rights, based on "Rawl's (1971) theory of justice", which states "all persons have an equal right to the most extensive public liberty compatible with like liberty for all" (Clark, 1997, p.66). It is exceedingly difficult to apply these principles so that all facets of a situation are encompassed, and being aware of a principle does not guarantee its correct application (Coombs, 1998, in Husa, 2001). At best, deontological approaches provide a "guide" to action (Husa, 2001, p.4).

Virtues, or personal qualities, comprise the third theory. This theory can be traced to Aristotle who believed virtue¹ was central to the good life, and virtuous people, those of good character, consistently exhibit virtues in every aspect of their lives (Noddings, 2012; Rachels & Rachels, 2010). Utilising this approach, one identifies the central virtues and then proposes a course of action based on how well these virtues are exemplified in people's actions (Clark, 2005). This theory is closely linked to Dewey (1915, p.7, in Clark, 2005) who argued all in a community ought to want for their child that which the "best and wisest" parents wish for theirs. Virtue theory is criticised due to its high level of relativism, in that what might be good in one society, might be indifferent, or even harmful, in another (Noddings, 2012). In this theory one's values can be imposed upon others. Is this fair in a societal context of increasing diversity and ethical and moral plurality? Who decides whose version of ethics and morals are 'right'? Such questions could equally inform or confuse moral decision making. This approach may widen inequalities as it indicates to some members of society their ethical and moral perspective is subservient to the viewpoint of those holding decision making power.

Care is fundamental to human life, without it one could not survive, and it is a key element of people's relationships (Starratt, 2012). The ethic of care proposes ethical discussions, held within caring interactions with those affected by the discussion, is to be the basis of decision making (Noddings, 2012). A feminist perspective dictates such an ethic prevails within schools (Campbell, 1992). An ethic of care compels school leaders to consider the impact of their decisions on individual students, as opposed to groups of students (Larson & Murtadha, 2002). Beneath an ethic of care an individual is first, and always, caring in their personal relationships, and when one is a teacher, they enter a more specific and specialised caring relationship (Noddings, 2007), a relationship characterised by attentiveness to specific individual needs and a desire to act to promote these needs (Tuana, 2007).

¹ In discussing Aristotle's definition of virtue Rachels and Rachels (2010) offer a definition of "a trait of character, manifested in habitual action, that is good for anyone to have" (p.161) as a thorough approximation.

Moral Decision Making

It is critical difficult dilemmas be examined impartially and judgements supported by evidence as the morally justifiable resolution is always that best supported by evidence. This involves identifying the applicable moral principles, determining whether they are justified and whether they are being applied correctly. Impartiality demands the interests of each individual are given equal weight and no special treatment accorded to any party over another (Rachels & Rachels, 2010). This is difficult when those charged with making moral judgements have a vested interest in the issue.

There is no definitive 'right' or 'wrong' approach to applying moral theories as "there is no formula, no rule, for deciding when to take consequences into account and when not to, or whether to be guided by rules or by virtues. Each and every one of us, as teachers, needs to work out our own particular ways of tackling the moral challenges which confront us" (Clark, 2005, p.66).

Reflection in Dilemma Resolution

In making moral decisions it is important each issue is examined on its own merits and in context. Therefore, an awareness of one's own moral position, achieved through reflection, is fundamental. Failure to develop this awareness may result in a realisation of answers to problems that are logically incompatible (Barrow, 1982). Reflection is vital for fair and just decisions and ensuring participants learn from their experiences for future application (Powell, 1989, in Leask & Terrell, 1997; Strike, et al., 2005). Decisions involving dilemmas can be unreflective, without thought to alternatives, or reflective, where the widest array of alternatives is contemplated, ensuring dilemma resolution becomes a transforming action, achieving higher levels of teaching expertise (Palestini, 2003). The day-to-day pressures of teaching prevent a measured examination of moral issues, an unfortunate reality as reflection informs teachers whether their actions align with their values and morals, which is not always the situation (Bottery, 1990). Unreflexive action leads to fragmented, incoherent and inconsistent decisions (Hodgkinson, 1996, in Gunter, 2003). Teachers can

improve their resolution of difficult dilemmas through developing their ability to engage in debate about the moral purpose of education (Benninga, Sparks, & Tracz, 2011).

There is rational plausibility to the argument that critical reflection improves moral decision making, although this does not guarantee moral action will prevail (Hodgkinson, 1978, in Campbell, 1992). Unless those reflecting have a philosophical understanding of moral theory they may not be competent in evaluating the morality of their actions (Winch & Gingell, 2004). A coherent response to moral problems relies on clearly identifying the concepts involved and discriminating² between issues that are superficially similar but nevertheless different (Barrow, 1982). This process requires sufficient time for reflective thought. From a practical perspective Langlois (2011) warns a moral void has been created as a consequence of time for reflection being perceived as unproductive.

Dilemmas Defined

Teaching is a values-laden moral activity in which ethical dilemmas are frequently encountered (Bottery, 1992; Ehrich, et al., 2011) when values conflict. Sometimes the constraints and uncertainty make it impossible for any cherished value to succeed (Cuban, 1992, p.6, in Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). Dilemmas are unavoidable in teachers' daily lives, immersed as they are in the multifarious social milieu of people's interactions and experiences. Inevitably in morally challenging situations there are layers of complexity and ambiguity (Starratt, 2004), within which the 'right' and 'wrong' decision is not apparent. Some dilemmas involve choosing between two 'rights' or two 'wrongs', depending upon the competing values or principles involved. Feeney and Freeman's (1999, p.24 in O'Neill & Bourke, 2010) definition of dilemmas as "a situation an individual encounters in the workplace for which there is more than one plausible solution, each carrying a strong moral justification" requiring "a

² Barrow (1982) explains that while 'discriminate' has negative connotations this is an incorrect interpretation. Discrimination involves distinguishing or differentiating, and is essential to the art of philosophy as one refines their conceptions until their position is known precisely. Discrimination, therefore, is an essential skill in resolving difficult dilemmas.

person to choose between two alternatives, each of which has some benefits but also some costs” (p.166-7) eloquently encapsulates these components.

There is a difference between problems, which although difficult are solvable, and dilemmas, where the problem cannot be solved (Barrow, 1991), meaning the best educators can do is ‘manage’ dilemmas (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002, p.12). In attempting to resolve a difficult dilemma one will not always succeed but can do no better than their best attempt, having first carefully evaluated the principles involved and devised an appropriate response (Hatcher, 1998, in Langlois, 2011).

Professional Ethics for Teachers – The New Zealand Teachers Council Code of Ethics for Registered Teachers

Today’s educational environment demands greater accountability and professionalism from teachers (O’Neill, 2002, in O’Neill & Bourke, 2010). It is prudent that professional considerations, and more specifically the NZTC Code of Ethics for Registered Teachers (hereafter referred to as the Code of Ethics), exerts some influence over teachers’ ethical decision making. Tensions are evident as the ‘New Public Management’ reforms, beginning in the 1970s, simultaneously devolved increased autonomy for decision making to schools and increased the expected level of accountability. Teachers find themselves in the middle of this scenario, with accountability structures prioritising “practical rationality”, at the expense of “value rationality” (O’Neill & Bourke, 2010, p.159), imposed upon them, leaving little space to explore teaching’s moral and ethical dimensions.

The NZTC Code of Ethics is a framework rather than a specific prescription of how principles, requirements and commitments best be met (O’Neill & Bourke, 2010), providing some guidance in morally-challenging circumstances, although allowing significant latitude for varying and contradictory contextual interpretations. Strike (2007a) advocates incorporating an understanding of the ethical concepts and values regulating the practice of teaching into the knowledge base of the profession to assist teachers’ interpretation of ethical codes. Without preparation to address the moral and ethical issues confronting them, teacher effectiveness is diminished (Leonard, 2007). Professional ethics

in teaching serve two purposes; firstly, preventing harm through the education process and, secondly, promoting the good associated with education (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2001, in Starratt, 2012).

The Code of Ethics clarifies the ethics of the profession, inspires behaviour reflecting the honour and dignity of the profession, encourages and emphasises attributes of professional conduct that characterise effective teaching, and enable members of the profession to appraise and reflect on their ethical decisions (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2004). The code is not a set of rules intended to be applied expediently as each situation is contextually different. There will be no single correct resolution to some predicaments; however, justifying one's actions in accordance with the principles of the code is vital. The Code of Ethics specifically identifies conflicts between the principles of justice, responsible care, truth and autonomy as needing to be resolved, and that there may also be tensions between different groups to whom teachers have commitments: students, parents/guardians and family/whānau, the profession and society (New Zealand Teachers Council, 2004).

Dilemmas are complex and difficult to satisfactorily resolve, with previous experience, current context and personal values and beliefs, all influencing factors. Within this milieu the guiding principle for reasoned decision making is the best interests of the learner (O'Neill & Bourke, 2010). Four concerns with using a framework such as the NZTC Code of Ethics as a guide are identified. These pertain to the limited practicality of principles as effective guides to action, the complex nature of ethical dilemmas, the significant learning and experience required to develop the capacity to resolve difficult dilemmas and teachers' lack of formal ethical reasoning in their dialogue about classroom practice (O'Neill & Bourke, 2010).

How the NZTC Code of Ethics is practically beneficial in assisting teachers in complex situations is uncertain, although identifying one's own core values and beliefs is an important first step (Bolman & Deal, 1991, in Short, 1997). Superficial acceptance of prescribed codes will achieve little, making comparative analysis of personal and professional ethics a critical component of teacher reflection (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 1994, p.2 in Short, 1997). Teacher

education utilising formal ethical codes as the basis for ethical judgements are too narrow (Nash, 1991), and therefore flawed. Moral codes are written in the language of moral incitement, lack specificity and do little to equip teachers to solve difficult dilemmas or encourage deep reflection regarding teachings moral complexity. Teachers need to be aware of the specific norms of intention, thinking and behaviour embodied in the expectations and demands that teaching impresses in the public consciousness (Aloni, 2002). As the code of ethics offers some direction, not concrete answers, it is essential each moral dilemma be considered in context.

Moral Decision Making in Practice

Middle Managers - Roles and Tensions

Broadly speaking the role of a school can be split into two comprehensive spheres; academic and pastoral. Within these spheres exist layers of hierarchy, and levels of responsibility and accountability. Classroom teachers have academic and pastoral responsibilities relating to curriculum delivery and caring for students in their classes. Middle management positions are occupied by classroom teachers with specific extra responsibilities associated with these roles. Middle managers are responsible for determining the nature of the curriculum classroom teachers deliver and for providing additional pastoral support and intervention when matters are beyond the scope of the classroom teacher to resolve. Middle managers operate below a layer of senior managers, therefore occupying an intermediate position within a typical school hierarchy, a source of tension in itself as they are responsible for leading those below them and accountable to those above them within this structure (Bennett, Crawford and Cartwright, 2003, in Stephenson, 2010).

Middle management roles align with the pastoral and academic spheres, with Heads of Departments (HoDs) leading the academic side, and deans³ having pastoral responsibility. Middle management positions are established on a rational division of labour, with subject specialists expected to concentrate on

³ A number of different titles may be used to delineate these positions in different schools. However, the general focus and job descriptions associated with the Heads of Departments and deans' positions are similar.

pupils' academic development while pastoral carers support their social and emotional needs (Power, 1996). Power (1996) highlights a perception of the academic role as value-free and the pastoral role as value-laden, but concludes this is misleading as all educational transmissions are pregnant with moral and social dimensions. Three core categories of dilemmas facing educators have been identified: control issues, situated around classroom and behaviour management; curricular issues, based around questions such as who controls the curriculum and whether the child be viewed as a customer or an individual; and societal, the history the child brings to school with them (Palestini, 2003).

Those with academic responsibilities are charged with designing and implementing the curriculum, a planned and taught programme with specific goals and objectives for student mastery (Weller & Weller, 2002). In New Zealand the overall curriculum framework is provided by the New Zealand Curriculum. How this is implemented in secondary schools on a subject by subject basis is largely the responsibility of academic middle managers.

Dilemmas faced by academic leaders often stem from the many differing roles they perform, as teachers, managers and leaders, working within teams, for the team and leading the team (Blandford, 1997) and will arise especially if value positions are adopted in management roles that differ from those exhibited in their role as a classroom teacher. Stephenson (2010) examined issues facing HoDs in New Zealand secondary schools, concluding many dilemmas concerned the management of people. Feist (2007) examined the roles and leadership practices of faculty heads in New Zealand secondary schools and likewise concluded people management was a source of many dilemmas. Faculty heads recognised developing their social skills in building trusting relationships as essential to success in their roles. The skills of problem solving were perceived as vital in developing that trust.

Other dilemmas identified by Feist (2007) included rivalry within faculties over student enrolments in various subjects generating competition for resources, budgetary allocation, classrooms and teachers. Resourcing dilemmas were also evident in Stephenson's (2010) work, with HoDs struggling to appropriately allocate the available resources to meet educational objectives and stay within

budget. Dilemmas arose over what items to include and which to exclude when setting budgets.

Time pressure was identified by both Stephenson (2010) and Feist (Feist, 2007) as a significant issue facing academic middle managers. O'Neill (2001, pp.118-9) concluded middle managers experienced a significant workload increase from 'moderate' in 1991 to 'extremely heavy' in 1995, an increase relatively larger to those in other positions in New Zealand secondary schools. Those affected reported the increase in time demands had a negative impact upon their classroom teaching. The rapidity of educational change has greatly increased the time demands upon HoDs forcing them to prioritise which tasks are completed fully and which are paid 'lip service' to. Much of this increased workload relates to bureaucratic managerial requirements. In situations such as this, there is a tendency for resolutions to become tightly rule bound rather than reflective (Bottery, 1992).

Decisions taken by heads of departments involve ethical issues, as they struggle with competing demands placed upon them (Busher, 2004). In determining how to balance these demands one's moral position is challenged, making moral self-awareness crucial (Begley, 1999, p.2 in Busher, 2004). Resolving dilemmas is a huge demand on any head of department, and in doing so they are guided by their own morals, the school ethos and the particular context of the situation (Gold, 1998).

Examination of leadership dilemmas experienced by school leaders identified three categories: managing people issues, such as staff performance and developing underperforming staff members; managing resources, such as meeting timetable requests despite staff shortages; and, managing personal issues, such as the tension between being both a leader and a friend and having to deliver hard messages. People management provided the most significant dilemmas, especially in terms of performance appraisal (Cardno, 2007). Issues regarding people management will likely result from poor relationships, or in the case of performance appraisal, previous failure to address issues of teacher performance and competency.

The term 'pastoral' is widely used in schools (Best, Jarvis and Ribbins, 1977, in Clark, 2008) and comprises all aspects of teacher work with students other than "pure teaching" (Marland, 1974, p.8, in Clark, 2008). Pastoral care encompasses many non-instructional positions such as the guidance counsellor or careers advisor. Terms such as guidance and counselling delineate a focus on supporting students' general well-being, specifically addressing barriers to attendance, attainment or behaviour at school. An increasing focus on pastoral care evolved concurrently with growth in emphasis on child centred educational approaches (Hughes, 1980, in Power, 1996).

The academic tradition, based on a view of education as a class allocating device (Bernstein, 1977, in Power, 1996), characterises the academic sphere as exclusive and the pastoral as inclusive. Standards and hierarchy are stressed through the academic, while the pastoral emphasises individual care, equality and uniqueness. This highlights a dichotomy, a conflict between the 'whole child' approach of pastoral care and an academic approach that, arguably, may tend to cater for only part of the whole (Power, 1996).

Focused reflection is essential for effective middle managers (Fleming & Amesbury, 2001; Leask & Terrell, 1997) as is a need for teachers to be involved in dialogue about values within their schools so informed practice ensues (Bottery, 1990). As a consequence of the day-to-day pressures of schooling teachers tend to adopt pragmatic approaches allowing them to rapidly resolve issues (Bezzina, 2012). While this may be efficient, whether the resulting decisions are morally sound is questionable.

The recent publication 'Leading from the middle: Educational leadership for middle and senior leaders' (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012) recognised improving student outcomes, embracing education, welfare, and development, as the key roles of middle managers (p.8), strongly blurring the distinction between the academic and pastoral spheres. Both the 'Leading from the Middle' and 'Kiwi Leadership for Principals' (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2008) documents identified Manaakitanga, leading with moral purpose, as essential for leadership. This entails a moral commitment to improving outcomes for all students through leading with integrity and ensuring

decision making is ethical and consistent (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012).

Models of Moral Decision Making

A simple model of ethical decision making is proposed by Palestini (2003, p.82), suggesting philosophical views of ethical behaviour be applied to ascertain any potentially harmful consequences of courses of action. A judgement, prioritising moral concerns over financial or other concerns, is then made and enacted. This model presupposes one is able to distinguish moral issues, perhaps an unrealistic supposition given the lack of relevant focus in teacher preparation programmes (Barrow, 2007; Starratt, 2004). Another approach involves simplifying complex decisions by dismantling the main dilemma into a number of smaller problems which can be solved utilising intuition and common sense (Klein, 2010). While this approach has some merit, it is extremely time-consuming.

Four psychological processes control moral judgement (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). First is moral sensitivity, or empathy towards the situation and the participants, and an imaginative comprehension of others' feelings and appreciation of apprehensions relating to possible choices. This is followed by moral judgement, where the most morally justifiable action is chosen, and then moral motivation, a commitment to the action and to taking personal responsibility for the outcomes. Finally is moral character, the willingness to persevere in the action despite possible negatives consequences.

In studying leadership moral dilemmas Langlois (2011) concluded every person in an organisation is capable of exerting ethical leadership. In critiquing previous research she dismissed much quantitative investigation, instead giving credence to approaches examining specific situations of ethical dilemma, providing contextual evidence of value conflicts, and allowing the harvesting of richer data. She promotes the TERA Model (Towards an Ethical, Responsible and Authentic Trajectory) of ethical decision making, comprising three stages: stage one is knowledge, the process of ethical analysis based on critical reflection to reveal the moral dimensions of a situation of conflict; stage two is volition, which examines one's individual beliefs and values and questions the

extent to which one is conscious of them. The ability to examine an issue dispassionately, objectively and from a range of perspectives other than one's own are vital, and; stage three, action, having identified the considerations that will justify the chosen resolution and considered whether the decision will stand up to the scrutiny of others. This model is grounded on critical reflection, awakening one's ethical sensibility, awareness of the elements of justice, care and critique, and providing a more detailed understanding of the possible consequences of action (Langlois, 2011).

Teachers can identify and resolve moral and ethical problems in students' lives using ethics of care and justice by implementing a basic schema for practical ethical decision making (Maxcy, 2002). Initially it is important to gain knowledge and understanding of the dilemma from the perspectives of all parties involved. The second step is to identify the particular elements or principles in conflict and then reflect on this information in order to make a fair and just decision. It is important to learn from the decision and use this experience to guide future dilemma resolution (Maxcy, 2002). Teachers employ various resolution methods depending upon a number of factors, most noticeably the urgency of the issue and how well established or objective the 'facts' of the situation are (Stradling et al., 1984, cited in Bottery, 1990). Indeed, the more relevant information available, the more rational the decision is likely to be (Barrow, 2006).

Teachers have to understand three interrelated dimensions of ethical analysis if they are to make appropriate and correct ethical judgements. These three dimensions are: (1) the rules/principles approach, which examines specific examples in which two or more values are in conflict and there are two or more possible courses of action; (2) the character/structure approach, in which the differing communities within which one is located form a back-drop for ethical decision making, a more subjective approach, permeated with personal emotion and memory, and; (3), the background beliefs/ideals approach, which operates in the private world of individual consciousness, and is based on personal morals and beliefs (Nash, 1991).

It is argued that moral deliberations must be rational, reliant upon facts and logical arguments, be impartial and objective, universally applicable to all people given the same circumstances and take into account the desires of, and possible consequences for, other people. It is essential there is sensitivity towards the principle of justice, meaning people receive what they deserve by virtue of human equality and rights, and after consideration of their special achievements and individual needs. The core component of justice is equal treatment for all people, a concept not to be confused with uniformity or unity (Aloni, 2002).

An ability to identify the dimensions of a dilemma that make it a moral issue is crucial. Many educators lack the vocabulary to name moral issues (Starratt, 2004) and a personal moral framework from which to respond. They often struggle to navigate their way through complex situations in an ethical manner as their professional practice lacks a sound moral and ethical underpinning (Campbell, 2003, p.65, in O'Neill & Bourke, 2010). Consequently teachers are unsure which moral principles to apply, partly a consequence of the current focus on technical responses to issues in education, at the expense of consideration of associated moral issues. This is problematic as 'purposeful' leadership requires technical expertise guided by sound moral judgement (Sergiovanni, 1992).

Recognition of those involved as human beings "whose interests deserve to be taken into account no less than our own" (Barrow, 1982, p.50) is important in moral decision making. It is therefore essential moral situations be considered by reference to facts and conduct, without consideration of the personalities or personal characteristics of those involved. Impartial treatment demands no distinctions between individuals unless there are relevant circumstances. This might involve, for example, assigning extra resources or attention to those who are lacking, in order to bring them to the same level as others (Barrow, 1982).

No Single Theory Suffices

While a central component of any coherent moral theory is an emphasis on respect of persons as individuals (Barrow, 1982), it is problematic to formulate a single theory or model to guide all moral decision making (Barrow, 1991;

Campbell, 1992) due to the contextual and apparently chaotic nature of moral dilemmas (Barrow, 2007). Traditional wisdom indicates moral viewpoints differ temporally, spatially, between different people, different cultures and societies (Barrow, 2007), although there are characteristics recognisable in any culture at any time.

Rather than being circumscribed by a particular moral theory, actions may be governed by moral principles. Principles serve as guidelines, informing moral deliberation and decision making through identifying what is to be considered and how one might think and act in diverse human situations (Aloni, 2002). In this sense, the first-order principles of fairness, respect for persons as ends in themselves, freedom, truth and concern for people's well-being are central (Barrow, 2007). These are broad notions open to a wide range of interpretations, inconsistent with a need for moral matters to be guided by specific concepts. Second-order principles achieve this. The first-order principle of truth, for example, generates second-order principles such as sincerity, open-mindedness and honesty, concepts more able to guide moral decision making. In a study of thirty elementary and secondary school teachers and principals Campbell (1992) concluded it was impossible to produce "blanket" statements to guide decision making as there are so many contextual disparities (p.3). The abstract nature of ethical frameworks provides challenges in promoting moral literacy and understanding (Begley & Stefkovich, 2007, p.403 in Bezzina, 2012). Consequently, moral theory is best thought of as a guide to decision making.

Older and more experienced people integrate a broader range of ethical dimensions and consequently make better ethical judgements (Langlois, 2011). This conclusion is supported by the work of Kohlberg who proposed a series of stages in the development of moral decision making which people move through as they age. This theory has drawn criticism as not all people move through the stages at the same speed, nor do all people necessarily achieve the highest stage. Therefore, not everyone will make the best moral decisions (Wilson, 2012). People learn from observing the behaviour of their peers, and naturally more has been observed by those who are older and more experienced. Importantly this observation is as true of both ethical and moral

behaviour as it is of unethical and immoral behaviour (Bandura, 1977, in Langlois, 2011).

School leaders are recognised as role models and tone setters for the school (Strike, 2007) with some suggestion their role will have an influence upon the school community, a concept supported by Owings and Kaplan (2012) who explicitly describe the responsibility of principals for others' ethical behaviour. The amplified focus on moral leadership emanates from the increasing cultural diversity within communities, encapsulating a greater breadth of social values, some of which are incongruous with each other, than has historically been the case (Begley, 2004).

Previous Studies of Teacher Moral Decision Making

A 1999 Finnish study involving 33 secondary school teachers (Tirri, 1999) identified four categories of ethical dilemmas: how to deal with students, comprising issues such as confidentiality and the unprofessional behaviour of colleagues; student behaviour issues such as cheating and conflict between home and school; rights of minority groups, especially in relation to religion, and; rules at school, especially with regard to teachers inconsistent enforcement. Tirri and Husu (2002) examined dilemmas faced by 26 early childhood teachers and discovered the most significant was identifying exactly what constituted a child's 'best interests', an issue noted to be of intense debate (Stefkovich, 2006, in Eyal, Berkovich, & Schwartz, 2009; Stefkovich and Begley, 2007, in Eyal et al., 2009). Some writers argue it is vital teachers critically reflect upon their everyday difficult dilemmas to develop the moral sensitivity necessary to resolve situations appropriately and fairly (Tirri, 1999). Similarly, people realise their ethical positions in the midst of a dilemma rather than "in the sanctum of self-reflection" (Tinsler, 2003, p.65).

Tensions between the moral consciences of teachers and principals and the ethical components of their institutions were examined by Campbell (1992). This involved thirty respondents, five elementary principals and ten elementary teachers, plus five secondary school principals and ten secondary school teachers. Respondents were a mix of genders, ethnicities, ages and teaching experience. Campbell (1992) concluded it is wrong to assume the ethics

contributing to a school's cultural identity are in unison with those of the individuals working within that culture; inevitably tension and conflict will arise. Where conflict resolution relied upon the morals and values of individuals, or the ethics of a collective group, decisions were implicitly valuational.

The Mastery in Learning Project, a model for restructuring at 26 American High Schools (Livingston & Castle, 1992), concluded dilemmas arose when choices were made from problematic alternatives where any decision compromised cherished values. Such decisions are complex situations which at best may only be able to be 'managed'. Teachers accept conflict and ambiguity as inevitable and develop coping strategies, emerging as valuable resources themselves in managing educational problems (Lampert, 1985, in Livingston & Castle, 1992).

Gaps in the Research on Moral Decision Making

While much has been written in discussion of moral philosophy, and there have been a range of studies highlighting the moral imperative in educational leadership (Fullan, 2001; Starratt, 2004, 2012), and this has been stressed further in recent New Zealand educational leadership documents (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2008; 2012), there is remarkably little research exploring the moral decision making of those in middle management positions. Langlois (2011) proposed a model of decision making when dealing with complex moral situations, Tirri (1999) and Tirri and Husu (2002) were able to identify key categories of moral dilemmas in different school sectors and Ehrich et al. (2011) identified a range of strategies schools may be able to implement in order to limit the potential negative impacts of ethical dilemmas.

There are a number of models providing a theoretical perspective as to how difficult dilemmas are best resolved. Whether these are adhered to, or are of any practical assistance in real world contexts, is unknown. These models indicate a so-called 'values neutral' position is required on the part of those responsible for resolving the dilemma. Is this possible in a school environment? Power dynamics, either between students and teachers or between different levels in the school hierarchy play out, individual and institutional values and

beliefs may clash, school culture, ethos and expectations may play an overriding role.

There has been little attempt to identify links between the moral leadership of school principals and the way in which middle managers resolve difficult dilemmas. The assumption appears to be the moral leadership of the principal permeates the decision making of others within the organisation; the extent to which this occurs in education is unclear.

This lack of knowledge raises a number of questions around the process that middle managers use in resolving complex dilemmas and the extent to which their decisions are influenced by their own individual moral positions, the values and ethics of their colleagues, their leaders, and the norms established by the institutions within which they work and the communities within which they are located. This leads to a specific research question: how do secondary school middle managers resolve difficult dilemmas?

Summary

An overview of the literature relevant to managing difficult dilemmas in education from a theoretical perspective reveals a wide range of possible frameworks to guide decision making. The highly contextual nature of dilemmas, and the fact that sacrificing cherished values is often a reality of such situations, makes applying any one theory across all situations impossible. The same is true from a practical or applied perspective. There are many proposed models which middle managers could adopt when attempting to resolve difficult dilemmas, although it is vital the specific context of the dilemma be the foremost consideration when attempting to derive a morally just resolution.

The large body of literature relating to the moral imperative in education and educational leadership highlights the importance of persevering when dealing with morally challenging situations. This could be difficult given many teachers lack of formal moral understanding, a situation exacerbated, perhaps, through a lack of prominence during initial teacher education programmes and the lack of time and emphasis on reflection in teaching practice.

The absence of concrete direction from either theoretical or applied models of decision making is problematic. Middle managers work in busy environments, juggle a multitude of competing demands and are required to resolve complex situations, often without being able to 'step back' from their other demands to ensure a measured approach to resolution is taken.

This study set out to illuminate the factors determining how secondary school middle managers resolve difficult dilemmas and contribute to linking theoretical approaches to the moral decision making that takes place within schools. Uncovering the extent of the influence of the principal upon such decision making was a key element in this.

Chapter Three – Research Methodology and Design

Overview of Chapter

This research sought to illuminate the decision making of secondary school middle managers when resolving difficult dilemmas. Theoretical approaches to moral decision making provide a framework, while practically based models of moral decision making outline processes to be utilised in such situations. How the process of resolving difficult dilemmas is actually undertaken by middle managers is unknown and requiring empirical investigation.

The paucity of knowledge created difficulty hypothesising about the process of dilemma resolution. This study was therefore exploratory, seeking to describe the resolution of difficult dilemmas from the participants' perspective. An approach generative of theories was paramount. Teachers' stories of situations in which they, or their colleagues, have been required to resolve difficult dilemmas, were gathered. Specifically, this illuminated the types of dilemmas encountered, the decision making process, and factors determining the choice of resolution strategy. This chapter discusses the theoretical research framework chosen for this study before identifying the specific methodology and research tools guiding the research process.

It is argued an investigatory approach is necessary given the lack of previous study with which to anchor a specific hypothesis. As the area of investigation relates to human experience and is highly subjective a qualitative approach has been utilised. Because a hypothesis has not been delineated the research methodology needed to allow for theory to emerge as data is accumulated. For this reason a grounded theory method was selected. The extent to which this was an appropriate and successful methodology will be discussed further in chapter four. Narrative accounts elicited through semi-structured interviews with middle managers in New Zealand secondary schools provide the specific tool with which the data was obtained.

In completing research of this nature there is inevitably intrusion into the lives of the participants. Consequently a number of ethical concerns are addressed. These relate to ensuring participants are fully informed of the purpose of the

research, their rights and the responsibilities of the researcher, protecting the confidentiality of the participants, and consideration of measures to protect from the disclosure of illegal or serious unprofessional conduct during the data collection phase.

The sampling framework is justified and comparison made with a previous narrative study (Cortazzi, 1991) as a mechanism for judging the appropriateness of the proposed sample size. Unfortunately the research did not achieve the desired sample size or randomness of participants. It is argued that despite these shortcomings there is sufficient variation in the data pool to draw valid and pertinent conclusions. The methodology in action is described, providing a detailed account of the data gathering process. Included is discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the process to assist in evaluating the validity or otherwise of the data collected and consequently the strength of the conclusions reached further in the study.

The process of data analysis is examined, specifically alternative approaches to narrative analysis, the importance of transcription and the utilisation of computer software.

Qualitative Research

Exploring the resolution of difficult dilemmas involved engaging with personal experience. Qualitative research achieves this, providing comprehensive descriptions and insight into the meanings people construct through their interactions with other people and their environment (Springer, 2010). This inductive approach moves the researcher from curiosity, to data collection, and then to the development of a formal theory (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Qualitative research pervades the complicated social milieu within which people live, provides insight and understanding of the subjective meanings people bring to situations (Clough & Nutbrown, 2002) and was therefore appropriate when exploring people's experiences in resolving difficult dilemmas.

Grounded Theory

In exploring human behaviour, which is to a large extent random and unpredictable, a framework from within which theories can develop was

relevant. Grounded theory works on the premise of theory emerging from the data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2009) and consequently appealed when a scarcity of previous study made developing hypotheses difficult. Grounded theory incorporates some analytical methods applied in statistical techniques to quantitative studies (Cohen, et al., 2009), through identifying a broad topic area and gathering relevant data.

Grounded theory is systematic, utilising a sequence of steps (Cohen, et al., 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially comes theoretical sampling, where data is obtained until there is sufficient information to explain what is happening in the context or situation under study. This data is 'coded' so it can be disassembled, and then reassembled, in such a manner that its meaning becomes apparent and links between data can be identified. Open coding involves identifying units of analysis that deconstruct the data into manageable chunks. Axial coding then seeks to establish linkages between categories and codes, and to examine the inter-relationships between them. Selective coding involves identifying a core code and then identifying the relationships between that code and other codes meaning new concepts and connections are made (Cohen, et al., 2009). A method of constant comparison is utilised, meaning data is continually examined, and new information compared to prior information and existing categories, to determine the quality of the 'fit' through identifying a core variable which accounts for most of the data (Cohen, et al., 2009, p.494). Saturation is achieved when no new insights, codes or categories are generated, even when additional data is obtained. The aim is to attain a perfect fit. If this is not achieved then the categories have to be amended until all the data are accounted for (Cohen, et al., 2009, p.493). A pragmatic 'applied' approach to grounded theory research was desirable, as this stresses the generation of analytic questions as the data is methodically analysed. This is in contrast to what Glaser terms 'pure' grounded theory, a more theoretically driven approach using comparative methods and employing very systematic analysis (Charmaz, 2000).

As the narratives were analysed a number of consistent themes were revealed and these became the focus of the research. This involved a move away from the envisaged grounded theory approach and the adaptation of a more general

inductive approach utilising thematic analysis. Such an approach is congruous with that applied by Tirri (1997, 1999). Furthermore, once analysis was complete, the theories to explain the data that might be expected from grounded theory did not emerge, leading to discussion on a thematic basis.

Relevant Research Methods

It was essential participants recount their experiences in their own words. Surveys enable a large volume of data to be collected, allowing for generalisations to be made with a high degree of statistical confidence (Cohen et al. 2009). Such a tool would not capture the particular uniqueness, complexity, interpersonal dynamics and context associated with dilemma management. Qualitative surveys often rely on participants spending considerable time recounting their experiences in detail, and consequently completion may rank as a low priority. Much context specific explanatory detail can be lost in survey data, enabling only broad generalisations to emerge (Cohen, et al., 2009).

The strong moral component and frequency of teachers' decisions indicated contemplating a case study approach. Case studies are specific instances intended to be representative of more general principles (Cohen, et al., 2009), a method enabling close examination of real people in actual situations. While case studies would yield very specific insight into dilemma management, the scope would be narrow as the practices of only a limited number of individuals would be examined. Given the lack of previous research such a narrow approach has limited value. If theoretical generalisations are derived, a case study approach to further enquiry may be applicable.

An experimental approach using structured 'real life' scenarios would have the advantage of examining responses from a large number of middle managers to the same dilemmas, allowing for comparison of responses and decision making processes. Such an approach would fail to capture the very subjective elements of context and personal experience that influence decision making. The resolution proposed in a dilemma 'scenario' may well be very different to that proposed in situ where a myriad of personal emotions and characteristics feature. Role playing, in which participants are exposed to simulated social

situations intended to be indicative of their responses to real life scenarios (Cohen, et al., 2009), was precluded for similar reasons. Role playing is unreal, the behaviour displayed is not spontaneous or sensitive to complex interactions, and subjects portray what they would do and it is taken as if they did do it (Cohen, et al., 2009).

In previous research Tirri (1997) utilised interviews in which teachers recounted dilemmas they had faced and the resolution strategies. A subsequent study (Tirri, 1999) utilised a combination of interviews and written essays in which participants described experiences of moral conflict. In both instances the data was coded thematically to identify categories of dilemmas. Campbell (1992) used interviews to compare tensions between the moral conscience of teachers and principals and their institutions. In reviewing the 'Mastery in Learning Project' Livingston and Castle (1992) chose a combination of methods: timelines for individual schools detailing their involvement, end-of-project telephone interviews and narrative accounts submitted by each school describing significant issues occurring during restructuring.

In these examples personal accounts were elicited, with interviews the primary data collection method. As moral decision making is a deeply personal process, influenced by individual characteristics, experiences and context, it seemed most fitting a research method was employed that elicited examples of these situations in the words and voices of the participants. A narrative methodology provided such scope.

Narrative Methodology

Definition and Purposes

An understanding of the nature of difficult dilemmas and the steps employed in resolving them was sought from the perspective of the participants. A methodology providing deep insight (Clough, 2002) and powerfully bringing to life the experiences of the participants (Booth, 1996, in Clough, 2002) was essential. A narrative's purpose is to observe how respondents represent and understand their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Elliott, 2005; Mishler, 1986).

Compiling people's 'stories' in their own words is a form of narrative research (Goodson, 1983, in Cohen, et al., 2009) providing insight into how educators come to terms with the constraints and conditions affecting their work. Narrative research appeals to 'realists', those focusing upon inductive research techniques (Cohen, et al., 2009). Narratives allow us to understand the past and enable the teller to make sense of their experiences through the process of retelling it (Cortazzi, 1991). It is essential this 'sense' is identified by the researcher so the essence of experience is captured and illuminated. Narratives have the effect of simplifying and reducing complex situations. To an extent this is desirable, as it provides clarification to the multi-layered and complex environment of human decision making and reduces multifaceted experiences to simple examples (Cortazzi, 1991), although over simplification distorts events.

Strengths of Narrative Inquiry

When people recount narratives they develop comprehension of their experience by organising the relevant data through the narratisation process (Brannigan, 1992, p.3 in Cortazzi, 1993). Narrative has an important role in providing opportunities for teachers to share their experiences with colleagues (Blasé & Blasé, 2001) as it clarifies experiences, develops critical knowledge and provides new perspectives on teacher's practice.

Narratives are symbolic structures representing human actions in terms of resolutions to complications and crises (Cortazzi, 1991). Narratives provide insight into the process of managing dilemma situations. An example is the approach of primary school teachers in managing dilemmas when confronted with a choice between devoting their time to one or two students with 'high needs' or to the remaining thirty children in their classes (Cortazzi, 1991, p.35 & p.126). These were occasions in which there is not an explicit 'right' or 'wrong' answer, requiring teachers to make moral choices.

Limitations of Narrative Inquiry

The researcher and narrator construct the narrative together (Mishler, 1986) with one participant not having been present during the actual event, raising

concern as to the authenticity, or more precisely the accuracy, of the narrative. Narratives give meaning to events as opposed to simply reflecting experience, and as such their accuracy is limited by the interpretive lens imposed by the narrator (Ferber, 2000, in Elliott, 2005). Both human agency and imagination determine what gets included and excluded during narratization (Riessman, 2002) and narratives are open to interpretation by both researchers and their audience. Ultimately, the meaning inferred from accounts may differ from that intended by the teller.

The validity of educational narratives is questionable as they record experiences in a superficial manner and this, coupled with their often colloquial language, signifies a lack of erudition. Analysis, therefore, is vital if narrative accounts are to advance knowledge about educational matters (Barone & Pinar, 2000). The compilation of a sufficient number of narrative accounts, allowing for common themes to be identified, and the discarding of data that fell outside this commonality, addressed the concerns regarding validity, while systematic analysis fulfilled the primary purpose of the investigation. The utilisation of qualitative data analysis software provided analytical rigour (Flick, 2009).

Research Methodology

Specific Objectives

Narratives from fifty middle managers were sought, detailing occasions in which they or their colleagues resolved difficult dilemmas. These accounts were analysed to identify common themes in terms of the types of difficult dilemmas and the decision making process employed. Previous studies by Tirri (1997; 1999) indicated the suitability of such analysis in identifying the types of dilemmas faced by teachers.

Methods of Data Collection

When examining tensions between individual morals and institutional ethics an exploratory approach is necessary (Campbell, 1992). Personal perceptions, values and beliefs are revealed through descriptive language. Semi-structured interviews are the most appropriate tool for gathering data of this nature (Bailey, 1987, p.190, in Campbell, 1992), offering participants the 'space' necessary to

relate their experiences while ‘focusing’ the narrative, ensuring data obtained relate to the research questions.

Structured interviews are the least favoured form of narrative elicitation, a function of their non-relational quality. They impose limits upon subjects (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as the questions, and the sequence in which they are asked, is predetermined, not allowing for pertinent detail to be captured (Munford & Sanders, 2003). Conversely, semi-structured interviews provide an ‘outline’ (Reber, Allen, & Reber, 2009) enabling the interviewer to respond to observations made by participants and provide an opportunity to relate the characteristics, stories and experiences important to them. This enables the eliciting of complex behaviour without imposing categories, limiting responses and consequently the data obtained (Punch, 2009).

Research participants were asked to recount three stories describing in detail occasions in which they, or their colleagues, had to resolve difficult dilemmas. Three broadly worded questions were used to prompt responses:

- (1) Tell me about an occasion in which you have had to resolve a difficult dilemma.
- (2) Tell me about an occasion in which someone else in a middle management position has resolved a difficult dilemma.
- (3) Tell me about an occasion in which someone you hold in high regard has resolved a difficult dilemma.

Participants were encouraged to recount up to three narratives, even if there was more than one story narrated in answer to any of the questions above, as all accounts contributed to the data pool.

The language employed to elicit these narratives was kept purposely jargon-free to avoid confusing participants (Elliott, 2005). A ‘loose’ definition of dilemma was also applied as some examples were problems as opposed to dilemmas (Barrow, 1991). To blur this definition will not impinge upon the validity of the research as its focus remained on examining the influencing factors, although this was taken into account in the analysis process.

These questions were intended to encourage a comprehensive narration of stories describing dilemma situations by not limiting any facet of the 'story' that was recalled.

While the use of interviews as a narrative tool may result in some detail being lost, there is still the opportunity for teachers to portray the relevant features (Cortazzi, 1993). The use of interviews can counter one of the greatest limitations to narrative research, the often very small sample size (Cortazzi, 1993). Information in narratives is negotiated through questioning and the rapport and trust that develops between interviewer and respondent is of critical importance as both play a role in shaping the story, the listener through the questions they ask (Cortazzi, 1993).

Unprompted 'normal' conversation in 'normal' settings is the ideal environment for hearing narratives, although it is possible to elicit valid data through interviews (Cortazzi, 1993). The structure of the narrative in an interview situation is very different to ordinary social situations, where there are asymmetrical rights to talk (Cortazzi, 1993, p.55). In an interview, the interviewer has the unilateral right to ask questions and the respondent is obliged to answer. The interviewer determines the sequence of the 'conversation' and opens and closes topics, characteristics inconsistent with unplanned conversation. Narratives elicited through interviews lack the performance features associated with a genuine narrative, and are merely a summary of events (Wolfson, 1976, p.206; 1982, p.62 cited in Cortazzi, 1993). While it was impossible to negate some of these criticisms, the choice of a semi-structured interview approach provided respondents a greater role in determining the 'flow' of the narrative than would occur within a more structured approach.

A further influence upon the narrator is the intended audience. This is especially true when narratives are recorded in interview situations, as the narrator is conscious the audience extends beyond just the interviewer (Elliott, 2005). This could influence both the content of the narrative and the style in which it is related.

The types of questions asked, and the ways in which they are structured, dictate the type of data obtained as they provide a framework within which personal experience is recounted and the narrative shaped (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore open-ended questions that encourage narration were important, as opposed to closed questions that are directive or constrictive.

Sampling Framework

Obtaining narratives from a wide range of respondents in relation to age, gender, ethnicity, teaching subject and experience in middle management was important and ideally participants would come from a wide range of different schools. This may influence, but not dictate, the type of dilemmas portrayed in their narratives. An even number of respondents in academic and pastoral positions would be ideal, although, as most schools have a greater number of academic positions than pastoral, it was anticipated this would be reflected in the participant group. These considerations would assist in making the study's conclusions more generally applicable to New Zealand secondary schools.

The collection of narrative data from a wide range of respondents allowed for patterns to be identified. Restricting participation in terms of the characteristics of respondents or school type would limit the potential to generate valid, widely applicable, theories. In order to publicise information regarding this study to as many potential participants as possible, the Post Primary Teachers Association (PPTA), the union for New Zealand secondary school teachers, was asked to disseminate the information sheet (see appendix one, p. 100) to all schools in an area of the North Island. This strategy helped to negate concerns principals might act as 'gate keepers' and choose to withhold the information in the interests of protecting teachers from further demands upon their time.

As this study is exploratory, no particular group of middle managers was targeted. Hence an approach to recruitment that would not channel the information to any particular group was required. Choosing the PPTA as the vehicle for disseminating information was only limiting in that any middle managers who are not members of the union would be excluded from participation. As PPTA membership is open to all teachers and middle

managers in New Zealand, this neither excluded nor targeted any particular group. Subsequent to the initial distribution of information by the PPTA copies of the information sheet were delivered to all local state secondary schools. Enclosed with this information was a letter to principals inviting them to publicise the information with all middle managers. Assuming the information was circulated in this manner, and participant comments indicated it was in at least one school, this would have alleviated any sample bias that may have inadvertently occurred through distributing information via the PPTA.

Cortazzi's (1991) narrative investigation of primary school teaching was utilised to provide guidance in terms of an appropriate sample size to ensure validity. In this study narratives from 123 teachers were collected, which, when combined with narratives from other sources, gave a total data pool of 961 narrative responses. Cortazzi (1991) utilised very broad questions such as "What are the children in your class like?" (p.21) and consequently an expansive range of narrative responses were recorded; to this particular question 105 narrative responses were obtained.

The target was for 50 interviews to be conducted with middle managers. As a consequence of a lack of participant interest only 43 interviews were completed, eliciting a total of 134 separate narratives. This number was significantly lower than Cortazzi's (1991) study but nevertheless allowed for data saturation and valid conclusions. As all narratives relate specifically to examples of dilemma resolution, the pool of data was larger than that which Cortazzi (1991) accessed in answer to any one specific question.

Research Issues in this Study

There cannot be value-free or bias-free research (Janesick, 2000), meaning it is important the researcher identifies and articulates their biases so the rationale behind the questions guiding the study are accounted for. It is impossible that the researcher's previous life, educational and teaching experiences will not influence his approach. The identification of a research topic is a function of personal and professional experience and was largely influenced by professional learning, academic studies, and career goals. Consequently this study was undertaken with certain preconceptions regarding the nature of

ethical and moral decision making. The researcher's teaching and management experience imprinted beliefs which influenced his practice and thinking. It is vital one strives to ensure these do not influence data interpretation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) acknowledge the impact of previous experience, but stress the positives this may afford, explaining a key source of significant theorising is the sensitive insight of the researcher themselves.

The use of a less structured interview regime reduced the potential for data to be influenced by the researcher's biases. Narrative captures the essence of people's individual experiences, tensions and emotions, elements central to individual identity. Narrative research is impossible without the willingness of the researcher to listen, and through this research method there is a submission of narrational control to the teller (Cortazzi, 1993). Regardless of the structure of the interview, the interviewer "is actually present to witness and procreate the narrative, and hence is always implicated, always an accomplice" (Theobald, 1999, p.15) indicating the researcher's presence helped shape the data.

Of fundamental consideration is the relationship between narrative and the truth, a concern because narratives do not constitute an objective data source. They are subjective stories recalled by participants or observers, sometimes well after the event has transpired. In this respect a narrative may or may not be an accurate representation of what occurred calling into question whether or not a narrative is representative of the truth. The narrators undoubtedly believed what they were recalling was the truth, even if it may have been somewhat distorted by the lens of their beliefs, values and assumptions. In this sense there can be no dispute that it is the truth, leading Walker (1993) to suggest "the story is only the mask for the truth" (p.124). An incorrect retelling of a situation may not be a factually accurate representation of events. It is, however, the truth from the perspective of the participant and this truth is the essence of the research: illuminating the process of middle management dilemma resolution. Such influencing factors are known only to the narrator and therefore may escape capture in a simple objective description of events.

To reduce the likelihood of false reporting of events, participants were provided with a transcript of their interview to check for accuracy. This reduces "the

likelihood of falsely reporting an event” and “increases construct validity” (Yin, 1989, p.145). Two participants made minor alterations to their transcripts and none requested any material be removed. Once checking and editing were completed the narratives represented the truth as the participants believed it at the time it was spoken. A large pool of data, derived from 43 interviews in which 134 separate narratives were recorded, was available. This meant consistent themes, the truth for multiple middle managers, were identified, reinforcing the validity of the data.

Ethical Considerations

Narrative

Employing a narrative methodology raised ethical concerns as it challenges and conflicts with scientific and objective norms for recording factual accounts of past experience. Narrative enables the transmission and capture of shared experience and the redefinition of reality through combining fragments dispersed by time and space into a coherent form (Kearney & Williams, 1996). This allows an intimate interpretation of personal experience that purely scientific methods do not and provides answers to people’s questions concerning how they shall live together, as recounting stories of the past assists in understanding present ways of living (Frank, 2002). Narratives evoke representative thinking, encouraging the audience to empathetically relate themselves to others. This is achieved through organising past experience, providing an access point for the audience to experience, imagine and reflect upon what has happened. In this way “the narrative function of empathetic identification in no way contradicts the scientific function of recording objective facts ‘as they actually happened’. If anything, each compliments the other” (Kearney & Williams, 1996, p.45).

Three interrelated ethical responsibilities are identified as applicable to narrative inquiry (Adams, 2008). Firstly is the importance of acknowledging narrative privilege, one’s ability to tell or listen to a story. Those involved in narratives have no possibility to respond or to convey their perspective and it is important this is acknowledged so one can discern who might be negatively impacted or silenced through the story telling. This concern was ameliorated to a large

extent by the anonymity afforded participants. The narrative media must also be considered. In this instance the use of semi-structured interviews gave control over the story telling to the narrator, limiting genre as a controlling influence on its construction. The final presentation of the narrative, as a document in a university library and online database, is removed from the participants and not immediately accessible. The third responsibility relates to 'ethical violence', the influences on the interpretation of the stories. The researcher was aware of how participants' background, experience and expectations might influence interpretation, although it was uncertain whether awareness would be sufficient. While one acknowledges the potential for narratives to be interpreted in many different ways "we can never definitively know how others interpret our work nor can we ever definitively know who we harm and help with our life stories" (Adams, 2008, p.188).

It is the task of social science and public discourse to link personal experience and public concern, a process that begins with the examination of personal stories. A key task of narrative analysis is to identify the important moments representing the moral ideal of being true to oneself. Narrative analysis provides a medium for questioning the assumptions of those whose preferred reality is expressed, highlighting the possible void between what is publicly expected and reality. In this respect narrative research processes have the potential to model how society can most usefully utilise stories in solving its difficult dilemmas (Frank, 2002).

Qualitative Research Ethics

Qualitative research inevitably intrudes into others' lives (Schostak, 2002). The type of intrusion, and the minimisation or elimination of any negative impacts, are of primary concern to researchers. Seven widely applicable guidelines for ethical practice are identified by Bogdan and Biklen (2003, in Jurs & Wiersma, 2009): (1) avoid research sites where participants may feel coerced to participate; (2) honour informants' privacy; (3) be conscious of informants' time commitment; (4) ensure subjects' identities are protected so no embarrassment is caused; (5) treat subjects with respect; (6) be very clear in terms of any

agreements when negotiating to complete the research; and (7) be truthful and accurate in writing up the research report and findings.

Three fundamental ethical principles for researchers are: respect for persons, who as autonomous agents strive to maintain dignity and are capable of making choices when presented with all relevant information; beneficence, ensuring that efforts to ensure participants well-being are central to the research process, and; justice, in terms of deciding who is to receive the benefits of the research and bear any associated burdens (Thorkildsen, 2005, pp.28-31). In research involving interviews the main ethical concerns involve informed consent, the right to privacy and protection from harm (Fontana & Frey, 2000) and the consequences of the interviews (Cohen, et al., 2009). These are addressed below.

Informed Consent

Participation was voluntary and persons expressing interest were provided a full summary of the purpose and conditions of the research so their consent was as fully informed as possible. Informed consent is the process through which individuals freely choose whether to participate in an inquiry having been made aware of all factors likely to influence their decision (Diener & Crandall, 1978, in Cohen, et al., 2009). Informed consent comprises four components: competence – ensuring the research subjects are capable of making a correct decision given all relevant information; voluntarism - individuals feel free to decide whether to participate or not; full information - as much information as possible is given to participants, and; comprehension - participants fully understand the nature of the research. Informed consent has a further function in narrative research as it includes what aspects of a story can be shared with the audience (Adams, 2008).

Participants were required to complete a consent form prior to the interview. This provided a further check that they understood the purpose and conditions of the research, that they had an opportunity to have questions answered, and reminds them of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time if they change their decision regarding participation.

Right to Privacy

Two key concepts are involved in maintaining the privacy of participants. The first is confidentiality, concerning the non-disclosure of participants' identities or providing any indication from whom data was obtained. The identities of the participants were known only to the researcher and all data collected during the interviews remained confidential. Audio copies of interviews were held by the researcher until the conclusion of the project and then destroyed. The only other person with access to the recordings was the transcriber who was required to complete an agreement outlining their obligation in maintaining confidentiality.

The second consideration was that of anonymity, meaning participants' names were not published (Jurs & Wiersma, 2009). Participants had an opportunity to view the transcript of their interview and, after checking the accuracy of the transcript, were required to complete a release form prior to their data becoming available for use in this research. This information remained their 'property' throughout the research process. Likewise, the schools at which they work and the identities of others involved in the narratives, remained confidential. Issues of anonymity were afforded extra consideration, as, unlike other research methodologies, narrative research is potentially revealing of those involved (Cohen, et al., 2009). To this end any details making identification of people or institutions possible were removed from the final report. While confidentiality of the data can only be guaranteed to the extent of the law, the researcher is duty bound to take every foreseeable precaution to achieve both confidentiality and anonymity.

Protection from Harm and the Consequences of the Interviews

Qualitative research inevitably inflicts harm on participants as it delves deeply into personal experience, emotions and perceptions (Magolda & Weems, 2002, in Cohen, et al., 2009). The power relationship between researcher and subject, in which the research subject is reduced to "being of value as data" (Schostak, 2002, p.174), are also to be considered. Relational ethics are especially important in narrative studies as the interpersonal bonds that develop between researcher and participant are different to that in many other research

contexts. No longer is the participant the 'stranger' so often assumed when considering research ethics (Adams, 2008). These concerns are inescapable. Acknowledging them and treating the research participants as ends in themselves was vital, making developing relationships with participants, albeit on a very brief basis, essential. This is part of the researcher's obligation to protect participants from any risk of physical, social or psychological harm (Jurs & Wiersma, 2009). Ensuring informed consent was obtained and safeguarding participant privacy will go a long way towards negating these concerns.

A physically safe environment for both the research subjects and researcher is important (Jurs & Wiersma, 2009). This criterion was met through negotiation with the participants and their work places to arrange a secure and accessible room in which face-to-face interviews can take place. Such considerations were unnecessary for telephone interviews which took place at a time suitable to the participant.

Disclosure of Unprofessional or Illegal Conduct

While it was expected that middle managers narratives will reflect situations in which difficult dilemmas have been successfully resolved, preparation has to be made for the disclosure of situations in which resolutions have failed, a realisation that may only occur during narratization. Such an eventuality could leave the interviewee feeling humiliated or angry. Researchers need to be caring and empathetic, treating subjects with respect and that subjects have a right to expect researchers to be concerned for their welfare (Cohen, et al., 2009).

Narrative responses could cause personal embarrassment, or disclose unprofessional behaviour or illegal conduct. Such situations pose difficulty due to the confidential nature of the interview relationship. In extreme situations, such as a disclosure of suicidal feelings, the researcher's duty to non-maleficence would compel seeking further assistance. There is no easy solution in such circumstances, with it being necessary for the researcher to reach a resolution between the extremes of ignorance through to impinging upon the rights of the subjects. Researchers can become party to 'dirty knowledge' about deviant groups or members of a school who may harbour

attitudes and exhibit behaviours counter to accepted school culture (Cohen, et al., 2009). In these circumstances it is vital for the researcher to determine their boundaries of acceptance, beyond which they will not venture. Boundaries can be set prior to the interview phase of the research. All respondents in this study were provided with information regarding the purpose of the research explaining the researcher's obligation to report behaviour deemed unprofessional or illegal. Highlighting this stipulation provided protection through dissuading such disclosure.

While the aforementioned ethical concerns satisfy specifically the ethical demands placed upon researchers by codes of conduct and approval bodies, Dingwall (1980, in Woods, 1996) summarises research ethics more eloquently, suggesting a clear conscience on the part of the researcher is essential. Achieving this entails strictly adhering to the "non-negotiable" values of "honesty, fairness, respect for persons and beneficence" (Stolis, 1989, in Woods, 1996, p.66).

Data Collection

Research Site and Time Period

Interviews began on July 31, 2012, and concluded on September 19, 2012. Forty three interviews were conducted in total, forty two in person and one via telephone. Teachers' narratives could come from any secondary school environment within New Zealand, although logistical limitations made the researcher's local region desirable. Face-to-face interviewing was preferred as this enabled observation of body language, tone of voice and gesture, all important elements in storytelling.

Data Collection

The regional branch of the PPTA distributed the information sheet to all schools and principals. Unfortunately this generated very few enquiries. A further approach was made to all state secondary schools in an urban area with hard copies of the information sheet. This resulted in some principals verbally advertising the invitation for involvement directly to their staff and others disseminating the information sheet to middle managers. Unfortunately this

again met with little success. A third strategy was employed in which direct contact was made with teachers known to the researcher who occupy middle management positions in a variety of schools. A common response was an indication of interest in being involved but that they 'hadn't got around to' responding to the email or hard copy of the information sheet. These initial contacts were used to 'snowball', increasing the sample size by asking participants to speak with their colleagues and encourage them to accept the invitation for participation. This proved successful in a few instances.

At the outset it was intended to achieve a random participant sample. While there was a wide range of coverage in terms of teaching subjects and middle management experience, a significant majority of participants were from one institution. Unfortunately this limited the random nature of the participant group, having implications for the validity and applicability of the research conclusions.

Participant Profile

Narratives were obtained from middle managers with a range of experience, from a newly appointed dean with seven months' experience, to a HoD with thirty years' experience in both pastoral and academic positions. On average the participants occupied middle management positions for almost ten years. A wide range of subject areas were represented with HoDs in nineteen different curriculum areas, and participant teaching responsibilities spread over twenty-six different subjects. Those occupying pastoral roles represented all year levels at secondary school, from year nine to year thirteen, and some occupied positions such as head of house in schools with 'vertical' pastoral structures. Additionally there were middle managers in other roles such as principal's nominee for the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, education outside the classroom coordinator, specialist classroom teacher, international dean, as well as several who either worked in, or managed, school boarding hostels.

As participants came from a small number of schools there were confidentiality issues involved in analysing this data more specifically. Consequently there is no discussion of school specific information and middle managers are referred to in gender neutral terms, lessening the likelihood of a narrative being linked to a specific person or school.

Table 1. below details participants' ethnicity and gender. The data was not further disaggregated in terms of middle management role as several held both HoD and dean positions simultaneously. Likewise no analysis was made of teaching subject as many participants taught in multiple subject areas.

Table 1. Participant Ethnicity and Gender

Participant Ethnicity	Number of Female Participants	Number of Male Participants
New Zealand European	10	26
Māori	0	3
Other	0	4

Some interviews took only a few minutes to complete, while others lasted longer than half an hour. This depended primarily upon: (1) the organisation of the participants, as in some instances people were well-prepared allowing them to recount their experiences succinctly, while others spent some time during the interview in the process of remembering the particular story or example they wished to narrate, and; (2) the complexity of the dilemma, with some examples involving multiple players, taking place over a prolonged period of time, and involving the resolution of a number of different issues, generally taking longer to explain.

In most instances little prompting was required for stories to be narrated. Often it was necessary to ask questions so the particular decision making process driving the dilemma resolution became apparent. Where more specific questions were required there was the risk that the interview may have been led in a particular direction. Every effort was made not to employ leading questions; however, that this may have been an influence cannot be discounted. The vast majority of respondents related examples of difficult situations they had encountered, although a small number of narratives related to general examples rather than a specific instance, and others provided a general description of skills such as communication, which middle managers believed was integral to their role.

Analysing Narratives

Narrative analysis has to be systematic if conclusions are to be significant (Mishler, 1986) and the type of analysis applied depends upon the purpose. Narratives can be analysed in terms of either their content or structure (Elliott, 2005). In analysing content the purpose is to identify either the chronology of events or the narrator's evaluation of events. The structure of the narrative refers to how the story is constructed. In analysing dilemma resolution narrative content is of interest so that the types of dilemma, and resolution processes can be identified. Content analysis involves reducing the data to gain insight and understanding through identifying core consistencies and meanings, an inductive process (Patton, 2002).

Too much emphasis on structure weakens the accent on content, the primary reason for narrating a story (Riessman, 1993, in Elliott, 2005). Structural analysis is useful in examining short sections of interviews as this effectively links the evaluation to prior events in the narrative (Elliott, 2005). Labov and Waletzky proposed such a model in the late 1960s which is now widely employed in narrative analysis (Cortazzi, 1993; Elliott, 2005; Mishler, 1986). As this study aimed to establish the common practices enacted in dilemma resolution, analysis to determine the most common themes within the context of the narrative was the primary consideration, eliminating concerns that too much emphasis on structure detracts from the narrative meaning.

Transcription

Transcription is integral to the analysis process and detailed transcripts provide clues to aid interpretation and understanding (Elliott, 2005). Gee (1986, in Elliott, 2005) proposed a transcription method which orders the discourse into numbered lines, each line comprising a single 'idea unit', expressed as short sequences of words, allowing for particular focus on the meaning imparted by the narrator. Such recommendations were considered. However, the focus on content rather than structure negated the need for significant detail to be included.

Clean transcriptions, in which pauses, utterances and repetition are removed are suitable when content is the primary focus, enabling the chronology of events and evaluative elements of the narrative to be captured. Many narratives were elliptical, as the narrator utilised the interview to order the events in their accounts. Repetition of words and phrases was common, and the meaning of some narratives may have been unclear to those not present for its creation. For this reason, the key phrases and sections of narrative chosen to represent the main themes were further edited, non-essential wording and repetition removed to ensure the passages were legible for the audience.

Transcription took place continually as interviews were completed. This allowed analysis to begin as data accumulated and for themes to emerge. The most consistent themes became the focus of further analysis.

Computer Software as an Analysis Tool

When confronted with a mass of unstructured data a common approach is to disassemble it into more manageable sections, allowing the data to be coded and retrieved as necessary. This fragmentation of data is easily supported by computer-based analytical software (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The use of computer analysis to uncover patterns in the narrative content incorporates some of the statistical techniques applied to validate quantitative research to qualitative studies (Elliott, 2005).

The disaggregation of data provides expediency. However, there is concern such approaches do not equate with the subtlety and intuitiveness people bring to bear through more personal analysis (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). The utilisation of the Gestalt principle, which places greater emphasis on the consideration of the whole narrative, as meaning can only be understood in relation to the whole, not through the examination of fragments, is proposed as an alternative method. Such an approach would benefit study involving in-depth narratives elicited from a much smaller number of participants where there is less focus on narrative content.

This study utilised QSR NVivo 10 software in data analysis. This allowed the main dilemma themes to be identified, and excerpts from the narratives relevant

to the themes to be coded. This involved 'creating nodes', highlighting the supporting narrative text and 'dragging and dropping' it into the appropriate node. Each node represented a core narrative theme which could be further fragmented into sub-categories as subsequent examples were revealed. With the NVivo programme recording the frequency with which data was placed into a category, the emerging dilemma themes were easily identified. Similarly, nodes (or themes) which initially appeared relevant but then failed to accumulate data, thereby falling outside of the identified common themes, were deleted.

Summary

The explorative nature of this investigation and its concern with human experience dictated a qualitative approach. Narrative inquiry was chosen as the research method as this allowed insight into the subjective nature of middle managers' decision making processes in resolving difficult dilemmas. Semi-structured interviews provided an appropriate data gathering tool as they encouraged the narration of stories specific to the research question without limiting or imposing categories upon participants.

For the research conclusions to be valid and useful they have to be widely applicable. To achieve this, the sample size and composition had to be sufficient and diverse enough to allow for analysis and the emergence of consistent themes. The sample size achieved allowed for data saturation and systematic analysis, although the nature of the participant group was less than ideal. This had implications for the validity of the data. However, many of the concerns can be assuaged.

Chapter Four – Results of the Research

Overview of Chapter

The systematic analysis of data in order for key themes to emerge was essential. This systematic analysis revealed a number of consistent themes, which are identified and discussed in this chapter. The reasoning or theory behind the resolution strategies applied to these difficult dilemmas is also discussed. It is structured with dilemmas discussed first followed by description of the difficult problems faced by middle managers. Initially discussion was to be separated into an analysis of the types of dilemmas and problems followed by analysis of the resolution. This proved inappropriate as an organising schema given the complexity of some issues and the way in which the narratives often wove strands of the two, cause and resolution, together. Disassembling the stories into separate sections of cause and resolution proved impossible, as to break them into manageable and singularly themed units of text so reduced the narrative effect that their significance and meaning was lost.

Many more narratives related to difficult problems than to difficult dilemmas. Some problems were extremely difficult for middle managers to resolve. These difficulties, however, related to hierarchical positioning or the intricacies of personal relationships rather than competition between values, or between two 'right' or two 'wrong' choices. Often problems were resolved expediently through a combination of middle managers' experience and school procedures.

The influence of the principal was a theme in only three narratives relating to problematic situations rather than dilemmas. These problems were resolved pragmatically but had sufficient impact upon the middle managers that they recalled them, in some instances, many years later.

Discussion of Results

Many participants held, or had held, a variety of either pastorally or academically focused middle management roles. When discussing the data reference is made to deans and HoDs, indicating the particular role the middle manager fulfilled in dealing with that dilemma, not necessarily a fixed position. For example, a dilemma may have been recounted which was resolved in their

capacity as a pastoral middle manager, and another dilemma recounted by the same person resolved in their capacity as an academic middle manager.

Any names included in the narrative excerpts have been altered to protect participant anonymity and any other identifying features have been excluded. As the data was considered as a single pool, reference is made to the interview number when discussing the results.

Thematic Discussion

Presenting the findings thematically rather than by interview question was a consequence of the number of narratives gathered in answer to each interview question. Most participants narrated stories in which they personally had been involved in resolving a difficult dilemma. This provided a rich pool of data (129 of the 134 narratives) in relation to interview question one (Tell me about an occasion in which you have had to resolve a difficult dilemma) allowing for valid conclusions. Conversely, only two narratives were recounted in answer to each of questions two (Tell me about an occasion in which someone else in a middle management position has resolved a difficult dilemma) and three (Tell me about an occasion in which someone you hold in high regard has resolved a difficult dilemma). The small data pool made drawing valid conclusions specific to these questions impossible.

A striking feature of the analysis process was the frequency with which themes emerged, with surprising consistency between HoDs' and deans' narrative themes. Relationships materialised as a main theme with analysis of the first interviews and remained a consistent narrative topic. As the data pool related to relationships grew, this theme was broken into three specific categories: relationships between teachers and students; relationships between teachers, and; relationships between middle managers and senior managers. In creating these theme categories, another, student behaviour, was deleted as the theme 'relationships between teachers and students' better encapsulated the nature of the data.

Tirri's (1997; 1999) previous studies of moral decision making were considered. These investigations analysed accounts derived from interviews and written

essays. When the data obtained was coded and analysed key themes emerged. This gave further validity to a thematic approach to the analysis and presentation of data.

Narrative Analysis

It was vital that the data analysis allowed for the main themes to emerge rather than imposing preconceived categories, an important consideration in exploratory investigations. This necessitated the continual analysis of data as it accumulated, with new data compared to previous data, and existing categories scrutinised to determine whether or not they remained relevant. Some narrative theme categories were excluded as only a single narrative correlated; others were modified as the data pool grew. Consistent themes, such as relationships, were identified, with the validity of a category confirmed when it appeared in multiple narratives. Some themes were amended, such as with the addition of categories of relationship dilemmas, or rejected, as was the situation with the initial category of student behaviour which appeared in only a single narrative. . The NVivo 10 qualitative analysis software assisted in ensuring a systematic approach to analysis and allowed for constant comparison of new data to existing data and categories.

Another requirement was for data saturation, attained when additional data did not provide any new insights, codes or categories (Cohen, et al., 2009). This was achieved as the core theme categories emerged and were reinforced consistently throughout the narrative analysis process.

Data Obtained

Table 2. below summarises the number of dilemmas narrated in each theme category. The number of dilemmas displayed is less than the total number of narratives collected as some were excluded because they arose only once or centred on a general theme, such as communication as a key middle management skill, not a specific problem or dilemma. The data has been arranged with the most frequent narrative themes appearing first. Discussion of the data is ordered in the same manner.

Table 2. Main Dilemma Themes

Main Dilemma Theme	Sub-theme (if applicable)	Number of Dilemmas in this category
Relationships	Relationships between students and teachers	26
	Relationships between teachers	17
	Relationships between middle managers and senior managers	6
Student issues	Student safety	11
	Financial concerns	3
	Consistency in decision making	3
	Time allocated to one student v. time allocated to the remainder of the group	3
	Truancy and attendance concerns	3
Curriculum issues		13
Teacher accountability		10
Time and workload		4
Consistency around assessment		3

Identifying the specific factors driving the resolution process proved challenging as many narratives suggested multiple influencing factors. For example, an HoD's decision to act on their concerns regarding teacher accountability or competence might be motivated by concern for the quality of classroom teaching and its impact upon student academic progress, the relationships between students and the teacher that developed as a consequence, concerns

about fairness within the subject department where the teacher was not making what was perceived to be an appropriate contribution and the corresponding deterioration in collegial relationships.

Where actions were motivated by multiple considerations, the main influencing factor, as stated by the narrator, was utilised as, presumably, this was the primary driver in the resolution process. This enabled clear discussion of the results and for identification of the most prevalent influencing factors. There is undoubtedly an element of subjectivity in this process, although as most narrators specifically indicated what motivated their decision making, either in their narration or in response to questioning, the degree of certainty with which the motivating factors were isolated was high.

Table 3. below summarises the main motivating factors and is organised thematically, with the most common themes recorded first.

Table 3. Main Motivating Themes

Main Motivating Theme	Sub-Theme (if applicable)	Number of Narratives in this Category
Student best interests	Academic progress	21
	Repairing relationship with teacher	18
	Student safety	9
	Fairness	9
	Repairing relationship with parent	2
	Respecting student rights	1
Teacher best interests	Teacher dignity	4
	Support of teacher	4
	Stand against workplace bullying	3
Academic	Course in student best interests	7
	Consistency of assessment conditions	4
Teacher accountability		9
School rules and processes		3
Legal responsibilities		2
Consistency of decision making		2
Example of principal		2
Opinion of more experienced colleagues		1

Difficult Dilemmas and Difficult Problems

Most narratives revealed situations middle managers found difficult to resolve. However, not all constituted dilemmas. This was expected as removing the term 'moral' from the research questions and asking for accounts of difficult dilemmas encouraged a wide range of responses. Most narrations related to managerial and professional problems, frequently situations in which the cause of the problem was easily identifiable and resolvable. Dilemmas were situations in which the choice was from a number of alternatives, the constraints of which did not allow for an individual's cherished values to be embraced (Goldring & Greenfield, 2002). It was in examples where there were clashes between the values middle managers believed to be important that real dilemmas emerged.

The discussion begins by examining narratives relating to difficult dilemmas. The discussion is structured with the most common dilemmas identified first. Following this is analysis of narratives recalling examples of problems, which although difficult, were soluble (Barrow, 1991) and did not involve the contestation of cherished values.

Approaches to Dilemma Resolution

A consistent theme was the importance of acquiring a comprehensive understanding of a situation from the perspective of all parties involved before attempting resolution: *"...what the teacher perceives and what the student perceives are two different things..."* (interview 18). In another example a dean recounted a situation in which a parent complained about a teacher. The dean took note of the parent's information, sought clarification from the teacher and arranged a meeting for all parties: *"...the mother was accusing the teacher of certain things or saying...she's not giving my daughter a fair deal...the teacher came in and was able to give this information and the mother read it and had to say to her daughter, are you doing these things, and her daughter had to say...yes I am...So it was quite interesting because then it went from this quite nearly attack type behaviour from the mother, you can't treat my daughter like that to being very much, okay, so now I know that my daughter is actually doing this, let's think about it..."* (interview 20)

Whether the narrative related to a difficult dilemma or a difficult problem, fully understanding the context was consistently depicted as vital in resolution. This supports Barrow's (2006) assertion that rational decisions result when all relevant information is available and Aloni's (2002) insistence that fair decisions be based on facts and logic.

Difficult Dilemmas

Relationships between Students and Teachers

Most narratives relating to pastoral issues described problems rather than dilemmas. The exception was where school expectations influenced middle managers: *"...we want to be seen to back our staff 100% because they are colleagues..."* (interview 3). Dilemmas arose if the actions of the teacher contributed to the problem, a scenario encapsulated in a number of narratives: *"...the...dilemma that I've been faced with is...trying to remain professional and support my colleague and staff member when...he's as much to blame for the issues and conflict...as anyone."* (interview 2). This created a dilemma between their beliefs in supporting the teacher, the value placed on resolving the situation fairly for those involved, and acting in the best interests of students.

In such situations it was common for a resolution to be enacted which attempted to meet these competing demands: *"...publicly I'd always back the staff member. I might afterwards go back and say, hey look, actually there's some things that you could have tidied up but I'd actually never do that in public. I'd always do that in private."* (interview 26). Choosing such a strategy appeased both parties.

Middle managers' belief in the primary importance of supporting teachers, even when they were responsible for the problem, influenced resolutions. In such instances neither party was truly served in a moral sense: the student received a reprimand of some description for something which they had not caused, and the teacher's actions were publicly endorsed even though they were 'wrong'. In describing such a situation a middle manager explained: *"...you're not trying to get a win, you're trying to get a win win...I got a win for the boy and a win for the*

teacher..." (interview 26). The reality of such resolutions however is morally questionable.

Curriculum Issues

Academic-related narratives revealed a greater number of dilemmas, especially concerning the alignment of NCEA standards. In many subjects more standards and credits are available than can be reasonably included in a course of study, meaning HoDs have to determine which standards to include and which to exclude. Their primary consideration was a desire to create courses teaching and assessing standards they believed contributed to the best possible outcomes for students. This purpose is highly valued so any impediment to its fulfilment, and consequently having to deliver an inferior programme, presented dilemmas.

In one example a standard could not be taught as the school computers were unable to load the necessary software package: *"...I left out the computerised accounting one this year because the barriers to teach that...you can't have MYOB on our computers because we've got a new upgrade and [the] computers won't cope with it...I guess it was going through all of those barriers... I tried to work through them, I tried to make sure that we could get it and it just didn't happen...it's hard because as a teacher...am I then giving my students the best possible chance to prepare for the workforce or prepare for University..."* (interview 20)

In another case a HoD passionate about a particular aspect of their subject did not feel they could offer the applicable standard as the achievement criteria enabled a highest grade of merit only. Including this standard devalued the subject and imposed limitations upon students aspirations for subject or NCEA level 'excellence endorsement': *"...having spent all this time planning this course... we thought it's going to be a bit too long, what will we drop, everybody put their hand up and said, let's drop the microbiology, the microscope work, and the reason why we should drop that is because it can only earn a merit at the very top...it's against the ethos of the school...I don't want biology to have in it achievement standards which only reach merit, they don't go any higher...it's bad for biology and I think it's bad for the principle of the school where we aim for excellence all the time."* (interview 28)

Another HoD described the decision to eliminate what they believed was an important standard preparing students for further study in the subject. Despite the department's unanimous belief that a programme designed to best meet student needs had to include this standard, the requirements made it too time consuming and challenging: *"...the idea was really good but then when we had all the exemplars come out they were just ridiculous, you just couldn't do them, you know we gave them to [the English department to look at and they said] this is level 3 University English stuff...look how hard it is...quite a difficult decision to make..."* (interview 26)

HoDs were visibly concerned at being unable to overcome barriers preventing them creating and delivering courses offering the maximum benefits to students. Utilitarian principles lay behind HoDs' desire to construct such programmes. They were forced to abandon beliefs about what was in students' best interests and compromise, offering sub-standard courses of study. In one instance a decision was forced by resource limitations, in another the HoD's perception of the 'value' of a standard that did not allow students to gain a grade of excellence, and in the third example it was felt the requirements of a standard required too much time and would have been too difficult for many students.

Consistency around Assessment

Ensuring consistency of assessment conditions was a frequent HoD concern, becoming an issue when several classes with different teachers completed the same assessment. There was a dilemma between allowing individual teachers to employ their own teaching philosophies and beliefs, against the need for effective pedagogy and consistency of information used for assessment purposes: *"...conflict...when there's more than one teacher teaching something, how they approach their teaching... how much information do you give the students...you've got one teacher who might be giving them a structured answer. You've got another teacher...who has a philosophy of, you need to learn to think and I'm not going to spoon feed you, and then you've got another teacher doing something else...So how is it that you get a fair thing...is this a legitimate assessment when they've all obviously*

memorised an answer that's been given to them...should this be allowed, or if the teacher's interpreted it differently and the kids have answered it differently... how do you then approach those issues with the teacher. How do you say to them, look I think your students might be cheating but actually they're just remembering what they've been told...and everyone's all very sensitive about how they go about teaching things and they don't want to be pinpointed for doing it wrong or for giving them too much information...Is it encouraging good thinking, or is it, the standard tells us that this is what needs to be assessed but what other skills do we want our learners to come out with, if we staircase it...what does that mean for their thinking, are we squashing their thinking?" (interview 19)

The HoD was aware of the value attached to both teacher autonomy to deliver the curriculum in the manner they felt was best for their students, against the requirement to provide consistent assessment conditions across several classes. In this situation it was impossible to satisfy both demands. Utilitarian principles are strong drivers in the desire to achieve fairness as the conditions imposed were for the benefit of the majority.

Relationships between Teachers

Resolving relational problems between teachers was narrated as the most complex challenge facing middle managers. One example recalled a situation in which members of a subject department felt they were not receiving appropriate guidance from their HoD: *"...one thing was a disagreement between staff members. That ended up in quite a lot of anguish and made a very unhealthy environment for everybody else."* (interview 19)

In this instance the assistant HoD was required to resolve the issue: *"I got to the bottom of that issue then I had to address it with the other person involved and that was quite difficult because they were quite a bit higher than me. But being there for my staff as assistant HoD I was kind of a bit in the middle of the sandwich...and so I couldn't go to my HoD so I had to actually do something about it."* (interview 19)

This posed a dilemma as they had responsibilities towards the members of their department, who are 'under' them in terms of hierarchical and authoritative

position, and had to resolve the issue with their HoD, who is 'above' them in terms of hierarchical and authoritative position.

Relationships between Middle Managers and Senior Managers

One HoD narrated a breakdown in the relationship between themselves and their principal. At the time the HoD was also the staff representative on the school Board of Trustees (BOT) and did not support the principal at a BOT meeting. The HoD's decision was based on what they believed to be 'right' in a student discipline issue, contravening the principal's opinion. The principal confronted them over this, suggesting that the staff representative abstain if they disagreed with them. The HoD refused to acquiesce to this demand, believing in their obligation to do what they believed to be the right thing: *"He and I fell out because I didn't back [them] in a board meeting and...were very unforgiving if you didn't back them or didn't support them, they never let you forget, you know...I didn't back him and it was over this option for kids and from that point it's always terrible...I mean it ended up to the point where he asked me to, if I disagreed to abstain from voting, and I said well look, wait a minute you're elected to do stuff...if you want to make a call you've got to call it in, but he said no not if you can't back me..."* (interview 35)

The relationship between the HoD and principal became irreparably damaged. Tied to this was a dilemma that arose during an Education Review Office (ERO) review. At the conclusion of the ERO visit there was disagreement between the principal and the ERO team as to the contents of the report. The HOD, whose opinions resonated strongly with the views of the ERO team, was approached and asked to attend a 'confidential' meeting at the review team's motel, portrayed as an opportunity for HoDs to deliver their opinion on the school without the presence of the principal. They were informed that the invitation had been given to all major HoDs within the school: *"...ERO...were disagreeing with [the principal] markedly...and they actually went around HoDs...and asked them to meet with them....one... asked me to go to their motel and said would I meet with them to discuss, and that was a dilemma...and they said, look other HoDs are going and*

would you come? I said no, I don't believe in that. And I had no idea whether the meeting happened." (interview 35)

Confronting issues between middle managers and senior managers was difficult. Often the dilemma was between standing up for themselves against someone in a higher hierarchical position, and the consequences they felt this could have for their work environment, against their firmly held belief in making the 'right' decision.

Time Allocated to One Student against Time Allocated to the Group

Determining how much time to devote to one student compared with the remainder of a class or other group was not narrated as a specific dilemma, although it is recognisable as a sub-theme.

A dean described at length a difficult problem managing sexually inappropriate student behaviour. Only mentioned briefly in their narrative was this dilemma: *"A lot of what is guiding my decision making [is]...the fact that I have to care for 370 other students in the year level...we are now at a point where...so much time has been invested into that student regarding the same issue and there doesn't seem to be anything being resolved."* (interview 1)

While working through the strategies available to them, the dean was conscious of the demands one student was placing upon their time and that this was detrimental to their ability to respond to the needs of other students in the year group. They reluctantly decided to follow a discipline pathway with the student as this provided them with time to devote to the other students for whom they were responsible.

Another complex situation related to a student suffering a form of epilepsy, resulting in the sudden onset of seizures. When this occurred at school the student's peers and teachers initially coped well in providing the necessary support and assistance. Putting such procedures in place had been straight forward for the dean. This changed, however, when a group of students shared their concerns regarding the significant impact this was having upon their academic progress. When a seizure occurred, it disrupted learning and

necessitated other students being out of class for extended periods of time. The dean was faced with the dilemma of balancing the health needs of one student against the learning needs of other students: *"...it happened actually for quite a long time before...actually we need to do something about this because it isn't fair on those other students...often you think about the girl who was having the seizure, making sure she's safe and getting her sorted...but it was actually for the other girls that needed to be sorted as well."* (interview 17)

In resolving this situation the dean was challenged by competing demands. They were concerned with acting in the best interests of the student suffering the seizures while also promoting the best interests of the other students in her classes. Utilitarian principles influenced the dean's decision to refocus the resolution strategy to meet the needs of the larger number of students.

Difficult Problems

Relationships between Students and Teachers

Many pastoral problems involved conflict between students and teachers. Previous discussion identified how a belief in the importance of 'backing' teachers in such situations created dilemmas. This contrasted with the approach of some other deans who saw their role primarily as student advocates: *"...but my role as a dean, I'm more there for the students."* (interview 18). Such an approach did not create dilemmas.

The sentiment that their role was primarily to support their students was expressed by deans in only one school. Of note is the gender difference between the narrators of these accounts. Deans who indicated their first priority was to support their colleagues were male, while those who indicated their first priority is to support students were female and employed at the same school, indicating school expectations were a strong influencing factor in how relationship issues between students and teachers were resolved

Regardless of the perception of their role (either as being in support of colleagues or students) most deans viewed themselves as mediators in instances of conflict. They facilitated meetings, sometimes with parents or

support personnel in attendance, between the aggrieved parties in an attempt to resolve the dilemma in a fair manner: *"...quite often you need to facilitate a meeting between the two parties...and break down what is the main issue...quite often...what the teacher perceives and what the student perceives are two different things and so, I get them to meet but often it completely resolves the situation and you have a more positive outcome and they don't end up presenting for the same reason again, so it is quite a worthwhile process to go through.."* (interview 18)

Overwhelmingly the motivation for resolving these problems is a belief in the importance of acting in the best interests of the student. In explaining what motivated a decision to follow up concerns about a student's attitude and behaviour a dean recounted: *"...the boy's ability to learn in class. His attitude hasn't been that great and...it does show academically as well...I'm thinking...if we get his attitude correct then his academics are going to come up as well..."* (interview 4)

Unlike Stefkovich (2006, in Eyal, et al., 2009), Stefkovich and Begley (2007, in Eyal, et al., 2009) and Tirri and Husu (2002), who identified that determining what was in a child's best interests is a source of intense debate and dilemma itself, middle managers assumed that it is in their best interests to be in class engaged in learning.

Relationships between Teachers

Relational problems between teachers appeared difficult to confront and resolve. In one instance a teacher internally promoted to a HoD position replaced a colleague who retired after a considerable length of time in the role. There was significant contrast between the leadership styles of these two people. The new HoD felt they inherited within the department a teacher who was disillusioned and actively undermined them: *"...the key...thing that, me as a middle manager probably struggles with, is unmotivated staff...my department is a really good department but there's always one person who will always either be negative or, not so much working against you but in some ways trying to undermine you."* (interview 9)

The HoD felt daunted in confronting this situation and lacked experience in such circumstances. They were informed by the former HoD that the staff member displayed similar behaviour towards them, and they either ignored it or covered over it, making confronting the situation more difficult. Initially the HoD attempted to resolve this problem using their relationship with the teacher: *“I think in the first two times that I’ve met with him...I’ve come from a more personal approach...he knew that it wasn’t anything to do with me as such, but because of the negativity he had towards the school, it was just a matter of seeing that played out...”* (interview 9). This proved unsuccessful; the situation remains unresolved and weighs heavily upon the HoD: *“...from my end it’s probably deciding how best to approach it in the next couple of years, he goes up and down in terms of positive whether he’s got a good attitude or bad attitude.”* (interview 9)

The importance the HoD placed on retaining a positive relationship with this teacher, regardless of the extent to which they believed the teacher’s actions created problems, is a strong influence making a more direct and confrontational approach to resolution unlikely.

Relationships between Middle Managers and Senior Managers

A small number of examples of conflict with senior managers were recounted. It was obvious from the nature of these particular interviews that such situations were extremely stressful.

A middle manager described being publicly admonished by a senior manager in front of staff and students. The teacher was very upset and explained that the problem was how to approach a staff member in a more senior position whom they believed to have a ‘bullying’ management style: *“I had thought that for both of our sakes that sort of behaviour couldn’t continue...I did feel that it was pretty unprofessional to do that... because I was going to confront my senior manager, so I thought, what’s a good way of me being accountable for what I say, and my senior manager being accountable for what she says, and for there being a, the issue being resolved in some way. So I thought, right I’ll approach the guidance counsellor and ask her to go with me to the senior manager to confront her with her behaviour and just*

tell her how I felt and explain why I thought that her behaviour was unacceptable...”
(interview 27)

Their desire to bring the senior manager's attention to this bullying approach, as well as their own dignity, were strong influences in their choice to confront this behaviour rather than to ignore it, as they believed other teachers had done. Through making this choice they believed they were making a 'stand' for more than just themselves: *“...with our senior manager we can send her computer messages and she'll, as a power thing, ignore us or she'll delete them if she doesn't want to answer them. If you confront her directly she'll often try to intimidate and bully...”* (interview 27)

Confronting problems between middle managers and senior managers was a difficult proposition. Those who narrated such accounts indicated their choice was between standing up for themselves against someone in a higher hierarchical position and the consequences this could have for their work environment, against their belief in the importance of challenging workplace bullying.

Consistency in Decision Making

Providing consistent responses to students was an important consideration for deans, to the extent that sometimes they chose consistency above examining the particular circumstances around an issue. In one instance a component of a dean's position involved administering an off-site programme. Students selected from a range of activities organised for them or created their own activity. A problem arose when inconsistent responses were given to students requesting permission to undertake their own activities. Some students were approved and others refused approval for the same activity, resulting in complaints from students and parents. The dean resolved this by adhering to their decision to refuse participation. This necessitated contacting those students who had their involvement approved and withdrawing this: *“...the problem came down to... two different groups... and I must have slipped up somewhere and I'd said yes to some of them and no to others...that was quite a difficult situation to deal with and be presented with angry parents...I had to make a call and my argument*

was that I'd made the decisions I had to try and be consistent. In the end it came through that there was a great inconsistency...I thought...it could flare up and the students and the parents had grounds to be reasonably upset, I've got to be consistent..." (interview 5)

While this resolution caused stress and created extra work for the dean, their belief that consistency was vital was the determining factor in shaping the approach they took. This was revealed when the dean explained the contact they had with parents regarding this decision: *"I have been inconsistent, sorry, none of them get to do it, and the parents, it was obviously not what they wanted, they wanted to use it and the fact that some students had been allowed to do it is no excuse to force me to add the other ones too, and I said no you've got a good point, you're right, but I'm going to have to say no to all of them...they weren't very happy about that."* (interview 5)

This example was only a difficult problem because of the dean's strong belief that any decisions they made had to be completely consistent. Decision making in this vein takes a deontological approach as the dean believed decisions have to be binding in all similar situations.

Financial Concerns

Two narratives related to financial pressure on students and the associated implications for the students socially and academically.

A dean, who coaches a sporting team, recounted a situation in which three players were at risk of being forced to withdraw from a pre-season fixture due to their failure to pay the associated travel costs by an imposed deadline. When the coach became aware of this they contacted the students' families, each of whom gave reassurances that the costs would be paid prior to the trip. Unfortunately the timeline the coach was working to was at odds with that imposed by the school's senior management and the threat of withdrawal from the fixture remained: *"...we have blanket rules at school for involvement in activities, so you've got to be well presented and they've got to pay their fees and...those rules seem fairly black and white but every student has a different situation, some are*

boarding, some are private boarding, some have got solo parents, there's a lot of different ways that families function and family finances function...two days before we were about to go and you were still, we were training and one of the members of senior management came out and said um, there were 3 boys that won't be going to this exchange, on Friday because they hadn't done this process." (interview 6)

Believing there to be implications for the dignity of the students and their families, and social repercussions from their peers if the students were withdrawn, as well as the impact the removal of three players would have on their team at short notice, the coach approached the principal to advocate on behalf of their players: *"Two of them were guys who are not very forthright, very quiet, the classic Pacific Island, I guess mentality where they don't tell you if there's a problem. So if you don't hear anything you don't do anything, and the two guys who probably lacked a bit of confidence on the field as well so we were pretty keen to make sure that the season started well for them...it put us in a difficult position because we're trying to get boys to perform at a really high level and, basically...if we'd followed the rules with this school they would have been excluded from this exchange and I think that probably would have shamed them a little bit, particularly one of them...we could see that the school had made a stand and the boys unfortunately missed the deadline but we could also see that it was complicated factors with home, you know, one boy would have been, he doesn't hold the purse strings and you know, mum and dad are quite quiet, they don't communicate that well either, they all came in first thing the following morning and paid."* (interview 6)

The coach was able to view this issue from the perspective of all parties involved but felt that their first priority lay in supporting the students in their team: *"I think you need to be able to tighten your screws on your boys but you also need to...not to take the soft option with them but you need to understand a little bit about hey, his situation is a little bit different from his, and yes they've all got to pay...some parents make different arrangements, and at some point in the school, you know, you've got to have the money in, but you've also got to have some leeway as well...particularly in the extracurricular activities you're dealing with a lot of parents who don't, money doesn't flow that freely...you've got to have some black and white*

rules but there's got to be some room for flexibility in cases of hardship or, where there's the difficult family dynamics..." (interview 6)

The coach delineated different cultural perspectives that were not accounted for in the very rigid approach to financial management employed by the school: *"sometimes...we come at it from a very...white middle class [perspective] you pay by this date and everything will be fine, well things don't always go like that in the Islands"* (interview 6)

In choosing to approach the issue in this manner the coach was motivated by their very strong belief that it was in the students' best interests to participate in this particular match as being forced to withdraw would bring shame on them and their families as well as creating problems with their peers.

Student Safety

Student safety concerns caused problems for middle managers working in 'high risk' areas such as technology workshops, while more general student safety concerns had a significant impact on resolution methods in a number of other instances: *"The danger was that if the lathe had been started it could have led to somebody being seriously injured or worse...I've had issues of injury in the workshop. One was a significant burn."* (interview 15)

In working through circumstances such as these the HoD has to balance the desire of the student to participate in their subject against the health and safety needs of all students and staff in the environment. In this particular instance safety concerns for the larger group were deemed to outweigh the academic concerns of one individual: *"That was really...a significant safety incident that the boy got biffed out eventually from metalwork. If they...own up, apologise or whatever, that can be taken a little bit further. But when they don't seem to understand or don't care...that's unacceptable, we can't have kids like that in the workshop."* (interview 15)

Where student safety was a concern problems were resolved expediently, with middle managers believing strongly in taking whatever actions were necessary to ensure student safety.

Truancy and Attendance Concerns

A dean narrated an example of their work with a student who had been repeatedly truant. The dean's quandary was between following school procedures, with disciplinary consequences for the student, and keeping the student engaged at school while still addressing the truancy issue. After discussing the issue with a senior manager a compromise decision was reached addressing these concerns: *"...he would often be truant from school, so much so that he was issued a final warning by me in my role as dean, then he was truant again, but he was always honest, always admitted when he was truant. I actually took him to [senior management]...he discussed with me giving him a chance, and not choosing to ignore it but holding onto that in case there were further incidents of truancy, in which case then we would have to deal with it. And I like the fact that someone was able to say 'OK we'll give him a chance to try and fix it'"* (interview 1)

This resolution enabled the dean to work with the student regarding their truancy. In approaching a senior manager for assistance the dean was attempting to develop a resolution that satisfied their belief in the importance of penalising the truancy while simultaneously working in the best interests of the student's academic progress.

Teacher Accountability

Problems related to teacher accountability proved difficult to resolve. A HoD described concern over the lack of accountability for a teacher responsible for providing support to individual students with specific learning needs. The teacher had a blasé approach to fulfilling their time commitments, but when challenged always explained how they were going to 'make up' the sessions that had been missed: *"...if you have to trust somebody to do something when they should do it, it's very hard to prove that they haven't done it except when you're told by someone... if you say something, oh but I was going to catch it up next week..."* (interview 11)

The HoD attempted to introduce accountability processes but had been unable to construct a robust system: *"...the biggest issues...are with staff not doing what they're expected to do. And how you fix it...there's no system in place if people don't take professional responsibility for what they should do...appraisal covers a little bit of it but, especially in learning support you have to trust people to do in a period what they are meant to be doing...that's a problem I still actually haven't resolved..."* (interview 11)

The HoD was motivated by their belief the teacher, as a professional, is to be accountable for undertaking their assigned duties, and that the extra help being provided to students was essential for their academic development.

Time

A HoD responsible for implementing the numeracy project in their school described the effort required to overcome teacher apathy. Significant progress was made while the project received direct resourcing. However, once this was removed time pressure increased and their ability to monitor implementation and provide regular feedback to colleagues diminished: *"...the first two years [were] quite busy in terms of having PD every Monday after school for a couple of hours with teachers...delivering how they should deliver the course, and then meeting with them more or less on a voluntary basis once a week. We made ourselves available after school so...if they had any problems with resources or, needed any help we were there for them... one of the pushes was supposed to be supporting them in the classroom and even team teaching, like planning a lesson together, going in and delivering it and a lot of those things didn't happen as well as they could have...finding time with the teacher, and us as facilitators...that was the hardest thing to find time for both parties...common time...especially after a full day's teaching...they probably don't want to sit down for an hour and a half and plan a lesson for the next day."* (interview 10)

Time pressure was a common refrain in narratives from HoDs, mirroring the findings of Stephenson (2010), Feist (2007) and O'Neill (2001).

School Rules, Procedures and Hierarchies

A number of middle managers indicated school rules, procedures and expectations of their role as drivers of resolution strategies. A dean described the influences on their responses to a truancy issue: *“School processes but also my own personal belief that I have a responsibility to treat everyone in a fair and respectful manner, and I couldn’t choose to ignore one student’s truancy but choose to act on another student’s truancy.”* (interview 1)

There is a deontological element in such decisions, albeit without moral consideration, through the belief that decisions have to be widely applicable in similar circumstances. Middle managers appeared happy to be guided by these requirements, presumably working beneath the premise that the rules are ‘right’.

Legal Considerations

Legal considerations influenced situations involving truancy and the use of illegal substances. Deans responding to attendance concerns were able to use the law as a tool to encourage parental engagement with the issue. This was particularly important when parents were condoning absences through providing excuses when their child was not in fact sick: *“...it was because she found it easier to stay at home because her mum would ring in and say that...she was sick...so her mum was condoning it as well and so when she didn’t really feel like being here or it was too hard that was the option...it’s a bit of a wider issue then, it’s just not the student not being at school because you’ve got mum condoning it as well.”* (interview 17)

The legalities of such situations, coupled with the strong belief by the deans that they were acting in the best interests of the student, were powerful tools for engaging parents.

Experience and Specialist Knowledge

Less experienced middle managers and those new to their schools were more likely to consult with colleagues, and the results of this consultation were significant influences: *“So in terms of the decision making process, it was probably*

consulting with somebody who had a hell of a lot more experience than me...getting their sort of opinion on how they would handle things and then trying to adapt that to my own sort of style.” (interview 5)

Conversely, more experienced teachers were less likely to seek the advice of colleagues, a validation of Weeks et al.’s (1999, in Langlois, 2011) conclusion that greater experience allows for more holistic approaches, leading to better ethical judgements. Several experienced middle managers recounted examples in which they provided advice to less experienced colleagues: *“There’s a situation I’m dealing with at the moment where a...staff members come to me...It’s in the very early stages but she thinks she’s already having some success after a brief conversation I’ve had with her.” (interview 30)*

The exception to this was situations where specialised knowledge was identified as being of value with many middle managers quick to utilise support when it was available: *“...we are currently working with the Ministry of Education, we have involved CYFS in the process as well and we have involved school RTLB and Guidance Counsellor and school management. We’ve had meetings with CYFS and we recently had a meeting with the Ministry of Education where funding was put in place for a teacher aide to work with Phillip two hours a day and we are continuing to try and work with his behaviours. We have a Ministry of Education psychologist visiting the school at the moment and she’s finishing an assessment.” (interview 1)*

Utilising specialist assistance is indicative of considering the specific context of an issue when framing a resolution. In such situations middle managers acknowledge that their level of expertise may be inadequate, and personnel with specific skills or knowledge are sought to achieve the best outcome for the student.

Principal Involvement

Only three narratives made reference to the example of a principal. In the first instance the principal was described responding to a parent complaint about a decision involving her son: *“We had a parent that was very irate and how he handled that was very good and the parent came in defending her kid without actually*

listening to the facts and he listened to what she had to say, and when he explained it from a school point of view she...went off her handle a bit to say...the school should change...and then, in a very matter of fact way, he just said, we won't change, these are our school rules...your son has made a choice, now you need to make a choice if you like our school rules or not, and, without him getting irate...with her, he just was very calm and just said to her, no." (interview 8)

Another example concerned a theft that occurred when a cultural performing group, comprising members from several schools, were rehearsing. As there were students from a variety of schools involved, and as each of these schools had different processes and expectations relating to such issues, the HoD in charge of the group made a judgement based on what they believed their principal would have done. When this decision was questioned they turned to their principal for support: *"...while they always knew...I was speaking on behalf of [the school]...it wasn't until I actually took the official word back and said this is [the principal's advice, he's] prepared to come and speak to the Exec...from out of that...the final decision after a long period of time was the original decision that I put forward..."* (interview 23)

Another narrative described a principal putting aside personal differences with a teacher who resigned after some very public differences of opinion between the two. The teacher was subsequently diagnosed with a terminal illness and the principal made personal contact with them, extending an invitation into the school. While this was not a dilemma, the HoD narrated the story as to them it was a powerful example of moral leadership on the part of the principal: *"Another one...is about Brian because I have admired him hugely in what he's done here...David is not well and, and there'd been a significant falling out between those two gentlemen and David...was very suddenly diagnosed and...things weren't good...I was with David having a coffee about two weeks ago...and he said I'm coming to school tomorrow, I'm coming in at morning tea...Brian invited me to come, told me to come in and said people want to talk to you. And I thought that was absolutely fantastic because I know that there is some bad blood there and I thought, yeah, David has done an awful lot for this school and we've all had our disagreements with him, but*

I thought that was a really great thing, and it meant a huge amount to David.”
(interview 16)

These narratives relate to problematic situations as opposed to difficult dilemmas and were resolved with little difficulty. The example set by the principal though was powerful enough for it to remain embedded in the memories of the narrators. The first example above took place more than ten years ago and was easily resolved by the principal. That it was recalled many years later by a very experienced teacher who has occupied a number of pastoral and academic middle management roles gives credence to theories espousing the importance of the example of the principal.

Summary

The range of themes emerging from the narrative data was surprisingly narrow and indicated a high degree of consistency in the challenges faced by secondary school middle managers across roles (academic and pastoral) and across settings. The majority of dilemmas stemmed from relational issues, unsurprising given the nature of schools, in which relationships are essential for teaching and learning (Claxton, 2002; Hattie, 2009; Hodgkinson, Biesta, & James, 2008; Wylie, Hodgen, Hipkins, & Vaughan, 2008). While many of the narratives recalling relational concerns were problems rather than difficult dilemmas, the frequency with which they were recalled and the stress resolving such problems placed on middle managers indicated the difficulties they posed. Consistently mentioned in the narratives was the importance of communication and how this could prevent relational difficulties from developing if it was appropriate and timely.

The NCEA standards alignment process has placed considerable time demands upon HoDs. Their inability to create courses of study to best meet the needs of their students was a source of many dilemmas, indicating the committed manner with which HoDs approach their role and the importance they place on doing their best for students. It seems unlikely time pressure will alleviate for HoDs once the standards alignment process is complete. They appear to be the middle managers most affected by changes in educational and

assessment policy, a finding congruent with O'Neill (2001, pp.118-9), who concluded HoDs experienced significant workload increases between 1991 and 1995, disproportionate to those in other positions in New Zealand secondary schools.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Overview of Chapter

This chapter summarises the main findings and examines the extent to which the findings support, or contradict, the existing knowledge base related to difficult dilemma resolution in educational contexts.

Dilemmas stemming from relational problems, particularly relationships between students and teachers and relationships between teachers, accounted for nearly one third of the narrative topics. This reinforced the nature of teaching as situated in a complex social milieu in which relationships are both vital, and prone to challenges. Curriculum issues proved the most frequent concern for academic middle managers, followed by teacher accountability concerns. Student safety issues were the other significant category in terms of the number of pertinent narratives, although these constituted problems as opposed to dilemmas.

In terms of factors influencing resolution, consideration of students' best interests was the most common theme. Whether this involved resolving relational problems, personal or academic concerns, working in students' best interests was key in resolving nearly half of all problems and dilemmas. Where the narrated dilemmas related to teachers, working in their best interests, either to preserve their dignity or develop personal and professional capacity, was the theme most frequently cited. This was followed by teacher accountability, indicating discrimination between situations evaluated as requiring sensitivity or consideration of personal factors, as opposed to resolutions driven by accountability considerations.

Findings that Support Existing Knowledge

Based on the responses elicited in the interviews there was no evidence that the participants had a formal or explicit grounding in moral theory, perhaps reflecting Starratt's (2004) assertion that many educators lack the vocabulary to name moral issues, and therefore frame them appropriately for resolution. This may have been related to the overwhelming proportion of difficult problems narrated. Those recounting problems, regardless of the degree of difficulty,

tended to summarise their actions succinctly and resolutions were driven by adherence to rules and procedures, or a desire to achieve a fair outcome.

Undoubtedly care was intrinsic to the resolution of many dilemmas, especially those involving students, although the 'depth' of care proposed by Noddings (1984, in Campbell, 1992) and Gilligan (1982, in Campbell, 1992) was absent. Given the multitude of demands upon middle managers' time, and that they often faced several problems or dilemmas at once, more expedient and practical approaches were employed. In these, care for the individual student, and a strong desire to act in what they believed to be the students' best interests, were highly influential factors on decision making.

While few participants could succinctly identify the steps in the decision making process in their resolution of problems, supporting the assertion that many resolutions are enacted with little reflective thought, where complex dilemmas were narrated there was evidence of reflective consideration. Dilemmas required more time to resolve than problems, a consequence of the requirement to fully comprehend the complexity and ambiguity of the situation, and to evaluate the consequences of alternative resolution strategies. This consideration of the consequences of actions in determining an appropriate resolution is an example of the application of a teleological or consequentialist moral framework to the decision making process (Clark, 2005; Owings & Kaplan, 2012; Samier, 2003).

The blurring of the distinction between the pastoral and academic spheres in schools is well-illustrated (Power, 1996). Nearly a quarter of participants simultaneously held both pastoral and academic middle management positions. The interwoven nature of the pastoral and academic spheres was evident with many narratives including components of both.

Managing people was identified by Stephenson (2010) and Feist (2007) as the most significant challenge for HoDs. This was borne out as approximately one third of the narratives described a relational problem or dilemma. Time pressure was identified by Stephenson (2010), Feist (2007) and O'Neill (2001) as an issue for middle managers. This was especially evident in narratives relating to the NCEA standard alignment process, although it was identified as a

dilemma or problem in itself in only four instances. Teacher accountability issues were the main theme in ten narratives and were complex issues for middle managers to resolve. This echoes the findings of Cardno (2007), although the role of performance appraisal systems in these issues is unclear.

What constitutes the best interests of a child is an area of intense debate (Stefkovich, 2006, in Eyal, et al., 2009;Stefkovich and Begley, 2007, in Eyal et al., 2009) and was identified by Tirri and Husu (2002) as a source of dilemmas in an early childhood environment. The belief that it was in students' best interests to be in class emerged as a strong influencing factor in this study. This assumption appears to be widespread across schools and was a strong driver of resolution strategies. Problems and dilemmas arose from trying to remove barriers to student attendance and participation in class.

Tension between middle managers and school culture was evident in several narratives relating to pastoral concerns where the middle managers believed their primary duty was to support their colleagues. This created tension between proposing a resolution in which the parties concerned were treated fairly in accordance with their involvement in creating the dilemma, and the expectation that fault would somehow be apportioned to the student, even if this was unwarranted. Comparison can be made with Campbell's (1992) conclusion that it is wrong to assume the morals and values of individuals and those of the institutions they work in will align.

It is proposed that better ethical judgements are associated with greater experience (Langlois, 2011) as people move through stages in their moral decision making ability (Wilson, 2012) and learn from their experience (Maxcy, 2002). This assertion was supported as more experienced middle managers were better able to explain their resolution strategies and articulate the factors considered in their decision making process. More experienced middle managers were more likely to narrate examples of ethical dilemmas as opposed to difficult problems, perhaps indicative of a relationship between experience and appointment to more demanding middle management roles. Middle managers leading large departments or faculty areas tended to be more experienced and narrated more complex dilemmas. They were more likely to

narrate examples in which they were required to resolve problems or dilemmas created by less experienced department members.

Findings that Challenge Existing Knowledge

Models of moral decision making emphasise fully understanding the context (Aloni, 2002; Bottery, 1990; Gold, 1998), identifying the values in competition (Maxcy, 2002; Rachels & Rachels, 2010), considering the full range of possible resolution strategies (Noddings, 2012), and then selecting the most appropriate resolution (Clark, 2005). Where difficult problems were narrated such an approach was seldom employed, with resolutions often being compromises to appease the parties involved, indicating important values were not involved. In part this appeared to be driven by the time constraints upon middle managers; given the diverse and multifaceted nature of their positions they often cannot devote the time necessary to enact such strategies.

Models of moral decision making stress considering dilemmas from a values neutral position (Rachels & Rachels, 2010), to assist in understanding the perspectives of all involved. Institutions in which middle managers feel pressured to support teachers when resolving problems with students place them in a situation from which it can be difficult for a morally sound resolution to be achieved. Resolutions in these circumstances tended to be driven by compromise with the student being publicly admonished, while any reproach for the teacher was completed in private. In this way inappropriate behaviour was condoned, certainly not an appropriate response from a moral perspective.

A number of problems were resolved by adhering rigidly to school rules and expectations. Such an approach does not align with the importance of obtaining all relevant information (Barrow, 2006) before proposing a resolution. Ethical actions are a consequence of conscious autonomous decision making, not the unreflective enactment of prescribed routines (Starratt, 2012), calling into question the appropriateness of rule-bound responses. Such reliance on rules and processes to resolve difficult problems is indicative of unreflective action.

The NZTC Code of Ethics was not recounted in any narrative as a consideration in managing any of the problems or dilemmas narrated. This raises concerns as to whether or not the Code of Ethics is effectively promoted to teachers, or whether it is overlooked due to the lack of concrete guidance provided (O'Neill & Bourke, 2010).

Only three narratives recalled a specific instance in which the example set by the principal was an influence. These narratives related to problems rather than difficult dilemmas: two were resolved in a straightforward manner; while the third described how the principal repaired a strained relationship rather than how an actual problem was resolved. Further narratives detailed relational problems between middle managers and senior managers. However, their example did not influence decision making. This contradicts the expectation created through the recognition of principals as the moral role models and tone setters for the school (Coleman, 2011; Southworth, 2011; Strike, 2007) and their responsibility for the ethical behaviour of others (Owings & Kaplan, 2012).

Principal influence may be exerted indirectly. School rules, procedures and guidelines were drivers of how problems were resolved in a number of narratives. Presumably the principal will have played a significant role in establishing and reviewing such processes, and in doing so imparted their beliefs about how such issues are best managed or resolved.

Summary

Many of the findings supported existing knowledge regarding the resolution of difficult dilemmas. Educators' lack of moral vocabulary, and attendant ability to appropriately frame difficult dilemmas for resolution, was reinforced. Aligned with this was the lack of reflection with which many problems are resolved by middle managers. More reflection was evident in resolving difficult dilemmas as opposed to difficult problems.

Managing people, especially when there is disagreement or conflict, proved to be the most challenging situations confronting middle managers. For HoDs in particular, time pressure was also evident. These findings mirror closely the conclusions of previous studies examining the work of academic middle

managers. While these themes were evident in the narratives, threads of stories detailing pastoral and academic concerns were often closely related, and many of the problems and dilemmas shared by pastoral and academic middle managers were very similar. This finding echoes Power's (1996) description of the blurring of the distinction between the academic and pastoral elements in schools.

Decision making in the best interests of the child was a strong influencing factor, although what constituted a child's best interests was often assumed as opposed to specifically explored and identified. This focus aligns with the stress on the importance of care in education, but does not engender the depth of trust espoused in an ethic of care (Noddings, 2012).

Middle managers with greater experience were the most likely to resolve difficult problems and dilemmas expediently and successfully, while less experienced middle managers were more likely to describe problems with attempted resolutions. This pattern supports the theory that moral decision making ability develops with age and experience (Langlois, 2011). More practiced middle managers were able to utilise previous experience to guide their decision making, a facility their less experienced colleagues lacked. To counter this, less experienced middle managers often relied on advice from their more senior colleagues.

Utilitarian principles were a strong driver of much decision making. Academic middle managers saw a primary responsibility of their role as providing consistent conditions for teaching and learning so all students had equal opportunities, a concern especially applicable in formal assessment situations. The dilemma for them was in balancing this desire against the requirement to respect teacher autonomy in terms of differing pedagogical approaches and teachers' ability to respond to the specific needs of their students.

A small number of findings contradicted existing theories of moral decision making. In attempting to balance the interests of different stakeholders, middle managers often attempted compromise resolutions. This frequently resulted in a response that didn't resolve the problem or dilemma in a morally just way, as

in some instances behaviour that was deemed wrong was sanctioned, while actions not in themselves inappropriate were chastised.

It is important those charged with resolving difficult dilemmas adopt an impartial stance (Rachels & Rachels, 2010). Institutional expectations and middle managers' beliefs frequently meant this was not possible. A number of narratives highlighted adherence to rules and institutional expectations at the expense of considering the specific context when enacting a resolution. There was an element of deontology in the resolution of problems in a manner where actions are governed by rules. However, as this did not have a moral basis it was reflective of the requirements of individual institutions rather than a considered moral judgement.

The NZTC Code of Ethics provides a moral and ethical framework to guide the work of teachers. That this code was not an influencing factor, or indeed mentioned as a consideration, in any narrated example is at odds with the importance it is intended to hold for the teaching profession.

The greatest contradiction to educational literature was the absence of the influence of the principal over moral decision making. This influence is strongly intoned as crucial in setting the example for, and guiding the decision making of, members of a school community. Any such impact was discernible in only one of 134 narratives.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

Overview of Chapter

The final chapter draws together the various strands running through this investigation and evaluates the extent to which the findings were aligned with previous research and literature in the field of resolving difficult dilemmas. The reliability of the research and the extent to which it achieved its aim of identifying the decision making processes secondary school middle managers employed in their management of difficult dilemmas was evaluated. It was argued that the difficulties experienced in achieving an ideal participant sample did not detract from the validity of the results. Recommendations were made as to how similar future research could be improved, primarily through utilising a different recruitment strategy.

It was concluded that teachers need to be more aware of, and involved in, dialogue regarding the morally challenging issues confronted in their schools. This would provide the opportunity to develop their individual capacity for resolving such issues. Also identified were a number of areas for further investigation that would help grow the knowledge base concerning the resolution of difficult dilemmas in educational settings. I also reflect on the research process and how it altered my assumptions as data was analysed and the thesis evolved.

Integrating Research with Existing Knowledge

This study was an exploratory investigation of the factors influencing secondary school middle managers in their resolution of the difficult dilemmas encountered in their work. A review of the pertinent literature indicated that managing and resolving difficult dilemmas is a complicated process, in practice perhaps confused more than informed by the range of theoretical and philosophical theories. Applied models of moral decision making attempt to succinctly summarise theoretical approaches and incorporate them in a practical manner. Whether one considers moral decision making from a theoretical or applied perspective, it is essential judgements take into account the specific context and understand the viewpoints of those involved. Gaining such insight takes

considerable time. This study concluded that the multitude of demands upon middle managers time coupled with school specific expectations and constraints created environments in which difficult problems and difficult dilemmas were rarely managed or resolved in a morally justifiable manner.

There was nothing in the participants' narratives that revealed an obvious grounding in moral theory or an articulable model they could apply in resolving morally challenging circumstances. Emphasis was placed on gaining as much specific detail as possible regarding any dilemma. However, often little time was taken to synthesise this information before enacting a resolution.

Review of the Study Methodology

Qualitative research was appropriate in investigating personal experience and the narrative methodology ensured the essence of that experience was captured. However, the nature of the interview questions and the data elicited, did not lend itself to the emergence of a particular theory or theories to explain how dilemmas were resolved. This resulted in a move away from grounded theory to a more inductive approach utilising thematic analysis. Evidence about the most common approaches middle managers employed in the resolution of difficult dilemmas emerged through this process.

Strengths

Gaining insight from the perspective of participants proved invaluable. Resolving difficult problems and difficult dilemmas is a highly personal endeavour and the methods employed varied between individuals and institutions. Were it not for the intimate nature of the data obtained this would not have been apparent.

Limitations

The research questions gave wide scope for participants to narrate stories important to them. This proved successful, although resulted in a large number of problems being recounted. Perhaps rewording the questions to emphasise "the most difficult problem you have had to resolve" would have encouraged a

deeper level of reflection and consequently a greater frequency and variety of dilemmas being narrated.

The most significant limitations resulted from the nature of the participant group. While the choice of the PPTA to disseminate the research information and elicit participants overcame concerns principals might act in the interests of teachers and seek to limit impositions upon their time, written communication was not effective at stimulating interest. Although more time-consuming, and potentially limiting as access to some schools may have been blocked, personal approaches requesting opportunities to speak directly with middle managers may have been more successful. When the researcher was able to speak directly with potential participants there was considerable interest, and involvement could be organised directly rather than relying on middle managers initiating contact.

A key aim was for the results to have widespread applicability. There are some concerns as to whether or not this was achieved and as to how valid the data was. These concerns are outlined below:

- a) The study involved teachers from a very small number of schools (five).
- b) The overwhelming majority of respondents (approximately three quarters) came from one school.
- c) There was a significant over-representation of male perspectives (approximately three quarters of participants were male) in the data pool.
- d) The vast majority of participants were New Zealand European, Māori comprised less than one tenth, while there were four participants in other ethnic groups. No middle managers of Pasifika ethnic origin participated in the study.

These statements suggest the participants are not reflective of the composition of teachers in New Zealand schools.

In response to a) and b) above; while the participants came from a very small number of schools, with an overrepresentation from one school in particular, their narratives did not necessarily relate to their current work place. A number

of narratives related to other schools within the region, and some to schools in other New Zealand regions.

Mitigating concern regarding the overrepresentation of male participants is impossible as this is the antithesis of the predominant situation in New Zealand secondary schools where the majority of teachers are female. Similarly the ethnically limited nature of the sample is more reflective of the teaching population of the region than it is of New Zealand.

Many participants had experience in both academic and pastoral areas, in some instances holding such positions concurrently. The variety of subject and year level responsibilities represented by the participants, the range of experience in those positions, and the assortment of other middle management roles participants occupied, give legitimacy to the data collected.

Recommendations for Practice

It is apparent middle managers require a broader moral knowledge base if they are to resolve challenging situations in an appropriate manner. While it is most appropriate this is developed within schools given the highly contextual nature of moral decision making, incorporation into teacher education programmes would contribute to building an awareness of moral principles, an appropriate starting point for moral deliberation.

Not directly associated with the scope of this project but nevertheless emerging from the interview data, is the lack of preparation given to aspiring middle managers. Several less experienced participants narrated examples of situations in which their inexperience led them to attempt resolutions in a manner they now, upon reflection, recognise as inappropriate. A formalised preparation programme encouraging discussion between current and aspiring middle managers about the morally challenging situations in their work might help to alleviate such situations.

School leaders must be aware of the limitations and obstacles their expectations and institutional norms place on achieving moral resolutions. Principals need to engage with and lead teachers in dialogue about moral decision making. Doing so will help develop comprehension of the moral issues

in education, an appropriate vocabulary with which to frame moral issues and the moral sensitivity essential in resolving dilemmas (Rest, et al., 1999).

School specific expectations weighed heavily on the resolution of relational problems between teachers and students. Evaluation of such examples indicated dilemmas were created where support of teachers was expected as the primary response from middle managers. This expectation also created a situation in which many dilemmas were not resolved in a morally justifiable manner. Altering school expectations so the facts of a situation, rather than institutional norms, become the foundation of decision making, would enable middle managers to address problems and dilemmas from a neutral position and achieve morally justifiable resolutions.

Considerations for Further Research

It was expected that a relationship between the moral decision making of the principal and that enacted by middle managers would be identified because the importance of the principal as a role model is commonly evident in educational leadership literature. Such a link however was identifiable in only one narrative. Research involving a larger sample may yield different results, reveal a greater number of dilemmas and ensure conclusions are valid and widely applicable. It is possible middle managers are not present during principals' deliberation in morally challenging circumstances, thereby removing this as an influencing factor. By coincidence participants in this study were all currently employed in large secondary schools. These institutions have a number of hierarchical layers, distancing middle managers from principals' moral decision making. A possibility may be to target schools with smaller student rolls as middle managers may not be as insulated from their principals. Senior managers could be the focus of future investigation as they are more likely to be aware of the difficult dilemmas challenging their principals.

Approaches to pastoral support varied between schools, with middle managers in institutions expecting support of teachers as the primary response to relational issues experiencing dilemmas not present for those who focused on supporting students. This distinction occurred along both school and gender lines; all deans indicating their first priority was to support students were female

and employed in the same school. As the participant sample was skewed it is unclear whether this peculiarity is more widespread. Further investigation would confirm whether such patterns are common and how applicable this aspect of the research findings are for New Zealand schools.

The deliberate choice to keep the research questions free of concepts or terminology drawn from moral philosophy so as to avoid any confusion or lack of confidence among participants was perhaps limiting in terms of the type of responses that were subsequently elicited. Further research could specifically ask participants to recount their experiences in resolving moral dilemmas. Furthermore, questions specifically asking participants to identify the factors influencing their resolution of dilemmas may elucidate these more explicitly. Direct questioning of participants as to their awareness of what constitutes a moral dilemma and their understanding of moral theory may also provide important insight and assist in allowing valid conclusions to be drawn as to educators' awareness and understanding of such issues.

The NZTC Code of Ethics was not referred to in any narrative account. Whether middle managers are aware of the Code of Ethics, whether they have the tools to apply it in their context, and the degree to which it might be practically useful in the work of middle managers are considerations for further investigation.

Adherence with school rules and discipline processes impacted upon resolution strategies. Within this is an implied assumption that school rules and processes are fair and presumably morally defensible. Whether this is believed by middle managers, and the extent to which it might be true, if the relevant rules and processes be subject to a moral examination, is unknown.

Researcher's Reflections

Rather naively the researcher presupposed that middle managers would be able to succinctly narrate examples in which they had encountered challenging situations requiring resolution and the factors they considered in their attempts at resolution. Completing the literature review, in which theoretical and practical models gave what appeared initially to be straightforward strategies, reinforced

this expectation. An assumption was also made that resolution strategies would be driven primarily by the specific context of the issue.

These preconceptions were challenged immediately data collection began with many narratives recalling difficult decisions or problems as opposed to difficult dilemmas. In some instances the researcher was aware of complex moral issues participants had grappled with yet these appeared not deemed important enough to warrant recall. Many middle managers struggled to succinctly narrate events, a point reinforced by notes from participants after checking their interview transcripts, and realising the extent to which they were interposed with repetition, pauses and nonsensical statements. Many also failed to identify their decision making process without additional questioning. That so many of the recounted problems and dilemmas were reportedly resolved using methods largely ignorant of the specific context was also at odds with preconceptions.

These challenges to the researcher's assumptions have contributed to an awareness of the inadequacies of much school decision making from a moral perspective. The researcher has reflected on their decision making in similar circumstances leading to an awareness of the importance of approaching complex situations from an open-minded perspective, taking the time to fully evaluate the situation and ensuring resolutions are morally justifiable.

Having the opportunity to listen to an incredibly wide range of stories detailing the difficulties middle managers experience in their positions was itself some of the best professional learning the researcher has experienced. This permitted insight into the different approaches and varying decision making processes, determined by school expectations, the context of the particular issue and the individual characteristics of the middle managers who were responding to the problem or dilemma. This exposure provided a wealth of knowledge as to how the researcher might resolve similar problems and dilemmas in their practice, aware of what has proved effective and appropriate in others practice.

Summary

Resolving difficult problems and difficult dilemmas is intrinsic to secondary school middle management. The manner in which such situations are resolved

was affected by a number of factors specific to the particular situation or context. Institutional expectations, the personal beliefs of middle managers and their understanding of what was in the best interests of individual students or groups of students were all key considerations. Unfortunately it appears the complex and demanding nature of middle management positions makes measured approaches to resolution a rarity.

Much has been written regarding the importance of the principal's moral leadership and the example this sets for teachers to follow. However, this was recognisable in only one narrative, strongly contradicting this assertion. Recommendations were made suggesting that making teachers aware of the morally challenging issues in their schools, and engaging in dialogue to identify appropriate resolutions, could enhance their individual ability to resolve difficult dilemmas and also allow the example of the principal to be of influence.

Concerns regarding the validity of the data and conclusions of this study were identified and an argument made that the conclusions are valid. Whether there is widespread applicability was less certain. The exploratory nature of this study dictated further questions would emerge. Those questions were identified as possible topics for further investigation.

The researcher reflected on how their expectations were altered during the completion of this thesis. Narrative analysis encouraged reflection on their management of difficult problems and difficult dilemmas, reinforcing the importance of ensuring resolutions are morally justifiable and relate specifically to the facts of the particular issue.

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Appendix one: Information Sheet

Managing Dilemmas: What Influences Secondary School Middle Managers?

INFORMATION SHEET

Invitation to Participate

My name is Gerard Atkin and I am a student enrolled in the Masters of Educational Administration and Leadership degree at Massey University. I invite you to take part in a research project focusing on how middle managers in New Zealand secondary schools resolve difficult dilemmas.

Reasons for the Research

While the importance of moral or ethical leadership is strongly intoned in leadership professional development and literature, there has been very little research conducted in terms of middle management decision making. I am seeking to uncover factors influencing the decision making process. Please note: this research is NOT an evaluation of decisions made in resolving difficult dilemmas.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Middle managers from a wide range of secondary schools have been invited to participate. Information regarding the project has been communicated with the [REDACTED] branch of the PPTA who were invited to pass this onto all teachers in middle management positions, be they academic or pastorally focused roles.

Project Procedures

Participants are invited to recount occasions in which they, or their colleagues, have been involved in resolving difficult dilemmas. Each participant will be invited to share up to three accounts, with each interview taking between 20 and 30 minutes to complete. These stories will be audio recorded for later transcribing. Interviews can be conducted either in person at your place of work or other suitable location, or via telephone.

The interviews will involve responses to three key questions:

- (1) Tell me about an occasion in which you have had to resolve a difficult dilemma.
- (2) Tell me about an occasion in which someone else in a middle management position has resolved a difficult dilemma.
- (3) Tell me about an occasion in which someone you hold in high regard has resolved a difficult dilemma.

It is not essential that you are able to recount a story in answer to each of these questions. They are intended to stimulate the process of story-telling. The key component of this research is the accumulation of a number of accounts from a range of participants. You may wish to share fewer than three stories, or you may relate more than one story in answer to any of the questions above.

Data Management

The accounts of how difficult dilemmas have been resolved will be analysed to identify common themes and influences on the decision making process. These themes will then form the basis of the written report.

All possible steps will be taken to ensure information provided in the interviews remains confidential.

- Only the researcher/interviewer and transcriber, who will be required to complete a confidentiality agreement, will have access to the information.
- With your permission recordings of the interview will be retained until the conclusion of the project and then destroyed.
- All information provided during the interviews will be stored securely so there can be no unauthorised access.
- Participants in the research will not be identified by name. All identifying material will be removed from the transcripts and will not appear in the completed report.
- Likewise, no school will be directly identified, referred to only by general details such as decile rating, roll range, rural or urban location.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- *decline to answer any particular question;*
- *withdraw from the study within four weeks of the interview taking place;*
- *ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;*
- *provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;*
- *be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;*
- *ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview.*
- *you will be provided with a transcript of the interview and have the right to request alteration should this be necessary.*

Please note: ***Illegal or serious unprofessional behaviour disclosed during the interview may be discussed with my supervisor to determine whether referral to the relevant school principal is necessary.***

Project Contacts

Should you have any questions regarding this research project please do not hesitate to contact me or my research supervisors, John O'Neill and Karen Anderson.

Thank you for your consideration of the invitation to contribute to this study. Should you wish to participate please contact me either by email or telephone so that a suitable interview time can be arranged.

Yours sincerely,

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"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Doctor Nathan Matthews, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Southern B), telephone 06 350 5799, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz".