

Sabbatical Report 2017.

Topic:

“To investigate the professional development (leadership) and support principals find to be effective in assisting them to lead successful schools.”

By:

Craig McKernan, Principal of St Francis Xavier Catholic School, Whangarei.

Acknowledgements:

I am grateful to the St Francis Xavier Catholic School Board of Trustees, the Ministry of Education and NZEI for this opportunity.

I especially want to thank Mrs Glenys Jakicevich (Deputy Principal and Acting Principal in my absence), the leadership, teaching and support teams at St Francis for their effort while I was away from the school.

Special thanks to my principal colleagues from all over New Zealand who willingly gave me their time and shared their experiences with me.

Purpose:

The purpose of this sabbatical was to research and identify professional development and support that principals have either accessed, or would like to access, to enable them to become effective leaders.

In order to undertake this research and gain a perspective from several viewpoints, it was important to hear the stories of principals in urban, rural, small and large schools, throughout New Zealand.

Executive Summary:

For some time now I have felt that principals are not receiving or accessing the leadership development that is necessary to cope with the demands of being a school principal. The job of a principal is complex and we are all well aware of the increasing accountability, improving student achievement and adapting to

change. Added to this are the parental aspirations, complex student behaviours, societal expectations, funding and a myriad of other factors.

My sabbatical was designed to research whether or not the provision of professional development (PD) and support had reduced over time or was this merely an assumption that I held. Consideration was given to gaining an insight from across differing school communities, sizes and locations because I believed that these factors would impact on the accessibility and effectiveness of any PD.

It comes as no surprise to hear that small rural schools find the cost of principal professional development prohibitive. Their budgets are considerably smaller and the challenges faced by these schools in accessing face to face professional development is extremely limited. In many cases finding a reliever to release the principal for the day is a challenge in itself. An Education Review Office Report – “Managing Professional Learning and Development in Primary Schools” (2009) states that:

Principals in most other schools in this evaluation also identified the availability of relievers as a challenge, particularly if the whole school was involved in professional learning and development and there was insufficient coverage. To counter this, most principals, senior managers and lead teachers tended to organise their school-wide programmes during teachers’ non-contact time. (p.29)

By contrast, principals of larger schools are often able to access leadership training and better able to support their leadership teams with development courses, especially if the courses are offered in the cities and in close proximity to the school. However, they too find the costs prohibitive and are also faced with the dilemma of choosing programmes, conferences or courses that are going to meet their needs and still remain within budget.

An overwhelming number of principals commented that they receive support and leadership professional development from their local principal associations

and colleagues. A significant number have a network of like-minded colleagues who they meet with and contact in times of need, for professional discussion and on a social basis.

Several experienced principals agreed and some lamented that, in times past, there were more Ministry funded initiatives such as the Principals' Development Leadership Centre (PDPC), the Experienced Principals' Programme and support from a dedicated principal adviser.

Like anything, professional development and support is available if you are keen and persistent. If you have a school Board of Trustees who are prepared to invest in the principal's and school's development, then opportunities are much improved.

Rationale and Background Information:

In 1988, before Tomorrow's Schools, I was appointed to my first principal's position. It was a small, sole charge rural school and, as was the norm at the time, a stepping-stone to a career as a principal in a larger school. I was fortunate to have the support of a rural adviser and a strong principal's association. Apart from dealing with parents and a school committee there wasn't a great need for leadership development because the only person I could lead was myself!

As time progressed the need for professional development for principals became more apparent because Tomorrow's Schools (1989) added a significant amount more work and accountability for work previously undertaken by the Department of Education. A school Board of Trustees appointed principals and these principals had an executive function, a reporting function and an instructional function. At the time, concern was expressed that the management aspect of a principal's workload was overtaking the leadership role. This was further supported when the following statement was stated in the Kiwi Leadership for Principals (2008)

While devolution has allowed principals to develop systems in response to the needs of their students, it has also increased their administrative workload. Some research (e.g. Hodgen & Wylie, 2005) suggests that New Zealand principals spend almost twice as much time on administration as do their international counterparts. The multiple demands of leadership and administration can be a source of tension for the principal when deciding how to prioritise time and attention. (p.13)

It was acknowledged that the leadership role of a principal was important because principals found themselves accountable to the community and the government for the results their children received. In 1998 The Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the professional associations, identified a set of six interim Professional Standards for principals to help clarify the role of the principal. One of these six dimensions included “Professional leadership”

There are currently four Areas of Practice in the Professional Standards for Principals. They are Culture, Pedagogy, Systems, Partnerships and Networks. The Culture dimension concerns the “professional leadership that focuses the school culture on enhancing learning and teaching.” One of the requirements is that principals “Demonstrate leadership through participating in professional learning.”

In the 2001 budget the Government announced a series of initiatives to support the professional development of principals with the goal to improve student achievement. These initiatives included:

- an induction programme for first-time principals to develop their knowledge, skills and capabilities.
- an electronic network for principals, named LeadSpace, to support principals in their daily work.
- professional development centres for existing principals (PDPC) who have five or more years experience. This was an opportunity for principals to assess their leadership style and effectiveness. This was a five day programme.

- The staged development of Principal Professional Learning Communities. This involved the establishment of small networks of principals, discussing, reflecting and engaging in professional readings.

As time has moved on we have seen various programmes such as the Learning and Change Networks (LCNs) come and go. The PDPC contract finished in 2011, at the same time that the local Education Advisory Services were also closed in favour of the Ministry of Education appointing Senior Leaders to assist schools and principals.

The National Aspiring Principals Programme (2011) was also very beneficial. However, because it was optional and candidates were able to apply to be on the programme it possibly lacked some credibility.

First time principals felt that the FTP programme was very helpful but questioned the timing. In their opinion there was a heavy emphasis on leadership and it may have been better to have a module on this post FTTP. This would have enabled them time to become more familiar with the management aspects of the job and “get their head above water.” Contrary to this is a statement by Derek Wenworth – Networked leadership “This programme has also been criticized recently for its emphasis on management concerns, rather than the aspirations of leadership.” (2015).

In 2017 the First Time Principals Programme that was delivered by the University of Auckland Centre of Educational Leadership (UACEL) was terminated and a new provider, Evaluation Associates, was contracted to deliver the support. There are significant changes to the original model with the new approach being targeted to individual need as opposed to a programme approach.

In my opinion there is discussion to be had around the subject of newly appointed principals being ready to lead. Having been a FTTP mentor it is apparent to me that newly appointed principals come to the job with a range of

skills and experiences. A tailored induction programme for each individual helps to navigate the leadership and management roles. This raises the question whether all aspiring principals should have an initial qualification, or training, before being appointed to a principal position. Having personally completed a Masters in Education Leadership (MEdL) five years ago, I feel that my ability to lead our school has been enhanced.

In 2008 an excellent report named "Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) on Professional Learning and Development" (2008) identified that there was a clear link between student achievement and professional development. This report has been the foundation for other initiatives and successive reports such as the "Report of the Professional Learning and Development Advisory Group". (2014)

Over the past few years there has been a significant change in the way that professional development has been delivered to schools. Apart from a great deal of emphasis on improving achievement the Report of the Professional Learning and Development Advisory Group provided advice on the delivery and design of professional development in the compulsory school sector. The report identifies the key ingredients for successful professional development and requires teachers and leaders to develop strong lines of inquiry and reflection.

Methodology:

The leader's role in a school is paramount to success and therefore we need to ask, "Do leaders, in our current education environment, have the skills and the training to effectively identify the professional development necessary to make the shifts in achievement that we desire?" If not, then what professional development is available to help principals succeed and what barriers prevent them accessing this resource?

To answer these questions and to help me decide whether this was a study worth pursuing, I approached Ms Donna Kerkmeester, Resource Manager and Mr Colin Donald, General Manager from UACEL (University of Auckland Centre for Educational Leadership) and sought their opinions.

In Colin's opinion, principals preferred way of learning was to meet face to face. He believed that this method of delivery was far more beneficial and gave principals the opportunity to get away from a computer screen. With this in mind the UACEL has a diverse range of professional development programmes to support principals and grow their leadership capability. The Leadership Centre has been operating since 2002 and like anything, has undergone some changes. Gone are the days of the one or two day courses because nowadays it is widely recognized that in order to get the change, courses need to be sustained and offer a wide range of material.

According to Donna, what has been evident is the increasing number of middle managers involved in the courses. This often involves two or three staff from one school. Often, but not necessarily always, the middle managers are supported by their principals.

As mentioned in the PLD Advisory Group Report, 2014. One of the key features to a new approach to PD is the "Equity of access for all schools and kura regardless of size, type or location." This would be a welcome development for many of the school principals that I spoke to. There is a real fear that if you are appointed to a principal position in rural New Zealand then the ability to access courses and PD is significantly reduced. This in turn makes it difficult to return to and apply for positions in urban areas when your skill growth and development has been static or minimal. The Education Review Office Report (2009) states that:

Although being rural was not in itself an issue, being rural and small presented challenges for a significant number of these schools (57 percent). Attendance by a teacher at any professional development and learning initiative cost money and time. Travel, overnight accommodation and the employment of a relieving teacher often had a negative impact on the school's limited financial resources. Principals in these schools saw internal professional learning and development with an external

facilitator as a way to overcome this, but such PLD could be constrained by the availability of an external facilitator. (p.28)

Colin Donald acknowledged that the costs of the courses is sometimes prohibitive, especially for schools with rolls less than 500 students and those in outlying areas. The cost of the Growing Great Leaders course is \$1450 + gst for one full day course and four half days. Added to this is the cost of travel, reliever and accommodation. (A quick and approximate calculation for the school in which I am principal, two hours from Auckland, amounts to a total cost of \$5,200 per participant. At least twice as expensive compared to a school in Auckland).

Like other PD providers, Auckland and Waikato Universities provide some very good programmes. I agree with Colin's statement about face to face learning. Although digital technology enables you to access these courses there is still something special about meeting and discussing your leadership issues, successes or development, face to face (kanohi ki te kanohi). Sometimes the most valuable learning is done over a cup of coffee.

During my tour of New Zealand I visited fifteen schools and interviewed their principals. I also informally discussed my survey with a further five principals. The principals were from state and state integrated primary schools. Most of the discussion focused on the following questions.

Leadership:

What professional development have you received that has helped you to be an effective principal?

International, national and local Conferences

University Courses such as Dip Ed Admin, MEdL and other leadership courses.

Harvard Courses (1 principal)

LCN (MoE Learning Change Network)

Principals' Associations (majority of principals mentioned this)

First time Principals' Programme

Consultants

Principals' Development Planning Centre (PDPC)

Principal cluster groups

Have you ever had a leadership coach or mentor?

One principal was mentored for a year by the immediate past principal.

One had a Board member mentor him for a year in conjunction with a local University.

Ten mentioned that they had never had a mentor.

Two had a consultant or research colleague

Two mentioned that their appraiser was also their mentor.

Can you recall the last time you received some leadership PD? What was it?

Five mentioned that their local principals' association provided some PD.

Four said they hadn't had any

local University Leadership centre.

One through edLead

One mentioned NZSTA

Education Council

Catholic Schools Office

Professional Learning Groups or LCN.

Have you received any leadership PD from the MoE? If so, what was it?

The majority (10) felt that they hadn't received any leadership PD from the MoE.

However, in general principals felt that the senior advisers were helpful.

Christchurch MoE ran principal days and principals from Christchurch spoke favourably of the work that their local office does.

The Ministry of Education Statement of Intent 2014-2018, Priority 1, outlines how the Ministry of Education will raise teaching quality and leadership. It states that: "High performing education systems recruit high quality education professionals, invest in their development and ensure they are able to meet the needs of every child and student"

On a scale of 1-10. One being poorly, and 10 being extremely well. How well do you believe this statement of intent is being achieved?

One principal scored it as 8 and twelve mentioned scores between 0 and 3.

Do you actively look for opportunities to improve your leadership skills?

All principals responded saying "yes"

Other comments were:

I'm bombarded with emails but PD is always too costly.

I study conference programmes and attend if I see value in them (several responses)

I have better intentions than I have practices.

My school cannot afford to send me anywhere. Course fees, reliever costs (if a reliever is available) and travel.

When time is available. I need three things to survive 1. A good DP 2. A balanced family life 3. A good TAB account

I look out for professional reading (this was a common response)

1 principal felt very strongly that the legislative changes, Vulnerable Children's Act, Health and Safety Act have created so much extra work on what is already a busy job, that he doesn't have time for any additional courses. He would like to work more on personal inquiries.

Has your school paid for leadership PD for you?

The majority of principals have a separate PD budget for their development. Two have elected not to use it this year as there are more pressing needs.

What leadership PD would assist you in your role as principal?

Discussion groups

Someone to bounce ideas off

Access to furthering education

A mentor

Two day courses focussing on leadership, relationships, growing leadership in others, managing conflict, difficult conversations, finance, change, vision setting

Middle management leadership courses

Coaching

Support:

How well do you feel you are supported as a principal?

I'm not. I do however have caring colleagues. I need a support person like a rural adviser, just someone to bounce ideas off.

I'm supported by my networks

I feel supported by the Catholic Schools Office

Adequately by my colleagues rather than the MoE.

I have an excellent BoT

The principals' association is great (this was a common response)

Fairly poorly.

Do you believe that Communities of Learning will improve the support offered to principals?

Long term it might

Unsure (6)

No (2)

Yes (5)

What forms of support do you believe would be beneficial in your role as principal?

Advisory service (3)

Secondments to Education Review Office

Supervision

Regular conversations with someone knowledgeable (4)

Survey Conclusions:

Apart from the surveyed questions our conversations invariably raised other matters and issues for principals. What was explicitly clear was the fact that principals relied on their colleagues and local principal associations for their support.

Further evidence of this is supported in the Kiwi Leadership for Principals (2008) “Principals can benefit from personal reflection, sharing ideas and initiatives with their peers and working with others to clarify situations and solve problems.” (p.13).

The majority of principals felt that there was an opportunity to access professional development, whether it be through conferences, online, professional learning groups, courses or programmes but the cost involved in attending these was a factor.

It was interesting to hear from principals in various regions talking about the support that they receive from the Ministry of Education. This support tended to vary considerably. Similarly, the support of the various Catholic Schools Offices also varied.

A significant number of principals felt that their ability to access, and the availability of, affordable professional development has reduced over recent years. The issue of accessing leadership PD in rural as opposed to urban and small schools as opposed to larger schools is something that needs to be addressed. For some schools the ability to source good relievers and time is just as much of an issue as the costs involved. In large schools a challenge is finding suitable programmes for middle management teams.

The Future:

The Education Council has called for papers on the future of education. The five papers (mentioned below) informed the Leadership for Communities of Learning and they give us an insight into the type of leadership that is being suggested for the future:

Community of Schools’ (CoSs) leadership –Throwing money and hoping for success? By Linda Bendikson.

Think-piece on leadership education in New Zealand By Dr. Jan Robertson.

Networked Leadership By Derek Wenmoth. Educational Leadership for Tomorrow By Mason Durie.

Leading in collaborative, complex education systems By Jane Gilbert.

The authors of these articles each have a personal view on the desired leadership qualities and an opinion on the style of leadership that will make a difference to improving learning outcomes for students in the future. The challenge will be “How will the Education Council reach out to leaders and engage them with the professional development, change leadership styles and challenge them to become leaders of learning within networks?” Clearly the emphasis will be on collaboration, working alongside teachers, coaching, mentoring and supporting them while always looking for opportunities for the future. As stated in the “PLD Advisory Group Report, ” (2014) we need leaders who are “capable and confident to design, lead and collaborate on PLD in their schools and kura and community of schools and kura in ways that develop adaptive expertise.” (p.5)

In an announcement on July 1 2017, Education Minister Nikki Kaye revealed that the Government has decided to transfer responsibility for teachers’ professional learning and development to the Education Council in January 2018. We know that the Government is heavily committed to Communities of Learning so, in my opinion, we can assume that the academics viewpoints that were discussed in the five papers will shape the professional development of principals.

In a phone interview with Frances Nelson, Principal of Fairburn School and convenor for the Centre of Leadership Excellence at the Education Council since January 2017. Frances explained the role that the Education Council will play in the delivery of professional development for principals and teachers. Initially the Centre for Leadership Excellence will support those principals appointed as Community of Learning leaders but the goal was to support all leaders and teachers. The Council is committed to developing leadership capability and capacity. Frances commented that the type of professional development required for the future required a “reconfiguring of thinking. It’s about developing leadership in the sector.”

Summary:

There is a very strong movement in New Zealand education for the principal and senior leadership teams to be the change agents in schools. It is clear that despite various interventions, student achievement outcomes have not improved at the desired rate. Community of Schools is another attempt.

It concerns me that the assumption has been made that principals of successful schools will be the best “fit” to lead a community of schools. We all know of brilliant teachers who, when given the opportunity but not necessarily the support, have not been successful leaders of schools. Now we will get the opportunity to see if successful principals and leaders of schools will be very effective leaders of other principals and the education community. The success of this latest initiative will be how well the lead principals will be supported and whether they have the ability to pull leaders of learning and their principal colleagues together. Ideally, Communities of Learning will foster these relationships and provide the motivation that we need in order to collaborate and have rich conversations about student achievement.

Leadership is very important to the success of a school. The Education Review Office report (2009) “Managing Professional Learning and Development in Primary Schools” states:

we found that an important difference between schools with high quality professional learning and development (PLD) and other schools, regardless of size or location, was the quality of the principal’s leadership and management of the school’s professional and development programme. (p.12)

The opportunity to discuss with principals their feelings about the level of support and professional development to lead a school was interesting. We have

some wonderful principals leading our schools and I felt that the responses were very similar to my initial beliefs about the provision of PD and support in rural, urban, large and small schools.

Clearly, principals have historically, and intend to continue to collaborate with their colleagues as this is where they feel that they get the most support. In the future Communities of Learning may enable us to focus some of this discussion around student achievement.

It is very clear that at the present time, the delivery of professional development for principals is complex and not always equitable. The Ministry of Education have used rich sources of material such as the Best Evidence Synthesis, papers from academics, research and the PLD Advisory Group Report to design professional development that will be tailored and delivered through the Education Council. It is heartening to see this happening and hopefully it will assist in the transformation of leadership that will be required to meet the needs of our 21st Century learners.

References:

Education Review Office. (2009) *Managing Professional Learning and Development in Primary Schools*.

Ministry of Education (2008). *Kiwi leadership for principals: Principals as educational leaders*. Wellington.

Robinson, V., M. Hohepa and C. Lloyd (2009), *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why, Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES]*, Ministry of Education. Wellington, New Zealand

Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007). *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Education.