



# Changing Practice through Distributed Leadership

**Peter Witana**

Kawakawa Primary School has five bilingual classes operating at level 1 and level 2 immersion and nine mainstream classes. Over a number of years all teachers have been involved in sustained professional learning that has led to them making fundamental changes to their teaching practices. Central to achieving these changes has been the leadership provided by middle and senior leaders at the school. Principal Peter Witana writes here about the process he undertook to build leadership capacity in the school.

## Change happens over time

Significant professional development has been underway at Kawakawa Primary School for five years through our involvement with the RAPU project (Reporting, Analysis, Planning and Use of data). RAPU has centred on the implementation of formative practice as well as the importance of having reliable, valid and consistent reading data available. As RAPU schools had a number of transient children, teachers were finding that children coming into the schools often had reading data collected by an unfamiliar tool, or no data at all, or data that seemed unreliable. RAPU had set out to eliminate this problem in the mid-North.

There were originally three RAPU lead teachers in our schools. However as each was a full-time teacher the cascade model of passing on information from professional learning was not working well enough to bring about the classroom level change that we needed. I decided to release one teacher to deliver professional learning to the staff through meetings, talking with individuals and teacher teams, modelling to teachers and providing feedback and feed-forward to them about their practice.

In 2006, when RAPU was supposed to be in its sustainability phase, a new project, Mid-North Writing, came our way. It seemed to fit nicely with what we were doing. Mid-North Writing was also about formative practice, but focused on writing. This was an area we felt



we really needed to work on. Staff meetings generally contained professional learning from the combined Mid-North meetings.

Current assistant principal, Kylie Cook, and another lead teacher, Ineka Halse, developed a new writing resource for the school. Our teachers felt that they lacked knowledge about writing as a content area and also the best writing pedagogy. This resource was important in helping them feel more confident about how to teach writing. The resource included explanations of various grammatical terms, the sort of elements to include in the teaching of different genres, resources available for certain types of writing and more.

## Sharing leadership

A priority for me is identifying teachers who show leadership potential and giving them projects we can develop together. While overall project responsibility remains with me, they are encouraged to develop and implement ideas and work alongside staff to achieve our goals. Previously this may have been done more autocratically with a leader implementing ideas without much consultation with teaching staff. Now it is a process that all are involved with.

For example with the new writing scheme, classroom teachers together came up with what they thought teaching and learning progressions in writing looked like and Kylie and Ineka put the scheme together.

Last year we introduced a literacy team, again another way of sharing leadership knowledge, skills and workload! Sharing leadership also takes into account succession planning, which allows for a continuation of what is happening should one leader leave.

This year we have restructured senior management meetings so all senior staff are focused on data-informed decisions, teaching practices and assessment, with room for work around current research and readings. This in turn filters down to our syndicate meetings where we have focused discussion around student data, teacher inquiry and practice and sharing of knowledge and ideas. In this way we are all on the same path, building knowledge and capability across all levels and working towards raising student achievement.

In 2007 Kylie also became a lead teacher in two other groups. The first was the Leaders' Learners' Network, which was developed to build networks between the different initiatives and schools in the North. The second group was Master Teachers (renamed Cluster Lead Teachers). Two teachers from the Far North, three teachers from the mid-North and three Auckland teachers, facilitated by Carolyn English and Jenni Dittmer from the Literacy Professional Development Programme, have been involved. This project was designed to build leaders within initiatives so that when people like TEAM Solution facilitators finished contracts, people within clusters were able to take over or take part in facilitating their cluster.

### Embedding practices

We learned things from these projects that have assisted us with school development. We have undertaken:

- in-depth data analysis
- use of scenarios to look into teacher practice
- teacher inquiry
- developing tools to observe guided reading
- use of learning talk to analyse a variety of situations
- moderation of writing within a cluster facilitation skills
- ways to effectively challenge teachers' practice and leadership skills
- how to change systems and practices that traditionally only senior management know about.

Much of this professional learning has changed practices in our school. Some change is still in its beginning stages. A current learning focus is on teachers embedding formative assessment practices into their daily programmes. We know that this approach is very much in line with the Effective Pedagogy section of *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

Assistant principal Kylie was released from full-time teaching to lead the development of this work. She is supporting individual teachers in their classrooms to implement the learning they had gained. The next step is for Kylie to return to her class and lead by modelling on a daily basis – to prove that this kind of change can be business as usual.

