Growing Leaders in our Schools
Principal Sabbatical Research Project
Carolyn Marino
Westmere School Auckland
Term 2 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Board of Trustees for supporting my application for this sabbatical project and encouraging me to take time to think and reflect.

My thanks to the senior leadership team of Westmere School and in particular Kerry Morrison who stepped up as acting Principal during my absence.

I would like to acknowledge the many teachers and school leaders at all levels for their generosity, spending time talking with me and sharing their dreams and visions. Their commitment to their students and their schools was humbling.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

" A school leader's effectiveness in creating a culture of sustained change will be determined by the leaders he or she leaves behind" Fullan 2002

This report endeavours to provide a summary of some of the research findings with regards to ways to grow and promote leadership from the very beginning of a teacher's professional journey. Through informal discussions with teachers, team leaders, Deputy and Associate Principals and Principals, I have tried to provide an insight into some of the challenges and barriers that face schools in ensuring leadership succession within our schools. In conclusion, I have identified understandings that will influence our school in moving forward as we grow educational leaders of the future.

PURPOSE

Anecdotally, I hear many NZ Principal colleagues talk of how difficult it is to encourage NZ teachers to step up and accept formal middle management responsibilities on top of their full time classroom teaching load.

How widespread is this view in reality? What effect is the new MU allocation having on encouraging a positive movement towards middle management responsibility? How are NZ schools creatively re-developing leadership structures within their schools to encourage succession planning?

I have been fascinated with these questions over the last 2 years after watching many highly competent classroom teachers turn down opportunities to accept formal leadership roles in our school. In 2009, with the new allocation of Management units, we had the opportunity to work with staff to develop leadership opportunities that moved away from the traditional pathways of succession through team leadership to Deputy Principal to Principal ship. In particular we have developed roles where teachers are acknowledged for their skill as expert classroom practitioners and encourage their development as leaders of learning.

I am now watching teachers rise to leadership challenges at all levels of our school and am interested in understanding what it is about what we are doing that may be changing their attitudes towards accepting leadership roles. Also what would it take for these teachers to begin to aspire to more traditional roles of leadership i.e. Senior Teacher, Deputy Principal and Principal roles?

The aim of this small research project was to explore the literature and visit a selection of schools in New Zealand to inquire into the following:
- How have Principals organised / allocated leadership responsibilities (MU's) in their school?
- What impact have these new management units had on teachers stepping up to middle management roles?
- What motivates teachers to accept leadership opportunities in their schools?
- Teachers with middle leadership responsibilities – do they have aspirations to Principalship?
- What are the barriers, the attractions?

METHODOLOGY

The selection of schools I visited was entirely unscientific. I contacted teaching friends in Wellington and Taranaki whom I wanted to spend time with over my sabbatical and they in turn provided me with contacts of Principals in their local Clusters who were happy to host me. Because of the provincial nature of the towns I visited, the majority of schools had rolls between 100-350 students.

On my return to Auckland, I visited 3 larger schools (over 500 students) to gain another perspective. The Principals were extremely generous with their time and were very open and frank with me about the successes and challenges they faced growing leadership within their schools. Many deputy and associate principals and senior teachers were also open and willing to share their perspectives.

I would like to acknowledge the wealth of experience and expertise I was offered and thank them all for assisting me so readily in collecting my data.

I conducted a semi structured interview with 3 key questions that I elaborated on as appropriate to each situation. The information was then transcribed and used anecdotally in my report.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE AND FINDINGS

Much of the literature around building leadership capacity has alerted us to the real risk of a chronic shortage of Principals in this decade, across the developed world. In his book "The New work of Educational Leaders" (2003) Gronn asks "*How do we produce individuals fit for leadership and to guarantee the production of successive cohorts of institutional –level leaders?*" (2003, p11)

This is the challenge that many schools across the OECD are facing as "*we are losing scores of talented people as demographics shift and early retirements mount… the turnover is so high that we need to devolve massive attention to the leadership problem*". (Fullen, 2002).
- Why is this happening?

A desire for work- life balance

Teaching has been described as "*greedy work- such that it demands one be constantly "fully there" (Kahn,1992): always attentive, alert, absorbed in and utterly committed to the particular task as a totally functioning, fully available, non stop cognitive and emotional presence in the workforce.*" (Gronn, p149)

Within our current system, reward for high levels of teaching competency has often become even more work overload and responsibility and a move from the classroom to increased administrative roles. (Grohn 2003, P 51) Workaholism has become a culturally accepted norm with the effect that it narrows and concentrates the life commitments of school professionals at the expense of their engagement in voluntary institutional activities.

Younger generations of teachers have learned lessons promoted and modelled by their elders. They appear to be less career committed in the vocational sense of service. They are more willing

to pursue their self interests through role choices designed to keep their career options open, rather than locking themselves in or leaving the profession altogether to pursue other work.

This is a trend that Principal A is seeing in her area. Having recently been a Principal advisor to a Board of Trustees making an appointment at a local school she was very surprised to see that only 7 people applied for the role (3 DP's, 4 P). This was a school of 400 students with good systems in place. A low decile school, it is well regarded in the community as a school doing well.

Principal A believes that fewer senior leaders want to step up to the role when they see what affect the job has on their own Principals. Many see Principals working long hours and dealing with difficult issues that take a lot of time and diplomacy.

She also is aware however, that many staff are probably unaware of what Principals do - she knows that in her own case she shelters her staff from some of the harder realities to allow them to get on and do their jobs without additional worry and demands put on them.

Lack of Opportunity to Lead

When Principal B first came to her school, there was a change in the leadership structure of the school. Traditionally there were two joint Associate Principals. When one of these teachers left the school the decision was made to return to one Deputy Principal position with no Associate Principal. The Principal was aware that there was a perception amongst teaching staff that there were limited opportunities to step up to leadership positions within the school as the Associate Principals had also held team leadership responsibilities.

This was a good opportunity for the Principal to look at restructuring to consider ways to support young teachers with leadership potential, to take on some leadership roles within the school. Many staff at the school had started as beginning teachers and been recognised early as having leadership potential.

Two team leaders were appointed internally. Each of these team leaders hold 2 MU's for this responsibility and have 5-6 teachers in their team.

Each team is given 0.2 for release a week for the team leaders to allocate as they see fit- for 1:1 testing, observations in class, leadership time.

Deputy Principal Z and Associate Principal Y who both work within the same province as Principal B, have seen a number of people in the area all on the same leadership pathways, being thwarted with not enough positions or openings available within the region. Both have applied for a number of Principal's role in the past.

Deputy Principal Z is now no longer interested in this. She recognises that she is seen as too old by some Boards. She is now wondering where her career will go and is considering looking outside of the primary setting to other educational providers as a future progression; and yet she has at least 15 more years before retirement. She feels it is getting more difficult to maintain the pace of classroom teaching AND work at senior leadership level.

Associate Principal Y has a young family and is restricted by family commitments to how far he can apply away from his home base. This means jobs at Principal level are few and far between in his small provincial town.

Associate Principal X unlike the 2 senior leaders described above, who are fully released this year to fulfil their leadership roles, is released from classroom responsibilities one day a week. On top of her classroom responsibilities she is the Numeracy leader across the school; holds schoolwide responsibility for Physical Education; relievers; assembly organisation; team leadership for 3 staff, appraisal of this team and 2 teacher aides; part of the SNCO team, the Maori team and Literacy team.

Associate Principal X has always wanted to be a Principal but recognises that many younger teachers coming through do not want additional responsibilities- they feel they are already too busy and find it hard enough to cope as a good classroom teacher without the added pressure of additional responsibilities.

With limited classroom release, she recognises there is a real need to plan for the leadership part of the job. Strategic release e.g. a week to revamp the whole literacy resourcing in the school was seen as a better way to tackle the problem. Guided by an action plan that helps her keep her priorities on track, she recognises the imperative to be flexible in meeting the needs of her class and her leadership responsibilities.

School Organisational Structures

In many of the schools I visited there was a realisation that school organisations needed to allow for the development of coaching and mentoring relationships, as such relationships and skill building underpinned successful leadership development. This was particularly obvious in the three larger Auckland primary schools, where the larger number of MU's were being used in diverse ways to create organisational structures where leadership was diversely held and prominent amongst the majority of staff.

While still acknowledging the traditional leadership positions and those extracurricular and curricular leadership areas of the curriculum, there was a move to using more units to grow young leaders through "shadowing" roles. One school had set up a "junior" team leader who in effect shadowed the team leader and held one MU to undertake some of the traditional leadership tasks associated with this role.

Research studies in England show that individuals who experience Principalship become more positive about taking on the role. Therefore bringing aspiring leaders closer to reality by giving them leadership of a piece of work within the school and offering a mentor or coach, can be a way to give aspiring leaders a positive reality check.

The Principal noted that this model had resulted from an observation that there were a number of young teachers who would not have accepted a leadership role unless one of the senior management team had not shoulder tapped them. They often expressed excitement to have been approached but were hesitant to pick up a role, seeing themselves as not old enough or suggesting that maybe someone else should be approached, especially if they have older colleagues that they may be being asked to lead.   These feelings of intimidation or lack of confidence were being addressed through this apprenticeship model.

IMPLICATIONS

What have I learnt?

School Organisational structures shape leadership opportunities within our schools.

John West-Burnham of England's National College of School Leadership argues that current thinking on leadership development is too focused on the career of the individual and ignores the potential of leadership as a collective capacity that is reflected in structures, processes and relationships. While this is the case, our schools are at the mercy of being forever at risk of leadership poverty when key players leave our schools.

Grohn (2003) argues that schools need to note the way structure and culture shape the leadership of our schools; as organisations, schools must develop systems and structures that break organisational activity in the school into distinctive parts and promote leadership across all these parts.

In recent years the increased management unit allocation has given schools the opportunity for increased flexibility to do this in new ways.

However, most of our organisations are structured as hierarchies with descending levels of authority and responsibility. Often, a few individuals exercise disproportionately significant levels of influence and power on the rest of the organisation that depend on them for approval, permission and advancement. This can create a culture of dependency, minimise individual potential and put schools at risk when key personnel leave.

School organisational structures benefit from being flexible.

Our typical school hierarchical structures are no longer suited to the 21st Century learning organisation for the following reasons :
- They are an inappropriate model for a professionally staffed organisation
- Our schools focus is on the learning of children, so our structures should reflect learning relationships
- The job is too challenging for any one individual or small select group
- There remains difficulty in recruiting people to school leadership positions
- Challenges facing educational organisations require optimum levels of leadership to respond to the rapidly changing world.
- There is a need to develop a systemic approach to building leadership capacity

To move our schools to a focus on leadership, one could argue that the following conditions are required :
- Building Trust: This is a crucial shift. With too much control there is virtually no trust, no choices, few opportunities for autonomous action and the need to seek permission for almost all activities - the growth in trust relates to a growth in leadership capacity within the organisation as more people have the opportunity to lead.
- Redesigning jobs in terms of leadership responsibilities with negotiated outcomes rather than a list of tasks to be completed
- Changing organisational structures to ensure the organisational form is flexible and team based with a coalition of teams each with responsibility for a specific function or project
- Creating a learning culture for adults as well as children
- The most effective leadership role we can take is to invest in the leadership of others and in building leadership capacity for even greater success in future generations.

Many teachers actively chose to undertake informal or non permanent leadership roles in our schools (Leiberman,2007). Such leadership opportunities are not imposed on them; they choose to take on certain leadership activities as essentially instructional leaders.

A spin off of this form of capacity building and distributive leadership is that it is a succession strategy (Fink 2006). However, it can only be achieved by deliberately creating and orchestrating the internal conditions in which distributive leadership can function.

The concept of teacher leadership is a core principle of distributed leadership because it is concerned with the interactions on both formal and informal leadership and the way they produce different patterns of activity. There is a need to develop systems and structures and foster cultural mindsets where there is a recognition of the role of teacher leader, a role that allows master teachers to lead from the classroom in ways that maintain their sense of passion for the job by doing what they love to do (teach), while giving them opportunities to grow and be challenged to accept leadership and career progression through this legitimate avenue.

We need to work towards school organisations that are team based, where leadership opportunities are fostered across all roles.

Teams can be viewed as the most powerful way of developing this leadership capability and potential; they can be seen as the "nurseries" for developing potential and fostering and coaching capability.

"Teams" as such are characterised by having :
- A shared sense of purpose
- Clear values
- Agreed protocols for working
- Emphasis on building working relationships
- Leadership that is rotated according to need not status
- A clear focus on learning through group processes

Coaching is an essential learning relationship within such teams where there is a shared commitment to growth and learning; when there are shared standards of performance and regular feedback and review of practice. Underpinning this is a culture of trust where excellent interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence are valued; where we celebrate the diversity of generations within our schools and draw on their diversity and differing strengths.

For many baby boomers in positions of power, there is a yearning for the "good old days" when teachers did the job because it was there to be done, not for the reward or recognition. Yet the Generation Y teacher could well be one of our current greatest untapped resources for organisational change and renewal. These teachers are often innovative, entrepreneurial, energetic and technologically native. They are more than willing to help to drive change in the staffroom and they expect to be developed and challenged professionally. Furthermore, they know that they have skills and ideas to offer!

25% of our talented Generation Y educators leave the sector 5 years after beginning teaching (DEEWR 2008- Australia), yet many report that they were waiting for a chance to lead and contribute. The traditional hierarchical model does not serve well these teachers.

To make the most of emerging leadership talent one needs to consider:
- Thinking creatively and widening the scope of who can lead whole school developments
- Not letting inexperience be a barrier to opportunities for those with potential to lead
- Using teams that operate across the school to build up leadership capacity (develops big picture thinking rather than balkanism)
- Supporting emergent leaders with mentoring from other middle and senior leaders so as to build this capacity across a number of people
- Giving less experienced teachers budget or professional development responsibilities in areas of interest and expertise as a good place to start to build capacity

Systematic Planning for Leadership

Our recruitment processes must aim at attracting high quality staff and this begins with ensuring that at the selection process the job has to be perceived as providing high levels of job satisfaction. Teachers will not apply for jobs they perceive as stressful, traumatic, demanding or overwhelming.

Therefore to attract high quality staff to leadership roles :

- Principals need to articulate and display a sense of job satisfaction- share the joys of the job!
- Leadership roles need to be demystified, particularly administration and financial roles
- Our organisational structures need to provide flexible work options at all leadership levels
- Shared leadership roles for principals and leading teacher positions need to be considered.

CONCLUSIONS

The allocation of management units has the potential to assist schools to change the landscape of the organisational structure that has allowed the status quo to limit the potential for wider leadership in our schools. Yet schools are not redeveloping leadership structures as radically as they could. What is clear however, is that succession planning - "the deliberate and systematic effort made by organisations to recruit, develop and retain individuals with a range of leadership competencies capable of implementing current and future organisational goals." (Leibmanm Bruer & Maki 1996) is being more readily seen as a process not just about job replacement.

There is a growing realisation in our schools that systems and structures need to promote leadership activities rather than management roles as a matter of course, so such roles are seen as the norm and as inclusive to all, within schools.

To ensure we have highly competent and motivated leaders across our schools all staff need systematic planned for opportunities to lead in our schools, to reflect on these experiences and to consolidate the learning under extended practice.

As leaders, we must ensure that any changes we make happen in structured and systematic ways in our school to ensure the changes we desire are sustained.

To do this we Need to Consider:

- Creating a leadership strategy to achieve improved student learning outcomes that involve potential leaders in driving these e.g. researching an approach and presenting this to staff; modelling and giving feedback to teachers through in class observations by "lead teachers.'
- Create job descriptions and role profiles that reflect BOTH the tasks to be completed AND the leadership roles, opportunities.
- Creating smaller teams that can increase the willingness to lead and lessen the load.
- Making the selection process of potential leaders of projects a rigorous process to add value to the role.
- Make public the value of the role- include emergent leaders in whole school strategic meetings.
- Consider using triads both within and across the schools e.g. two team leaders and 1 Associate Principal who meet for support and coaching (involve observations, feedback, coaching discussions, role shadowing, self evaluation and goal setting based around developing leadership skills).
- Give emerging leaders a chance to assess the leadership qualities they possess - strengths and next steps for development - develop clear criteria of leadership skills and activities for staff to reflect on their performance against.

Underpinning all these suggestions is an assumed shared understanding on the nature and purpose of leadership.

Leadership has to be learnt - through creating an organisational culture that values learning that will enhance the capacity of individuals to lead at all levels of the organisation - within classrooms, in teams, in day to day decision making through to strategic planning.

To ensure such changes occur we need to seriously review the administrative support for Principals to ensure adequate time is given to the crucial task of educational leadership and organisational review. Only then can we begin to feel confident we have a profession that is safeguarded from the extreme vulnerability that change can create.

References

Hargreaves, A and Fink ,D. (2004) *The Seven Principles of Sustainable Leadership* Educational Leadership Vol 61: Number 7

Lacey K *Succession Planning for school Leadership*. Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council

Hay Group (2010) *Identify and grow your own leaders.* www.nationalcollege.org.uk

Breakspear,S ((2010) *Gen Y Emerging Leaders* The Australian Educational Leader Volume 32 Number 1 2010

Lazenby, S (2010) *Developing a School Professional Development Framework*. The Australian Educational Leader Volume 32 Number 1 2010

Gronn, P (2003) *The New Work of Educational Leaders*. Sage Publications

Fullen M, (2002) *Leadership and Sustainability*. Principal Leadership Volume 3 Number 4

West-Burnham J (2010) *Building Leadership Capacity* National College of School Leadership

Jill Blackmore, Pat Thomson (2006) *Beyond the power of one: Redesigning the work of School Principals.* Published on line 25 August 2006 Springer Science and Business Media B.V 2006