

Sabbatical Report 2018

Title: Does leadership of a Kāhui Ako, as a Principal, strengthen leadership capacity for the leader and for others?

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Executive Summary

The responses of Lead Principals, with consideration to researched and published material referred to in this report, strongly supports and affirms leadership growth for participants within the seven Kāhui Ako. Further to this, the insights given as to the nature of this growth in leadership, could be useful in the future when system changes are reshaped as a result of the Report by the Tomorrow's School's Independent Taskforce, 2018. That report, in its findings, speaks to... "system-wide challenges because our current schooling system is designed for autonomous self-governing schools, not for networked and connected schools." Kāhui Ako will have a significant part to play in this wider system change within New Zealand. In Recommendation 18 the report talks about the Kāhui Ako pathway model becoming more flexible in clustering arrangements, achievement challenges and funding resources. Other recommendations to support leadership and the development of Education Hubs, will further strengthen leadership capacity in Kāhui Ako.

Purpose

The purpose this inquiry was to gain insights as to whether the leadership capacity of both Kāhui Ako/CoL leads and others grew and developed through participating in a Kahui Ako/CoL. If so, how did participants experience this?

Background and Rationale

From the beginning of the announcement of IES, Kāhui Ako/CoL, at the time referred to as Community of Schools (CoS,) experienced considerable opposition by the Primary School Union (NZEI Te Riu Roa) and the New Zealand Principal's Federation (NZPF). Much of this was about the design and funding model and subsequently this opposition attempted to undermine the great opportunity for schools to collaborate. It divided many schools and colleagues. Consequently, for those who decided to go with the design, it required a profound belief that collaboration for all students, in any given community, had to have long term positive gains. The Report by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce 2018, has subsequently been, in most part, supported by both the Post Primary Teacher's Association (PPTA), NZEI and NZPF. This no doubt has come from recommendations that would give Kāhui Ako more flexibility.

The big question then, after 3-4 years, is did it make a difference for leadership across so participating in Kāhui Ako/CoLs?

The author was a Kāhui Ako lead and would like to state that this report is based on both Kāhui Ako Lead Principal's voice, including her own, and information from researchers and academics who have been thinking and expressing their thoughts on this development since 2015.

Methodology

A survey was sent to 7 recipients as an invitation only, followed by face to face interviews based on the survey questions and included any additional thoughts. The author also reviewed some of the research literature and articles published on Kāhui Ako/ Community of Learning (CoL). The inquiry asked 5 questions (see below). I have used the terms CoLs and Kāhui Ako together and in singular form within this report.

Survey Results as verbatim:

How has your leadership grown from being a Kāhui Ako/ Community of Learning (CoL) Lead?

I have grown in confidence in dealing with tricky, complex situations. I have learnt a lot about leading and managing other leaders - massive growth in learning about collaboration. Managing and leading a lot more staff. Juggling and prioritising. Become far more objective and less concerned or worried about taking things personally around points of criticism or in dealing with issues. It has given me another environment and context to look at change management, collaborative inquiry and understanding other systems, policies, beliefs, values and processes.

I have only been in the role for less than two terms. One unexpected outcome in terms of leadership growth has been developing an Acting Deputy Principal in his role. Also ensuring I give the person in the Acting Principal's role enough autonomy to do the job. I have had the opportunity to meet a cross section of Kāhui Hui Ako Leaders from across the Bay of Plenty. This has allowed me to gain a good understanding of how these leaders are dealing with the range of challenges they face in their CoLs.

I have become more global in terms of what the wider community's needs are from our cluster schools. I have more in-depth knowledge of the secondary sector and have become more adept at leading a larger number of personnel more strategically. I feel more relevant in the current educational climate

Exposure to more curriculum understanding across the education sectors, Involvement in Reference Groups, Lead principal hui, Cross Sector hui, Iwi partnering, ECE, Learning Support. Conversations and engagement with a border range of education sector.

How has leadership capacity grown with Across School Teachers?

Dealing with a wide range of personalities. Understandings leading teaching as inquiry, coaching and mentoring, effective and triangulated project / practice research. Culturally responsive and relational pedagogy.

This has been a big opportunity and a big step forward for our across Kāhui Ako teachers. Over the last 2 years they have grown their knowledge in curriculum, facilitation skills and confidence. They are able to lead other teachers with confidence. This has definitely given them career extension which is what the purpose was from the beginning of IES. This part is certainly working well for us. Their growth has been significant. Over time they have redefined their roles, developed into an inclusive and effective team and helped determine the future direction of the Taupo Kāhui Ako. The team we have has really gelled effectively and are very respectful of each other's environments and work practices. They meet regularly and prioritise contact with schools to ensure equitable coverage. Each of our 4 ASM's have grown in both self-belief and self-efficacy as leaders in their own

right. Two of our 4 have applied for promotional positions but have both been unsuccessful so there's a feeling that schools do not recognise the leadership strength of an ASM position Theory of Improvements, Change Agents, Strategic Planning, Measure and Evidenced based developments.

What changes did you notice in your own leadership in this role?

Diplomacy has been the most important leadership challenge. I have had to learn when to tackle things and when to ignore. Leading the cluster is slow in terms of change but we are seeing small changes over time which is exactly in line with what all the change leadership research shows. We are beginning to be at a point where I can push for some of the work around progress and achievement to be worked on - we have established good working relationships.

I have found the role difficult in terms of managing two roles. Trying to divide my Principal's role up into discrete parts has been hard. A case in point is I am dealing with an HR issue at the moment that is taking a lot of time and cannot be ignored or handed on to the Acting Principal. I have getting better as time goes on. My leadership role of the Kāhui Ako has meant that I have had to establish a much closer working relationship with Principals and managers from other sectors

The excitement to be managing a cluster of schools; engaging with groups of leaders at SLT levels across schools and the rewards from seeing our Within School Coaches grow their expertise when coaching their own staff colleagues. There has been a positivity injected in our Kāhui Ako which reflects some true collaboration - this is extremely rewarding, and an absolute "buzz" is felt doing this work. My leadership has grown in terms of strategic planning; access to national forum PLD sessions and delivering presentations sharing with other Kāhui Ako

Became a lot more strategic - was able to provide the skills to completely change the direction of my own school with confidence

What have you noticed about the leadership of your peers in the development and on-going work in your Kāhui Ako?

Taken a lot of convincing around new ideas - have to be very prepared when presenting new ideas and possible structures - good reasoning behind decisions and recommendations. Really supportive of me as Lead in the role and helping make it work within the constraints of the resourcing At first it was slow to have other people step up and lead "you are paid to do this" was the mantra but over the last term more Principals, DPs and APs are coming on board to lead and facilitate areas of the cluster. More and more small PLC groups around a variety of cluster foci are developing and running without me doing all the work around them.

Not a lot at this stage although ECE has certainly stepped up in terms of collaboration.

The ability to discuss our schools openly and honestly with each other without judgement or prejudice or competition. Principals in our cluster range from Beginning Principals to long standing Principals from Decile 2 to Decile 9. We have a unique relational trust among us and can talk individually about all school developments.

Move with the willing. Still egos in the room but slowly breaking down barriers. Noticed how individuals prefer to operate. And how to work with each leader with an approach that they prefer.

Would you support this Government in changes that they may make with the current design of Kāhui Ako?

If so, what would you like to see change and what would you like to see unchanged?

Yes! Much greater flexibility with the resourcing - being able to appoint the right person the job of AST - so we can some APs and DPs in these roles and other specialised areas where people already have experience, without having rules around appointments like how much they teach. Flexibility to re-allocated 0.40 release to needs and priorities. A model of equity for resourcing - we have a one size fits all model where I am a Kāhui Ako Lead with an Across School Teacher Team of 9 and I get

the same 0.40 fte release to work with this group compared to Kāhui Ako with less Across School Teachers.

Yes. I would like to keep Kāhui Ako but would like more flexibility in how we cluster and who with. We don't necessarily have a clear pathway for students as our children go to 4 or so schools from here but we can only cluster with one of those schools. If we are truly about success for all and personalised pathways, we must be able to be in more than one cluster. Release money is also essential.

That depends on the changes. I think the Kāhui Ako is well resourced and would not like that changed. I also like the concept of Across School Leaders supporting the Kaupapa of the school. The role of the COL leader needs to be full time. This would allow these leaders the opportunity to give the Kāhui Ako their full attention rather than doing a lot of strategizing on "the hoof"

For us, the current model is effective and is a positive influence in our schools and across our wider community. Our BOT's are fully supportive and engaged in the process, so change would be detrimental to the traction and progress gained over the past 3 years.

I still believe that is not the government that needs to consider changes but the NZEI and PPTA.

Quotes from face to face interviews

How has your leadership grown from being a Kāhui Ako / CoL Lead?

"I have a greater understanding of the aspirations of our Maori community..... deeper understanding to enable me to work with different people..."

"My Board took a lot of convincing at first and without a good Deputy Principal it would fall over..... respect and trust led to good relationships but like all families we argue"

My confidence has grown, and I have a greater understanding of contributing schools, Early Learning and the community."

"It has impacted my leadership at school, more trustful of other senior management and I delegate more readily."

"My leadership has grown hugely, and I am more globally aware. A staff member commented to me that I was networking on steroids!"

"I have been empowered to view a much bigger picture and aware of the learning progressions right through the learning pathway and this made me think differently about my own school."

"I have become acutely aware of my time management skills and how to manage the different personalities and their belief systems."

"I became more strategic and visionary through the Theory of Change and took this learning into my own school."

How has leadership capacity grown with Across School Teachers?

"Originally the Across School Teachers were set up with mentors and now they can lead independently.... confidence is growing but in places there are still challenges to gain creditability."

"We have provided them with a career pathway and their leadership growth has been successful."

"The vast majority have had a great shift. The cultural responsiveness and relational pedagogy has taught them to ask effective questions and they actively think and talk about pedagogy."

"The Across School teachers added to the quality depth of pedagogy as well as content knowledge"

"They worked with Expert Partners and became experts themselves."

"The Across School teachers have become independent leaders that have advanced the pedagogy of teachers across the Kāhui Ako...they have contributed effectively to the development of strategic thinking and planning."

What changes did you notice in your own leadership in this role?

“The use of levers is important, I upskilled our Kaumatua on data and what it tells us about our school achievement. The Kaumatua on all the Boards meet under the CoL and are gaining insights as to how to raise achievement.” “We can produce for equity, achievement and progress.

“I became more strategic and visionary through the Theory of Change and took this learning into my own school.”

“Through Visible Learning approaches (Hattie), Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) and Cultural Responsiveness for Relational Pedagogy (CRRP) our school turned around in two years.”

“Not feeling guilty about where things are at and realising that collective responsibility is where we are heading and that this will take time.”

What have you noticed about the leadership of your peers in the development and on-going work in your Kāhui Ako?

“Leading a school as a principal you have authority but with a CoL, right from the beginning everyone is involved in all the processes.... Early Learning, Iwi, Boards and this is an inclusive, collaborative approach.” “You have to have excellent communication and see leadership coming also from conversations on the side.”

“A difference in the peers came through with the Principal’s Association and the CoL. The CoL became the place where we focussed more deeply on the impact of what we do for students in the whole community.”

“Principals in the CoL vary in terms of their commitment to the strategic plan and their participation in CoL business. The up take continues to progress however and the development progresses for our CoL.”

“There has been a shift in principals’ seeing now the value of the Kāhui Ako and they have become more supportive over time.”

Would you support this Government in changes that they may make with the current design of Kāhui Ako?

“We would welcome more flexibility as the disparity between existing roles and CoL resourced roles is problematic” “Some restrictions in teacher contracts need to be more flexible.”

“It would be good if the capacity for Governance to grow and maybe a one board for all schools, with accountability of lead role to that one Board.”

“It would be good to not mess with the notion of collaboration.”

What did the research and researchers tell us? How aligned was the thinking of Kahui Ako Lead Principals and recent research?

Communities of Learning/ Kāhui Ako: The Emergent Stage Cathy Wylie. Findings from the NZCER National Survey of Primary and Intermediate Schools 2016. *Cathy states that, “the CoL model comes with much more signalling of deeper change, and has been more complex to bring to life than the initial political expectation that “all roles will be fully in place by 2017.”* From the above we can agree with Cathy on this point and we now know with the change of government and the review of Tomorrow’s Schools, that Kahui Ako and clustering arrangements are likely to keep embedding. We also know that the Kāhui Ako voices above have re advertised and rolled over positions and are continuing to progress a different view of their achievement challenges, due mainly to the demise of National Standards.

Leadership for Communities of Learning, 17th November 2015. Education Council.

“The leaders of CoL must have demonstrated their ability to lead improvement and change within their own school/kura”. The Council makes an important argument here in terms of the capacity of CoL/Kāhui Ako leads. It is important that these leads have the dispositions needed to strategise for change across all the schools in the CoL/Kāhui Ako. *“As leaders in a collaborative self-managing system, they also need to provide the conditions to enable leadership development at all levels across the community”*. The responses from the principal voice above clearly indicates that the leads have enabled leadership development, not only for themselves but also for Across and Within school Teachers. *“Overall, the leaders need to possess the capacity to lead a more network-based system and lead through influence rather than drawing on the authority of an institutional leader”*. Some leads have made this point about not being able to rely on authority that comes with individual school principalship, but rather lead with influence in an arena where consensus has to occur. The author would also assert that leadership by influence is more effective long term than by institutional authority.

Education Review Office (ERO) Communities of Learning/ Kāhui Ako: Collaboration to Improve Learner Outcomes, 2016.

“Collective responsibility positions leadership differently. Leading improvement across a range of diverse contexts can require different expertise and different ways of working”. Again, the Principal voice above concurs strongly with this notion of leading differently.

‘Leaders in these positions model effective practice, facilitate learning and leadership in others, support collective investigation of new possibilities, make changes, and sustain improvement. By facilitating collaboration, effective leaders build relational trust at every level of the community’. The notion of trust and relationships also came through strongly with the CoL/Kāhui Ako leads.

Findings

In respect of the 5 keys questions posed in this inquiry the following themes emerged from the Lead Principals. Some findings were incidental to the key inquiry questions but were worth mentioning;

- All participants with key roles experienced growth in leadership
- The collaboration achieved ranged in quality from individuals in the Kahui Ako from highly engaged to others who participated minimally, and others in between on the continuum. This was a common feature of most Kahui Ako, although Lead Principals were quick to point out that some individuals started with low input and over time increased. In a few cases a complete 360 degree turn around on their beliefs in the Kahui Ako
- Universally Lead Principals reported that Across School Teachers gained significant leadership experience and a number have gone onto other leadership roles in the system e.g. Deputy Principals, Team Leaders and Principals
- Across School Teachers represented key change agents in pedagogy shifts
- Many Lead Principals spoke on the increased communication required and they all found they had got new insight into the need have this effective for all concerned
- Some Kāhui Ako had developed meaningful and localised relationships with Iwi Partners to an extent that had not occurred before in the communities. An economy of scale for Iwi participation with a group of schools was seen as productive for reaching out to schools with Iwi aspirations for their tamariki/mokopuna. This proved more challenging in areas of high density populations where many individual Iwi co-existed

- All agreed that flexible use of the resources was needed to allow the Kāhui Ako to explore beyond the restraints from early in their development
- The involvement of Early Learning groups varied across the Kāhui Ako but was generally acknowledged as an imperative for success
- Some Kāhui Ako, with support of both their participants and Expert Partners, were able to deepen the implementation of Strategic Planning and Theory of Change practices

Implications and Conclusions

Kāhui Ako continue to be endorsed and grow in number and this supports the direction outlined in the recommendations in the Report by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce. As this report has many recommendations to grow leadership in schools, the future and success for Kāhui Ako located within Education Hubs, is promising. *"Ensure that effective principals/tumuaki contribute to leadership support and growth across the Education Hub network."*

Support for Kāhui Leads is also needed as much of the voice in this report speaks of the additional work load. Juggling the demands of both roles was for many a new learning curve.

It is clear that Kāhui Ako leads reported that significant leadership growth for Across School Teachers occurred, however, the Within School Teachers roles saw variability of leadership growth.

Benefits

The benefits of this inquiry can affirm for those who work diligently in this highly demanding and collaborative endeavour of Kāhui Ako, that their efforts will contribute to the future education landscape. Moving back from the highly competitive and individualist schooling system to one of collaborative and expertise sharing, can only strengthen the overall system in New Zealand.

Mason Durie and Professor Jane Gilbert in recently published papers summed up below;

"What is needed are 'leaders for learning'. Leaders for learning are enthused by the vision of communities; they accept a brief that transcends schools to embrace learning for whole communities - including schools. They work with families, employers, children, rangatahi, adults, older people, teachers, professionals, Iwi, and other community leaders. ... Leaders for learning are educational brokers. They are committed to optimal learning conditions and are open to innovation, advocacy, and lobbying on behalf of all learners. (Sir Mason Durie)."

"System-wide change has to come from within the system, not from "top down" initiatives designed to produce specific kinds of change, thought to be knowable in advance. We need within-system initiatives designed to produce more – and deeper – interactions between the system's elements – people (teachers, students, school leaders, parents, policymakers, researchers, and so on) and their physical and intellectual environments." Professor Jane Gilbert — Leading in Collaborative, Complex Education Systems"

It cannot be overstated Kāhui Ako and Communities of Learning have given a strong basis in New Zealand to assume that the education community as a whole is ready to return to highly collaborative ways of being and leading with an approach that is not "top down".

References/ Research. The following publications were considered in this report:

Communities of Learning/ Kāhui Ako: The Emergent Stage Cathy Wylie. Findings from the NZCER National Survey of Primary and Intermediate Schools. 2016.

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ERO: Kāhui Ako in Action, what we know so far. 2017

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