

## LEADERSHIP STRATEGY: SYNTHESIS OF VIEWS FROM THE PROFESSIONAL FORUM

31 MARCH 2017

A further stage in the collaborative development of the Education Council's Leadership strategy was a forum for the profession, held on 31st March 2017, chaired by Frances Nelson, the Convener of the Education Council's Centre of Leadership Excellence.

Participants in the Professional Forum were invited to assist with the design of a coherent leadership strategy for registered teachers throughout the system, in early childhood education, schooling, and elsewhere. Attendees brought a range of perspectives to the discussion; they included registered teachers and leaders in early childhood centres, state, special character, independent schools and kura, as well as leaders in te ao Māori, initial teacher education, and teacher organisations. Discussion at the forum was informed by the Education Council's rationale for the leadership strategy and responded to earlier papers from the Academic Forum and the Agencies Symposium. **The aim of the Professional Forum was to refine the Education Council's proposed approach to developing the strategy, and to move the discussion forward to shape a draft shared vision of a profession strong in leadership at all levels.**

### INTRODUCTION

In general, the outcomes from the Professional Forum were consistent with the directions set by the Education Council's rationale and the thought leadership of the Academic and Agencies meetings. For example, participants strongly supported the Academic Forum's concept of the Treaty of Waitangi as foundational. All three discussions identified a pressing need for the strategy to re-shape and bring coherence and clarity to a fragmented leadership landscape, and to enable the provision of cohesive and better focused support for leaders in education.

Three themes in the discussion at the Professional Forum have potential as headline concepts in a vision statement. The terms "**principled**" and "**professional**" seem to capture key understandings about leadership expressed by participants at the Professional Forum, most of which reinforced or at least echoed ideas in the feedback from the Academic and Agencies discussions. In addition, a reiterated idea was that leaders in education must be "**future-focused**", accepting some responsibility for intentionally building a "preferred future" for their learners and the nation. All three concepts could be unpacked in the strategy.

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## AN EMERGING VISION FOR THE EDUCATION COUNCIL'S LEADERSHIP STRATEGY

### (a) Principled leadership.

The first step in developing a coherent map for leadership throughout the education system in Aotearoa New Zealand is a clearly articulated vision that captures the idea of leadership as **principled**, by expressing a unifying moral purpose for all leaders of learning.

There are two key elements of a vision of this kind for the leadership strategy; the vision statement must be learner-centred and signal the profession's commitment to honouring our bicultural context. The notion of principled leadership might usefully evoke for many in the sector the "underpinning" principles of *Te Whāriki*, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (with its reference to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi), and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, all of which have as their "starting point" equitable and excellent<sup>1</sup> outcomes for all learners, and taken together are representative of a bicultural approach to education in Aotearoa New Zealand. These are documents owned by the profession, having been developed with significant input from the sector.

In the words of one group's feedback, "Children and young learners, their success and well-being, must be at the centre of the strategy". Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa<sup>2</sup>. If for principled leaders the learner is the heart of the matter, leaders will need as part of the strategy high-level, renewed clarity about what learner success looks like. One participant commented "Our data is too narrow – adaptive leaders need a better understanding, a more holistic definition of what successful learners are and can do". Achievement should be understood in terms of the valued outcomes set out in the curriculum documents mentioned above, that is children and young people actively developing dispositions, capabilities and competencies for living and learning as well as gaining knowledge.

Participants at the Professional Forum discussed the need for simple language in the strategy, and their preference for using "our" language. As the Council frames in the vision, and explains in the strategy, its broader definition of leadership, the use of language that mirrors and affirms our national curricula could reinforce the Council's re-alignment of leadership with teaching and learning, and bring some much needed coherence to the landscape in which educational leaders currently work.

### (b) Professional Leadership

The concept of being professional as a leader was implicit in many of the discussions of during the professional forum. Noting and generally accepting the central tenet of the Education Council's rationale, that leadership will be enabled at all levels of the system, participants asked for a clear definition of leadership that would make sense of the work done by leaders in multiple, different roles within the system.

It was also suggested that the new code and standards should be integrated with, not additional to the strategy's definition of leadership, a further expression of the group's strong support for a more coherent framework for school leadership. The phrase "professional leadership" is consistent with the Council's mandate to "develop a (new) Code of Professional Responsibility as the professional body representing teachers ... to guide the teaching profession ..."

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1 Academic Forum recommendation for the vision statement

2 Education Review Office whakatauki

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The markers of professionalism in the literature could help to unpack the idea of professional leadership – they include, for example, a shared knowledge base across a professional community, a strong focus on each client’s (or in our case learner’s) unique needs, and taking personal responsibility for on-going professional learning.

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As discussed earlier, our profession can draw on an established, valuable and valued shared knowledge base. Our teachers already have some understanding of what their learners will need in the long term, through the national curriculum statements the profession already owns and which should be built on in the strategy. Several voices at the Professional Forum argued that a closer look at the relevance of concepts developed for Māori medium learning could add value to the development of a leadership strategy for all educational leaders in New Zealand.

The strategy could readily define and insist on some essential research-based understandings for all leaders in education in Aotearoa New Zealand. We have ready access as a profession to some excellent high-level research that could underpin professional learning, for example the work on relationships-based learning, in which teaching is culturally responsive (Bishop), and work on the best evidence in relation to teacher and leader effectiveness (Robinson and Hattie). One group at the Professional Forum urged that we “pay attention to our own research and experience ... and look inwards for our own rich cultural and professional resources of leadership knowledge and good practice”.

Consistent with the recommendations of the Academic Forum, a more active, on-going and mutually respectful interface between researchers and practitioners at a local level would be welcomed by the profession. Support for more researchers in future to work alongside teachers, as they interact with their learners in their own contexts, and encouragement for more teachers to engage with and participate in research that is focused on their contexts and aligned with their goals, would help to ensure that more published research is relevant and likely to be used to improve practice.

Participants at the Professional Forum agreed that the strategy could guide both the provision and selection of relevant professional learning about leadership by defining the core capabilities of all professional (and principled), leaders of learning, including the drive to inquire and use evidence-based practice.

In Hattie’s sense of the pursuit of “collective efficacy”, collaboration in order to lift student achievement was also seen to depend on the strategy clarifying the goals of NZ education, based on our established valued outcomes. Collaboration with leaders outside education was also recommended, including some discussion that supported the Agencies Symposium’s advocacy of a much more joined up environment – to “make sense of the bigger picture, and show connections”.

In discussion about the concept of leadership as a “way of being rather than a hat to wear”, participants supported the view that professional leaders will need personalised learning appropriate to their roles in order to grow as well as learn. Currently, appraisal processes are the mechanism through which some personalised professional learning is possible, at all levels in the system. There was strong support for the strategy to normalise for all leaders expert coaching/mentoring, which is now usually reserved for principals and professional leaders. The idea of supervision was also considered worth investigating.

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Discussion supported the Council's challenge to the current hierarchy implicit in notions of professional leadership in our sector, for example in schools in the belief of too many teachers that there is a single ladder to climb, out of the classroom and into "administration", on the way to principalship and then to principalship in bigger organisations. It is more complex in ECE settings and in some independent services, there are limited opportunities to take on positional leadership roles. It was acknowledged that building leadership capacity and density is the right goal, backed up by the provision of professional learning appropriate to the different roles filled by these 'leaders for learning'.<sup>3</sup>

While their influence may have been exaggerated in the past, some discussion at the Professional Forum sounded a warning that simply including the currently unique role and responsibilities of principals/or professional leaders within the concept of leaders for learning could weaken the strategy. Principals and professional leaders have responsibility and authority in relation to a bigger picture than most leaders in "creating the conditions" for effective teaching and learning across an organisation, and "ensuring an orderly and safe environment"<sup>4</sup>. At best they establish and then personify an organisational culture that can ensure effective teachers are understood to be the crucial change agents, through their direct, day-to-day leadership of student learning and growth.

The wider community will not give up easily on its understanding of the importance of one person as the conductor of the orchestra, at least, and there is a possibility that general support for building capacity and density of leadership could be undermined without some clarity about the particular responsibility of the principal or professional leader. We need leaders to want to take up the principal or professional leader role, which should be visible and valued in the strategy as an integral rather than a dominant part of the pattern of interdependent leadership.

### (c) Future-focused leadership

The Education Council's Rationale notes the need for innovation and the theme of leading change also emerged at the Professional Forum. For example, one contributor noted that leadership in education is "characterised by homogeneity, with heterogeneous learners; we should be growing diversity in leadership". Another commented that future leaders need "permission to innovate, be creative, adapt, fail intelligently".

Future-focused leadership suggests the responsibility of teachers to future-proof their learners, readying them for the changing world in which they will be citizens, with implications for definitions of learner success, as discussed earlier, and pedagogy. If this idea of future-focused leadership is included in the vision, it would provide an opportunity to integrate in the strategy the increasingly widespread discussion of future-focused pedagogy, in which learner agency is enabled/enhanced by digital technology. We need to further accelerate the closing of the gap between current professional practice and the teaching and learning environment of the 21st century.

<sup>3</sup> Mason Durie, Educational Leadership for Tomorrow, [educationcouncil.org.nz/publications/five key think pieces on Leadership](http://educationcouncil.org.nz/publications/five-key-think-pieces-on-leadership), 2015

<sup>4</sup> Robinson, V, Student-Centred Leadership, Josey-Bass (CA), 2011 (Print).

This recognition of the importance of equipping our learners to live well recalls Unesco's four **pillars of education** throughout life, which are still relevant: Learning to know; **Learning to do**; **Learning to live together**; **Learning to be**. Learning to know (not knowing) and learning to "do" have particular resonance and relevance in a digitally enabled world.

There was a future focus in Hui Taumata statements as early as 2001 when Sir Mason Durie suggested three goals for Māori educational advancement:

- i To live as Māori;
- ii To actively participate as citizens of the world;
- iii To enjoy good health and a high standard of living

In his think piece for the Education Council, Sir Mason positions collaboration among leaders as an aspect of future-focused leadership in a global community:

Strategic leaders differ from institutional leaders in several respects. Rather than defending the school or past glories, strategic leaders go beyond schools in order to address community approaches to change as well as the likely impacts of change. They are increasingly aware of global markets and environmental risks and engage in strategic visioning so that they might be better informed about change possibilities. Instead of guarding tradition, they are more interested in scoping the future, and far from seeking autonomy (for their school) they are more interested in building networks and alliances. Strategic leaders want learners to be ready for change and to acquire new ways of gaining and processing knowledge.

Derek Wenmoth's Think Piece offers another way of expressing the concept of collaboration, which may be better aligned with future-focused leadership.

I have chosen to use the term 'networked' over 'collaborative' as I believe it best captures the paradigm shift that our school leaders must be prepared for. While collaboration is an unavoidable way of working within the networked environment, many would argue that collaborative activity already exists in the structures of our current education system.

Discussions at the Professional Forum would support his conclusion:

[Leadership development] should operate within the networked paradigm, promoting high levels of collaborative inquiry and activity, activated by strong mentoring and coaching relationships. The primary focus of leadership development within this network should focus on actions that will shape the culture of learning more powerfully and develop the professional capital of teachers as a group.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Derek Wenmoth, Networked Leadership, educationcouncil.org.nz/publications/Five key Think Pieces on Leadership, 2015

### Synthesizing the three themes in a draft vision statement

Based on the above analysis of discussion at Professional Forum, which took into account the outcomes from the other two meetings, and bearing in mind that there will be much debate and word-smithing to come, some starting points for a draft vision statement are:

Leaders for learning in Aotearoa New Zealand are principled, professional nation builders; through manaakitanga and whanaungatanga they inspire and grow in all children and young people the qualities, mindsets and capabilities of confident, connected future citizens.

Principled and professional educational leaders at all levels in Aotearoa New Zealand inspire and support all children and young people to aim high, and equip them with the dispositions, knowledge and capabilities to fulfill their aspirations as future citizens and stewards of a strong and just society

In Aotearoa New Zealand, educational leaders are themselves collaborative, energetic and creative learners, principled and professional in their commitment to challenging and supporting all children and young people to learn and to grow as creative and contributing future citizens.



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