

LEADERSHIP STRATEGY: SYNTHESIS OF VIEWS FROM THE ACADEMIC FORUM

10 MARCH 2017

EDUCATION COUNCIL

The Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand aims to raise the status of the teaching profession by supporting and developing effective, high quality practice across teaching pathways and building strong collaborative relationships across the profession.

The Council's 2016-2021 Strategic Plan focusses explicitly on enabling leadership at all levels of the system.

The plan outlines an intent to:

- enable leadership of a coherent, high-performing education system
- support and grow leaders and leadership across the profession
- enable leadership for ongoing improvement, innovation and transformation that will open up new ways for the system to support and enhance learning.

Leadership is a priority because the Council believes achieving valued learner outcomes in our fast changing world requires adaptive leadership focussed on evidence at all levels of the system. This calls for a system flexible enough to reshape itself in response to the needs of our infants, toddlers, children and young people.

What are the critical elements of adaptive leadership in a future New Zealand context? What conditions support this type of leadership and how might leadership capabilities be nourished in our future leaders? We need an understanding of the evidence base and a clear sense of the health of leadership in our system as it stands to answer these questions. We also need a vision of where we want to be in ten years and a map or strategy of how to get there.

For these reasons, the Education Council will spend its time through 2017 working with the leadership community and providing the context for the collaborative development of a leadership development strategy. The comprehensive development process involves working meetings with the profession, academics, Māori, providers, and education agencies. The Council intends to draw on the collective evidence and wisdom of its stakeholders to design a strategy that supports and develops a powerful leadership ecosystem for professional educators who are registered teachers working in early childhood, schools/kura and tertiary settings.

A draft leadership strategy will be released in October and feedback will be actively sought before the final version is published in November. This will include the Education Council's leadership strategy and programme of work.

ACADEMIC FORUM

The first strategy development working meeting was held on 27 February 2017. Twelve distinguished academics across the country participated in a meeting chaired by Tony Mackay, Deputy Chair of the Council. The forum's purpose was to draw on participants' understandings of international and local evidence about what constitutes effective leadership and the best way to support the strengthening of leadership capacity and capability across our education system. The following paper is a synthesis of the views expressed there.

Introduction

The forum strongly endorsed the Council's intention for the leadership strategy be co-constructed and owned by the profession. Ownership of the actions that follow will require a strategy that is motivating, refreshing and compelling for registered teachers across all settings. It must provide a 'road map' that is realistic and aspirational.

There was optimism the authority entrusted in the Education Council would lead and be influential in shaping New Zealand's leadership ecosystem.

The strategy must be focussed and be very clear of the critical elements and why they are important.

Six elements were identified as essential to the strategy which must:

1. Be guided by a clear vision of the Treaty of Waitangi as its foundation.
2. Take account of the wider education system while planning to influence and reshape the leadership ecosystem.
3. Connect research, policy and practice and draw on the opportunities offered by the interplay of the three areas.
4. Draw on the evidence of effective leadership activities and be open to new evidence.
5. Provide clarity about the key leadership capabilities needed for a future-oriented profession.
6. Provide an ecosystem that promotes and supports leadership learning.

A clear vision that places the Treaty of Waitangi as the foundation for the strategy

The forum thought the leadership strategy must be premised on an agreed, ambitious and aspirational vision for leadership—a vision that seeks equity and excellence in education and social change.

The vision must capture the idea of a leadership ecosystem that provides enabling conditions for registered teachers to be leaders, to learn leadership and to expand their leadership capabilities. In this context the term 'ecosystem' is used to capture the complex network of connections, relationships, stakeholders and opportunities within the leadership space. Children and young peoples' well-being and learning must be central to the vision and capture our goal for educational equity and excellence. The vision must acknowledge the Treaty of Waitangi as a platform of the strategy.

The leadership strategy should be deeply woven and constructed around biculturalism. There are strong examples where the Treaty has been conceptualised as foundational, such as Ka Hikitia, Tū Rangatira, Te Whāriki and the ERO evaluation indicators. Contributors hoped the vision for educational leadership and related strategy would draw from this thinking and provide coherence across the system. The Māori concepts of manaakitanga,

What does it mean as a leader to be true to the Treaty? How does a commitment to the Treaty differ from a commitment to equity? How do we think about authority in the context of the Treaty and again what are the implications for leadership? It was clear we won't achieve our aspirations for leadership in New Zealand if we don't tackle these issues.

whanaungatanga, ako, and mahi tahi, for example, that frame the way we approach educational provision in the New Zealand context might also provide the foreground for the leadership strategy.

That it is challenging work to realise the Treaty in practice was acknowledged. What does it mean as a leader to be true to the Treaty? How does a commitment to the Treaty differ from a commitment to equity? How do we think about authority in the context of the Treaty and again what are the implications for leadership? It was clear we won't achieve our aspirations for leadership in New Zealand if we don't tackle these issues.

Take account of the wider education system while planning to influence and reshape the leadership ecosystem

The leadership strategy sits within a complex system, and successful implementation requires an enabling policy environment. It is a system where everything is connected and constantly moving and we are developing a strategy that will serve the profession for the next 5 to 10 years.

The forum recommended two courses of action. Firstly, locate the strategy as well as possible within the current system, particularly in policy. Secondly, and more importantly, ensure the strategy signals a proactive stance to influencing and reshaping policy development. We know policy coherence and alignment are requirements for high-performing education systems and the Council can lead this coherence and alignment.

In shaping the future, the leadership strategy must signal the importance of:

- a shared direction for the profession, that is common across political parties
- the profession being more influential in policy development
- a system-wide spirit of productive inquiry, that includes the educational agencies. (Inquiry is seen as important for teachers and leaders but if their work isn't set within a system of inquiry at the policy level the potential impact on student learning won't be realised.)
- transformative, system level change for achieving greater equity in education.

Connecting research, policy and practice and drawing on the opportunities offered by the interplay of the three areas

Knowledge from research, policy and practice will inform the leadership strategy, but the intersection of these three areas is the most important in the way we shape the work. There was considerable discussion about the importance of bringing together the different knowledge perspectives. That it is hard work to understand the multiple perspectives and build collective ideas was acknowledged. There is a lot of mutual misunderstanding between researchers, policy developers and practitioners, and it takes particular capabilities to do productive work across these areas.

It was also acknowledged that the system drivers for researchers and research did not sufficiently value this collaborative work with practitioners. The Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) does not provide opportunity for researchers to build new knowledge in collaboration with teachers and leaders. It does not encourage bringing practitioners into the research environment. This is a good example of a disconnect in policy at a system level that achieves one goal—stronger research—at the expense of another critical goal—strengthening educational leadership across the system. It was thought that the gulf between research and practice was a significant constraint to the longer term success of the leadership strategy so we need to create new ways of making the system nimble.

Effective implementation of the compelling evidence about leadership activities that promote student learning, was viewed as another complex challenge. While it is widely agreed that the iterative Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) programme has provided rich evidence of what makes powerful leadership, there is insufficient evidence for the ideas being used. Effective use of compelling evidence requires productive work and maybe new ways of thinking about leadership and the development of leadership capabilities.

In shaping the future, the leadership strategy needs to signal the importance of;

- Policy coherence; setting goals for the system that align and add value to each other. In the education context this might involve reducing the numbers of active research staff in a university and providing funding to enable strong research-practice links in the service of stronger practices and better educational outcomes.
- Investment in disciplined innovation through high impact research and development in New Zealand.
- More powerful connections between the significant players such as leaders, iwi, academics and policy developers. This would assist each group to build a better understanding of respective perspectives and share knowledge. However, if we are to build new knowledge together—such as between leaders and researchers—we must shift our thinking and ways of working and develop new theories of action. It would require an increase in depth and robustness of the interactions and collaborations. If we are then to learn and build from this productive work there must be a focus on techniques and capabilities for collecting, analysing and synthesising the ‘results’ of the interactions and collaborations.

Drawing on the evidence of effective leadership activities and being open to new evidence

The strong evidence base of the leadership activities with the biggest impact on student learning needs to be visible in the leadership strategy. The iterative BES programme, for instance, clearly establishes the importance of leaders creating and actively sustaining the conditions where learning flourishes—the learning of children and young people, of teachers and leaders. The School Leadership and Student Outcomes BES provides compelling evidence of the leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make a difference to student outcomes in Māori and English medium classrooms and schools. This evidence has been used to inform the ERO evaluation indicators—leadership of conditions for equity and excellence—offering another resource for the strategy.

Our knowledge of effective leadership practices is evolving. A prominent development is the importance of collaborative practices, working and learning collectively. This is an essential practice for everyone in education, including leaders. Collaborative leadership practices are a particular challenge for those in leadership roles in Communities of Learning/Kāhui Ako. The role senior leaders play in inducting new members into the profession must also be considered in the strategy. Demonstrating the importance of contributing to the overall wellbeing of the education system, and not just the setting of employment, is a key aspect.

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The forum strongly supported the Council's intention to develop a leadership strategy that positioned leadership as a capability for everyone in the profession.

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In shaping the future, the leadership strategy needs to signal the importance of:

- Acknowledging what evidence we have and the emerging knowledge and practice, and also where there are gaps. This means;
 - Knowing the current and emerging knowledge about the leadership practices with the greatest impact for diverse learners across best evidence syntheses, the exemplars and other trustworthy evidence, and iterative knowledge building through the use of evidence in action.
 - Knowing that while our knowledge of leadership is evidence-based, there are still gaps in understanding. How to make the Treaty central to leadership is one example. Another limitation in our knowledge lies in the area of 'educationally powerful connections'. We know relationships with families/whānau can accelerate learning, but we have more to learn about how to realise this potential in practice.
- Being responsive to the uniqueness of the New Zealand and contemporary context while learning lessons from high-performing systems for equity and excellence in education elsewhere.
- Understanding the dynamic nature of education nationally and internationally and the need to take account of the implications for the leadership capabilities required to be effective in new environments.

Clarity about key leadership capabilities required for a future-oriented profession

The forum strongly supported the Council's intention to develop a leadership strategy that positioned leadership as a capability for everyone in the profession. That the knowledge and skills required relate to a leader's particular area of responsibility and influence was acknowledged. This was an issue explored in an earlier Council discussion paper, *Leadership for Communities of Learning*, which discussed the new leadership capabilities needed of Community leaders.

The leadership strategy needs to capture what are to be valued leadership capabilities, as nourishing these will be the focus for professional learning.

It was suggested that leadership is a way of being and doing rather than a hat to wear and involves:

- having a deep knowledge of the area of responsibility and influence
- having a strong sense of the moral purpose of education
- deliberate, informed and purposeful action
- being adaptive and agile while being true to the values of the profession
- being culturally responsive
- a strong sense of self-knowledge and self-care
- the ability to be humble, to listen carefully, to be reflective and to learn
- courage; to set expectations, support people to meet these, and deal constructively with those who do not 'step up'.

The leadership strategy must address leadership learning for all registered teachers while providing targeted support and professional learning for those in, and aspiring to move into, leadership roles such as principals, centre leaders, heads of departments and syndicate leaders.

In shaping the future, the leadership strategy needs to signal the importance of:

- recognising leadership is a capacity and action that everyone can contribute to and that developing the capacity for leadership can be learned
- using leadership authority for influence not control
- considering multiple perspectives and being open to new possibilities
- making a contribution to education in New Zealand, not just the setting of one's employment
- establishing and sustaining productive collaborative relationships; the ability to work together across the education system, not just talk together.

Providing an ecosystem that promotes and supports leadership learning

The leadership strategy must address leadership learning for all registered teachers while providing targeted support and professional learning for those in, and aspiring to move into, leadership roles such as principals, centre leaders, heads of departments and syndicate leaders.

Key features of effective professional learning opportunities include:

- engaging with the evidence about what makes for effective leadership in educational settings and for effective learning (see BES School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying what works and why: and Teacher Professional Learning and Development)
- being intellectually challenging
- being theoretically informed, for example, learning that is informed by critical theory and leads to addressing questions such as: who am I?, what do I stand for?, what might I need to unlearn?, what do I need to stop doing? and what I need to start doing?
- personalised and adaptive approaches
- actively experiencing the research-practice dynamic through relational and evaluative learning. An important feature is to create some form of dissonance. This could be something relatively easy, such as shadowing in a nearby classroom or school, or doing something differently. It might involve working in a context where there are different ways of seeing the world. This could be in a cultural or disciplinary context. It could also be working with children and young people in new ways. Inquiry and action research approaches are helpful in shaping the experience and the learning
- support by other experts who are able to challenge, ask hard questions and be collaborators. The support might be provided by peers, a coach, or an experienced leader from within education or externally.

And finally, in shaping the future the leadership strategy needs to signal the importance of:

- all registered teachers having the opportunity for high quality relevant professional leadership learning
- the Education Council working across the agencies and with key stakeholders to maximise knowledge sharing and learning at different levels of the system.



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