



LEADERSHIP FOR COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING

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BACKGROUND

The government's policy, Investing in Educational Success (IES), seeks to lift educational achievement by establishing Communities of Learning (CoL). The policy encourages collaboration across, and within, early childhood services, kura and schools, and new leadership roles that have been established to oversee and co-ordinate the work of the CoL.

As the independent professional body for teachers, the Education Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (the Council) plans to build on the professional work programme of the previous professional organisation, the New Zealand Teachers Council (NZTC). The NZTC made a significant contribution to the teaching profession in the areas of induction, mentoring and appraisal of teachers. The Council intends to expand this work into leadership for teachers and school/kura/early childhood service leaders. It is interested in contributing to the building of leadership capabilities at all levels, for example middle management, and in those who aspire to be principals, and has identified the new leaders of communities as its first priority. The Council wants to lead debate about the capabilities needed by leaders of CoL and how the required expertise can best be developed. It believes there will be a need for leadership for ongoing improvement within the current system, as well as leadership of innovation and transformation that will open up new ways for the system to support and enhance learning.

With this expansive view of the kind of leadership required in CoL, the Council commissioned five papers to provide insights relating to the professional practice of "leading improvement, innovation and change". Three external experts were invited to comment on the papers – Professor Viviane Robinson, Professor Michael Fullan and Margery Evans – in a conversation facilitated by Anthony Mackay, Deputy Chair of the Council.

This paper pulls together the intention of the Council with the five commissioned papers, issues raised by the commentators, and supporting literature.¹ The Council will use the paper as a platform for discussion with stakeholders and to promote and influence the investment in, and the provision of, leadership development in New Zealand. It is intended to stimulate professional conversations to enable the collective building of knowledge, not only about the key tasks of these new roles, but also about the capabilities required and the learning and development opportunities that would be most helpful to these new leaders. While the central focus of the paper is leadership for CoL, the Council believes the issues raised are relevant to many leaders of schools, kura and early childhood services who are already taking professional leadership responsibilities beyond the parameters of their own institution.

¹ The five commissioned papers are listed on the back page. The points made by the authors and comments made by the external experts are not referenced. References are included where additional sources are used to support the points made in this synthesis.

“Based on my experience, failure usually appears to occur for three reasons: school leaders do not apply tunnel vision and focus narrowly, but feel compelled to have many goals and interventions; leaders do not measure intermediate outcomes which provide essential feedback on progress towards the goal and allow for adaption of strategies early enough, and leaders do not sustain their efforts on the goal over the course of the year – their attention drifts away and therefore so does that of the team charged with reaching the goal.”

Dr Linda Bendikson –
*Community of Schools (CoS)
 Leadership – Throwing Money and
 Hoping for Success?*

The paper makes its contribution within a shifting landscape. The Council acknowledges the dynamic environment and the iterative nature of learning across the system as the new leadership roles are established. It recognises there is a contribution for the Council to make at the macro policy level that might involve, for example, providing advice about the professional standards that will be developed for these roles. There are also contributions to be made at the micro level where the Council could potentially foster a professional community of practice and facilitate learning from implementation. Overall, the Council is committed to contributing within this space and the nature of its ongoing work will be shaped by conversations with stakeholders.

The paper begins by briefly describing what is known about effective leadership of schools and kura and highlights the additional leadership demands on leaders of CoL. The paper then describes the conditions that enable the building of the leadership capabilities needed for a collaborative self-managing system. Finally, it proposes ways the Council could support the development of this leadership capability across the system.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS AND KURA?

There is strong empirical evidence about the leadership practices that affect student learning. It is clear that the more leaders focus their relationships, their work, and their leading on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes.² Effective leaders of schools/kura foster conditions that enable teachers to work productively with their students. They put a relentless focus on: identifying areas of learning strength and areas for improvement; negotiating school-wide goals and the setting of expectations; overseeing the planning, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum and teaching; ensuring resources are allocated to support the agreed priorities; investing in their own and their teachers' learning; and establishing and maintaining a collegial and professional working environment.

The school improvement research has given deeper insights into what these effective practices look like in action. Problem identification and goal setting for example, while essential, need to be evidence-based and the goals need to matter to the leader, the community and the teachers. They also need to be achievable. Most importantly, there needs to be an intensive focus on one or two things.

There is less agreement about the capabilities leaders need to engage in practices known to positively affect student learning. The evidence suggests, however, the importance of three inter-related capabilities: being able to apply leadership knowledge, to address complex school-based problems and build and sustain strong and trusting relationships with staff, parents, and students.³ Effective leadership not only requires expertise in framing and supporting the work of the organisation, it means having the knowledge, insight and foresight to actually do the leadership work.

² Robinson, V. (2011). *Student-centred leadership*. UK: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

³ Robinson, V. (2010). From instructional leadership to leadership capabilities: Empirical findings and methodological challenges. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 9: 1-26.

“So here we see the fundamental shift. In earlier times, leaders exerted influence through centralised control of resources. Today, however, power lies in networks, not nodes. A small group of passionate enthusiasts can connect to others that are like-minded, who in turn can recruit still others to the cause. Networked leadership is relational, collective, and emergent. It is both distributed and democratic.”

Derek Wenmoth —
Networked Leadership

“Instead of guarding tradition, they (the new leaders) are more interested in scoping the future, and far from seeking autonomy (for their school) they are more interested in building networks and alliances.”

Sir Mason Durie —
Educational Leadership for Tomorrow

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP CAPABILITY

In recent years there has also been considerable collective work undertaken in the area of school/kura-based leadership that acknowledges the unique role of New Zealand principals. The Kiwi Leadership for Principals (2008)⁴ is one example. This describes the qualities, knowledge and skills required to be an effective leader. The investment in leadership development through initiatives such as the First Time Principals programme, the National Aspiring Principals programme and professional development contracts focused on leadership, assessment and clusters, are other examples of collective endeavour.

At the same time, there has been growing interest in exploring ways schools, kura and early childhood services might collaborate to improve the learning experience of their students. Some of these collaborations have been self-initiated and others have been funded by the Ministry of Education. While the evidence of the impact of cluster and network-based initiatives on learning is inconclusive, a great deal has been learnt about practices that enable successful network-related activities.⁵ Many of these practices shed light on the type of leadership qualities that would contribute to successful outcomes in CoL.

WHAT LEADERSHIP CAPABILITIES ARE REQUIRED IN THE NEW ROLES?

The leaders of CoL must have demonstrated their ability to lead improvement and change within their own school/kura. Their additional task is to create and sustain a community of practice across a number of organisations. This will involve working with the community to negotiate the strategy and achievement priorities and ensuring the conditions are in place for the effective planning, implementation and evaluation of the agreed action plan. 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.

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. There are also different accountabilities. Although these leaders are technically accountable to their Board of Trustees, their moral accountability is to the other leaders and the community as a whole. They have responsibilities as leaders of a school or kura, as leaders of their community, *and* as network system-level leaders of their profession. The latter is the kind of leadership demonstrated by some school and kura leaders; it is leadership that will be required by all those leading CoL.

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).

⁴ <http://www.educationallleaders.govt.nz/Leadership-development/Key-leadership-documents/Kiwi-leadership-for-principals>. Downloaded 9/10/15.

⁵ Timperley H. & Earl, L. (2012). *Learning and change networks: A background paper on designing networks to make a difference*. Wellington: Ministry of Education

“To lead a network of schools takes all the above (the expertise required to run an effective school) and more – confidence in one’s own knowledge of the required process (which implies previous successful experience), courage to take a strong lead with the process, and the ability to inspire others to act in a timely way. Leading a network of schools is incredibly skilful and hard work.”

Dr Linda Bendikson –
Community of Schools (CoS)
Leadership – Throwing Money and Hoping for Success?

“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

“Leading in complex situations involves developing the collective intelligence of the system as a whole, and then allowing it to function new practices will emerge, probably in unexpected ways, from the system’s interactions.”

Professor Jane Gilbert –
Leading in Collaborative, Complex Education Systems

LEADING IN COMPLEXITY

A great deal of what leaders do is not simple or even complicated; it is difficult and complex. This is particularly the case for leaders of CoL. What is particularly challenging about complexity is leaders cannot control or predict what will happen which requires them to observe and listen, look for patterns, and intervene with an emergent, experimental approach.⁶ There is no formula to follow either, as context is critical. Strategies that work in one situation will not perform the same way in another situation with different starting conditions and different interactions.

Leading in complexity requires agreement on a general direction—or vision—and then a steady focus on providing conditions that allow the system to move in that direction. It is different work from that required of leaders working in more predictable environments. To navigate successfully demands different ways of thinking, engaging and acting.⁷ Leaders working with complexity tolerate more uncertainty and ambiguity, and have the confidence to make decisions in dynamic conditions. They engage the stakeholders inside and outside their community of responsibility in more inclusive, collaborative and emergent ways than have been commonly used in the past. The nature of this engagement is much more demanding. It is more than just exchanging or pooling existing ideas, with no space for critique and extension; this just reproduces the status quo.⁸ Leading strong collaboration involves building a commitment to moving ahead together and making it possible for everyone to participate in robust, collegial debate where disagreement, uncertainty and failure are anticipated.⁹ Finally, the leaders take action not by posing a solution but by trying a number of purposeful interventions designed to shed light on the challenge the community has set for itself.

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR DOING THIS WORK

Just as the new leadership work is complex, so is the approach to building capacity. While building capacity for doing the leadership work of a CoL relies on individual learning, the step change in leadership capability across the system will take more than individual learning or even learning within a CoL; it is the collective work and learning across the system that has the potential to realise the system shift and change. The new network leadership roles offer the opportunity for collaborative and connected knowledge building work, by these leaders and other system-level leaders; opportunities that have been all too rare for principals of schools and kura.¹⁰

A social learning system offered by a community of practice has much to offer in this instance. It would enable knowledge building across the CoL and with other system-level leaders, and the kind of collaborative context known to be necessary to do complex work (as described above). New practices would be generated from within the system, by the community itself, supported and facilitated by external experts. These experts need to be familiar with the context of the leadership work and to have shown the capacity themselves for thinking differently about leadership.

⁶ Garvey Berger, J. & Fitzgerald C. (2015). *Coaching for an increasingly complex world: A Cultivating Leadership white paper*. Downloaded 23 September 2015. <http://www.cultivatingleadership.co.nz/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Berger-and-Fitzgerald-Coaching-for-complexity-white-paper.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hargreaves & Fullan (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. New York: Teachers College Press.

⁹ See also, Garvey Berger, J. & Johnston, K. (2015). *Simple habits for complex times: Powerful practices for leaders*. California: Stanford University Press.

¹⁰ Wylie, C., Burgon, J. & Cosslett, G. (forthcoming). New Zealand principals: autonomy at a cost. In Ärlestig, H., Moos, O., & Day, C. (Eds). *A decade of research on school principals: cases from 24 countries*. Springer International.

“Everything in a system can socialise that system back into being what it has always been unless there are interventions of transformative change that prevent this.”

Dr Jan Robertson –
Think Piece – Leadership Education in New Zealand

“The key to building any form of professional community lies in understanding that a community operates more as an ecology rather than a structure or thing that can be owned and managed. In this regard, the community envisaged as being most effective in terms of developing professional leadership must operate as a network does, where hubs form and evolve, and links connect.”

Derek Wenmoth –
Networked Leadership

Over time, a leadership community of practice would also play a role in upholding the agreed standards and inducting new members into the community. It would provide the conditions for taking a more systematic approach to leadership development. For example, the construction of a professional leadership development strategy that includes middle leaders, aspiring leaders, first-time principals and experienced principals as well as network leaders. Most importantly, it would build leadership density across the system, as well as the conditions for the depth of the interactions needed for innovative change.

It is the leadership community of practice, well supported by experts in leadership for improvement, innovation and change, which needs to decide the most productive approaches for building professional practice. There is, however a good deal known about the elements for leadership learning that are powerful in developing the kind of leadership qualities required for the new environment. These are:

- *Personalised, self-regulated, reflective and meta-cognitive learning;*
 - *Connected and networked leaders sharing and creating knowledge together;*
 - *Coaching leadership capacity in self and others;*
 - *Inquiry-focused leadership and learning, informed by research and evidence.*
- (Jan Robertson)

Similarly, there are clear principles of effective professional learning; in depth, sustained over time, contextually relevant, linked to practice and supported by professional mentors and coaches.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE SYSTEM?

A new type of leadership is required for CoL, and for other system-level leaders working to support individual communities and the collective endeavour. It requires leaders to think, engage and act differently from their roles as leaders of a school, kura or early childhood service.

The work is complex, as is building the capacity to undertake the leadership role. The leaders need the opportunity to engage deeply in demanding professional conversations where assumptions are challenged and ideas are explored and stretched. They need to be confident with experimentation, tolerant of failure, and open to learning. Importantly, they need to be confident in leading when the destination is clear but not the pathways.

The building of new expertise for this complex task will be greatly enhanced by a strong leadership community of practice, supported by experts in improvement, innovation, change and adult learning.

If the system as a whole is to benefit from a new type of leadership, the community of practice needs to include those holding the new leadership roles *and* other system-level leaders such as Ministry of Education regional managers. The CoL offer an opportunity for system-level learning, something that has been difficult to achieve in the self-managing school model.

This opportunity will only be realised, however, if the leadership approach from the Ministry and other national bodies and agencies is itself collaborative and appropriate for the new agenda.

A PROPOSED ROLE FOR THE EDUCATION COUNCIL

The Council proposes to provide a hub—virtual and face-to-face—to enable the fledgling community to have robust collegial debate to decide its priorities and needs. The intention is for the Council to work with the leadership community and provide the context for the collaborative development of a leadership development strategy, initially for the new leadership roles but over time for leadership development more widely.

An important component of the initial strategy work will be clarifying key aspects of the new leadership roles and the conditions that will be required to enable the leaders to be effective in practice. Questions to be pursued include: how will the new leaders work with each other, across sectors and with related agencies regionally and nationally in ways that enable learning and development? What responsibilities do the new leaders have to the “system” beyond their own community and how might these be realised? What role should these leaders play in strengthening the teaching profession? What responsibilities do the various agencies have to these new leaders and how might these be enacted for individual leaders and for the leadership community of practice?

The Council is well placed to lead these strategic discussions, to support the development of a leadership community of practice, and to advocate for the kind of professional learning required by network leaders. The way the Council undertakes this important work will be guided by its discussion with stakeholders.

The following five papers informed *Leadership for Communities of Learning*:

- Dr Linda Bendikson — *Community of Schools (CoS) Leadership – Throwing Money and Hoping for Success?*
- Sir Mason Durie — *Educational Leadership for Tomorrow*
- Professor Jane Gilbert — *Leading in Collaborative, Complex Education Systems*
- Dr Jan Robertson — *Think Piece – Leadership Education in New Zealand*
- Derek Wenmoth — *Networked Leadership*

Access these papers on our website – educationcouncil.org.nz – under About the Education Council / Publications

Robyn Baker authored *Leadership for Communities of Learning* on behalf of the Education Council.