

# **PASSIONATE AND PROACTIVE: THE ROLE OF THE SECONDARY PRINCIPAL IN LEADING CURRICULUM CHANGE**

**MICHELE MORRISON**

*Department of Professional Studies in Education  
School of Education, University of Waikato*

**BEVERLEY COOPER**

*Centre for Teacher Education  
School of Education, University of Waikato*

**ABSTRACT** *It is widely recognised that the leadership of school principals is a crucial factor in school-based curriculum change. With the recent introduction of a new national curriculum in New Zealand, schools will need to develop strategies to incorporate this new curriculum into their programmes. This paper outlines evidence from international literature about how the leadership of principals is linked to change. It also examines evidence from case studies of early adopter schools. A major finding is that there appear to be common factors at work across effective secondary school principals, in particular an enthusiasm for proactive leadership of changes in school culture involving fundamental shifts in thinking and behaviour.*

## **KEYWORDS**

Principal leadership, school culture, curriculum change

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper focuses on the role of the secondary principal in leading the implementation of the revised *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). Our findings emerge from interviews conducted with the principal, nominated teachers and board of trustee (BOT) members during the first phase of the research project Curriculum Implementation Exploratory Studies. Research was carried out in term one, 2008, in four secondary schools within the greater Waikato region that had been identified by the New Zealand Ministry of Education as early adopter schools. The case study schools are all mid-decile (4-6), have rolls ranging from 600-1450 students, and include rural and urban contexts. Importantly, these schools had begun to explore the implications of the new curriculum when presented with the draft national curriculum for critique in 2006.

In conducting cross-case study analysis, we were interested in establishing whether the principals of early adopter schools possess leadership capacities in common. Our analysis reveals that all four case study principals share leadership capacities which are “common across contexts in their general form but highly adaptable and contingent in their specific enactment” (Leithwood, 2005, p. 622).

These include: a passionate unrelenting focus on learning; the ability to develop and articulate collective vision (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003); visible commitment to continued professional learning (Barth, 2001); the ability to establish a supportive community of practice with a culture of professional learning (Wenger, 1999; DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005); a willingness to distribute leadership (Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2005; Fullan, Hills & Crevallo, 2006); sensitivity to context and an understanding of the change process, and the ability to align systems and resources to support curriculum change (Dimmock, 2000). Using these capacities as a framework, we describe similarities and differences in the way in which principals initiate and lead curriculum change within unique school contexts, and relate case study findings to recent literature. We conclude with the speculation that a new breed of secondary principal appears to be emerging.

### **PASSIONATE UNRELENTING FOCUS ON LEARNING**

Recent literature suggests that highly effective principals possess enduring and genuine passion for the education of children. They are deeply committed to serving and preserving democratic principles of freedom, equality, and justice (Day & Harris, 2001; Starratt, 2004), and to facilitating the ethical “release of human possibilities” (Barth, 2001).

Passion for learning and the educative mission, a phenomenon described by Fullan (2001) as the energy–enthusiasm–hopefulness constellation, permeates the thoughts, words and actions of highly effective principals. It is manifest in the courage, drive, persistence and unwarranted optimism (Brighouse, 2001) with which they pursue educational goals and vision. These principals exercise significant positional power and influence over the quality of intellectual development and the formation of professional community. They are often the instigators of, and catalysts for change.

Highly effective principals are first and foremost learners whose intellectual curiosity and pursuit of personal mastery is life-long. As visible lead learners, they model the habits of inquiry, reflection and dialogue that enhance learning; demonstrate pedagogical knowledge in depth; scaffold, challenge and debate; and coach and mentor others (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Barth, 2001; Collarbone, 2003; Fullan, 2003; Senge, 1990). Principal participation in formal and informal teacher learning and development activities is identified in the forthcoming *Iterative Best Evidence Synthesis on Educational Leadership* as the leadership dimension having the greatest effect size on student learning outcomes (Robinson, 2007). Robinson (2007) cites research (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Bamberg & Andrews, 1991) which suggests that direct principal involvement in these activities is greater in higher achieving, higher gain schools than it is in lower achieving, lower gain schools. Further, “leaders who are perceived as sources of instructional advice and expertise gain greater respect from their staff” (Robinson, 2007, p. 16).

Principals of the case study schools similarly perceive themselves to be leaders of learning who prioritise pedagogical leadership and engage in continuous professional learning. One principal, for example, comments that “learning lifelong” is a key philosophy underpinning practice and that she is “unapologetic

about leading learning.” The principals concur that active, hands-on involvement is critical to successful and sustained curriculum innovation. Their leadership provides the catalyst for systemic changes in staff expectations of professional development and influences teachers to make the necessary long-term personal commitment to their own professional learning. Enthusiastic modelling of a culture of learning is perceived by many teachers to be both highly credible and inspirational. One teacher commented that:

The motivation of the principal, her excitement and passion sparked up and influenced me. She has been instrumental in feeding the excitement.

The case study principals agree that the new curriculum provides a timely opportunity to refocus staff on the nature of learning and its relevance for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners.

We can make this curriculum ours. It is a journey and a process turning us into learners again. It’s very exciting. We can use the flexibility of the document to meet the needs of our students in thoughtful ways ... It is not content driven, it is conceptually driven.

A future focus was evident in the initial decision by the principals to maintain a school-wide rather than subject-specific approach and their insistence on examining the implications of the ‘front end’ of the curriculum document for their learners. The ‘front end’ of the document focuses on purposes and scope, vision, principles of curriculum decision making, values, key competencies, effective pedagogy, broad principles underpinning the eight learning areas and school curriculum design and review.

In the principals’ view, a focus on the ‘front end’ provides opportunities to fundamentally re-evaluate the nature of learning, teaching and knowledge, and the appropriateness of current curriculum models. This enhances the likelihood of fresh perspectives and reduces the temptation to fit existing practice to new curriculum models. Aligned with this is a prioritising of critical skill development over content.

Knowledge is exponential in its growth and the idea of attaining knowledge is not possible but to access it is.

It’s not what you teach, it’s deciphering, being critical, enterprising, smart and discerning.

The principals acknowledge that this represents a departure from the approach taken in response to the previous curriculum review (Ministry of Education 1993), which focused on changes to learning area delivery.

The principals interviewed in the case study schools all possess the ability to translate their passion for learning into a credible personal vision which they believe will meet the needs of learners in their schools. The principals are the key players in motivating staff and alerting their communities to educational issues. Although early leadership literature suggests that highly effective leadership is both charismatic and heroic (Meindl, 1998; Meindel, Ehrlich & Dukerich, 1985; Senge, 1999, 2000; Weber, 1947), the case study principals do not uniformly demonstrate aspects of charismatic or hero leadership. In fact, much of their credibility

seemingly arises from the ability to quietly, sincerely and resolutely articulate their philosophies (Badaracco, 2002), to distribute leadership and to work alongside colleagues.

### **THE ABILITY TO DEVELOP AND ARTICULATE A COLLECTIVE VISION**

Personal vision alone will not secure curriculum change. Principals must be able to unite their diverse school community in the negotiation of shared understandings and common purpose (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The case study principals emphasise and prioritise the importance of developing a collective living vision and have approached this in a variety of ways. Some developed a clear vision and charter before they embarked on curriculum change; others were revising their vision, charter and curriculum concurrently, while others were reculturing the school approach to professional learning.

Contextual factors determined the nature of their response, as reflected in the examples below.

#### **i) School A**

The principal, inspired by her own professional development experiences, prioritised the formation of a vision that encapsulated the aspirations of staff, students and the wider community. She gathered together interested teachers who became known as the 'Good to Great' group. The aspirational group title derives from Jim Collin's (2001) research into companies that sustain leading market edge. Collins argues that leaders build enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of professional will and personal humility, principles which apply equally to educational contexts: "We don't have great schools, principally because we have good schools" (2001, p.1).

A critique of *Good to Great* formed the basis for subsequent group meetings during which members met frequently but informally to exchange views on what the future might hold for their learners. A metaphor featuring a widening river formed the basis of a new vision for the school. In 2006, after sharing this concept with the Board of Trustees (BOT) and seeking feedback from the wider community, school staff and students, the charter was developed. The charter is unique in that ideas are represented in pictorial form and drawn by a student of the school.

The staff, students and community have strong ownership of the school charter and can articulate its philosophy with understanding and confidence. The school community is proud of the charter's innovative nature and the pictorial representation of its ideals.

This vision is owned and seemed to be articulated by all stakeholder groups in the school community, and is an integral part of school life and procedures. For example, the charter is used in all assemblies and disciplinary meetings and students are asked to unpack it and describe what it looks like in their life. Staff consistently comment that students are able to use the language of the charter with confidence: "Kids have picked up that the school is about learning."

## **ii) School B**

School B is in the process of revising their charter and vision. The principal is determined not to rush this process: “It should take as long as it needs to take.” However, she equally recognises that the school must be prepared for curriculum implementation in 2010.

As a new principal, she acknowledges the importance of developing positive relationships with the BOT and the wider community. She initially presented her personal vision for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners to the BOT. This opened up debate, alerted her to the diverse opinion of board members and formed the basis for student and community consultation. One BOT member commented:

The principal is not afraid to admit she doesn’t have all the answers. I find this encourages people to feed in ... Valuing of parents and community is important. Listening as opposed to telling them: “This is the way it is.” This allows parents to recognise that the principal is a person. Relationships are important. I can see that the Māori community are responding well to this. The principal asks whether there are other ways of approaching issues.

## **iii) School C**

School C’s principal reflected both on her previous and current curriculum leadership experiences. In her previous school (where she was also principal), staff had seen the “new curriculum as an opportunity.” She took the school through a “revisioning process”. The school closed for two days to consult with contributing schools, current parents, organisations associated with the school, and students. They contracted external experts to facilitate this. This had led to robust discussion about the content offered in learning areas and appropriate pedagogy.

On her arrival at school C she began with a similar process but encountered some staff who were of the view that “this is the [School C] Way – the new way is not the [School C] way.” She changed direction to focus on best practice. “The ideal would be to start with the vision but it was not right for this school.” Consequently, current emphasis within the school is on professional learning which builds common understanding of effective pedagogy and supports teachers in enhancing student engagement and achievement. In the principal’s view this needs to be embedded before the school works on full curriculum review and the revisioning process.

## **THE ABILITY TO ESTABLISH A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE WITH A CULTURE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Recent research (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas & Wallace, 2005; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Fullan, 2005; Hord, 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003) suggests that professional learning communities enhance student, staff and community learning. Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003) contend that the defining characteristic of a learning community is the “collective enterprise that ensures that individual learning adds up to a coherent whole, driven by high-quality pupil

learning as its fundamental purpose” (p. 131). Leaders of learning put learning at the centre of everything they do: students’ learning first, then everyone else’s learning in support of it.

All principals in the case study schools changed the focus and nature of professional development for their teachers. In their view it is essential that as school leaders they actively lead, assist, monitor and model learning. Well versed in educational research and literature, they make their own learning visible and actively pursue and promote innovations that potentially enhance their school practice.

One commented that their role involves:

scanning the horizon, reading and pulling it together ... finding out what is happening out there and translating it to what is happening in this context.

Another principal commented on the value of her own professional learning strategies:

My first time principal’s training has influenced and assisted me in my thinking. I have a critical coach who is educationally based. We meet once a month for two-hour sessions. I have had opportunities to work with key people ... I am an avid reader of professional work.

It is evident that selected professional development pathways influence the manner in which the case study principals prioritise curriculum leadership and interact with staff. They tend to avoid narrow technicist approaches and engage instead in professional development opportunities which develop and refine the conceptual leadership frameworks necessary for principals to respond to complex and fluid educational environments. These demand commitment to continuous learning and critical reflection on leadership effectiveness, capacities which are second nature to the case study principals.

There also appears to have been a fundamental shift in emphasis away from the managerial practices required by post-1988 neoliberal educational reforms, towards curriculum leadership. Indeed, it seems that a new breed of principal may be emerging in New Zealand; one who prioritises learning (their own and everyone else’s) over all else, values innovation over compliance, and courageously resists external policy directives which divert energy from the essential educative mission.

Principals recognise that realising the school vision often necessitates deep-seated cultural change within the staff and acknowledge the time-consuming nature of this process. Whole-school staff professional learning becomes an important priority and is seen as ongoing rather than episodic. As one said, “Cultural change doesn’t happen through Teacher Only Days. TODs are good for pulling things together.”

The focus of staff meetings in all case study schools has changed from administration to professional learning, in order to provide teachers with opportunities to explore their pedagogical thinking. Time is set aside each week for whole school professional learning. At the outset external experts were invited to staff meetings to provoke and stimulate teachers to ‘think outside square.’ Teachers

were provided with professional readings that formed the basis of school wide discussion. A variety of strategies have been used during staff meetings to model effective teaching and learning approaches.

Principals recognise that this fundamentally changes the way staff are expected to engage in professional learning. Teachers need time to consider how to communicate with one another, think critically, have hard conversations and debate professional readings whilst respecting difference and avoiding animosity. In some schools a common discourse has developed to encapsulate their philosophies for effective learning. For example, in one school life-long learning is uniformly referred to as 'learning life long,' professional development groups have become 'critical enquiry groups', and faculty or special portfolio group chairs are now known as 'lead learning coaches.' In the principal's view this is gradually changing the culture of staff development:

I know that staff are now really comfortable about being learners, developing resilience and taking risks ... Staff are learning that they are more alike than different. They are finding that this learning is very relevant to them. I am seeing staff chivvy each other and I don't have to do this.

Another school has renamed heads of departments Leaders of Curriculum and Learning (LOCALs) to reflect the change in emphasis from managerial to learning leadership roles. The principal comments that the deliberate emphasis within team meetings on effective pedagogical approaches has enhanced ownership of the change process.

People enjoy these meetings and people come out buzzing ... We are planting seeds strategically through readings and LOCALs own it.

Teachers in all case study schools recognise that a collaborative whole school professional development approach, although initially uncomfortable for them, has been important in shaping their ideas related to curriculum change and innovation.

Active participation in wider communities of practice has been acknowledged as an important vehicle for professional development (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999). This enables educators to construct new meaning and develop shared and deeper understandings across wider contexts. Principals in the case studies acknowledge the importance of working with colleagues in other schools within and across sectors. Opportunities to develop professional links through the principals' association are highly valued. Two schools in the case studies belong to wider cross-sector clusters focusing on ICT and extending high standards across schools (EHSAS). For example, one school is involved with eleven contributing schools in the EHSAS project, "Kids on the plains and beyond." This project seeks to provide coherent learning pathways from primary to secondary through the nine gateways to Personalised Learning (Hargreaves, 2004). Teachers similarly value the opportunity to share knowledge and skills with colleagues from different school sectors. This has influenced the way they think about school structures and provided new leadership opportunities.

### **A WILLINGNESS TO DISTRIBUTE LEADERSHIP**

West-Burnham's (2004) research into 21 British secondary schools, all of which perceive themselves as being engaged in learning-centred leadership, reveals that the consistent emphasis on shared and distributed leadership has been "created by very determined headteachers whose personal values, vision, commitment and energy are credited by staff as having made the difference" (p. 18). Although principal leadership is a necessary prerequisite for curriculum reform, it is recognised that distributed leadership is essential for sustained change. Quite simply, the task is too monumental for the principal alone (Elmore, 2000).

Hargreaves (2001) believes that the key to "sustainable success in education lies not in training and developing a tiny leadership elite, but in creating entire cultures of distributed leadership throughout the school community" (p. 36). Fullan (2005, p. 29) concurs: "Sustainability is a team sport and the team is huge," a point also echoed in Southworth's contention that "belief in the power of one is giving way to a belief in the power of everyone" (2005, p. 77).

The case study principals recognise that curriculum reforms provide pragmatic as well as philosophical reasons to empower others in leadership roles. Whilst they see themselves as the curriculum leader, they acknowledge the importance of building collective capacity in order to effectively implement and sustain curriculum change and innovation.

This has had implications for both the function and membership of leadership teams. Strategic appointments have been made both from within and outside the school. For example, rather than appoint a fourth deputy principal one school decided to enhance the leadership structure from within by appointing Lead Learning Coaches (LLC). These people hold cross-curricula portfolios which include Gifted and Talented Education, Māori, Pacific students, Literacy, Numeracy, Resource Teachers Learning Behaviour, Specialist Classroom Teacher and ATOL. In another school strategic appointments include a deputy principal with curriculum responsibility, a learning dean and restructuring of other staff responsibilities to emphasise their roles as leaders of learning.

In an extreme case, circumstances allowed the principal, with the support of the BOT, to radically restructure the senior management team around the National Administration Guidelines (NAGS). New senior management personnel, who are committed to the new directions the principal has set, have been appointed from outside the school. One DP has delegated responsibility for curriculum (NAG1) and supports the principal in her role as academic leader. Other new DPs also have expertise in curriculum and contribute to a team approach. The principal envisages that this new senior management team will have a role in visiting classrooms, peer mentoring and working with staff on their classroom practice.

Curriculum leadership has been distributed to varying levels in all case study schools. High value is placed on the cross-curricula sharing of ideas, philosophies and good practice, and teachers are encouraged to read, conduct and critique educational research. In one school professional learning has evolved to a high trust model where small self-formed critical enquiry groups set their own agenda,

investigate an aspect of practice and present their findings to the principal as part of the appraisal process.

### **AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHANGE PROCESS**

The literature suggests that principals must understand the change process. Effective principals recognise that substantive change is messy, “complex non-linear, frequently arbitrary and highly political” (Fullan, 1992, p. 2). Like learners, it has curves and is neither instant, nor steady, nor immediately evident. Fullan (1982, 2001, 2005) has written a number of texts on the leadership of change. He argues that change is a process, not an event. Argyris and Schon (1978) maintain that an organisation’s key challenge is not to become more effective at performing a stable task in the light of stable purposes, but to restructure its purposes and redefine its task in the face of a changing environment. Principals must balance paradoxical and competing demands: to maintain a sense of urgency about improving their schools and the patience to sustain them over the long haul, to focus on an unknown future whilst remaining grounded in current reality, to adopt a ‘loose-tight’ leadership style which simultaneously encourages autonomy and demands adherence to shared vision and values; and to celebrate successes whilst perpetuating discontent with the status quo (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

It is now recognised in the research literature that highly effective principals are aware that prevailing contextual factors determine organisational readiness to change and the pace at which change can occur. The diagnosis of current reality enables these principals to provide a context of security and challenge which encourages innovation, avoids blame, extends moral support for change agents, and acknowledges the human dimension (Kanter, 1988). While principals need to manage the change process carefully to avoid the inherent pitfalls (Kotter, 1996), and guard against “the tendency to commit to far more activities and initiatives than anyone could possibly monitor, much less effectively implement” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 426) they recognise that the status quo is not an option. Blumberg and Greenfield’s (1986) study found that while leadership in schools is differentiated, highly effective principals are all “willing, from time to time, to disturb the equilibrium of their respective schools in order to challenge assumptions and bring about improvements in teaching and learning” (Southworth, 1998, p. 13).

All the principals in the case studies are supported wholeheartedly by their boards of trustees to institute change. Some of the principals have been appointed because their BOT perceives them as change agents.

The school was in need of a change of direction. The new principal has a track record. The BOT wanted someone to change the direction of the school.

Principals similarly recognise that there are teachers within their schools who embrace change. Innovative staff require the freedom to experiment at an individual and departmental level. Small-scale piloting of new pedagogical structures and approaches provides opportunities for innovators and minimises potential risks for students, and resistant staff.

We have a number of pilots to encourage innovators. We are exploring integrated curriculum, for example four staff are working on combined English and social studies. Some areas already have a double period of 100 minutes. We are exploring what we could do if we had longer. This is being trialled. Teachers are speaking about the joys of continuing on.

Teachers engaged in the trials are positive about the effect of innovative practices on both student and staff engagement. In one school the lead teacher offered them a choice of three projects within a technology context:

Some worked in groups and others individually. Students used me as a facilitator rather than the teacher who knows all answers. This worked well because girls chose what they wanted to do and therefore took greater responsibility. There was an impact on the department. Staff saw the results and the positive atmosphere in class. They understood it was effective, even though hard work. Staff are quite flexible anyway – goes with subject. A lot of group learning occurred – I had to consult with others in the team who had different areas of specialty.

Other examples from case study schools include: cross-curricula differentiated programmes at years 9 and 10; student involvement in the co-construction of units of work and assessment activities; the use of rich tasks such as cooperative problem solving; unit planning which includes key competencies; differentiated tasks; and the development of school-wide tutor group activities which develop key competencies.

Other teachers created resources which I've used with my Tutor group around connectedness and relating with one other. This has been good for me. I could not have done this alone. It has heightened concepts of student user-friendliness.

The case study evidence shows that diverse staff needs with respect to pedagogy exist within each school. Principals need to take cognisance of these diverse needs and recognise that “some staff will really struggle to make the pedagogical moves they need to.” The human dimension of change cannot be underestimated. There are several examples from the case studies where principals modified the direction and pace of change in response to staff reactions.

In one school the new principal encountered considerable resistance from staff to change. She was aware from her performance appraisal that some teachers perceived her to be totally student focussed and felt that their contributions were undervalued. The principal acknowledges that this was a “difficult situation which required careful management” and she responded accordingly. Whilst in her opinion revisioning was the preferred first step, contextual factors led her to focus instead on cultural change:

Making people do things doesn't make people learn ... Professional learning can be just about being open to change and taking responsibility for your own learning.

Another teacher has commented that some resistance from colleagues has been due more to the pace rather than the direction of change.

I have bought into the new principal's philosophies. Not all the staff have. Sometimes changes have been too quick. The principal has the right ideas and right direction for this school and is putting steps in place to get there. We are on the same waka paddling in the right direction to move us forward.

Therefore, the case studies highlight the importance of meeting diverse adult learning needs. For example, a teacher from one school would have preferred to be shown an overview of the development process at the outset, another preferred video rather than textual material and yet another preferred to consider bullet point summaries over entire readings. Other teachers have suggested that there could be greater variety in the timing and structure of professional learning sessions. In this particular school, the principal has responded by reducing the amount of professional reading, increasing the time that teachers had to complete their tasks and rescheduling meetings to better accommodate staff needs.

All the case study principals, on reflection, acknowledge that the change process is challenging. Teachers do not automatically embrace change initiatives and it requires considerable determination and resilience on the principal's part to effect cultural change. Whilst the case study principals have maintained an outwardly positive and proactive approach with their staff and community, this has not been easy. They have all experienced internal doubt and considerable frustration to the point that some have fleetingly questioned whether it would be simpler to retain the status quo. However, their overriding passion for enhancing and supporting student learning enables them to persevere in the face of at times considerable resistance. In addition to internal conviction, principals are sustained in this endeavour by like-minded colleagues. Interestingly, each of the case study principals mentions one or more of the other principals in this study as being influential and strongly supportive of their practice. This helps alleviate the loneliness and isolation of the principal position and highlights the importance of developing accessible principal networks.

### **THE ABILITY TO ALIGN SYSTEMS AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT CURRICULUM CHANGE**

Acting in a considered but often improvisational manner, principals align elements of the school system adroitly to produce optimal learning and teaching conditions, and establish the internal coherence necessary to sustain educational reform.

Hill and Crevola (2003) believe that "teachers have always shown a strong commitment to learning as professionals, but all too often this has been pursued outside the context of whole-school change" (p. 396). While people (and collaborative teams in particular) possess the capacity for leading and learning, the structures in which they have to function are often not conducive to the exercise of learning-centred leadership (Timperley, Phillips, & Wiseman, 2003). This is particularly evident in secondary schools where allegiance to a department and subjects often takes priority over commitment to school wide initiatives.

Dimmock (2000) argues that schools are complex systems of interrelated parts. At the centre, a curriculum based on student learning outcomes, informed teaching practices, informed learning, and computer technology constitutes what he terms the 'core technology' of the school and maximizes 'learning-centredness.' The remaining six elements (leadership and management, organisational culture, organisational structures, personnel and financial resources, and performance evaluation) support and further the quality of the core technology, and the interrupted boundary line "signifies the mutuality and reciprocity of influence between all of the elements" (p. 3).

Effective principals recognise that curriculum reform does not happen in isolation and has a significant impact on interrelated school systems including personnel, resources, organisation and procedures. Senge (1990) describes the ability to discern and respond to change impacts as systems thinking. Systems thinking requires principals to develop "an intuitive understanding or *gestalt* of the whole, which illuminates detailed knowledge of the parts" (Hill & Crevola, 2003, p. 397). They act strategically to ensure that critical system elements are aligned in a manner that scaffolds improvements in teaching and enables the organisation to flex and respond to rapidly changing contexts. This involves reviewing existing structures and processes, establishing new ways of doing things, tailoring the performance management system to reflect organisational goals (Dimmock, 1999; Fitzgerald, Young, & Grootenboer, 2003; Stewart, 2000), and ensuring that recruitment and selection processes result in the appointment of staff whose demeanour, expertise (actual and potential) and agency are compatible with the prevailing or desired organisational culture.

In the case study schools strong complementary working relationships are evident between the principal and the BOT. The BOT understands their governance role and takes a long-term approach to school planning. A board member from one school commented that boards need to "remember that we come and go, yet the school needs continual support." She was mindful that the BOT needs to monitor, act in an advisory capacity and ensure that actions are aligned to vision.

We are caretakers of now but also need to prepare for future. If you are focused on the future, decisions made at BOT level need to be aligned with the future. If we don't do this, we sell kids short.

In all case study schools the BOT has aligned school resources and structures to support the principal in the role of curriculum leader. For example, one school now employs a property manager rather than a caretaker and has outsourced accounting services. In two of the schools extra resourcing has been allocated to ICT equipment that supports pedagogical change. All principals have been supported in their decision to provide opportunities for teacher professional learning within the school day. They have achieved this by changing the timetable structure to allow for later starts or earlier finishes for students.

Importantly, all the Boards have allocated additional funds to the professional learning budget to support the development of teaching pedagogy. School-wide professional development is prioritised and professional development opportunities for individuals and departments are now coordinated and reviewed each term. In

one extreme the BOT has been able to allocate an additional \$200,000 to the professional development budget to support the principal's initiatives.

The research suggests that external developers offer important facilitation functions not readily accessible within the school (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007). They typically have experience working in multiple contexts and because they lack emotional commitment to a single site, analysis of individual schools is dispassionate. Outsiders bring fresh perspectives and approaches which stimulate and challenge thinking. The case study schools have all engaged the services of external experts at the early stages of curriculum review and two schools have elected to form and fund ongoing partnerships with external developers. Aligned to the goal of raising student achievement, the principal of one of these schools has employed an external consultant with strengths in literacy to support staff over a three year period. In the other school the external consultant is working to develop templates for whole school planning around charter goals and key competencies.

Schools operate within strict time constraints and time is a valued commodity for teachers. If time is allocated during the school day rather than after school hours the activity is more likely to be perceived by teachers as a valued school priority. The principals recognise that the shift from individual, episodic professional development to collective, ongoing professional learning requires additional school time. They perceive the need to be "savvy about creating learning time" for staff. Strategies include providing staff with reading time, releasing groups of teachers for planning and piloting new pedagogical approaches, and visiting other schools with innovative programmes. In one principal's view, the number of Ministry funded teacher only days is insufficient to explore implementation of the new document and she has devoted additional teacher only days to this.

In some schools principals have restructured performance management systems to ensure alignment with improving student achievement and engagement. In school B, for example, instead of individual appraisal, teachers meet for professional conversations with the principal based on their paired critical enquiry. She has been impressed with the depth of these conversations and believes that this avoids some of the tokenism associated with traditional performance management systems.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our cross-case study analysis reveals that the four principals possess critical leadership capacities commonly identified in the literature. They are unapologetic, passionate leaders of learning who resolutely and proactively focus on raising student engagement and achievement, both within and beyond formal schooling. They all recognise that a focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century learning represents a departure from business as usual and demands deep-seated cultural change. The establishment of new professional norms requires fundamental shifts in thinking and behaviour, a process which is both challenging and precarious. Sensitivity to context and careful attention to the human dimension of change are essential if principals are to

successfully lead new curriculum implementation. This is a critical skill which requires both personal humility and professional will. The case study principals acknowledge that change is a difficult, messy and complex process which tests their personal resilience and resources. Effecting curriculum change in dynamic, unpredictable educational contexts requires courage of conviction, deep pedagogical knowledge and skilful, emotionally intelligent leadership on their part. It is a decidedly hands-on endeavour.

While publication of the final report will precede the mandatory curriculum implementation date of 2010, emerging findings from the first phase of research are likely to be of greater potential benefit to principals whose schools have delayed the curriculum implementation process. The opportunity to benefit from the common experience of others and thus avoid having to reinvent the wheel is universally valued, as reiterated by each of the case study principals. However, first-phase analysis is not limitation free. Principals are not yet in a position to reflect globally on the curriculum implementation process and the human impact of change on themselves, colleagues and others. Nor are we able to move beyond the tentative speculation that a new breed of secondary principal is emerging. The fact that all four case study principals initiated fundamental re-evaluation of learning, teaching and knowledge prior to publication of the Draft New Zealand Curriculum is encouraging, but it is too early to determine whether a focus on curriculum leadership will endure beyond 2010. These are areas which warrant investigation over a longer period and on a larger scale.

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