



School leaders growing leadership from within: A framework for the development of school leaders

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Abstract

This article discusses the development of school leaders from within schools. Within this discussion, a framework is presented which identifies key features which support school leaders to achieve this. The authors propose that school leaders are required to deliberately establish and maintain positive relationships with their teachers while also developing a positive school culture. The framework demonstrates the strong influence that school leaders have on their relationships with teachers, and in turn the interconnectedness between these relationships and the school culture. It also shows how a positive school culture enables school leaders to create opportunities and support teachers to develop both personally and professionally, and grow as leaders from within their schools. Although in order to create this culture, school leaders draw on aspects from various different leadership styles, we suggest that to be successful the development of a new leadership style may be timely.

Keywords

School leaders, development, relationships, culture

Introduction

This article discusses the development of school leaders from within schools. Within this discussion, a framework is presented which identifies key features which support school leaders to achieve this. In the context of this article, growth is used synonymously with development and encompasses both the personal and professional learning that is required of a teacher to become a school leader. The key components of the framework are the responsibility of the school leader to deliberately establish and maintain positive relationships and a positive school culture; providing opportunities for teachers; and providing support for teachers. The framework shows the interconnectedness between positive relationships and school culture, and how this enables school leaders to provide opportunities and support for teachers to grow personally and professionally and see new possibilities for themselves, such as taking school leadership roles.

At times it is important that leadership is grown from within schools, such as in hard to staff areas, so that schools can be well positioned when leadership roles become vacant. Our interest in this arose



from our experiences and development as practising educational leaders within a decile¹ 2 school which was faced with the challenges of being in a low socio-economic area. Teaching in low-socio economic areas may seem undesirable to many teachers, as some of these schools face significant issues that can be challenging to overcome. These issues may include high numbers of students with behaviour problems, wide-ranging educational needs and a lack of family and community support. As we struggled in our school with issues such as these, we were also conscious that they were a deterrent for suitable applicants because we were frequently unable to fill teaching and leadership positions. The problem was not just with recruiting experienced teachers but, even in difficult job markets, beginning teachers also seemed unwilling to apply.

Our experience indicates that the effects of moving into a standards-based environment, where the political threat of accountability for teachers has become increasingly present, are being felt in some New Zealand schools (Codd, 2005; Thrupp, 2006). When teacher performance becomes attached to outcomes such as the national standards in literacy and numeracy (Ministry of Education, 2009), teachers and schools could become disadvantaged. This is particularly pertinent for those schools whose students, while making significant progress, take longer to reach the required standard. In these schools, a disconnect can become evident between that which teachers see as progress and the realities of an educational system that supports measurement against standards as the only valid measure of success. Some schools, such as those in low socio-economic areas, have been placed at a disadvantage in attracting appropriate, experienced and competent staff.

This draws attention to the issues that some schools in New Zealand face, such as recruiting and attracting staff and supporting new staff within challenging environments. Within such environments, particular care needs to be taken so that school leaders develop close working relationships with teachers and have an already established knowledge of the school culture and the wider school community. It is through these relationships and knowledge that school leaders can develop leadership from within their schools in order to overcome some of the staffing issues they face.

One of the key aspects which impacts on developing leaders from within is how school leaders manage the placement of teachers in class levels each year. Recent research on this topic by the Carlyon and Fisher (2012, 2013) shows that while some teachers see their potential as school leaders, others may require encouragement to actualise this potential. This aligns with Hargreaves and Fullan's suggestion that sometimes teachers "have to be steered into new practices" (2012, p. 56), and reinforces the importance of school leaders providing opportunities and support for teachers to grow (Carlyon, 2013, 2014) Teaching different class levels can be a useful opportunity for a teacher to reflect on their beliefs about their practice, and develop a broader view of the needs of all students and the school as a learning environment (Carlyon, 2014).

Teachers who take on these kinds of opportunities can develop a greater insightfulness and awareness of the school as a whole (Hoyle & John, 1995), which allows them to develop personally and professionally and grow into leaders. This personal and professional learning includes aspects such as having an understanding of what leadership entails and also the development and growth of one's character, which can be thought of as *real growth*. Wheatley (2006) suggests that growth such as this "happens in personal behaviours" (p. 149), and that without this growth leadership can be somewhat hollow. This aligns with Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011), who argue that leadership should be a group process which is founded on relationships for the greater good of all and that leadership needs to be seen as "the product of an individual's we-ness rather than his or her I-ness" (p. 2).

In this article, we discuss the development of school leaders from within schools. The ideas will be discussed under the following headings: deliberately establishing and maintaining positive relationships and a positive school culture; providing opportunities for teacher growth; and providing support for teacher growth. These describe the actions of school leaders that enable teachers to develop and grow as leaders.

¹ A school's decile rating indicates the extent to which it draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students.

Deliberately establishing and maintaining positive relationships and a positive school culture

Many school leaders see that growing leaders is part of their role and recognise that for this to occur, they must deliberately establish and maintain positive relationships and a positive school culture (Carlyon & Fisher, 2012, 2013). Many of these ideas align with John Dewey's (1938) early work, which suggested that leadership is about individuals demonstrating the capacity to cultivate growth within others. This refers to leaders having the ability to provide opportunities for others to grow, realise their full potential and use their skills for the greater good. When Dewey referred to growth he identified that it could be cultivated through a culture that is espoused by actions and words (Blake, Smeyers, Smith, & Standish, 2003). This also relates to Argyris and Schon's (1982) notion of espoused theory and theory in action, which they see as the ability to reflect on and learn from our actions. It is in answer to the question of how we would behave in a certain situation. It is what we communicate, not only through words but actions also. In relation to growing leaders, this can be illustrated by the example of a school leader presenting the idea to a staff member that they consider taking on leadership roles as they have the potential to develop into a school leader. This 'sowing of the seed' is then followed up by providing an opportunity within the school. Other authors, such as Fullan (2003), agree that part of a leaders' role is to help others to see new possibilities and Larrivee (2000) adds that "the more teachers explore, the more they discover" (p. 306).

However, the role of a school leader is not an easy one and it has been described as "multi-faceted" (Carlyon & Fisher, 2013, p. 69), encompassing administrative and management tasks and leading the learning, as well as growing leaders from within the school. We posit that it is important for school leaders to ensure the decisions they make are carefully considered and their planning is undertaken in a strategic manner (Carlyon & Fisher, 2013). The success of managing this multi-faceted role is reliant on a school leader understanding how to consciously establish and maintain positive relationships and a positive school culture. This requires school leaders to ensure that their leadership is based on sound knowledge and values (Begley, 2006) and although it could be said that this is an isolated role, it is also a collective one. It is important that school leaders work with teachers in a collective and collaborative manner and provide opportunities for them to grow personally and professionally. This leadership reflects that they value their staff and the relationships they have with them and that these relationships are more important than structures. These relationships are built on trust and respect, and provide the foundation for a positive school culture (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Such leadership is founded on relationships that will interconnect with the school culture. Although this reinforces the notion that relationships are significant, in order to grow leaders from within schools it is also important that school leaders are insightful and both recognise and understand the role they have to play in this process.

The style of leadership that has been described here could be aligned with transformational leadership. This is a variation to the more traditionally accepted form of transactional leadership, which originated in James McGregor Burns' (1978) publication, *Leadership*. An insightful leader will draw on variations of transformational leadership such as authentic, ethical, moral and relational leadership. A style of leadership such as this includes having authentic relations with staff that are characterised by traits such as trust and transparency (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005). Such leaders are ethical in the way they value their staff and create environments in which teachers feel a sense of safety and security (Starrat, 2005). Noddings (2005) suggests that moral leaders are committed to connecting to their staff through engaging in genuine dialogue and maintaining caring relations with them. Leaders such as these are able to inspire and challenge teachers to take risks while also providing support for them to do so (Burns, 2003; Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, & Collarbone, 2003). However, to be able to incorporate aspects from all these leadership styles, it may be necessary to draw on another more recent style of leadership known as trans-relational leadership (Branson, Franken, & Penney, 2015). These authors postulate that trans-relational leadership is demonstrated by those leaders who create opportunities for people to work together in harmonious ways and encourage understanding and empathy amongst others. This aligns with a social constructivist view; this is similar to Vygotskian ideas in that it highlights the relational nature of education by explicitly identifying the ongoing formation of human beings as a dynamic and social process (Giles, Smythe, & Spence, 2012). This social constructivist view repositions humanistic priorities, thus re-emphasising

the relational aspect of leadership. In recognising this, leadership is seen as a phenomenon that exists in everyday experiences, experienced by principals and teachers within a school context. This aspect is recognised and identified as what is seen as vital for a twenty-first century principal by the Ministry of Education (2008) in the document *Kiwi Leadership for Principals*: “School leaders who develop a climate of mutually trusting relationships with staff will be essential to fostering the kinds of innovation, creativity and confidence that will address new complexities in student learning” (p. 8). In establishing and maintaining these kinds of trusting and respectful relationships, school leaders need to be aware of the impact that this has on the culture within a school. It is these relationships that provide the quality interactions and shared experiences that allow school leaders to know and understand their teachers more fully. This aligns with Dewey’s (1938) suggestion that it is relationships which nurture teacher experiences and lead to growth, and more recently Le Fevre’s (2010) that trust is “essential to the creation of an environment in which people are willing to take risks” (p. 84). This kind of culture is one in which leaders know their staff well, and are willing to engage in informal and formal dialogue with them frequently. This enables teachers to more comfortably engage in critical reflection on their own practice, engage in open dialogue with others, see the needs of the whole school, support each other to try new ideas and become risk takers. This further endorses the notion that leadership is about relationships and that it is a shared experience. It highlights the integral role that school leaders play in deliberately establishing and maintaining positive relationships and school culture in order that leaders can grow from within.

Providing opportunities for teacher growth

Part of the role of a school leader in growing leadership from within is to provide teachers with opportunities to experience leadership in a range of different contexts. It is important that school leaders identify these opportunities and are able to strategically facilitate the organisation of them while still maintaining supportive professional relationships and a positive school culture (Carlyon & Fisher, 2013). This can be illustrated by drawing on the example of providing teachers with the opportunity to experience teaching in different year levels. Literature has shown that teaching in different year levels provides the impetus for personal and professional growth as teachers are “challenged to reflect on and re-evaluate their previous teaching and existing beliefs and values” (Carlyon, 2014, p. 13). Both Brookfield (1995) and Feldman (2005) posit that it is important that teachers have opportunities to critically reflect on their practice in order to gain new perspectives and develop a deeper understanding of themselves. In her study about four teachers experiences of changing year levels Carlyon (2014) found that all the teachers benefitted in terms of personal and professional growth and they saw themselves as “more effective and employable teachers” (p. 7). Despite some of the teachers initially being resistant to the change, they said it gave them opportunities to work in different contexts, engage in dialogue with colleagues and reflect on their practice and pedagogy. The research indicates that opportunities such as changing class levels help teachers to “further develop their identity and expertise by gaining a broader understanding of their schools, respect from their peers and career advancement” (Carlyon, 2014, p. 13). This aligns with Walkington (2005), who contends that teachers need these kinds of opportunities as they encourage them to challenge their personal philosophies and professional growth and Newell, Tallman and Letcher (2009), who suggest it is important that teachers are lifelong learners who are willing to adapt in different contexts. The kinds of opportunities that school leaders can offer teachers can be varied and may not be what are often thought of as traditional leadership roles, but could also include taking responsibility for an event, activity or curriculum area.

When teachers take on different roles this provides them with opportunities to engage in dialogue and work collaboratively with others. Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas and Wallace (2005) and Rhodes, Nevill and Allan (2005) posit that when teachers work with their colleagues in this way they will experience professional and personal growth. De Vries, van de Grift and Jansen (2013) agree, and extend this further by suggesting that when teachers collaborate with their colleagues this helps them to question their practice and “confront potential flaws in their beliefs” (p. 226). Palmer (1998) concurs and states that for people to experience growth, it is important that they work in this way so that they begin to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the wider school context and grow as professionals. Therefore, it is important that school leaders do not underestimate the “value placed on

the learning stimulated by working with others” (Kennedy, 2011, p. 26), but that they provide opportunities for teachers to do so because this becomes the keystone for teachers’ own further growth as leaders. However, Bolam et al. (2005) assert that the following eight characteristics must be present in schools for effective learning and growth to occur: shared values and vision; collective responsibility for pupils’ learning; collaboration focused on learning; individual and collective professional learning; reflective professional enquiry; openness, networks and partnerships; inclusive membership; and mutual trust, respect and support. Undoubtedly these eight characteristics highlight that teacher growth is socially situated and having good relationships is important if teacher growth is to occur.

Even though it seems that there is a clear understanding about how teacher learning and growth is nurtured, there are still some school leaders who tend to assume all teachers have the same needs. This is evident in Livingston’s (2012) recent comment that “teachers cannot be treated as a homogeneous group in relation to their professional learning needs” (p. 169). At times, teachers are not recognised as having “existing experiences, practices, perspectives and insights and most usually, anxieties about the highly complex nature of their work” (Dadds, 1997, p. 32). The importance of this is confirmed with findings from the summary of national and international research in the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES), which highlights the importance of teachers being equipped with skills to inquire into their practice, and being given time and opportunities to engage with key ideas (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2008). Livingston (2012) advocates that a clear infrastructure for effective teacher learning be set up in schools, which recognises teachers’ individual learning needs and builds a collaborative community of learning. Certainly it is important not to underestimate the “value placed on the learning stimulated by working with others” (Kennedy, 2011, p. 26). There is evidence of this occurring in recent models of professional development which recognise the individual nature of teacher growth and the importance of teachers becoming skilled inquirers (Kitchen, 2009; Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). These models align with Ferrier-Kerr, Keown and Hume’s (2008) suggestion that the three components critical to the success of teacher growth are teachers’ ability to be reflective; schools having a common vision; and sound school leadership. This section illustrates the importance of school leaders providing opportunities for teachers to experience leadership in a range of different contexts and understanding how teachers all learn differently. Highly effective leaders understand that this is part of their role and they are skilled at energizing others to do better things (Mintzberg, 2004).

Providing support for teacher growth

While the importance of school leaders understanding the role they play in developing leaders and providing them with opportunities to experience leadership in a range of different contexts has been illustrated, the role does not end there. It extends to ensuring support is provided for teachers so that the kinds of opportunities that have been described can be maximised and teachers can experience growth. In recognising that support is a further aspect, leaders also have to recognise the readiness of teachers to develop. Abbott (2008) states that “capacity building should ensure that people are first *ready* to perform, before trying to make them *able to perform*. Recognition of the need to develop readiness skills is crucial to effective implementation.” (p. 264). It is important that this notion of readiness is understood by school leaders if teachers are to be successful in taking on new leadership challenges. This readiness is not just about teachers having the skills, it is also about their preparedness to develop as a professional. In recognising this, leaders need to ensure that they provide support for teachers prior to them taking on leadership roles, including in the first instance developing the skills necessary to be considered for leadership.

The importance of teachers being provided with support such as coaching and mentoring to enhance their growth has been highlighted in the literature (Feldman, 2005; McIntyre & Hagger, 1996; Newell et al., 2009; Timperley, 2005). Bolam and Weindling (2006) agree that supportive processes such as these are required for teacher development and their synthesis of 20 research projects highlights the importance of the social element in teacher growth. This role may be one that school leaders undertake themselves, or they may choose to identify a suitable person who can act in this role for teachers. It is important to acknowledge here the difference between the roles of a coach and a mentor; while coaching involves assisting someone to master a skill, mentoring implies a relationship where one partner is novice and the other more experienced (Megginson & Clutterbuck, 2005). We agree that

mentoring has a more relational orientation and is more developmentally focussed rather than performance based. Although there is a difference between coaching and mentoring, as Giles, Bell, Halsey and Palmer (2012) assert, “Both practices prioritise the reciprocity and mutuality of collegial interaction” (p. 21). In accepting this notion of reciprocity and mutuality, we suggest that school leaders practise a mentoring role to support teachers to embrace change, and develop in a new area (Robertson, 2005). In these situations it would be expected that an experienced colleague facilitates the personal and professional development of a mentee and listens with empathy, shares experience and provides encouragement. A mentee is helped to change something, improve their performance and develop their leadership qualities, which aligns well with Palmer (1998), who suggests “the power of mentors is in their capacity to awaken a truth within us” (p. 21).

In her work, Kennedy (2005) identified the nine models of teacher growth as training; award-bearing; deficit; cascade; standards based; coaching and mentoring; community of practice; action research; and transformative. Of these models, two that align well with the notion of growing leadership from within schools are the coaching/mentoring model and the community of practice model. Both draw attention to the importance of teachers engaging in activities such as sharing dialogue with a colleague and learning in communities for their professional growth. Therefore it is important that when school leaders provide opportunities and support for teachers to grow as leaders, these are paired with ongoing observations and discussion about practice, which can often be more informal than formal. Certainly the value of informal learning is not to be underestimated and Fraser, Kennedy, Reid and McKinney (2007) argue for a balance of formal and informal opportunities.

This idea is reinforced by Cameron, Mulholland and Branson (2013), who also put forward other components of teacher growth such as the socio-cultural aspects of personal development. These authors provide three recommendations to help re-frame our understanding about teacher growth: firstly, that teacher growth is described in more holistic terms to allow for meaningful attention to be given to personal learning needs, as well as the deliberate improvement of professional skills, knowledge and attitudes; secondly, that a more broad approach is taken at both school and system level to the ways in which teacher learning is supported, and finally, that teachers should be free to choose some learning opportunities that are focussed on their personal needs in addition to those with direct relevance to their classrooms and pedagogy (Cameron et al., 2013). These ideas align with the framework presented next, which illustrates how school leaders play an important part in teachers developing as leaders. It also shows how they can enact this by paying attention to a teacher’s personal needs and encouraging them to take more responsibility for identifying individual opportunities for learning that meet these needs. It is important that teachers “see the reasons that learning is important to their present as well as to their future and they need to have confidence in the supportive nature of their work environment” (Cameron et al., 2013, p. 391). The influence of outside forces such as political, financial and community must also be acknowledged as having an impact on leaders’ capacity to provide opportunities and support, and also teachers’ readiness to take on opportunities. It is postulated that these outside forces have a direct link to the political environment, and can be seen as a response to the neo-liberal stance and direction that governments are taking in relation to education. The move to a more standards-based environment and culture of accountability based on student achievement can be seen as having created further inequities within the education sector. This aligns with Fennell (2005), who asserts that the changing nature of schools mean that school leaders are challenged as never before to find new ways of working in schools. Therefore, in developing this framework for growing leaders from within schools, it is acknowledged that the fundamental influence comes from the role that the school leader plays. Their ability to identify the potential in others and establish a culture that is supportive of risk taking and taking on opportunities is central to the success of growing leaders. School leaders have “responsibility for fostering a climate which will enable collaborative and informal learning, both planned and incidental, to thrive” (Kennedy, 2011, p. 29). In addition we acknowledge, from our own experience and development, that the relationships between school leaders and potential leaders are not one way, and as such we have represented this in the framework with multi-directional arrows to illustrate the interconnectedness and mutuality of the relationship, and how it can be seen as a developmental process for both parties.

The framework

The framework, which is presented in Figure 1 below, identifies the following three key features for developing school leaders: the role of the school leader to deliberately establish and maintain positive relationships and school culture; provide opportunities for teachers; and provide support for teachers. Although there is significant overlapping between each of these three key features, their interconnectedness is reflected by the cyclic nature and multidirectional arrows shown within the framework.

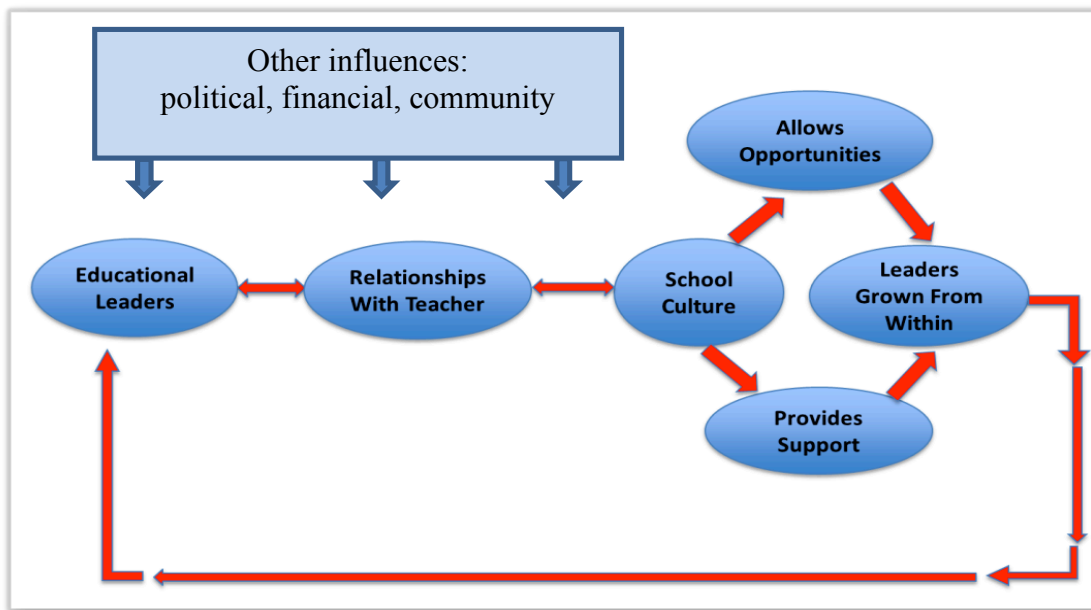


Figure 10. Framework for the development of leadership from within schools.

Concluding comments

In this article we have presented and discussed a framework for the development of school leaders from within schools. The development of this framework evolved from our personal experiences as we attempted to address issues such as attracting and recruiting staff to our school while working within a challenging educational environment. As outlined in the previous discussion, these school environments are the result of the developing neo-liberal view that considers education as a commodity and focuses primarily on performativity (Codd, 2005). The role that a school leader plays in growing leaders from within their school has been highlighted in the framework as integral. The literature drawn on in the above discussion supports our view that this role is very dependent on a school leader's ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with teachers while also providing opportunities and support for teachers to grow. Positive relationships create a school culture that is based on high trust and respect and is shaped by the actions and words of leaders. This is reinforced by Dewey's (1938) notion that learning and growing is a social and interactive process, and schools are places where teachers realise their full potential and use their skills for the greater good.

This article has discussed a style of leadership that is required to deliberately establish and maintain positive relationships and a positive school culture. From this, while we propose that trans-relational leadership (Branson et al., 2015) seems to align, it may be that it is timely for the development of a new leadership style in order to grow leadership from within schools. We suggest that leaders may be required to practise new ways of leading, given the current educational environment, in order to successfully respond to issues that are additional to those that we faced in our school. To this end we recommend that further research is undertaken that continues to explore the development of a style of leadership which encompasses all the aspects that are required for school leaders to grow leadership from within their schools.

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