

## LEA PRINCIPALS 2010

Sitting in a national office it often becomes apparent how the arrival of a new principal to a school has become a catalyst for change with curriculum initiatives, enhanced student learning and increased enrolments. Often from my armchair, I have been reminded that good principals do make good schools. Conversely, there are not too many good schools with ineffective principals.

This paper discusses the implications of a study on the efficacy of principal appraisal for developing principals in light of the significance of the role and the shortage of applicants for the position. This discussion is then related to two other research projects with a view of reflecting on what LEA could consider to assure itself that it has appropriate principals for 2010.

### Principal role

The community and governments generally are now expecting more from schools. In particular, national governments regard education as the basis for global competitiveness (DETYA, 2000) and an avenue for addressing social concerns (Knight, Lingard, & Porter, 1993). Furthermore, in information economies schools are called upon to both develop the potential of students more effectively and consistently, and also provide them with satisfactory foundations for entry into a world of changing job opportunities (Anderson, 2000). The Lutheran Church of Australia also looks to its schools as an effective way in which it serves its community (LCA, 1999). Consequently, as more is expected of schools, more has been expected of their principals

In the same way, the effective schools literature (Brown, Irby, & Neumeyer, 1998; Sammons, Thomas, & Mortimore, 1997) has identified the critical role of the principal in ensuring that schools achieve high quality educational outcomes. In addition, school improvement writers have also highlighted the pivotal role of the principal in providing instructional leadership for improved learning outcomes through supporting, empowering and increasing the capacity of staff (Barth, 2001; Fulan, 1991; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1996; Wallace, 2001). As part of the increased importance attached to education by government, schooling has been restructured in a way that places management at the local site level to ensure that the school responds more directly to the needs of its community (Caldwell, 1999; Rentoul & Rosanowski, 2000).

At the recent Curriculum Corporation Conference its Chief Executive Officer, Bruce Wilson (2004), demolished what he regarded as three myths about school leadership including: power should be shared, everyone is a leader, and we should talk about leadership rather than management. He called for principals to use their power to engage staff and hold them accountable, in the same way as the principal is accountable. He argued that principals are not to delegate for the sake of delegating, but to engage staff. There are some basic management responsibilities that need to be fulfilled well if there are to be productive and positive school outcomes. The expectations upon the principal are more focussed and strategic.

Yet at a time when more is expected of principals the health of principals generally is problematic, as seen by such indicators as levels of satisfaction compared to other leaders, intention to retire before 65 years, an aging profile, and, above all, a critical shortage of applicants for the position (QCEC, 2004).

### Critical shortage of applicants for principal

One result of the increased expectations on schools, and those who lead them, has been to make the position of principal more complex and demanding (Glasman & Heck, 1996), resulting in fewer people applying for the position worldwide (Fenwick, 2000). The work of the principal has been seen as "undesirable and the work undo-able" (Fenwick, 2000: 37). Other reasons for this

shortage include perceived inadequacy of compensation, the stressful nature of the job, unrealistic demands on time and family, and lack of support (ACU, 2001; Caldwell, 2000; Fenwick, 2000; Thomson, Blackmore, Sachs, & Tregenza, 2003).

A Victorian survey indicates 88% of teachers and deputies are not interested in the position (QCEC, 2004). Developing new principals and retaining existing principals is now an important issue for employing authorities, and providing them with ongoing support is an imperative (ACU, 2001; Edwards, 2001). Therefore, at a time when the role of principal is being affirmed for its impact upon quality student outcomes there is a serious issue of supply.

## **A research study**

My research (Jericho, 2004) on the experience of Principal Appraisal for Development (PAD) in Australian Lutheran schools sought to understand what perceptions principals and council chairpersons had of the efficacy of the appraisal process for achieving the aims, namely, the personal and professional development of the principal. The data indicated that there were five views of the efficacy of the process amongst PAD participants. According to these perceptions appraisal was viewed by principals and council chairpersons as:

1. **a focus for meaningful development** (the view that the appraisal process was fundamentally concerned with, and resulted in, genuine long-term development),
2. **a catalyst for episodic development** (the view that the appraisal process prompted a series of one-off development activities),
3. **a part of the development experience** (the view that whilst the appraisal outcome was instructive, it was only one contributor to development),
4. **a means of pursuing positive non-development outcomes** (the view that there were positive outcomes emerging from the appraisal process, but these resulted from the school or principal adopting non-development strategies in response to appraisal messages), and,
5. **a diversion from meaningful development** (the view that the appraisal process engendered no meaningful development).

## **Outcomes of the study**

The study outlined ways in which participants experienced professional learning as a result of the appraisal process. It described ways in which principals grew professionally and engaged in professional learning. However, if PAD was for development there were clearly some concerns about the appraisal process and its efficacy for principal professional learning. In this way, the outcomes of the study are pertinent for the topic of growing principals for 2010. There were eight outcomes from the study that explained the experience of study participants, as follows:

- a development purpose needed to have priority in appraisal for perceptions of efficacy to be evident,
- credible messages needed to emerge from the appraisal process for perceptions of efficacy to be evident,
- appraisal was perceived as a complex process of change involving meaning-making,
- when the principal acted as agent and initiator in the appraisal process, this situation facilitated perceptions of efficacy,
- a supportive and improvement-oriented environment for professional development was associated with perceptions of efficacy,
- professional development of the principal was a complex process,
- trust in process and in one another was necessary for perceptions of efficacy to be evident, and,
- appraisal can have outcomes that may distract from principal professional development.

Four of the outcomes of the study are particularly relevant to the professional learning of principals and these are now discussed.

### **Principal acting as agent and initiator for perceptions of efficacy**

The study concluded that it was necessary for the principal to be pro-active and take the initiative during the appraisal process for there to be perceptions of development efficacy. Accordingly, the study found that where there was a perception that principal appraisal was a process done to the principal, rather than an ongoing process undertaken by the principal for professional growth, it lacked development efficacy. Ownership and leadership by the principal in the appraisal process, consequently, led to more positive outcomes that reflected individual and authentic needs. Since each principal learns and develops in different ways (West-Burnham, 2001), the development plan also needed to take such individuality into consideration.

In this way the study's findings reflect the strong feelings of disempowerment identified in some imposed performance management-oriented appraisals (Brown, 1998; Down, Chadbourne, & Hogan, 2000; Mongan & Ingvarson, 2001). It supports the view that a "principal's performance is improved through active reflection" (Brown et al., 1998: 19) so that principals can "create coherent and personally meaningful visions, which then can inspire and move other people in their organisations" (Assor & Oplatka, 2003: 485). Writers on professional development (Fullan, 1995; Starratt, 1993) reinforce this finding that the principal needs to be the agent and initiator in a process of appraisal that seeks to generate professional and personal development opportunities for the principal. This finding, which is evident in professional development literature, has not had the same emphasis in scholarly writing on principal performance appraisals.

### **A supportive and improvement-oriented environment for professional development**

A supportive and improvement-oriented environment has been identified as critical in facilitating development of the principal as an outcome of appraisal. The need for the principal to have support in achieving development was also highlighted in the study. This support was important for understanding the appraisal messages, generating a development plan with appropriate strategies, engaging in ongoing reflection and following through with agreed development commitments. Whilst local support in a range of ways from both the chairperson and the whole council was vital, outside assistance from either a system person or a professional colleague was also valuable.

Such a supportive network was as necessary as the need for the individual to own the process. These findings in relation to the necessity for support are reflected in other studies, such as in New South Wales where the role of cluster directors was highlighted (Clayton-Jones et al., 1993), in the United Kingdom through peers (Hellawell & Hancock, 1998), the intentional training of appraisers in New Zealand (Piggot-Irvine, 2003a, 2003b) and in the USA through the role played by the superintendent (Brown et al., 1998; Grier, Reep, & Trenta, 1994).

In general, development from appraisal flourished best in a culture of improvement where there was a commitment by all to quality student outcomes and the personal and professional growth of all, including the principal. In such a context appraisal was seen as a tool for development and adequate resources were made available, thus confirming the literature's emphasis on an environment that is improvement-oriented (Duke & Stiggins, 1990), including, particularly, improvement in student learning outcomes (Manatt, 1997). Hence, where emphasis was placed on the appraisal report, rather than on the development plan, there was disappointment and little perception by participants of efficacy of appraisal for the personal and professional development of the principal. These findings strongly highlight the need to support the principal, as well as to provide an improvement-oriented environment, if meaningful professional development is to result from appraisal.

### **The complexity of principal professional development**

The professional growth of principals has been described as multi-dimensional (Assor & Oplatka, 2003), "an individual, unique and subjective process ... complex, diffuse and unpredictable" (West-Burnham, 2001: 26) and about formation (Caldwell, Calnin, & Cahill, 2003). This study has added to the understanding of the complexity of principals' professional development. The

development experiences of the study principals provide concrete examples of how principals respond to feedback on their performance and how they manage their professional development. Some were able to identify messages from the appraisal report that became the basis of, and catalyst for, personal and professional growth. These messages made them more aware of issues needing to be addressed and focused the development agenda. For other principals, affirmation from appraisal was significant, since they felt that they did not receive regular endorsement of their performance. The resultant increased confidence was both a motivating and galvanising factor for professional and personal growth.

In contrast, some appraisals did not generate messages that led to development agendas and, therefore, not all principals experienced growth. In these circumstances, appraisal did not relate to the professional needs of the principal, an aspect which has been identified as a requirement for development (Assor & Oplatka, 2003).

The study has underlined the complexity of principal professional growth, already identified in the literature (Dempster, 2001; Ruohotie, 1996; West-Burnham, 2001), and has contributed to a fuller understanding of it. Development was depicted as incremental, primarily building on strengths, rather than addressing deficits, and thus reflecting a model of professional development (Starratt, 1993) that cautions against focusing too much attention on identified weaknesses. Development was also related to the daily life of the principal in the mundane administration and learning activities of the school, and it was not always clear what factors became a catalyst for development. Factors highlighted as important in professional and personal development included reflection on experience and practice, mentoring and formal study. This finding reflects practice from a range of educational jurisdictions (Bush, 1998; Busher & Paxton, 1997; Caldwell et al., 2003). Therefore, development was seen by participants as a concept too complex to be solely dependent on appraisal, since meaningful professional and personal development requires a range of strategies to be effective.

#### **Trust in process and in one another for perceptions of efficacy**

Whilst there is reference in the literature to the significance of trust for effective appraisals (Edwards, 2001; Mongan & Ingvarson, 2001; Piggot-Irvine, 2003b), much more has been written about the impact of perceptions of mistrust in imposed performance management systems (Bottery, 2003; Codd, 1999; Naidu, 2001). In this study trust was identified as vital for the achievement of principal development in the appraisal process, particularly since the process involves meaning-making and can be emotionally confronting.

Principals needed to have confidence that the process would deliver meaningful development messages in a supportive context. Principals also needed to be able to trust that the purpose of the appraisal was development and that any performance issues emerging from appraisal would not affect their contracts. Moreover, there was trust in key players that they would follow through in their roles, according to the agreed procedures. Trust has emerged as critical for effective schools (Hargreaves, 1994, 2003) and the findings of this study provide evidence that it is particularly important that there is trust both in the appraisal process and in the key players, if there are to be perceptions of efficacy in development outcomes.

#### **Implications of the study**

The study has implications for system authorities, school councils and principals if LEA is to be assured of having effective principals for 2010.

#### **Challenges for Lutheran system authorities**

This study has implications for Lutheran system authorities, particularly for their responsibilities in supporting school governance, leadership development strategies and for the provision of principal professional development activities. In the first place, school councils have a key role to play in Lutheran schools, being responsible for establishing mission and policy for the school, monitoring performance, and the appointment, support, development and monitoring of their chief

executive, the principal. This study suggests that not all councils are well prepared for some of these responsibilities. An implication of this study, therefore, is that system authorities need to give more attention to ensuring that school council members are more fully trained for their important responsibilities, particularly in working with their principals in support of development.

Secondly, in fulfilling their responsibility for leadership development, the LEA and district Lutheran system authorities need to regard appraisal for development as only one strategy to develop leaders. The findings of this study indicate that a principal's ability to use experience is a critical factor in leadership development. Attention, therefore, could be given to assist principals use their professional experiences more productively through promoting strategies that encourage reflection on practice. Mentoring was also identified as an effective way of promoting reflective practice, and it would also be prudent to encourage and develop mentoring arrangements amongst principals. In these ways leadership development would receive its deserved emphasis and not simply be seen as appraisal-driven.

Thirdly, as principals generate their professional development plans the system could determine areas of common professional development needs and provide appropriate development programs in response. What are the areas where principals feel in most need of development? How can the system ensure that principals have access to a wide range of professional development activities? The data indicate that principals desired assistance in identifying appropriate development activities in response to identified needs. In summary, these findings have significant implications for system authorities including their support for governance, and leadership development strategies and activities.

#### **Responsibilities of school councils**

Lutheran school councils have important responsibilities that include supporting the development of the principal, as well as being accountable for the school's performance. The findings of this study have three implications for councils in carrying out both responsibilities.

In the first place, councils could consider what policies they have in place to support the professional and personal development of the principal and how these policies are described in the governance handbook. In addition, there is a need to consider budgeting appropriate resources for ongoing development of the principal. This important responsibility of school councils could figure more prominently on council agendas, especially in following up on agreed commitments arising from appraisal. Trust also emerged in the study as a key factor in achieving perceptions of efficacy. A supportive environment of trust is characterised by a culture of improvement where there is commitment to the personal and professional development of staff generally, and the principal in particular, with an overall focus on school improvement. The school council has a responsibility to establish such a climate and maintain it.

Secondly, school councils have significant legal, administrative and moral responsibilities to government, the Church, students, parents and the community. Moreover, operating in an environment of choice they need to be assured that the school is meeting the needs of its varied stakeholders. Performance management and accountability are thus legitimate concerns of councils. Consequently, school councils need access to appropriate instruments and strategies to evaluate school performance, review contracts, handle diminished performance and resolve conflict.

Finally, this study has found that school councils tended to confuse these responsibilities of accountability and development when undertaking appraisal for development. Therefore, whilst accountability is important and legitimate, it needs to be separated from support for the professional development of the principal through appraisal. Whilst there may be an appraisal option to determine whether a contract should be renewed, it would need to be distinct from appraisal for development. Since appraisal more likely leads to development when development is its sole purpose, there need to be other measures in place for these non-development responsibilities. The findings from this study indicate that the two functions were easily confused,

which thwarted the appraisal process from advancing into the development phase. Development of the principal and accountability for the performance of the school represent important responsibilities for Lutheran school councils, and need to be both kept separate and attended to thoroughly.

### **Encouragement of principals to take the initiative for their professional development**

The findings of this study have implications for principals in Lutheran schools, both individually and as a professional group. Despite important roles to be played by other key participants, the study has found that each principal should take the initiative and be the active agent in the change process that is at the heart of the appraisal process. Hence, the principal needs to be pro-active in working with either a support group or a mentor to use the appraisal process more productively for professional and personal development. The study found that some principals did not achieve a positive development outcome because the council did not follow through with its responsibilities. Principals could take more initiative to encourage councils to fulfil their responsibilities. Principals could also consider ensuring that they have appropriate support in listening to appraisal messages, especially those that are confronting. The findings indicate that their responses in such circumstances can determine their perceptions of the efficacy of the process.

Secondly, these findings have implications for Lutheran school principals as a professional group. In particular, since the principal needs to have greater ownership of the appraisal process if it is to achieve its development outcomes, appraisal should not be seen as something that the system is doing to its principals. Furthermore, the literature highlights the importance of professional accountability (Kleinhenz, Ingvarson, & Chadbourne, 2001; Piggot-Irvine, 2003b). Accordingly, an implication may be for Lutheran principals to form a professional association to take greater professional responsibility for PAD, rather than simply seeing it as a system strategy. Such an association could also take the initiative in fostering peer support networks and mentoring amongst principals. In these ways principals in Lutheran schools, both individually and as a profession, can ensure that PAD truly becomes appraisal for development with greater perceptions of efficacy of the process.

### **Other research and 2010 principals**

There are two other pieces of research that can assist in reflecting upon the development of principals for 2010 and that build on the study reported on in this paper. By the time that this elective is held research conducted by Insight SRC for ACLE2 will have been presented. In addition, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) has undertaken a number of projects to assure itself that it has appropriate school leadership for the next decade (QCEC, 2004).

The Insight SRC research is based on a model of school organisation that attributes to the principal key tasks in achieving individual and staff morale with resultant improved student learning outcomes. The principal is to engage staff through supportive leadership that provides feedback, builds role clarity and goal alignment, and empowers staff. Lutheran schools have some issues to consider as a result of the research, and there are particular implications for leadership development. As unsettling as this research may be, it may provide a strategic focus to nurture and support principals for the "cross currents" they face. The workshop to follow this paper can explore the significance of the Insight SRC research.

QCEC has developed a profile for leadership in its schools that reflects our learning on leadership from the Millennial Principals Project (MPP). The profile moves away from precise lists for the leader to highlight leadership dimensions and capabilities. Having developed a leadership profile, QCEC has established project teams to look at a number of principal issues including: personnel practices, alternative models of principalship, mentoring and changing relationships between schools and parishes. I was particularly interested in alternative models of principalship. To what

extent can the position be shared by two or more people – business and educational leadership? To what extent can the principal role be simplified by outsourcing services – ICT, finances? Can the role of principal be reconstructed into a more do-able position? The range of issues, identified by QCEC, indicates that provision of effective principals for 2010 has no quick fix or silver bullet.

In LEA circles the MPP was regarded as a success. However, success was not so much from how many participants are now in principal positions, but rather MPP was successful because we had a conversation about leadership and became intentional about leadership development and succession. As we consider the next phase of MPP, which will ensure principals for 2010, it is time for the leadership conversation to continue. Based on the above research what should we be doing as a system to have productive principals for 2010? We can be assured that there are a range of initiatives that can be undertaken to make a difference in our schools for the sake of student learning if we have the will. The practical implications of these possibilities are now explored in workshop mode.

## **Workshop**

1. What have we already heard at ACLE 2 that impacts strongly on principals 2010?
2. How should LEA respond to the Insight research in developing leadership for 2010?
3. What should be done to encourage applications for the position of principal?
4. What should principals do – what is their critical function and focus?
5. What support mechanisms for principals should be put in place? Whose responsibility is it?
6. Are there alternatives to the existing model of principal?
7. Can a system of schools that will barely have one third of its staff Lutheran in 2010 insist on Lutherans only for principals? What are the implications of this policy?
8. Can we talk about an LEA succession planning strategy – or are we too independent a group of schools?

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