

Core professional values for school leaders and teachers: Piloting an online tool

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Abstract

Evidence of the extent to which school leaders and teachers embrace core professional values may, through dialogue, open up new avenues for school improvement. With this in mind, the focus of this article is the piloting of an online survey tool designed to identify how widely four such values are held in New Zealand schools. The pilot was commissioned by the Te Ariki Trust with the support of the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), the New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF) and the University of Canterbury. The tool is based on items which together, define four values underpinning the mission of the Te Ariki Trust, namely "Professional Discretion", "Collegial Obligation", "Reflective Inquiry and Discourse" and "Evidence-based Professional Practice". An analysis of one school's responses to such a survey tool is one way to gauge evidence of collective commitment, the strength of collegial relationships and trust, with the realisation that knowing how to collect and reflect on data matters if important decisions are to be well informed. The article draws upon research and scholarly writing to explain the four values, describe the development of the tool and its pilot study and suggest what the results might offer for dialogue using the findings from a sample school whose staff members completed the instrument. Suggested changes to the instrument and its use conclude the article.

Keywords: *Professional values; leadership as activity; leadership values; leadership partnerships; disciplined dialogue; decision making*

Introduction

The Te Ariki Trust is responsible for the programme of research on which this article reports. The mission of the Trust (which is coordinated through the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) and the New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZPF)) is to provide "both a context and a set of protocols, supported by appropriate resources for ensuring that high quality thinking is applied to the work that educators do" (Te Ariki Trust, 2018). The process is defined as "collaborative critique informed by evidence of practice" in which collegial interactions are the means by which school goals are met when participants spend time "seeking correlations between their intentions, what they actually do and the consequences for teaching and learning in the school". The purpose of this article is to report on the development and use of an online survey tool, (a resource developed, and piloted for the Trust), that seeks responses on core professional values that may inform the actions of a school staff. These values are intrinsic to the mission of the Trust which funded the pilot study in one New Zealand region in 2017 as part of a research contract undertaken by the University of Canterbury. The Trust's objective for the pilot study, was to provide a way to open up conversations about values it holds to be important influences on the actions schools take. It wanted to know whether an instrument could assist schools to engage in conversations about the values that underpin their collective work. The four values coined and advocated by the Trust form a coherent and connected framework to guide the ways teachers and their leaders can develop and sustain a collective moral purpose to ensure student learning. The four values are *Professional Discretion, Collegial Obligation, Reflective Inquiry and Discourse* and *Evidence-based Professional Practice*. The Trust believes that these values, both separately and in combination, serve

to highlight essential processes that matter in creating and sustaining effective learning partnerships. The pilot instrument expresses the Trust's values elaborated as items following a literature review examining those values.

The article is structured in four parts. The first part defines each of the four professional values. The second part focuses on selected literature to demonstrate the knowledge needed by those engaged in the shared school leadership work necessary for staff members facing new initiatives for the enhancement of student learning. The third part introduces the tool and its pilot. This is followed by part four where the results and key learnings are outlined showing what can be gleaned by a school from the tool in action using a process called disciplined dialogue (Swaffield & Dempster, 2009; Dempster et al., 2017). Suggested changes to the instrument and its administration bring the article to a close.

Part one: Defining the four professional values

The four professional values which underpin the Trust's work and the online survey tool (the focus of this article), outline what it takes for school staff to harness their collective capacities for acting on issues of consequence in their schools. As aspirational values, the challenge facing schools is knowing how to turn these ideals into everyday actions. The Trust's first value is *Professional Discretion*. This usually refers to decisions that must be made when no rule, regulation or procedure defines a specific outcome. However, the Trust's view is more broadly aligned with the concept of professionalism and how professionals should act. While the very notion of professionalism has general acceptance, there is less agreement about how to develop it (Evans, 2008; Hoyle, 2008). Some guidance can be found in the work of Eraut (1994), an author who has articulated what acting professionally means in terms of the professional knowledge and competence required. The tenets he offers begin with a strong moral purpose placing students and their learning at the heart of teachers' and school leaders' work. Associated with that moral purpose is a commitment to monitor and review one's practices, extend repertoires of strategies related to teaching and learning and reflect on the effectiveness of those strategies. How to achieve these tenets with a whole staff is a puzzle to be resolved. It is also why there is merit in exploring responses to this puzzle, using, for example, a tool such as the one reported in this article. Decisions about what to do, how to act, and when to act are enabled and constrained by the unique characteristics and circumstances of a workplace and its personnel. No two workplaces are the same, a point noted by multiple authors (Gurr, 2014; Peus, Braun, & Schyns, 2016; Clarke & O'Donoghue, 2017). This is why Hallinger (2011) emphasises the need to acknowledge the importance of context because knowing how to read the context and understand it is a first step in working towards successful change implementation. This view is reinforced by Day et al., (2010) who say: "differences in context affect the nature, direction and pace of leadership actions" (p.1). Leading change initiatives necessitates attention to the content of what to change at the same time as why and how teachers might work together for that change. Leaders need to know what it takes to engage a critical mass in support of change initiatives which aligns with the Trust's continuing commitment to provide resources for school leaders, such as the online tool shared in this article.

The second value, *Collegial Obligation*, the term used by the Trust, is recognition that professionals benefit from working with their colleagues as a collective or team. A sense of collegial obligation is necessary and evident when colleagues see each other as mutual sources of support and expertise and are willing to engage in learner to learner relationships without fear of reprisal. Colleagues who acknowledge this collegial obligation move between being teacher learners and teacher leaders as they interact to further one another's expertise in pursuit of the shared responsibility of making a difference to student learning. However, acting collegially is dependent on relational trust which is one thing to espouse but like the previous value discussed, a different matter to enact as a practice. It involves more than being congenial and warm-hearted with colleagues.

The third value *Reflective Inquiry and Discourse* signals the importance of paying attention to processes which help teachers to extend their expertise and deepen understandings of practice. These processes need to

be embedded within school structures and ways of working to become deliberate and intentional rather than left to chance. Here the Trust uses the term “discourse” to foster communication of a professional kind which is essentially practical. While discourse may be invested in cultural assumptions, contextual understandings and political perspectives, it is enabling conversations about professional practice and the realities of those practices that concern the Trust. Shared dialogue about practice is the means by which teachers make meaning of and improvements to their pedagogy. That dialogue involves more than opportunities for talk. It, too, requires a measure of relational trust so that teachers become willing and able to converse with colleagues, so as to admit and reveal the problems of practice in order to find a way forward.

The fourth value, once again as expressed by the Trust, is *Evidence-based Professional Practice*. This is about recognising the need to collect and analyse evidence in such a way that it will be considered robust and useful to all. Nevertheless, close interrogation of data must be more than satisfying the demands of system accountability and compliance. It also needs to be accepted by individuals as necessary to their own sense of responsiveness to the needs of others on whom their work is focused. This is also where the professional values interact because using evidence to inform future practice is one hallmark of *Professional Discretion*, the first Te Ariki value.

Part two: A select literature review

A selection from a published international review of literature related to the Trust’s values (Lovett, 2016) is used here to provide brief explanations of the four values.

Professional discretion

Consistent with the concept of professionalism, the review shows the importance of individuals adapting to context as they make decisions about how to respond to problems. Timperley (2015) uses the term, “adaptive expertise” as a way of recognising that professionals understand their own capability to function through being adaptive and responsive to their work contexts and those they serve. In this sense, professional values must be owned and personalised by individuals. The need to develop expertise with teachers is similarly acknowledged in the work of Smith and Starmer (2017) and Anthony, Hunter and Hunter (2015). Knowledge of context shapes how decisions are made and who is best placed to make those decisions within the work environment. Timperley (2015) suggests individuals need to withhold “existing assumptions, and when they might be helpful or unhelpful” (p.7) and instead be willing to listen to others and be responsive to contextual factors. Such reciprocity is important if schools are to function as professional learning organisations and communities. The Te Ariki tool allows assumptions to surface in recognition that collective awareness enables open processes of communication to occur. Dialogue is critical to collective decision making. It is hoped of course, that decisions are based on robust evidence sources and are therefore informed and considered. Coupled with this is the realisation that decisions are enabled and constrained by national, regional and local levels of policy in which school leaders mediate. Depth of knowledge about these levels of policy and their implications assists leaders to act with discernment knowing they are adhering to policy requirements but at the same time being responsive to their local and immediate work contexts. While decisions contrary to policy may be infrequent, there are occasions when decisions will be coloured by local circumstances which require some “policy adaptation”, a reality uncovered and explained by McLaughlin (1998).

Recognising that expertise resides amongst multiple players, Coleman (2011) reminds us of the increased research interest in collaboration, specifically how to work in and maximise partnerships around a collective moral purpose, which for schooling, emphasises that professional decisions are made in the interests of students. Coleman’s 2011 study alerts us to wider collaborations with mention of inward and outward facing partnerships. An example of an outward facing partnership is an executive headteacher working across a group of schools.

An example of an inward facing partnership would be the distribution of leadership to members of a team within a school. These are of interest to New Zealand schools because outward facing partnerships are perceived as offering possible economies of scale in terms of sharing expertise and professional learning opportunities. Coleman's study of school based collaborations within the United Kingdom acknowledges that there are greater challenges involved in outward than inward facing partnerships.

Added to this level of complexity is the adoption of a blended leadership stance (Collinson & Collinson, 2011). Findings from Coleman's study show this requires a knowledge of five different forms of leadership, namely; authentic, relational, distributed, political and constitutive. Data from interviews, school inspection documentation and surveys revealed multiple challenges associated with blending leadership. Being authentic meant knowing how and when to align the needs of the context with one's own values and those of others. Being relational required a willingness to match approaches to each situation and being flexible rather than fixed on a particular way of leading. How to avoid leadership distribution being viewed as "abdication of responsibility" (Coleman, 2011, p.307) pointed to the need for collegial trust so that opportunities to share in leadership work were personally satisfying rather than being defined defensively as extra work. Political leadership was about reconciling "ethical commitment to principles such as openness and integrity with performative aspects of the role" (Coleman, 2011, p.309). The remaining constitutive form of leadership required knowing how to draw on others' views when shaping agendas and securing trust. How to create processes which address these challenges is complex work. There are no quick answers. A great deal of personal discretion is required to ensure that students' learning and potential is kept to the fore through leadership actions. The work is even more complex when actions involve other colleagues who have varying years of experience and expertise to contribute to this shared quest.

Hargreaves (2011) highlights three forms of capital to explain how collaborative partnerships work at local and national levels for the benefit of students. Human capital is the collective knowledge and skillset brought to a teaching and learning partnership. Social capital recognises the need for trust to draw people together in the partnership. This is followed by organisational capital, the structural elements which serve to combine both human and social capitals. Coupling is another term used by Hargreaves to convey what it takes to build capacity for change with three levels of coupling. Firstly, *professional coupling* values teacher autonomy. Secondly, *institutional coupling* relates to how administrative structures support student learning and thirdly, *inter-institutional coupling* suggests that partnerships can be beneficial beyond an individual school. Hargreaves' work signals the benefits of collective rather than individual professionalism showing what happens when teachers share insights of practice about students despite being in different schools. The interaction between capital and coupling is useful because it shows the opportunities afforded by tighter professional partnerships and how trust develops when social capital increases and teachers are reciprocal leaders and learners with one another.

Key points from literature informing the Trust's value, *Professional Discretion* recognise the need for leaders to understand when rules, regulations and policies can be applied to decision making and when variations and some adaptation are preferable because of an awareness of particular contextual considerations. Leaders who apply professional discretion consider multiple sources of input, value collegial sharing within and beyond schools and demonstrate that the moral purpose of schooling is what drives the work necessary for the enhancement of students' learning. This is viewed as collective rather than individual work.

Collegial Obligation

Acceptance that collaborative activity aids teachers' work is what drives the Trust's second value *Collegial Obligation*. The informing literature for this value draws on the qualities of professional learning communities and what it takes to develop trusting relationships. Levels of trust have been benchmarked against Tschanne-

Moran's (2001) five facets. These include confidence that others are "benevolent, honest, open, reliable and competent" (p.318). Processes by which trust develops are able to be identified along with the role of the principal in developing that trust and how trust contributes to teacher collaboration in learning teams. Common themes can be derived from case study research if the data collection and research questions remain constant. For example, the study by Hallam, Smith, Hite, Hite and Wilcox (2015) was able to check its findings against the Tschannen-Moran facets in order to establish any alignment. Hallam and colleagues (2015) highlighted the importance of professionals sharing personal information and fulfilling their responsibilities if trust is to form. Similarly, treating one another with patience and kindness were deemed important especially when risks were being taken. A small action, such as being included in staff appointment processes, was one example of how trust could be developed incrementally as a deliberate strategy in the workplace. Other examples included trusting colleagues' abilities and as a consequence being more likely to ask for advice. Or, if colleagues saw their counterparts as competent they might be more willing to rotate students between classrooms. And finally, if colleagues were viewed as benevolent by others, that disposition would likely signal safety to share student data.

A study from Malta by Cutajar and Bezzina (2013) is of interest because the inter-school collaboration reported is mandated rather than an option. Challenges realised in this study included accepting that schools cannot be replicas of each other if the potential of all teachers is to be maximised. For a principal, this might mean learning to become accountable to a team of leaders. The study also showed that it was not enough to change organisational structures. Those working within the structure also needed to see themselves as connected agents able to move across boundaries and forge new collaborations.

Moore and Rutherford's (2012) national strategy for improving literacy and numeracy in England is an illustration of a centrally directed and funded model of networking. It was instigated in 2005 in a third of England's primary schools with five to eight schools in each network. Central funding was available for one year provided that schools committed to the project for at least two years. Moore and Rutherford's (2012) study represents headteacher views and school observations from within one Local Education Authority. Two recommendations emerged from this study. One called for more teacher input in translating policy into practice. The other related to knowledge about the change process, specifically relationship building and power tensions. A point to note here is that a key implication of *Collegial Obligation* is to decrease power tensions by increasing power coalitions.

Key points from the literature informing the Trust's second value, *Collegial Obligation* show that while there is general acceptance of the potential of collaborative networking, opportunities to question, interrogate and reframe practice depend on the presence of trusting relationships. It must be safe for teachers to converse with colleagues without fear of repercussions, ridicule and embarrassment. Attention to these dynamics matters for the ongoing development of collaborative practice. If teachers always feel judged and vulnerable they will not want to work together. The need for trust applies within one's school and also when working in broader learning partnerships or networks.

Reflective inquiry and discourse

The process of deepening expertise and commitment to one's job depends on knowing how to ask questions about practice. Dialogue with colleagues contributes to that process. Quality learning circles (QLCs) have been adapted and adopted in New Zealand over several decades (Stewart & Prebble, 1993; Lovett, 2002). Typically QLCs require time set aside for peers to engage with one another around a mutually agreed focus with acceptable protocols and appropriate scaffolding through opportunities for questions about practice. The protocols are about interactions and agreement on the sequence and type of questions to be asked and addressed. This approach is adopted by the Te Ariki Trust. Key features include mutual understandings related to classrooms and student learning which are shaped and led by teachers over time. These circles are not just content focused. They work on

processes which enable teachers to admit and share issues of practice related to an agreed focus, knowing that the collective expertise of the circle will be beneficial to all members. It is this collective sharing which deprivatises teachers' practice, helping them to see the benefits of working with colleagues as learning partners.

While inquiry approaches are not new in the teaching profession and are described in different ways, research work on them continues. For example, Kaser and Halbert's (2014) study of learning networks in Canada over a period of 15 years has explored the potential of inquiry approaches to deepen teachers' professional learning and influence the education system as a whole. What their study demonstrates is how inquiry strategies can extend beyond a single school to become an approach used by wider collaborative networks involving several schools. Their learning networks have typically included year-long inquiries around a named theme, three formal meetings a year and a provincial seminar to encourage dissemination between schools in the network.

All of their networks shared similar design features and guiding principles. Student learning was the prime reason for these networks. This was made possible by paying attention to the ways in which teachers could interact as a professional learning community to work through specific inquiries (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018; Harris, Jones, & Huffman, 2017). This meant being aware of social learning factors including the role of emotions in learning, recognition of individual differences in learning, the need for ambitious goals and evidence of learning, all the while building horizontal connections, (teacher to teacher) to clarify understandings of practice. A six stage sequence of scanning, focusing, developing a hunch, new professional learning, taking action and checking was followed by each network. This sequence is similar to other recognised action research models (Schmuck, 2006; McNiff, 2002; Mertler, 2006; Robertson, 2016). These stages are often accompanied by a key descriptive question seeking an explanation for current practice or brainstorming possibilities for new actions. Making the structured sequence so explicit means that the participants are able to shape the pace of change thereby increasing their commitment and engagement in professional learning.

Modelling the reflective process is the intention of Rusche and Jason's (2011) work with an inquiry-guided learning study of an instructor working with students. Rusche and Jason suggest their approach "emphasises the importance of providing opportunities for students to engage [with] material with their own questions and concerns, rather than providing them with only 'correct' interpretation" (p. 349). The expectation to change learners from a passive to active learning mode is achieved through evidence-seeking questions which encourage personal agency and ownership of the problems of practice in a group setting. This learning curiosity and orientation then create momentum for further questioning and practice inquiries.

Attention to teachers' questioning skillsets was also a key feature of Lin, Hong, Yang and Lee's (2013) study of elementary science teachers in Taiwan. There they created a book club on inquiry teaching in recognition that teachers needed resources and support to adopt inquiry approaches. In addition to readings about inquiry teaching, they offered workshops, sample lessons, opportunities to observe colleagues, videos of teachers in action and training in higher order questions in facilitated discussions.

Moving beyond questioning, Ghamrawi's (2011) study in Lebanon focuses on leadership by teachers as a means to drive school improvement and student learning. Descriptions of school cultures act as a starting point for exploring the extent to which trust in teachers' capacity to contribute to leadership work is evident. This study builds on five elements: "self-efficacy, collaboration, commitment, collective vision and building a strong sense of belonging to the organisation" (Ghamrawi, 2011, p.333). The findings confirm that the development of teacher leadership depends on the presence of a strong positive school culture in which there is professional dialogue, open communication and safety and support to take risks. Other messages for principals include modelling distributed leadership as a means to make space for others to lead, active engagement in research on teaching and learning for enhancing principal credibility and the importance of

structures and processes which will enable the sharing of reflections, inquiries and experiences of successful strategies from which others will benefit. Ghamrawi argues that trust is the means by which professionalism is built. It stems from individuals contributing to the school's moral purpose of making a difference to students and their learning. Attention to school cultures which value teachers' contributions as leaders and learners builds that trust.

Key points from the literature informing the Trust's third value, *Reflective Inquiry and Discourse*, confirm the need for teachers to work in collaboration with colleagues rather than alone to gain deeper meanings of and about practice. This includes making time to read research and discuss insights with colleagues. Questioning skillsets also benefit from learning how to use higher order questions to advance practice. However, if classrooms are to be shared sites for inquiry amongst colleagues, teachers must be able to take risks knowing they will be supported and encouraged. This requires trust in one's colleagues if individual practice is to be deprivatised and colleagues are to be invited into classrooms as learners.

Evidence-based professional practice

The literature informing the Trust's fourth value reinforces the benefits of co-constructing meanings of practice with colleagues. Studies report on planned research processes, cluster inquiries and research groups to show how teachers can be supported to interpret and respond to data and how others can support evidence-based judgements and decisions to inform new strategies.

The matter of building teacher capacity for effective data use is a prime concern. Marsh and Farrell (2015) maintain "data alone do not ensure use" (p. 271). Instead there is a need for explicit data literacy professional development to ensure teachers are able to examine multiple measures, synthesise data and draw inferences. They refer to this skillset as data literacy competencies, describing meaningful data use as the "move from data, to information, to knowledge, to action" (p. 271). However, rather than assert that data capacity building is just a matter of acquiring skills and a body of knowledge, they use units of interaction to capture the ways experts and novices interact in communities of practice. Explicit attention to the practices of brokering, modelling, dialogue, opportunities for group work and the development and use of tools is recognition that learning is embedded in social events when teachers work with shared interests. Their findings are useful for they draw attention to the need for a process agenda suggesting that the development of data literacy is not linear but contingent on working with the complexity of school cultures and the interactions of people and systems.

Distinguishing between data to evaluate and data to inform is what Curry, Mwavita, Holter and Harris (2016) say is necessary for a teacher reflection and inquiry agenda. Their conceptual framework of self-determination theory emphasises the importance of teacher involvement and competence in data collection and interpretation. A sense of autonomy combined with trust is what they suggest drives teachers to act professionally using data to inform their future actions. This runs counter to high-stakes accountability where there is a tendency to use data for evaluation purposes. Curry et al. (2016) suggest such accountability can demotivate teachers "by removing the teacher from the [data informed decision making] DIDM process... [and separating] student outcomes from immediate instructional practices" (p. 103). A non-threatening approach is what they advocate so that over time, teachers can engage in joint inquiry work with colleagues to review teaching practices and make adjustments without reprimand. Learning to make adjustments to meet student needs is a skill best learnt in relationships with other teachers, achieved through talk, regular meetings and opportunities to work alongside others including specialists.

Approaches for collaborative work to enhance student achievement are explored by Parr and Timperley (2015) in raising literacy achievement of at-risk students in New Zealand. A continuum shows the differences in how facilitators, researchers or specialists work with teachers to interrogate practice. They explain that a traditional approach is one in which researchers translate findings and disseminate them in workshops. A second

approach is when teachers are engaged in formative research whereas a third approach is one where interpretation is co-constructed. In the third approach the co-construction is a structured process involving consideration of the evidence gathered, its suitability, making inferences and planning how to evaluate impact. Knowledge exchange is a key part of the process but here again, the importance of being able to share findings without shame or blame highlights trust as a necessary prerequisite.

Key points from the literature informing the Trust's fourth value, *Evidence-based Professional Practice*, emphasise the need for data to be seen by teachers as informing practice to guide an improvement agenda. It is recognised that constructing understandings of practice is enhanced when teachers have structured opportunities to work with colleagues, sometimes assisted by data coaches, researchers or specialists, who engage learners in the process of making meaning from the data collected. This helps teachers to discern what is important and to recognise that professional learning communities offer opportunities for all members to increase their knowledge, skills and thinking about practice.

Part three: The professional values tool and its pilot

The survey tool (see Appendix) was formulated from the informing literature for each professional value, a brief summary of which has appeared above (Lovett, 2016). Issues raised in the review provided the substance from which to draft items requiring ratings on a four point Likert scale (to a great, moderate, slight or no extent). The survey sought a response from each respondent on how they perceived their school staff in general by asking: "To what extent does the staff of this school ... (e.g. create opportunities for teachers to lead)?"

The information letter and layout of the survey tool were discussed with the Te Ariki Trust and subsequently "cold-piloted" with two principals in order to check the instructions, ease of completion and wording of the items. Both principals endorsed the survey tool and its potential. However, one of these principals reported that it had been somewhat challenging knowing how to provide a general judgement to describe the school staff when members were at various career stages. However, he said that making the ratings had been a useful exercise. Given the positive summary provided by this principal, a decision was made to continue with a general stem for each item. The decision to retain a generalised item stem was justified on the basis that aggregated data provide a ready basis for open conversations because individual identities remain undisclosed. The survey tool gained ethical approval from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and was subsequently uploaded into the Qualtrix programme for its initial pilot online.

Primary school principals from one region in New Zealand received emails inviting them to share with teachers an explanatory email and survey link. In a two week timeframe, 17 schools responded. The results from one school, where two thirds of the teachers responded are reported here so as to discuss the utility of the tool.

Each participating school received a personalised report. Information detailing a possible process for interrogating the data was suggested and modelled for the schools to use. This was based on Swaffield and Dempster's (2009) and Dempster et al's (2017) work with a "disciplined dialogue" strategy to illustrate how three specific questions can prompt disciplined conversations focused on staff responses to tools such as the Te Ariki survey. It is this process which the article also employs with the sample school. The three disciplined dialogue questions are:

1. What do we see in these data?
2. Why are we seeing what we are?
3. What, if anything, should we be doing about it? (Dempster et al., 2017, p. 44).

As can be seen from these three generic questions, multiple, subsidiary questions are possible, for example: what are we seeing for middle school teachers, junior school, or positional leaders?

A personalised report provides examples of how a school may interpret and use its data. Explicit modelling of disciplined dialogue in the analysis across all four professional values was viewed as an intentional way to

prompt decisions based on evidence and collective recognition of a school's combined insights for possible changed practice.

Part four: Discussing the results of the sample school's responses using disciplined dialogue

As indicated earlier, the results of the pilot are presented with a focus on one school. This is done so that an example of the type of discussion the results may provoke can be demonstrated using the process of disciplined dialogue explained above.

Sample school results

The sample school received its results graphed in Figure 1, using school means compared with regional means across all four professional values.

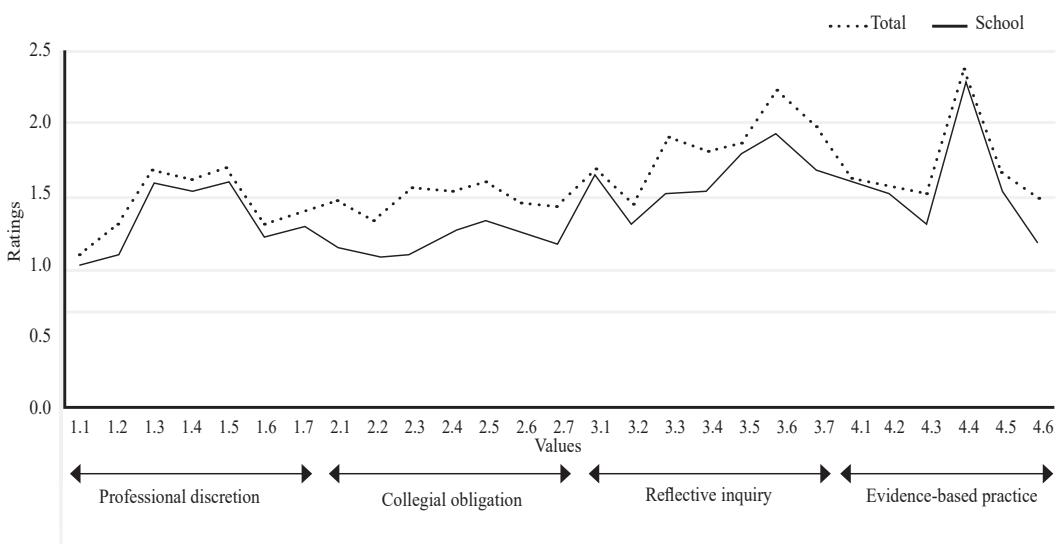


Figure 1. Means for the sample school compared with regional means across items for all professional values

The graph would show a mean of 1 if all respondents selected "to a great extent" on the scale. As can be seen, no mean was greater than 2.5 on the 4 point scale. This graph enabled principals and teachers to recognise items in alignment or otherwise with the views of others in the region. The distance between the lines shows the degree of difference between the two groups. The sample school's plot is the lower line in Figure 1, indicating that for most items, slightly more positive views were apparent than in the region at large. For the school in focus, direct alignment was found in items 1.6, 3.1, 3.5, 4.1, 4.2 and 4.4. There were many items for which the school results produced lower means and therefore, more positive results than those for the region.

The school response to the very first item (1.1) in the survey is a "standout" – *To what extent does the staff of this school stick to the moral obligation to improve students' learning no matter the pressures?* The mean here lies at 1.0, recording a 100% positive response rate for all teachers. As the figure shows, others in the region are not far behind, with almost 90% selecting "to a great extent" as their response while the remaining 10% selected "to a moderate extent".

The least positive means, both for the school and the region were recorded for items 3.6 and 4.4 respectively: *To what extent does the staff of this school make time for reading research and discussing insights*

with colleagues? and To what extent does the staff of this school work with a data coach/team to build data literacy? In both cases, more than a third of the respondents said that these actions were evident “to a slight extent” or “not at all”. More is said about these findings in the presentation of the school’s data below.

Value 1: Professional discretion

Table 1 records the results for the first of the four values – *Professional Discretion* – about which the first of the disciplined dialogue questions applies: *What do we see in these data?* For the purposes of the article, attention is paid to Items 1.1 and 1.5. As has been said, the 100% response for the moral obligation to improve students’ learning is noteworthy. The combined ratings of “to a great extent” (50%) and “to a moderate extent” (43%) for supporting those new to leadership work are positive (93%). However, there are some negative views (7%). A discussion of this matter will be picked up in the fourth section of the article using the second and third disciplined dialogue questions.

Table 1. *Professional discretion* in tabular form, showing percentages for the sample school

| Item number | Value 1: Professional Discretion | To a great extent % | To a moderate extent % | To a slight extent % | Not at all % |
|-------------|--|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 1.1 | Stick to the moral obligation to improve students’ learning no matter the pressures | 100 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1.2 | Adopt a continuous improvement mindset for teaching practice | 93 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| 1.3 | Take opportunities to deepen professional practice through partnerships or networks within & beyond the school | 43 | 57 | 0 | 0 |
| 1.4 | Create opportunities for teachers to lead | 57 | 36 | 7 | 0 |
| 1.5 | Accept that those new to leadership work need to be supported | 50 | 43 | 7 | 0 |
| 1.6 | Realise that collegial sharing provides new insights to practice | 79 | 21 | 0 | 0 |
| 1.7 | Collect and act on data to inform next steps | 71 | 29 | 0 | 0 |

Value 2: Collegial Obligation

Table 2 records the results for the second of the four values – *Collegial Obligation* – about which we also ask the first of the disciplined dialogue questions: *What do we see in these data?* Attention here is given to Items 2.2 and 2.3. Both of these items show that the school staff acknowledge the positive nature of staff relationships and the support available when practice vulnerability emerges. For these items: *Establishing trusting and constructive*

relationships and Showing willingness for mutual vulnerability in discussions about practice, the positive ratings reach 100%. More will be said about this in the later discussion of the two remaining disciplined dialogue questions.

Table 2. *Collegial Obligation* in tabular form, showing percentages for the sample school

| Item number | Value 2: Collegial Obligation | To a great extent % | To a moderate extent % | To a slight extent % | Not at all % |
|-------------|---|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 2.1 | Show interest and patience for colleagues no matter their level of experience | 86 | 14 | 0 | 0 |
| 2.2 | Establish trusting and constructive relationships | 93 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| 2.3 | Show willingness for mutual vulnerability in discussions about practice | 93 | 7 | 0 | 0 |
| 2.4 | Value opportunities to question, interrogate and reshape practice with colleagues | 79 | 21 | 0 | 0 |
| 2.5 | Blend considerations for colleagues alongside concern for task completion | 71 | 29 | 0 | 0 |
| 2.6 | Fulfil assigned responsibilities so others see them as credible and trustworthy | 79 | 21 | 0 | 0 |
| 2.7 | Trust one another's caring intentions and show commitment to others | 86 | 14 | 0 | 0 |

Value 3: Reflective inquiry and discourse

Following the pattern established for values 1 and 2, Table 3 records the results for the third of the four values – *Reflective Inquiry and Discourse*. Again we ask the first of the disciplined dialogue questions: *What do we see in these data?* In response, the focus turns to Items 3.2 and 3.6. The results for: *Respecting the integrity, honesty and commitment of colleagues* (Item 3.2) show this professional value is held “to a great extent” by 71% of respondents, with “to a moderate extent” drawing 29% of responses. This positive result reinforces the strength of *Collegial Obligation* already shown in Table 2. The “to a slight extent” with 21% of responses to Item 3.6: *Making time for reading research and discussing insights with colleagues*, is the highest for the items in this third values cluster. As for the results from previous tables, this finding is discussed later using the second and third disciplined dialogue questions.

Value 4: Evidence-based professional practice

Finally, Table 4 records the results for the last of the four values *Evidence-based Professional Practice*. Again

Table 3. *Reflective Inquiry and Discourse* in tabular form, showing percentages for the sample school

| Item number | Value 3: Reflective Inquiry & Discourse | To a great extent % | To a moderate extent % | To a slight extent % | Not at all % |
|-------------|--|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 3.1 | Take risks knowing support will be there | 43 | 57 | 0 | 0 |
| 3.2 | Respect the integrity, honesty & commitment of colleagues | 71 | 29 | 0 | 0 |
| 3.3 | Invite others to observe in one's classroom as learners | 50 | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| 3.4 | Share best lessons with colleagues | 50 | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| 3.5 | Know the types of questions which help to make sense of practice | 29 | 64 | 7 | 0 |
| 3.6 | Make time for reading research & discussing insights with colleagues | 29 | 50 | 21 | 0 |
| 3.7 | Co-construct meanings of practice with external facilitators | 36 | 64 | 0 | 0 |

Table 4. *Evidence-based Professional Practice* in tabular form, showing percentages for the sample school

| Item number | Value 4: Evidence-based Professional Practice | To a great extent % | To a moderate extent % | To a slight extent % | Not at all % |
|-------------|---|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 4.1 | Interpret & use data for improvement | 43 | 57 | 0 | 0 |
| 4.2 | Discern what is important & what is irrelevant | 50 | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| 4.3 | Show sensitivity to teachers' feelings & competence when interrogating student data in public | 71 | 29 | 0 | 0 |
| 4.4 | Work with a data coach/team to build data literacy | 14 | 50 | 28 | 8 |
| 4.5 | Develop mutual relationships where both parties increase knowledge | 50 | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| 4.6 | Construct new knowledge through collaborative work and social interactions | 86 | 14 | 0 | 0 |

we ask the first of the disciplined dialogue questions: *What are we seeing in these data?* From this table, the results for Item 4.4 are highlighted. Here: *Working with a data coach/team to build data literacy* drew only 14% of responses “to a great extent” and 50% “to a moderate extent”. This left 28% of respondents rating this item “to a slight extent” and a further 8% marking it “not at all”. These findings call for discussions of the reasons why these results have been reported and what might be done about them – questions which are featured in the disciplined dialogue sequence in the next section.

Having made a number of selections in response to the first of the three disciplined questions – *What do we see in these data?* – an example of the kind of discussion which might take place amongst this school’s staff members is portrayed using the remaining two questions.

The discussion is presented in Table 5, with the first column showing the results for selected items, the second, possible responses why these results might have been recorded in the school and the third, some suggested strategies addressing the explanations given.

Table 5. Disciplined dialogue discussion example

| Results for the items selected | Why are we seeing what we are? | What, if anything, should we be doing about it? |
|--|--|---|
| 100% of the staff report to a great extent sticking to the moral obligation to improve students’ learning no matter the pressures (Item 1.1) | In this school there is ongoing discussion about students’ learning needs. A discussion about the moral purpose of education is conducted at the beginning of each school year. | Present practices should be continued. Experienced staff should be invited to lead annual discussions of the pressures to be faced this year and what will be necessary for the continuing improvement of student achievement. |
| 93% of the staff report to a great extent willingness for mutual vulnerability in discussions about practice (Item 2.3) | The opening up of classrooms for peer observation is a recent development. The sharing of good practice examples and issues of practice occurs at staff meetings. | Extending the peer observation process as a common school practice with support for teacher release for improvement discussions. Creating opportunities for sharing effective practices within and beyond the school. |
| 21% of the staff report to a slight extent making time for reading research & discussing insights with colleagues (Item 3.6) | The low percentage here is explained through the busyness of the teachers’ day. A limited professional library exists within the school. | Selecting a high priority learning area as a focus for research review and the compilation of relevant articles. Creating research reading groups periodically and applying learnings. |
| 36% of the staff report to a slight extent or not at all working with a data coach/ team to build data literacy (Item 4.4) | Evidenced-based strategy development is relatively new to the school. Systematic gathering of school data is variable. | Determining what kind of data about student learning and achievement is a priority, gathering such data and creating professional learning opportunities for its use. |

The examples provided in Table 5 indicate the likely discussion that staff members with local knowledge about their circumstances would be able to contribute. There is much in the survey about each of the four professional

values which, when combined with disciplined dialogue, open the school to collaborative inquiry, reflection and planning. In this sense, the pilot shows direct and relevant utility for leaders and teachers in their own school environments.

Suggested changes resulting from the pilot

Since this article has been about the piloting of a professional values online survey tool, it is important now to identify suggested amendments to the instrument in the light of its initial implementation.

First, in the invitation for schools to use the tool, it should be made clear that the tool is meant as a discussion starter – a “tin opener” for dialogue. It is not a sophisticated research instrument. School leaders and teachers should be able to apply, analyse and follow up on their local results with ease. They may also like to administer the tool more than once, perhaps a year or so apart as an aid to continuing discussion about these core professional values.

Second, the items are currently not randomised in the tool but appear as category clusters. When randomised, each item is taken on its merits, thus avoiding repetitious responses to like items in a category. The re-categorisation of the items need only occur when the findings are reported. Each category and particular items within it then becomes the focus for staff dialogue.

Third, the disaggregation of results which allow for an individual teacher or leader to compare his or her responses with the aggregated school view overall, is likely to attract personal reflection and therefore possible commitment to action. It will also be possible for groups of teachers, such as the senior leadership team, to examine differences in perception.

Fourth, as has been indicated already, a school may implement the survey tool a second time following the implementation of improvement strategies developed from its first use.

Fifth, an aspirational suggestion derived from the trial recognises its potential as an enabling device that could usefully be employed by Communities of Learners (CoLs)/Kahui Ako being established by New Zealand’s “Investing in Educational Success (IES) Policy” (Ministry of Education, 2018). Under this policy, how these new partnerships develop is left for CoLs/Kahui Ako to determine. If each school in a CoL/Kahui Ako were to complete the Te Ariki online tool, there would be available to leaders and teachers, professional values profiles on which discussions to understand similarities and differences could proceed. One outcome of such discussions may be the identification of protocols, ways of working and relationship building amongst the schools in the CoL/Kahui Ako. If this were so, the Te Ariki Trust’s hopes for the wider use of its professional values may indeed be realised.

Conclusion

The pilot indicates that the results provide the basis for suggested improvements to professional values in practice. Therefore, it is on improvements to *Professional Discretion, Collegial Obligation, Reflective Inquiry & Discourse and Evidence-based Professional Practice* that dialogue should focus. When these four professional values are taken forward in combination with strategies for improved professional practice, school improvement is far more likely to occur. At the same time, staff relationships and the benefits that flow from collegiality will be strengthened.

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Appendix

Te Ariki Online survey tool: Professional values for school improvement

To what extent does the staff of this school ...?

1 - To a great extent 2 - To a moderate extent 3 - To a slight extent 4 - Not at all

| | | |
|-----|--|---------|
| 1. | Stick to the moral obligation to improve students' learning no matter the pressures | 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. | Adopt a continuous improvement mindset for teaching practice | 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. | Take opportunities to deepen professional practice through partnerships or networks within & beyond the school | 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. | Create opportunities for teachers to lead | 1 2 3 4 |
| 5. | Accept that those new to leadership work need to be supported | 1 2 3 4 |
| 6. | Realise that collegial sharing provides new insights to practice | 1 2 3 4 |
| 7. | Collect and act on data to inform next steps | 1 2 3 4 |
| 8. | Show interest and patience for colleagues no matter their level of experience | 1 2 3 4 |
| 9. | Establish trusting and constructive relationships | 1 2 3 4 |
| 10. | Show willingness for mutual vulnerability in discussions about practice | 1 2 3 4 |
| 11. | Value opportunities to question, interrogate and reshape practice with colleagues | 1 2 3 4 |
| 12. | Blend considerations for colleagues alongside concern for task completion | 1 2 3 4 |
| 13. | Fulfil assigned responsibilities so others see them as credible and trustworthy | 1 2 3 4 |
| 14. | Trust one another's caring intentions and show commitment to others | 1 2 3 4 |
| 15. | Take risks knowing support will be there | 1 2 3 4 |
| 16. | Respect the integrity, honesty and commitment of colleagues | 1 2 3 4 |
| 17. | Invite others to observe in one's classroom as learners | 1 2 3 4 |
| 18. | Share best lessons with colleagues | 1 2 3 4 |
| 19. | Know the types of questions which help to make sense of practice | 1 2 3 4 |
| 20. | Make time for reading research & discussing insights with colleagues | 1 2 3 4 |
| 21. | Co-construct meanings of practice with external facilitators | 1 2 3 4 |
| 22. | Interpret & use data for improvement | 1 2 3 4 |
| 23. | Discern what is important & what is irrelevant | 1 2 3 4 |
| 24. | Show sensitivity to teachers' feelings & competence when interrogating student data in public | 1 2 3 4 |
| 25. | Work with a data coach/team to build data literacy | 1 2 3 4 |
| 26. | Develop mutual relationships where both parties increase knowledge, skills & thinking | 1 2 3 4 |
| 27. | Construct new knowledge through collaborative work and social interactions | 1 2 3 4 |

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