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TRAINING AND SUPPORT OF LEADERS IN TODAY’S SCHOOLS IN NEW ZEALAND

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This paper describes a research based course in educational management for school leaders in Otago and Southland. In reporting how the course has been received, a range of features will be presented which could provide directions for future courses in educational management in New Zealand.

Under the Tomorrow’s School’s regime, some school leaders have found their energy levels well and truly drained, making life, (apart from policy writing, endless meetings and preparing for Education Review Office visits) rather difficult. I have noticed that once schools have experienced these hurdles for themselves, they have come to see more advantages than disadvantages for learning and teaching in their schools.

Admittedly the old support structures have disappeared and some principals have felt isolated and vulnerable. It is my belief that we now have a golden opportunity to develop a new and improved style of school leadership which will enhance the ability to self manage schools. However its success will largely depend on the way in which university education departments and colleges of education provide training, research and discussion forums for principals and prospective principals. (The future of Government funding for education is to some extent a separate, though related problem).

The model I favour, is one where school leaders are assisted in their leadership roles by a skilled and knowledgeable facilitator along with opportunities to network with colleagues from other schools. In this model, school leaders become problem solvers of real concerns in a supportive environment where other leaders are facing similar situations.

The facilitator assists in this process by introducing, at the appropriate time, the research literature to heighten their ability to reflect on current practice. This will lead naturally to well considered professional decisions being made. The progression from this stage is the involvement of the whole staff in a similar problem solving mode. A shared decision making process then takes place in which the staff become committed to the implementation of policy.

Since 1990, Dunedin College of Education’s Advanced Studies for Teachers papers in Education Management have undergone significant reshaping and development. Currently, either two papers in Effective Principalship or Middle Management form the compulsory component of a four paper Certificate in Educational Management. The completion of this certificate is also the first stage of a new Diploma of Educational Leadership. This Diploma has been a combined development by three Colleges of Education in Wellington, Palmerston North, and Dunedin. In 1994 the papers in Educational Leadership for the Diploma of Educational Leadership will be offered by each of the three Colleges.

Dunedin College of Education services a large area with its Continuing Education programme for school leaders in educational management. In delivering the two Effective Principalship papers throughout rural and urban settings in Otago and Southland, the reality of self-managing schools has certainly been discovered. Course members have come from a wide variety of school types and sizes, from sole charge to the larger city schools. Most have been principals who have held teaching or non-teaching roles. Others have held senior positions or used the courses as leadership training before experiencing such roles themselves.

The courses have been presented on topics in a three week cycle at each of five locations (Dunedin, Invercargill, Balclutha, Gore, Alexandra and North Otago). Initially the papers focused on meeting the
needs of principals in resource and personnel management and on improving learning and teaching. Since 1993, the first of two new papers in middle management and leadership has been offered to leaders in early childhood, primary and secondary sectors in Invercargill and Dunedin. Strategies and skills for middle managers have been the focus. The 1994 paper will concentrate on personnel and programmes.

The format for the delivery of the principalship and middle management papers has remained the same. When course members came to a session they had received a pre-session booklet with several readings and tasks to complete. At the sessions, a sequence of material was presented, interspersed with group discussion, simulation activities, role plays and observation of various group processes. Course members were required to actively participate and then complete a post session assignment which would relate course work to the needs of their schools.

Networks and Collegial Support

Each course group soon became a network of support for school leaders wanting to make the best of the many leadership challenges they faced. This was particularly true for the rural principals who were the most vulnerable to the mass of paperwork and demands from their communities. Some saw these Effective Principalship courses as their only regular form of support. This has also been the case for the Middle Management course members. When a survey was sent to principals in Otago and Southland early in 1992, the course had met three times. One principal in replying to the survey, said:

I have joined the College ‘Effective Principalship’ paper. Already 8-9 hours of rubbing shoulders sharing, plus the background materials is of more use than what I was involved in during 1991. This form of training/learning must grow in importance for me anyway.

In many cases, while problems could not be solved by others, participants would leave a session knowing that others were also facing similar challenges or had even bigger concerns. The opportunity to let off steam with a supportive group was very important. This is also reiterated by Robertson (1991, pp159-160) at the University of Waikato, who says:

It is important that at training seminars the participants get the opportunity to talk among themselves and share their issues and concerns. This was invariably cited as one of the most valuable parts of any training... In fact, often a reason for attendance at training seminars is to glean information as to what is happening in other schools. Sometimes this is so that schools can be reassured that what they are doing is similar to other schools.

In my survey another principal commented about the need to meet with colleagues.

... courses are suitable at certain stages in one’s career, depending mainly on isolation, smaller schools and possibly motivation to get ahead. A larger school provides its own motivation and at that stage it’s more beneficial to get away, hear what others in your situation do and reflect back to your own school.

These typical quotations clearly show the need for collegial networks.

Preferred Styles of Learning

In preparing material for the various sessions, continual adjustment of teaching style has been necessary to suit the course members' preferred styles of learning. It was important that material was seen as useful to current or future situations. This relevance was achieved by giving course members an option to negotiate an alternative post session assignment which would suit their particular situations and, if necessary, a longer time frame for completion of work.
More and more I have come to see my role as a facilitator, leading course members through a series of questions or issues designed to challenge their ways of thinking and operating. I have not attempted to provide answers but to introduce a process of problem solving. Often this has resulted in tempting course members to read relevant literature, highlighting key features and then leaving them to work with their staff.

What I have found particularly exciting about the Effective Principalship course has been the impact which the course content was having on schools where there were several teachers from the same school attending. In Waimate, for instance, both the teaching principal and deputy attended and worked together on post session assignments which in turn meant that there was a carryover throughout the school. Over a three week period they had carried out action research on gender equity in the playground which had been shared with the remaining staff who were then able to question what was happening for their groups of children. Here was a case of the leaders modelling reflective practice as data gatherers and analysers and, finally, as implementers of a changed practice. In Oamaru, four senior staff from the same school attended and carried the course topics into practice in their syndicate and staff groups.

My views are also supported by Snyder and Giella (1987, p40) who mention two strikingly different approaches to adult learning. One is the pedagogical approach which they say, ‘... assumes that a body of external knowledge exists to be learned and practised and that the learner remains dependent on that external source for validation.’

The other approach which I have endeavoured to practise is called andragogical. Snyder and Giella (1987, p40) cite Knowles (1980) as saying, ‘(This) views external knowledge and instructions as resources to the learner in problem-solving activities that lead eventually to self-directed learning.’

Brookfield (1986) is also cited by Snyder and Giella as stating, ‘... adults learn to problem solve best when they are working on real problems in a group context.’

It is recognised that the providers of educational management courses face a number of difficulties. Gray (1987, p35) writes:

Many heads expect management development courses to be full of ‘content’ by which they mean prescription of the ‘right’ theories and ‘correct’ practice and they expect to ‘learn’ management by listening to talks and lectures given by experts and ‘best’ practitioners.

I have found that course members much prefer opportunities to discuss than to listen to formal lectures or talks. The secret has been one of starting with something practical and then feeding in research findings from the literature to gently challenge thinking.

**Educative Leadership**

Duignan and Macpherson (1987, pp50-1) use the term ‘educative leadership’ to clarify what they believe is appropriate for educational management programmes. They argue that such courses should not just focus on the traditional elements of leadership emphasised in the literature of educational administration, namely, attitudes, styles and behaviours.

(They) prefer to be concerned with ways of knowing organisations and ways of leading that find expression in the cultural norms of the group, the educational organisation or the system... Educatively leadership is, therefore, central to the negotiation of what will count as important in education and what is morally right.

Duignan and Macpherson (ibid) see the consequence of this type of action as the development of professional values, intentions and practices. According to Smyth (1985) cited by Duignan and Macpherson:
Educative leadership helps professional educators work with others to shape their purposes and the meanings that they use to make sense of, and to justify, their involvement in and contribution to education.

An understanding and awareness of the cultural context is crucial, therefore, to successful leadership. Duignan and Macpherson continue,

The use of the adjective ‘educative’ thereby implies the active involvement of all members of an educational organisation as philosophers, planners and policy makers... (Educative leadership) is concerned with an active analysis of the way things are, the way they are seen to be, and with the creation of preferred ways of doing things.

Therefore, in my opinion, educational management courses should endeavour to be structured in such a way that school leaders can express their own values and be able to draw out other people’s values and concerns, as they would in a school staff situation. This leads into the building of a collaborative work culture which Fullan (1992, p19) argues is a key task of the principal’s work.

In the staff appraisal topic, course members gained much from the networking, finding out what was being done in other schools and the reactions from staff towards implementation. In Southland, I had a group of people who viewed performance appraisal as a necessary management control activity. When given a card activity with largely business statements about the purposes of appraisal, I was surprised that they did not want to change the wording or discard some of the statements. Other course members relished the opportunity to put alternative ideas on the cards. Such differences in opinion from course members made for a lively discussion and thankfully left one or two thinking again about their own attitudes towards the purposes of appraisal! I was similarly delighted in Central Otago, when a course member reacted to another’s draft appraisal policy by saying that if she were a staff member in that school, such as process would not be viewed as a helpful, professional growth activity.

Such learning opportunities as these fit Fullan’s (1992, p19) message that, ‘... principals should be learning as well as leading.’

This is by no means an easy task. Gray (1987, p37) sees the issue as one of authority. He maintains that many principals see themselves as having sole personal responsibility for what goes on in the school. Their authority is essentially personal rather than organisational. This can lead to principals resisting the process of personal change. Gray (1987, p39) writes,

Principals do not want to learn about themselves though they do claim to want to learn about other people. They may want others to change but they do not want to change themselves.

This requires a more subtle approach in which school leaders are led into a mind set of continuous reflection about their schools and what is happening inside them in order to promote, what Barth (1991) calls, a community of learners where everyone is as much a risk taker as an action researcher might be.

Perception of Management Training Needs

There have been many lists of educational management training needs for school principals. Robertson (1992, p14) confirms the framework of three qualities of leadership given by Macpherson and Duignan (1987) as being the most often mentioned. These are related to being a statesperson, a connoisseur and an entrepreneur. Robertson explains these qualities as:

(The statesperson) being an instructional leader, having effective communication and therefore effective relationships.
(The connoisseur) having a discerning knowledge of learning processes and instructional design.

(The entrepreneur) showing a willingness to initiate change and innovation.

Douglas Day (1991, p176) lists eight areas for management training. These are:

- **managing oneself** *(e.g. self awareness, self development, managing stress, managing time)*
- **managing people** *(e.g. recruitment, staff development, assessment, communication, motivation, handling conflict, negotiations, mediation, chairpersonship, group behaviour, counselling)*
- **managing resources** *(e.g. managing plant and equipment, budgetary control, financial management)*
- **managing the organisation** *(e.g. setting up and maintaining structures for consultation, devising systems for record-keeping and documentation, delegating duties and tasks, routine management)*
- **managing change and development** *(e.g. long-term strategy and planning overview, scenario-building, creating innovation, responding to demands for innovation, implementing changes)*
- **managing external relations** *(e.g. relating to the national system, relating to parents, employers, politicians, the press, the local community, etc)*
- **leadership** *(e.g. the contemporary role of the principal in developing democratic school leadership styles)*
- **knowledge of the law** *(e.g. the law relating to schools and to young people)*

**Principals' Perceptions of their Needs**

It was no surprise when I asked Otago and Southland principals to consider Douglas Day's list of management training areas as possibilities for future courses to discover that their first three rankings were managing people, as the most important option, followed by managing change and development and, then, managing the organisation.

These results were similar to Wadsworth's study (1990, p49) in which 19 newly appointed principals attending an orientation course were asked to arrange twenty-eight school management tasks in priority according to the magnitude of the problems presented to them by the tasks. Wadsworth reported:

> The most ‘difficult’ tasks were identified. Whilst the task relating to maintaining morale and running an effective school appeared to be first, over half the group ranked personal maintenance as number one or two. The fourteen most problematic tasks fell into three groups: personal, interpersonal and technical.

Cawelti (1982, p325) gives a much higher figure of 90% of principals mentioning people problems (relationships) as their biggest leadership problem. Clearly these findings link to the importance of helping school leaders to be active learners with the skills to problem solve and to be collaborative culture builders concerned with the ways of knowing, valuing and altering their schools with those who work alongside them in the school.
Timing of Management Support

One of the questions I investigated in my own survey of the Otago and Southland principals, was the timing in their careers when they wanted management courses offered. Time spent in principalship of those who responded to the questionnaire suggested that slightly more support was wanted in the 4-10 year period of being principals. There was however a difference between the rural and urban principals. For the rural schools, the 0-3 and 4-10 year periods as principal were the more important for support. For the urban principals, it was the 4-10 and 11 + years where interest lay in management support of one sort or another. When all principals were asked what they wanted Dunedin College of Education to provide in the way of support for school leaders in the future, their ranking was:

1. One day seminars,
2. Reflective Principalship residential courses,
3. Courses leading towards qualifications and
4. Consultancy Service.

So, regardless of where participants were in their time as principals, there was a clear request for support. Day (1991, p179) suggests that there are three stages of need for management training. The first is initial training before or upon appointment, the second as follow-up training in the early years of being a principal and then continuous training at regular intervals throughout subsequent years as principals.

Types of Management Training

However what is more significant is the nature of such management training. Day (1991, p179) sees three options:

(a) training individual principals to manage their own schools more effectively,
(b) helping the principal to be a change agent in the development of the school and
(c) combining both approaches.

Other issues of teaching methodology, duration of courses, the balance between theory and practice, and the role of trainers and consultants are also important considerations for those delivering management courses.

I will now outline five educational management programmes which are offered overseas, in order to highlight some possibilities for New Zealand.

The first is Peer-Assisted Leadership which has been used by Barnet and Long (1986, p675) in San Francisco. They argue that there is no single correct way to be an instructional leader and no simple formula for effective instructional management. The practice of mentoring and shadowing another principal means that principals learn from each other. As principals compare and contrast their own leadership styles with those of other principals they become clearer about their own philosophies. The PAL programme, which Barnet and Long introduced, interspersed the mentoring and reflective interviews with colleagues with a series of six weekly meetings for participants to learn new skills. The skills were those which participants needed to gather and analyse data about their partner’s leadership behaviours. Trainers would provide simulations, practice and feedback.

At the Manchester Polytechnic, a two year post graduate Diploma in Management in Education uses a similar course methodology with concerns - based work in the field. In this diploma the culminating activity is a group consultancy project which Beck and Kelly (1989, p19) describe as:
(a) a problem area for investigation,
(b) a client who initially identifies the problem,
(c) an organisational setting or settings within which to operate,
(d) a team approach to the investigation of the problem area,
(e) the opportunity to present to the client the team's conclusions and recommendations and
(f) an assessment, by an experienced panel, of the team's achievement.

Beck and Kelly (1989, p19) say that if this provides a worthwhile management experience, in a relatively safe and secure environment, then course participants not only gain a valuable training experience but also they can be evaluated and receive some feedback on their actual management capabilities.

A programme operating in Florida makes use of a four-cluster management model encompassing ten management competencies. Snyder and Giella (1987, p38) describe the four clusters as, organisational planning, staff development, programme development and school assessment. Within each cluster, research themes are devised for participants to treat as goals for study. A series of training activities follows in which participants apply theory to practice. Snyder and Giella (1987, p40) maintain: 'Such an approach supports the concepts of self-directed learning and group problem solving about school challenges.' They see the three interdependent variables of expectations, development opportunities and coaching, as the way to provide both the context and the direction for professional growth within school organisations.

Schank and Roberts (1987, p31) working in California, are also concerned about helping principals overcome on-the-job obstacles to learning. They say:

What emerges from practice and research is paradoxical; principals’ most valuable source for learning is their on-the-job experience, yet the reality of that experience is seriously limited as a vehicle for learning. Clearly, principals need systematic strategies for learning from their on-the-job reality by recognizing and overcoming its constraints. They need to see how constraints may be converted into opportunities for leadership.

In Schank and Robert’s Leadership Academy, the programme uses workshops to capture principals’ preferences for action in problem solving. They maintain that these workshop activities help participants to creatively analyse issues to generate alternative solutions rather than ‘right’ answers. The workshops also encourage participants to work in trios so that reflection is possible in a collegial setting. One interesting difference, in this programme, is the requirement of the superintendent or designee, and at least one school board member from each participating district, to attend two and a half days training during each of the programme’s three years. Schank and Roberts (1987, p32) describe these days as:

One half day each year becoming acquainted with what principals will be learning during the year. The other two days are spent examining and generating strategies that the superintendents and board members can use to support the instructional leadership efforts of both their district’s participants and other administrators at home.

Another American programme, in Portland, uses year-long workshops for training principals. Blum, Butler and Olson (1987, p25) use five content strands in which principals complete a self-assessment instrument focusing on the five content strands to identify their leadership strengths and areas where additional development work would be useful. These content strands are vision building, school climate and culture, curriculum implementation, improving instruction and monitoring school performance.
Conclusion

I am confident about the future of school leadership training and support programmes in New Zealand but outside help is clearly needed to make self-managing schools a success. There is no doubt that principals, and particularly teaching principals, have had increased workloads and responsibilities since the introduction of Tomorrow's Schools. The absence of the old support structures has left a vacuum. The numerous one-day offerings from business and education providers (often co-ordinated by the Colleges of Education) have not provided on-going themes of support. The principals, with whom I have worked in the Effective Principalship papers, have realised that the 'quick fix, one day offerings' are no longer satisfying their needs. They are now wanting longer term courses which allow them to be the culture shapers with a sounding board of practising educators and researchers. This is why the literature which I have described about mentoring, consultancy work and job related problem solving provides direction for future support services.

Any substantial provision of longer term courses does of course have implications for additional relieving staff, professional development leave, and travel expenses for rural principals. However, my judgement is that an increasing number of principals will take advantage of longer courses, even under the present restraints.

References


