

Professional qualities of education leaders (originally ‘The professionalism and the professionalization of educational leaders’)

Reynold Macpherson¹

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The recent decision by primary school principals to campaign against the use of standardised tests and national standards, on the basis of their collective professional judgement, begs uncomfortable questions about the quality of their professionalization. Their demand for absolute trust is unreasonable on two grounds. Legitimate stakeholders in the educational process of our nation should have access to trustworthy feedback on student learning because such data indicate student progress and the quality of teaching and leadership. Worse, accumulating evidence summarised below suggests that the professionalization of educational leaders in New Zealand is in need of fundamental reform and substantial investment to safeguard the interests of our children and peoples. Ministerial intervention appears to be warranted in the public interest.

A crisis in the quality and supply of leaders for middle and senior management and institutional leadership roles in the state education system has long been predicted. A series of Ministry, NZCER and university studies have pointed to troubling indicators from about 2005, especially with regard to the period 2010 to 2020 when the Baby Boomers retire. Pathways to improvement have also been indicated.

A National Review² was mounted to provide a preliminary and empirical base for a more systematic national policy review and the planned improvement of leadership development. The principals’ recent politicisation of the evaluation of student learning reiterates the urgency of these two tasks.

An initial pilot survey and workshop with 14 serving secondary school principals in early 2008 confirmed common knowledge; that the education system is relying heavily on serendipitous experiential learning at team and executive leadership levels, with a few workshop series being used to encourage aspiring leaders and up-skill first-time principals (see right).

The second pilot surveyed the current attitudes and intentions of 28 neophyte leaders in mid 2008. They reiterated what the secondary principals said and raised five additional issues (see right).

What 14 Secondary Principals Said

Current provisions are helpful but idiosyncratic and not systemic in effect
No career path planning yet growing diversity of career paths reflecting sundry local selection criteria
Negligible use of extrinsic motivators discouraging potential leaders becoming aspirants
Deficit of skills training by designation prior to appointment and mentoring after appointment undermining competency and ongoing development
Culture of uncritical coping – need to integrate role-specific skills training with higher and evidence-based learning about leadership
Paucity of leadership development infrastructure reflects poor policy development and niggardly investment in preparatory and succession strategies.

What 28 Neophyte Leaders Called For

District or regional systems to deliver career planning and mentoring
Satisfy considerable latent demand for access to deep learning about executive and institutional leadership
Research-based preparation for teaching principals going to small and remote schools needed to lower leadership failure rates
Match the growing acceleration through or bypassing designations with role-specific leadership training to guarantee *competence on appointment*
A succession policy and strategies to sustain learning about leadership *after appointment* to achieve capacity building in schools

¹ Formerly Professor and Director of the Centre for Professional Development, University of Auckland, CEO of Waiariki, Foundation Chancellor and CEO of Abu Dhabi University, awarded Konica Minolta Dame Jean Herbison Scholarship to conduct a ‘National Review of the Preparation and Succession of Educational Leaders in New Zealand / Aotearoa’ 2008-2009, and Evaluator of the School-based Integrated Health Centres, Cornwall, United Kingdom 2009-2012.

² A series of published research reports are available free from www.reynoldmacpherson.ac.nz

Relevant international policy research published in 2007 and 2008 was then considered by systematic review to clarify policy options for New Zealand. Included in this systematic review were research reports about leadership education and development in Australian systems, the OECD's Improving Schools Leadership project, the International Study of Principal Preparation and the seminal *International Handbook on the Preparation and Development of School Leaders* (see right).

Five relevant system strategies for New Zealand were derived from these international research findings (see below).

What are Other Systems Doing?

Developing leaders to achieve national goals, reliably measuring school effectiveness, offering systematic learning of leadership in planned career paths

Systems facing crises in leader supply are developing policies and programmes featuring: active learning (to integrate skills training, higher education and practice); a career-related learning framework; effective role transitions; rigorous summative and formative evaluation of leadership services; a validated indigenous knowledge base in a multi-cultural context; and, a research and development role for universities to improve the knowledge base of educational leadership.

What Should New Zealand Do?

Redefine school leadership responsibilities to untangle the current ambiguities of governance and recentralisation

Deepen the research base of leadership practice and advance deep learning about the dilemmas of practice

Distribute school leadership to help resolve endemic role overload and role conflict over accountabilities

Develop a national framework for leadership learning to reconcile careers, institutional needs, demands for system leadership and terms and conditions of service

Make school leadership an attractive profession through the professionalization of recruitment, salaries, national associations and career development

A third pilot surveyed 12 senior educational leaders in 2009. They endorsed the provisional findings of the two earlier pilots and the recommendations derived from the systematic review. They recommended opportunities based on their own experiences (see right).

A modified survey instrument was then offered online to all leaders in schools and pre-schools as well as to members and potential members of a national professional association. It surveyed preferences regarding preparatory and succession professionalization strategies.

Strategies recommended by Senior Leaders

Access to demonstrably trustworthy knowledge about educational leadership

Preparatory training in role-specific skills prior to appointment

On-going direct support, PD and HE in order to mediate the inevitably idiosyncratic learning about leadership 'on the job'

Preparatory opportunities; fixed term contracts, temporary placements, cadetships, 'acting up', release for short-term positions, and national leadership development customised for the ECE sector

Succession opportunities; succession planning embedded as a core leadership skill in leadership education and governance training, PD in strategic planning of leadership development for middle and senior managers.

Most of the 495 respondents reported an intense degree of professional frustration as leaders. The three main sources of frustration to effective educational leadership in schools were given as the quality of system management, inadequacies of funding and support services and uneven teacher productivity. Few could see any end to the frustration.

Curiously, respondents were also found to have limited knowledge, experience or interest in alternatives to learning leadership 'on the job' and, understandably, shared a belief in the efficacy of this approach. Respondents' current career and leadership learning data suggested that accelerating progress through (or increasingly bypassing) 'stepping stone' leadership appointments, without role-specific preparation or systematic learning in-role, was more likely to result in serial incompetence than in evidence-based leadership and critical professionalization.

The 495 Lead Educator respondents recommended that sixteen services be delivered by a new peak body comprising the currently separate professional associations of educational leaders in ECE, primary and secondary schools, in both private and public sectors. While awaiting the formation of a new peak body, current professional associations might care are advised to review their service priorities (see below).

16 Services to be Delivered by a New Peak Professional Association of New Zealand Educational Leaders

- Encourage research into educational leadership issues
- Provide regular networking events locally for members
- Collaborate with other providers of PD to educational leaders
- Collaborate with other stakeholders to advance national policy making in education
- Advocate the professionalization of educational leadership
- Link members and others in the field of educational leadership
- Provide a regular newsletter about current events and issues in educational leadership
- Lobby government to advance the interests of educational leaders
- Provide PD to aspirant and current educational leaders
- Coordinate invited speakers and study visits
- Enable networking with other national and international professional associations of educational leaders to the benefit of members
- Provide a scholarly journal reporting research in educational leadership
- Participate actively in education policy reviews as a national stakeholder
- Coordinate local mentoring and coaching services for educational leaders
- Provide information and public commentary on national educational issues
- Provide an annual conference for members, colleagues and international associates

The final issue examined in the National Review was the professionalization services in educational leadership available from New Zealand's tertiary institutions. Case studies of current educational leadership programs identified five acute problems (see right).

Five Acute Problems in Tertiary Education Programmes in Educational Leadership

- The need for a research-based development of educational leadership programmes in ECE
- Potential conflicts of interest for university faculties that are contracted annually to deliver government-driven PD, consultancy, and support services
- Substantial unmet demand for first-time team and executive leaders in schools and centre leaders in ECE trained and educated in leadership
- Programme leaders, PD providers and funders need to blend optional assessment of PD activities with postgraduate study to boost participation in both
- Participation in the professionalization of educational leaders needs to be tripled to keep pace with turnover in the period 2010-2020, quadrupled to match the numbers studying masters degrees in nursing for leadership purposes, quadrupled to match the percentage of first time principals in Australian states with masters degrees in educational leadership
- PD and higher education funders and providers need to remove conditions antithetical to the systematic professionalization of leadership while creating incentive regimes that will sustain leadership capacity building locally and nationally

Four general recommendations were offered at the end of the National Review. The first was that some of the educational leadership programmes and centres in tertiary institutions appear to be of such poor quality that they are probably bringing the discipline of educational leadership and the standing of their host university into disrepute. Each institution should review the rigor of its programme evaluation criteria and processes, and either ensure effective professorial leadership of the research, teaching, and advisory teams in educational leadership, or withdraw from the field.

The second recommendation addressed the deficit of leadership training and education in the ECE sector. Market leaders in ECE might form a consortium with national stakeholders to articulate a research-based and career-related leadership development framework. Funders and providers will need to move quickly to implement the framework.

Third, the latent demand for professionalization in educational leadership based on turnover already exceeds supply by a factor of three. Participation lags far behind sister professions and systems by a factor of four. Demographics alone suggest that the crisis in quality and quantity will deepen before it improves. The leaders in New Zealand's schools and education system are poorly educated in educational leadership compared to their international counterparts and need fresh

incentives to create an All Master's profession of educational leadership. A Ministerial review of policies, reform of incentives and substantial national investment in educational leadership were recommended.

The fourth recommendation was that New Zealand's professional associations play a much more significant role in the professionalization of leaders by setting aside past differentiation and competitive strategies, recognize all colleagues in designated leadership roles as educational leaders, combine into one national peak body, and engage positively in the governance of the professionalization services provided by tertiary education institutions and other providers.

Finally, and returning to the claims made by the primary principals, professionals are given considerable creative freedom to practice and are accorded higher salaries, power, standing and privileges. This is why professionalization processes need to transform a job into a profession by guaranteeing specialist competence and integrity. Hence they typically involve specialist qualifications that indicate successful training and relevant higher learning. They also involve meeting other rigorous entry and ongoing service conditions that clarify their duty of care to their clients and their accountabilities.

Given the personal and confidential nature and strategic consequences of educational leadership in communities of learning, there is also an inevitable necessity of placing a great deal of trust in such professionals. Hence, in order to sustain that public trust, educational leaders should welcome opportunities to regularly recreate their professional legitimacy. A powerful method is to openly discharge their accountabilities against technical, scientific and ethical standards of practice. This is why a concerted attack on the few remaining empirical standards of practice on the grounds of so-called 'professional judgement' is alarming.

Student learning is a critical to life chances in a knowledge society. It is a key proxy for teaching and leadership effectiveness. The principals' judgement that the state school system should dispense with objective and external measures of student learning, and presumably rely on internal and collective peer opinion, both violates the principles of professionalism and points to the inadequacy of professionalization in educational leadership. It appears that Ministerial intervention is warranted in the public interest.

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