

Challenges for Principals in High-Needs Schools

I recently attended the UCEA (American Educational Leadership Association) conference in Detroit. I was particularly interested in an international session which featured recent research on contextual issues and challenges that impact on principal leadership practices, and on student performance. One USA presentation attracted my attention and is summarised below:

Topic: “Key leadership practices in a successful turnaround urban high-needs K-8 charter school in an inner city Midwestern city (USA)”

Presenters: Mette Baran & Gladys van Harpen (Cardinal Stritch University)

Summary: Research findings revealed successful school leadership involves an unalterable commitment to the mission, vision, and goals unique to the school. The principal and the senior leadership team promoted a culture of teaching and learning that placed a balanced focus on academic work and character building or character development within the school and supporting community.

High expectations and unwavering academic focus were demanded of everyone: Teachers, students, staff and parents as stakeholders clearly understood the tremendous challenges in turning around a failing school. A proactive approach to “sweating the small stuff” placed great emphasis on character building and fostering a sense of self-efficacy in students, and a mindset that they are responsible for charting their own successful path.

Comment: For me, this joint focus on improved student learning outcomes and personal development (e.g. student self-efficacy, goal setting) parallels movements in New Zealand secondary schools, in particular, towards blending academic improvement with pastoral care, so that the two functions are joined together for a common cause. This is apparent in a forthcoming research publication that examines how a sample of New Zealand secondary schools use a leadership tool known as the Educational Leadership Practices Survey.¹ Discussion of the research findings posed a question: Can teachers’ pastoral care and academic support for students now be viewed as a duality rather than discrete modes of operation? The evidence from the study’s findings would support the increasingly interwoven nature of the two student-oriented tasks. Youngs (2014) notes that a review of recent national Education Review Office reports (2014a, 2014b), related to New Zealand secondary schools, reveals two key factors’ contribution to achievement improvement: “The first identifies a school-wide approach that cohesively integrates curriculum, pastoral and careers systems and staff, and the second identifies individualised responses to students based on their individual needs and aspirations” (p. 91).²

What is the link in your school between each student’s personal development/pastoral care and their learning?

¹ Notman, R. & Youngs, H. (forthcoming) Researching and evaluating secondary school leaders in New Zealand: The Educational Leadership Practices Survey, *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice*.

² Youngs, H. (2014). Moving beyond distributed leadership to distributed forms: A contextual and socio-cultural analysis of two New Zealand secondary schools. *Leading & Managing*, 20(2), 88-103.

Research Study:

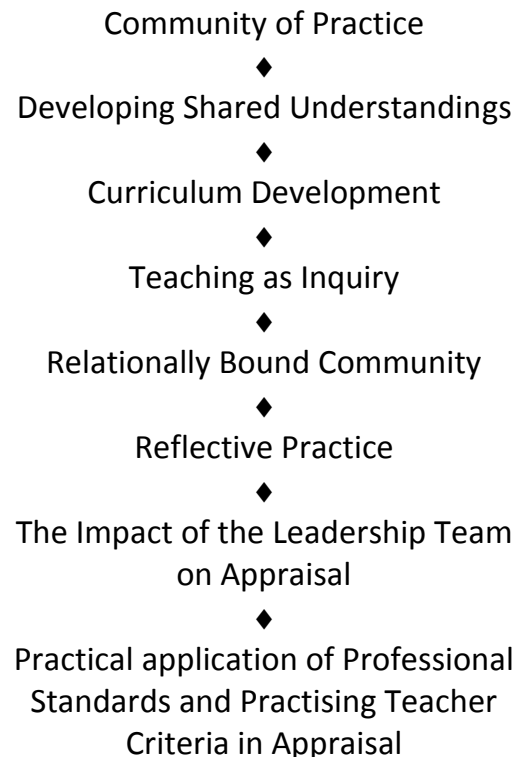
Factors that influence teacher appraisal in primary schools:
Making appraisal meaningful for teachers.

The study outlined below involved 10 Dunedin Primary Schools from a range of u-ratings and Deciles. The study was completed in 2015 and included a three-year case study of one school that was in the early stages of over-hauling their appraisal process with the ultimate goal of improving student learning outcomes as a result of reflective practice by teachers. The implications for all schools hoping to add meaning to their appraisal process is that the effectiveness of a *system* for appraisal is impacted by a set of pre-existing conditions that will influence the success of any process implemented.

Findings:

- Appraisal is most meaningful to teachers when it has direct impact on student learning outcomes and classroom practice.
- Identification of a set of conditions that need to be in place for effective appraisal to occur.
- How to meaningfully engage teachers in appraisal.
- A suggested model that includes embedding the set of identified conditions into a school community; whilst linking to curriculum development and student learning outcomes.

Themes:



For more information contact: Dr Bilinda Offen, University of Otago College of Education
bilinda.offen@otago.ac.nz

CELA Leadership Courses in 2017

Two leadership courses will again be offered next year.

1. Developing Teacher Leaders

A two-day course in Dunedin (mid February and mid March) that helps aspiring young leaders to make the transition from teacher to teacher leader (e.g teacher-in-charge / HOD / syndicate leader). A small in-school leadership investigation will be completed during the intervening weeks.

Available to primary, intermediate and secondary teachers.

Course Director: Ross Notman

2. Middle Leadership

This popular four-day course is delivered on one day each term. It is highly interactive. A key feature is its emphasis on relational leadership. The course will be delivered in Dunedin and Christchurch, and will be offered in Invercargill depending on numbers of enrolled participants.

Available to primary, intermediate and secondary teachers.

Course Director: Murray Fletcher

Information and expression of interest forms for each course have been emailed to schools in mid-November. We hope to have a new online registration system up and running at the beginning of next year.

Consultancy Services

The Centre offers leadership consultancy services to schools and early childhood centres.

Senior leadership teams in primary and intermediate schools

Murray Fletcher facilitates tailored professional learning for leadership teams. These are conversation-based, school context-driven and evidence-informed in sessions that take place over time (three / four terms). Murray acts as listener, questioner, reflector and provider of resource material focused on growing aspects of collective and individual capability within a leadership team.

Senior leadership teams in secondary schools: A leadership stocktake

Ross is available to assist senior leadership teams undertake an evaluation of their leadership portfolios and planning for future school directions.

CELA has a leadership development focus on promoting teacher middle leadership and senior leadership for 2017 - 2018. Inquiries should be directed to Ross at the Centre: ross.notman@otago.ac.nz.

Use of Office Facilities

We have an office available for educational leaders wanting to work with us, undertaking a period of sabbatical leave, or simply wanting a quiet space to reflect on leadership issues! Access to leadership staff is freely available, as is our library of leadership books and journal articles. Please contact me for further details.

Guest Speaker Engagements

I am very willing to accept invitations to speak at educational leaders' meetings across early childhood, primary and secondary sectors.

Appointment of Dean of the College

From April 2017, I will become the Dean of the University of Otago College of Education. However, I will still continue as the Director of CELA and look forward to working with teachers and senior leadership teams as required.

With best wishes for your leadership work as you conclude the year, and for a relaxing holiday break with family and friends.

Kind regards

Ross Notman
Director, Centre for Educational Leadership and Administration (CELA)
University of Otago College of Education
Tel: 03 479 5461
Email: ross.notman@otago.ac.nz
Centre Website: www.otago.ac.nz/cela