

# InSights

## Literature review: Learning leaders matter

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Note: This is a commissioned literature review. The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of AITSL or of the Australian Government

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## Abstract

Learning leaders position themselves first as learners, then as leaders of other learners. The inherent tensions in this duality are explored in this literature review. Drawing on a broad range of research from education, psychology and neuroscience, the review builds a picture of the situation facing school principals, as leaders of learning communities.

The review is directed towards illustrating the professional practice of Developing *Self and Others* in the Australian Professional Standard for Principals, and focuses on how this practice is demonstrated in the experience of learning leaders.

The discussion clarifies key terminology, distinguishing coaching from mentoring, and professional development from professional learning. It highlights how leaders need to understand the role of emotions, relationships, attachment behaviours, and collaboration in creating effective and sustainable learning communities.

## Key Points

1. Learning leaders draw communities together and direct the focus of the community onto learning. (p. 5)
2. Learning leaders promote the development of all members of a school community and position leaders as the key drivers of learning-focused school improvement. (p. 6)
3. Fostering good working relationships between and among staff is key to developing both self and others. This means that learning leaders matter by becoming actively involved in the management of the emotional climate of their school communities. (p. 16)
4. Understanding attachment processes helps learning leaders to manage good working relationships, particularly those aspects associated with the uncertainty of learning about learning processes. (p. 21)
5. The more visible and supportive principals are, the lower the incidence and intensity of student misbehaviour. This suggests a concurrent increased focus on learning, creating the cultural conditions for sustained development of self and others. (p. 23)
6. Teachers feel secure when supported by leadership, which leads to better teaching. In developing a culture of learning in a school, it is important that leadership imparts a feeling of security. (p. 22)

## Introduction

This literature review addresses the second key practice of the Australian Professional Standard for Principals, *Developing Self and Others* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) 2011). The specific focus of the report examines the hypothesis that 'learning leaders matter' by 'leading a learning culture and the impact that leaders have when they position themselves as learners'. The environmental scan covers literature related to developing self as leader and others in leadership, teachers and students.

### Philosophical differences in the literature

The literature on developing self is drawn from many sources, and reveals deep philosophical differences by the eminent scholars in the field. Many of these differences are difficult, if not impossible, to resolve in the review. For example, resolving the nexus between behavioural and psychodynamic explanations for the recent advances in neurobiological mapping of learning relies on fundamentally opposed views of human development and functioning (Fonagy 2003). Yet, both purport to explain the same phenomena in radically differing ways. And, while behaviourist approaches to both student and teacher learning have been the dominant theoretical model since the mid-1970s, there is growing discontent with the theory (Hargreaves 2013) and increasing evidence that it is an overly simplistic way in which to view the development of individuals, dyads, groups and communities (Neville 2013). In a recently published history of emotional aspects of individual development related to schools, Neville (2013) argued that,

*"The new fields of interpersonal neurobiology (Badenoch 2008; Siegal 2007) and affective neuroscience (Davidson 2012; Panksepp 2004) are challenging many of our conventional understandings, particularly the notion that thinking and feeling are separate operations and that it is the teacher's primary task to engage students in the former."*

**Neville 2013, p. 4**

### Learning leaders do matter

However, there are some agreements across the philosophical divide that can provide school leaders with the confidence to develop and sustain a personally nuanced, contextually relevant, learning culture within their schools. The main point of agreement is that learning leaders do matter. It is they who draw communities together and direct the focus of the community onto learning.

The more difficult question is how learning leaders achieve this outcome. A recent longitudinal study of instructional leadership behaviours that promote student learning reported 'coaching, evaluation, and developing the school's educational program predict positive [student] achievement gains... while informal classroom walkthroughs [by principals] negatively predicts student growth, particularly in high schools' (Grissom 2013, p. 433). This confirms that going through the motions does not cut the mustard. Leaders who expend time and effort in the systematic development of others help facilitate learning. While developing others takes planning, skills and tactics, developing self

is best done with honest reflection and a commitment to self-improvement through improvement in professional relationships (Ackerman & Mackenzie 2007; Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski 2002).

## **Professional communities and learning cultures**

The second major agreement across the philosophical divide is that leadership based on learning either develops professional communities, and/or that professionally supportive communities promote learning cultures (Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis 2005). While the correlation between the two is virtually unchallenged, causality is not established. In healthy learning cultures both coexist. The notion that a professional community built on, or emerging from, sound professional relationships supports a culture of continuous learning is not new. It promotes the development of all members and positions leaders as the key driver of learning-focused school improvement. While it is not certain from the literature whether leaders promote better relationships that aid learning or use learning to promote better relationships, both are essential to development.

As Grissom (2013) pointed out, attention to a 'broader school improvement strategy' (Grissom 2013, p. 433) is key to whole school improvement. This is the role of leaders. So it can be determined that learning leaders not only matter, but are essential to school function.

## **Learning conditions**

Essential learning conditions include safety for the learners, to feel protected when stretching themselves to take risks. Leaders create that sense of safety in organisations by acting like a parent (Popper & Mayseles 2003). It also creates a tension between the leader as secure base for others (Bowlby 1968/82; Popper 2004) and the leader as curious for knowledge, modelling the learning behaviours and associated vulnerability of the learner.

The following discussion considers how learning leaders work to improve schools and student outcomes. The strategies, tactics and ways to influence others need to be adapted by each leader to their specific context. Therefore this review outlines broad areas more often than specific skills, as the crucial role of adaptation to context is going to be influenced by the person-environment fit of each leader to each school.

## Overview

### The language of learning

The discussion begins with the important linguistic and symbolic changes in approach to adult development and learning, for both leaders and teachers in schools. The linguistic change from professional development to professional learning highlights the impact of language on the development of both self and others. A leader's cognitive work is transmitted to others through language and thus developing self and others is mediated by language. This is exemplified in the sub-title of a foundational text for organisational improvement through transformational learning, *Seven languages for transformation: How the way we talk can change the way we work* (Kegan & Lahey 2001). The discussion then considers another important linguistic and symbolic process distinction, that between mentoring and coaching. The review then examines the hypothesis in a disaggregated form using touchstones from the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL 2011) (the Standard) and the 360° Reflection Tool User Guide (AITSL 2013) as a framework.

### The dilemma for leaders positioning themselves as learners

This section of the review highlights the crucial leadership dilemma that needs to be addressed when adopting the role of learning leaders in schools. What are the costs and benefits associated with a leader of a school, regarded as an expert instructor by many members of the school community, deliberately positioning him or herself as a learner: open to new ideas, but seen as vulnerable and potentially uncertain whilst in the learning phase? The merits of positioning oneself as the secure base<sup>1</sup> (Bowlby 1969/1982) for all learners in the school, is then discussed, in terms of an alternative emotional leadership foundation of professional learning in and among a learning community.

### The role of relationships

Given the strength of the arguments for the leader's role as developer of professional community through learning leadership (Day & Leithwood 2007), the review then discusses the key influences. This section begins with a focus on the key role of relationships in the development of self and others from a *psychodynamic perspective*, using attachment theory and person-centred approaches to working with others, drawn particularly from the foundational work of John Bowlby and Carl Rogers. These nested theories are the most comprehensive frameworks for understanding the crucial role that relationships play in leaders' development as individuals and professionals and the others whom they must influence to enact whole school improvement.

The review concludes with a discussion of the Standard, and a brief outline of the issues arising from the literature review.

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<sup>1</sup> See page 17 for further details on the Secure Base phenomenon.



## Review focus

The review focuses on the leader's role in developing the teacher-learners for whom they are responsible, as it is a leader's facilitation of the development of teachers that is crucial to continuous school-wide improvement. Throughout the review the underlying aspects crucial to the positioning of learning leaders and followers are examined. Teachers, who are in fact also leaders of learning within each classroom, also facilitate self and the growth of others through learning. Managing this complex inter-relationship between learners and learning, knowers and knowing, knowledge and supposition and the particular vulnerability associated with not knowing for a school principal remains at the forefront. As a footnote to this discussion, that will further muddy the conceptual waters so to speak, the recent developments in neurobiological processes related to how we understand learning, whilst largely beyond the scope of this review cannot be underestimated. Any long term study of development and learning will need to keep abreast of these developments which are expanding exponentially.

## What neurology tells us about essential conditions for learning

Based on the neurological literature, learning is an outcome of selective attention, persistence and repetition of the firing of neural circuits in a safe and secure environment (Doidge 2007). Interestingly this understanding of the physical nature of learning in the brain changes our understanding of learning as collaborative rather than isolated activity, best done within the comfort of safe and secure relationships. Thus safety and security set the conditions for curiosity, which is essential for learning to take place. Therefore a crucial role for the leader in the development of others is to provide a safe and secure environment in which others can achieve their maximum potential through curiosity about that which they do not yet know.

For example, for a teacher to develop real expertise in student learning, the process begins with the teacher's curiosity about what experiences children at differing stages of development should be exposed to (Davies 2009). The teacher needs to persist in attending to perceptions of children's behavioural reactions to learning experiences provided to them that will facilitate the development of new neural pathways for the teacher and repeat the process enough to strengthen the connections between previously unconnected neurons. When the conditions (safety to be curious, repetition and persistence in the task) facilitate the teachers' learning about how children learn, this ensures her neural plasticity is directed toward experiences that will facilitate her growth as a teacher. Repeated experiences where her focus is on how students learn help the teacher's understanding of the learners she will interact with. Therefore, for leaders to develop others, they need to set the conditions that ensure the right kinds of stimulation are present. Of course, this is just as important for the leader of teachers as it is for the teachers of students:

"The competitive nature of [neural] plasticity affects us all. There is an endless war of nerves going on inside each of our brains. If we stop exercising our mental skills, we do not just forget them: the brain map space for those skills is turned over to the skills we practice instead. If you ever ask yourself, 'How often must I practice French, or guitar, or math to keep on top of it?' you are asking a question about the competitive plasticity. You are asking how frequently you must practice an activity to make sure its brain map space is not lost to another."

***Doidge 2007, p. 59***

## **Implications of neural plasticity for learning leaders**

When members of school communities, no matter whether they are leaders, teachers, students or parents, at any level of the organisation are not concentrating on learning, competitive plasticity – the endless war of nerves – will find a replacement activity for that part of their brain to perform. The evidence from neuroscience is that, collectively, this is likely to diminish the ability of the organisation to move toward continuous improvement.

For leaders of learning this has two important implications:

1. they must be learning and developing as individuals, and
2. they must be relentlessly focused on setting the optimal conditions in which others are most likely to keep learning.

The original hypothesis 'do learning leaders matter' is therefore answered in the affirmative by advances in understanding the role of the neural plasticity in learning. But the critical question becomes '*in what ways* do learning leaders matter?'

## Discussion

### The inherent tension underlying transformational learning

As learning is transformational, fundamentally changing an individual's identity (Bass 1985) a leader's quest for learning holds open the possibility of transformation of the leader, which will disturb his or her status for other members of the organisation. This tension is fundamental to understanding why and how learning leaders matter. It is a tension that leaders who have transformed organisations have dealt with well (Bass 1985). As stated above, bringing this about is done largely through language. Therefore we need to resolve two definitional issues that have obfuscated the debate about developing others: Professional Development versus Professional Learning, and Mentoring versus Coaching.

### Professional development versus professional learning

#### Inconsistent use of terminology

Relatively recently Professional Development (PD) paradigms, which had been seen as the norm in schools for decades, have been replaced by the more collaborative term Professional Learning (PL) (Loughran et al. 2011). This important change in language is not always reflected in policy, the research literature or in schools and makes any review of leading a learning culture among professionals, in this case teachers, problematic. Hayes et al. (2006) found professional learning is sometimes labelled Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Day and Sachs (2006) used this term the *International Handbook of Continuing Professional Development of Teachers*. In an extensive review of Professional Learning in the United States, Wei, et al. (2009) use PD and PL sometimes interchangeably to describe teacher learning.

The terms PL and PD are both employed in the *360° Reflection Tool User Guide* (AITSL 2013). The attribute of *Promotes professional learning* describes the following behavioural practices of the principal/school leader:

- reviews own practice regularly and implements change in their leadership and management approaches
- models 'learning for life' by investing time, effort and resources to developing own professional practice
- obtains feedback from others to develop an accurate assessment of own strengths and development needs
- provides opportunities for and actively encourages staff to attend professional learning linked to their performance goals.

What has become clear is that the professional learning of teachers and school leaders, as learning leaders, is increasingly recognised in enhancing individual teaching quality, while also developing the profession as a whole (Berry, Clemans & Kostogriz 2007). However the difficulties in defining these differences point to an underlying clarity issue for the profession.

### PL approaches

- Tend to emphasise sustained changes to practice
- Emphasise increased awareness of classroom context
- Are driven by research evidence, enhance professional learning communities (Hayes, et al. 2006), and
- Tend to position everyone as a learner and assume that everyone can improve, no matter where they are on any learning continuum.

### PD approaches

Many of the above attributes also belong to PD, however the PD model assumes a power imbalance, with 'experts' showing teachers what to do. The PD model is gradually being replaced by working with teachers, in ways that help them define and respond to pedagogical needs, issues and concerns through the development of skills, knowledge and abilities (Loughran et al. 2011). This is also a much more sensible approach given the neurological evidence. Fullan (2007) suggests that external approaches (the PD model) generally, are not 'powerful enough, specific enough, or sustained enough' (p. 35) to provoke meaningful change, because they are often too far removed from teachers' real needs. Wei and colleagues supported this view.

*"There is increasing consensus that the most effective forms of professional development are those that are directly related to teachers' instructional practice, intensive and sustained, integrated with school-reform efforts, and that actively engage teachers in collaborative professional communities. Teachers in many high-achieving nations [e.g., Finland] have these kinds of opportunities on a regular basis, as considerable time is built into their work week for collegial planning and learning, lesson study, and peer observations."*

**Wei et al. 2009, p. 39**

## Mentoring versus coaching for professional learning

As with PD and PL, mentoring and coaching are often used interchangeably in the literature. This reflects the confusion of many people in the area with regard to the two practices. While both are equally important, they are not interchangeable, and understanding the differences helps leaders to tailor professional learning in the development of others so that real needs of learners are met.

Many education systems around the western world (Day 2000) have emphasised coaching as the most efficient way to develop teaching skill, and have had much success with graduate teachers, and this has led a trend toward instructional leadership as best practice. However, this claim has recently been called into question (see Grissom 2013 above).

Instructional leadership which includes 'establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development, and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment' and 'promoting and participating in teacher learning and development' (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe 2008, p. 635) holds promise in the developing teachers' skills but only if it is enacted well. Like many other initiatives in education, done poorly it is worse than not intervening at all.

### **Coaching**

Coaching is most often defined as a short-term, specific, goal or task oriented and associated with a power imbalance between the coach and the coached. Therefore it is an appropriate strategy to employ with a beginning teacher, who needs to acquire many skills that can only be learned in situ, such as managing personal energy levels as the first year of teaching progresses. The aim is rapid improvement in performance. Performance improvement is the major achievement for a number of reasons.

*"Performance accomplishments are the major source of the feelings of success that enhance self-efficacy (SE). SE can be built by identifying and defining clear parameters of success, building and structuring potential success situations, identifying factors that lead to success, and identifying inner success sources. Simple and concrete tasks call for 'follow me' forms of coaching, and more abstract or complicated tasks such as leadership call for 'joint experimentation' and 'hall of mirrors' forms of coaching. Good coaches are characterized by devotion to their profession and their strong wish to excel through constructive feedback."*

**Popper & Lipshitz 1992, p. 15**

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring, on the other hand, is usually longer-term with sustainable continuous improvement as the ultimate goal, rather than specific skill development. Mentoring helps development of an increasingly nuanced professional identity (Mertz 2004; Riley 2009b). Intent and involvement are what sets it apart from coaching (Mertz 2004). Once a skill has been learnt and practised sufficiently the coach's job is largely completed. However, all teachers need to feel the support of their leader to continuously improve their practice, no matter how skilled they are. This is where the mentoring role is crucial (Smith 2007). The importance of the mentor-protégé relationship has long been regarded as central to continuous development, and is particularly useful for experienced teachers. Once teachers have honed their instructional skills, mentoring becomes a more appropriate tool for the leader to develop others. The development of the whole person is a more appropriate form of learning quest for the more experienced teacher, and equally important for creating and sustaining a learning culture in schools (Mertz 2004; Ehrich et al. 2004). The literature on mentoring and coaching, however, is full of overlap, and this creates confusion.

The 360° Reflection Tool User Guide (AITSL 2013, p.12) gives examples under the coaching section of suggested best practice for school leaders. While the list is a useful reference for school leaders, it does not specifically delineate mentoring, coaching accountability and leadership. The list is annotated with who is usually associated with the behaviours outlined in the tool, as follows:

- provides ongoing formal and informal feedback to all staff;
  - Mentors and coaches
- develops and maintains effective strategies and procedures for staff performance and development;
  - Neither mentors nor coaches, but clearly a leadership role, involving accountability and development related
- observes, reviews and evaluates staff to help them improve practice;
  - Coaches
- sees every interaction as an opportunity to coach and develop others;
  - Coaches
- builds the capacity of the future workforce;
  - Mentors and coaches
- identifies leadership potential in others and provides opportunity for others to demonstrate leadership;
  - Neither mentors nor coaches, but clearly a leadership role and development related

This mixture of leadership work, coaching and mentoring, falls under the heading of coaching in the 360° Reflection Tool User Guide (AITSL 2013). The role of mentors in schools needs to be more clearly articulated for learning leaders to appropriately develop protocols for the development of others as part of a continuous learning culture in schools.

### **Efficacy and outcomes of mentoring**

Considerable effort has been spent investigating the efficacy of different mentoring approaches and subsequent outcomes for protégés in a number of organisations (Ehrich et al. 2004; Mertz 2004). However, with one notable exception (Smith 2007), little research has been conducted into two significant aspects of the mentoring process that the literature identifies as problematic:

1. The efficacy of specific training for experienced school leaders to become expert mentors before they undertake a mentoring role, and
2. The outcomes of the mentoring process for experienced school leaders when they have received training.

The idea of mentor as protector is drawn from the French root of the word '*protogere* to protect' (Roberts 2000, p. 148). The support provided by the mentor, as the *secure base* (Bowlby 1978, 1988) for the protégé, allows the examination of the individual's own 'problem frame' from within (Stammers 1992, p. 77). Framing obstacles to growth internally allows the protégé to identify and come to terms with the skills and attributes needed for successful resolution of the problem at hand. This type of learning is deep and sustained as it addresses fundamental issues of the learner that only he or she can know and address fully. Therefore, this type of learning is inherently risky: learners at the beginning of the process are extremely vulnerable emotionally, so the learning can only be achieved in a safe and supportive environment provided by the leader, and therefore the role of facilitator/mentor/leader is paramount.

Mentoring involves the subtle blend of thinking and feeling in relationship to self and others. There are inextricable links among emotion, learning and leading. A supportive relationship with a mentor who understands the protégé's context is able to help the protégé articulate what he or she is becoming aware of in terms of developmental needs as a person, student and/or educator (Ehrich et al. 2004; Mertz 2004).

### **Limitations of mentoring**

However, mentoring has proved problematic (Ehrich, Hansford & Tennet 2004) as it often occurs over a short time span; and/or mentors are untrained and/or lack sustained support (Smith & Ingersoll 2004; Hudson, Beutal & Hudson 2009). To date, teacher-mentoring models have generally adopted a one-size-fits-all approach to mentee needs and mentor skills regardless of career stage. Many mentoring failures in education can be attributed to an assumption 'that teaching younger students translates well into mentoring new teachers effectively'

(Alhanases et al. 2008 p. 744). As a consequence of this assumption many mentors in education remain unskilled at providing constructive support, or facilitating difficult and challenging conversations with peers (Allard & Gallant 2012; Riley 2009a). This outcome is a challenge to learning leaders who are often charged with mentoring to concurrently develop self while facilitating the growth of others.

Leaders of learning need to address this situation by developing strategies to implement differentiated mentoring to meet the changing developmental needs associated with teachers' career stages (Gallant & Riley, in press). This probably explains why one-year mentoring programs have been ineffectual in responding to early career attrition. New teachers need support beyond the first year, and the second year appears to be quite difficult for many teachers when formal mentoring support finishes (Gallant & Riley in press).

### **Mentoring and coaching succeed or fail on relationship quality**

The quality of collegial relationships between new and experienced teachers is crucial (Kelchtermans 2007). Hong (2012, p. 428) noted: 'novice teachers can be more sensitive to school climate, principal leadership and decision-making structures'. Mentoring programmes therefore need to address micro politics (Kelchtermans 2007; Kelchtermans & Ballet 2000) and the emotional work of teaching. This approach also addresses the Gonski et al. (2012) review recommendation that 'the bulk of a teachers' ongoing professional development ... should be done on the job, working with students in the classroom, under the mentorship of experienced instructional leaders' (p. 218).

Taken together these issues point to the importance of positioning all staff in a school as learners, collaboratively constructing and reconstructing the pedagogical practices best suited to the micro-system of the school within the broader system environments (Bronfenbrenner 1977). In more plain language, it is a hallmark of good leaders to provide the conditions in which all teachers, at whatever career stage they happen to be at, are provided with opportunities for growth and developmentally appropriate challenges that will help stimulate their learning.



## Designing learning experiences

Given that development of both self and others in schools is a collegiate exercise (Kelchtermans 2007), leaders who seek to know the developmental needs of the teachers they work with and design learning experiences for their specific context, will have greater impact on the teachers who report to them. This also calls for a differentiated approach to staff development. As mentioned above the beginning teacher has very different growth requirements to her colleague with five years' experience. Generally, while the former needs coaching the latter will benefit more from mentoring. This differentiated approach could assist in addressing the dual problem of early career teacher attrition and skilled teacher migration, both significantly large problems in Australia. As Manuel and Hughes (2006, p. 6) argued, attrition and skilled teacher migration are not just about finding replacements. It signifies how 'building the cultural and intellectual capital of the profession' is perceived both inside and outside schools (Manuel and Hughes 2006, p. 6).

Previous attempts to stop skilled teacher migration, an issue inseparable from professional learning, have seen a rise in leadership preparation programs. The courses are not always school based (Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis 2005) and the learning focus is often on the development of individual rather than community building. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that this approach leads to a depletion of professional capital in schools, and current rates of attrition would seem to bear this out. Consequently, current mentoring models do not achieve the desired outcome. The quality of mentoring is crucial to success, directly impacting teacher efficiency, job satisfaction and career length (Hudson, Beutal & Hudson 2009).

### Professional capital in schools

According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) the sum of a culture of learning and improvement in schools can be labelled *Professional Capital*. Professional capital is derived from *human capital* (the development of the individual), *social capital* (the development of a networked group) and *decisional capital* (making and enacting decisions in complex school settings). An individual high in human capital working in a school of low social capital will 'either leave or burnout', whereas a school with high social capital 'generates increased human capital' (Hargreaves & Fullan 2012, p. 4). Decisional capital is derived from 'teachers acquired and accumulative knowledge based on structured and unstructured experiences, practice and reflection', informing discretionary judgements (Hargreaves & Fullan 2012, p.3). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, p.100) argue this is 'a capital that enables'. This promotes 'collaborative actions and collegial relations [that] constitute important working conditions for teachers and as such ...influence the professional development of teachers and school' (Kelchtermans 2007, p. 221).

It also promotes the value of teachers' knowledge to foster change that is both professionally relevant and sustainable, *optimising schools' professional capital*. The Gonski panel (2011) recommended that 'Australian teachers and school leaders, and those who determine policy and make decisions in schools, sectors and systems, [need] to take responsibility for their own learning and to commit to building a purposeful, active and pervasive learning culture in every school and workplace' (p. 216).



### **The effect of micro-politics on social capital**

Professional relationships shape the micro-political milieu. The quality of professional relationships within staffrooms can be a positive force, supporting the professional growth of teachers, or a negative force, driving them out of the profession. Therefore the development of others (teachers) can rest on staffroom atmosphere, so a leader's role in promoting relationships in both formal and informal ways can have a profound effect on the development (and retention) of teachers. Politics in schools are not confined to the higher levels of policy-making. It is dynamic, operating in classrooms, staff-rooms, with colleagues, parents and children. Micro-political conflicts result in diminished opportunities for professional growth, evidenced by the *arrested development* of new teachers (Gallant & Riley, in press), ultimately leading to attrition and *professional wounding* of skilled teachers causing migration (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski 2002). Geert Kelchtermans, an acknowledged expert in this field, found micro-political conflicts left unchallenged greatly reduce school morale (Ballet, Kelchtermans, Berens & Janssens 2000; Keltchermans 2007) and this limits social capital, and therefore the ability of the school to become a place where a learning culture is embraced by all.

### **Leaders, learning and emotions**

What also emerges from the scan of the literature is the issue of sustainability of professional learning: whether and how teachers and school leaders, as the drivers of professional communities, can sustain and maintain positive changes to practice derived from professional learning. This is a crucial question for the leader of any school to grapple with in seeking to apply the professional standard *Developing Self and Others*. It is concurrently a big question for system and school leadership, but is also an intensely personal question requiring a level of intra-personal (to develop self), and interpersonal intelligence (to set the conditions for others to also develop). This requires changing the self at a more fundamental level than surface practices and then setting the conditions in which others are able to do the same. And, it is a question that is more directly emotional than cognitive.

Developing self and others goes to the heart of the purpose of a school (Barth 2001), and involves the head, heart and hand (Sergiovanni 2005). 'Spray on' professional development, washes off (Mockler 2005). Collective efficacy on the other hand is enhanced when the teachers 'as a whole can execute the courses of action necessary to have positive effects on students' (Goddard 2001, p. 467). This has wider implications for teachers and leaders through reducing levels of stress and burnout (Leithwood 2007), which has recently reported at worrying rates (Riley & Langan-Fox 2013). Johnson and colleagues (2005) found six occupations with 'worse than average scores on ... physical health, psychological well-being and job satisfaction (ambulance workers, teachers, social services, customer services - call centres, prison officers and police)' (p. 178. and is clearly an issue that needs serious attention if the sustainability criterion of professional learning is to be met.

At one level, the concept of developing self and others goes to the fundamental human condition. Sharing new learning with others lies at the heart of this process. Deep transformation in schools relies on the capacity of the individuals within them to collaborate. In a socio-cultural sense, learning is the outcome of shared projects that build a sense of community (Ingvarson, Meiers & Beavis 2005). This is facilitated through the acknowledgment of the emotions. Vygotsky (1934/1987) considered emotions the motivating sphere

of consciousness. Boler (1999) created the term emotional epistemologies, drawing attention to their pervasive influence on all the mental activity that learning entails. This has since been greatly expanded by recent developments in neuroscience, and summarised in a foundational text, which outlines the importance of emotions in learning, *The Brain That Changes Itself* (Doidge 2007).

### **Emotional selves in the workplace**

However, until very recently school leaders have found that their emotional selves are anything but welcome at work (Gallant & Riley 2013; Struyve & Kelchtermans 2013). To challenge this orthodoxy, leaders must embrace a pedagogy of discomfort (Boler 1999): a counterintuitive commitment to connecting with self through reflective practice and others through collaborative enquiry. To lead in the creation of safe learning communities able to continuously reinvent themselves for a changing world, all leaders need to apply their whole selves to the task. This approach to leadership requires courage and a healthy dose of emotional self-awareness at the outset (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski 2002).

Learning leaders see emotional lives as part of the school experience. They value empathic interactions. This is not the opposite of rational thought but an extension of it. It is social intelligence (Davis & Sumara 2006; Gallagher & Vella-Brodrick 2008; Goleman 2005, 2006; Zeidner, Roberts & Matthews 2008). Failure of empathy in the leader arrests the development of both the leader and those who follow (Gallant & Riley, in press). Learning leaders matter, because their absence is so destructive to the learning process in schools (Barth 2004).

### **Emotional labour – maintaining professional composure**

Leading involves emotions and emotional labour for the learning leader. Emotional labour is the continual monitoring of emotional displays, informed by cultural knowledge of an organisation's display rules (Zapf et al. 2009). When a discrepancy between the emotion felt and the display rules exists, emotional labour is needed to produce the acceptable display rather than show the 'real' emotion. Kelchtermans (2011) investigated the impact of emotional labour in teaching finding profound negative effects. In a meta-analysis of emotional labour and wellbeing from 95 independent studies, Hulsheger and Schewe (2011) reported 'substantial relationships ... [between] emotion-rule dissonance, ... impaired wellbeing ... [and] job attitudes' (p. 361). Therefore learning about emotions is crucial for learning leaders in order to manage the learning culture within his or her school. This can be accomplished through experiences of genuine connectedness with self and peers in the context of professional learning and expert mentoring practices (Ehrich, Hansford & Tennet 2004). It is the actual process of developing self and others. This is built on trust, which has been outlined in another paper in this series (see Harris, Caldwell & Longmuir 2013).

### **The leader as secure base for others**

The self-positioning of the leader is crucial to establishing both safety for others to take learning risks (Bowlby 1988), and by providing opportunities for learners to create new neural connections (learning) and then consolidate these connections over months of repeated use (Doidge 2007).

Attachment theory is the most comprehensive theory of relationship formation and maintenance, and best articulates and reveals how to set the conditions for learning among colleagues in schools by becoming the secure base for the school.

This approach takes into account the emotional aspects of learning in a way that enhances the management of the mentor-protégé/teacher-student/leader-follower relationship process that is fundamental to all collaborative learning. Section 3.9 below provides further details about attachment theory, but at this point the discussion concentrates on mentor-protégé relationships as the prototype for all collaborative learning relationships which is at the heart of developing self and others.

In the 360° Reflection Tool User Guide, under the section *Managing self*, the guiding principle is that, 'Principals/school leaders manage themselves well and demonstrate commitment to their own personal health and wellbeing in order to manage the complexity of the role and actions required in the role' (p. 14).

The behavioural correlates of this guiding principle are that the principal/school leader:

- acts rationally in emotional situations; expresses emotions but does so calmly and constructively
- takes action to look after own physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing
- prioritises and acts constructively in response to constant numerous pressing priorities and conflicting demands
- takes appropriate action in times of uncertainty in the areas that are within their control
- looks for and focuses on the positives in situations and people but does not ignore the negatives. (p.14)

This is a very good description of a secure base leader (Bowlby 1968/82). It needs to be acknowledged though, that in positioning oneself as a learner, particularly a learner involved in complex learning, such as how to enhance the professional learning development of others, leaders may not be able to display all of these attributes as they struggle with the confusion and uncertainty of new knowledge and how it confronts or contests current thinking.

## Developing self and others: the foundation of a professional learning culture in schools

It is self-evident that school leaders and teachers should be continually developing themselves as leaders of student learning. There are many different professional learning and development interventions being researched with teachers in an attempt to improve practice. The history of these things tells us that most are likely to have limited success. Ingvarson, Meiers, and Beavis (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of 80 professional development activities with 3,250 teachers in Australia, finding that successful professional development programs depended on the extent to which the intervention strengthened the *professional community* that the school represented to the teachers undertaking it, irrespective of the type of intervention. Their analysis concluded that successful professional learning therefore relied on strengthening relationships within the professional community.

What is most interesting about this research is that the development of a professional learning community was often a *by-product* of professional learning rather than the focus. This means professional development programs designed to develop self and others that do not take the human reality of teaching and learning for all members of a school community into account, do not address the key issues involved. Developing self, as a learner first and foremost and then helping to develop others as learners in turn strengthens the professional community of the school. This ensures the best chance of sustaining the commitment to a learning culture within the school. This raises the question of why research into developing professional learning communities shows mixed results. It also suggests that the approach to learning is as at least as important as the content of what is to be learned. The processes involved are complex and interrelated with other elements of the Standard, most particularly the development of trust between the school community members.

The discovery that many teachers only briefly use new teaching techniques learned in a typical professional development program was confirmed by Ingvarson and colleagues' (2005) meta-analysis. For professional learning to impact teachers' sustained classroom practice, it needs '*active learning and reflection on practice...* The extent to which a professional development program influences knowledge and practice... is enhanced by the extent to which that program also strengthens the level of *professional community*' (Ingvarson, Meiers and Beavis 2005, p. 14).

Teaching can be a messy business, reliant on professional intuition, but also on hopes, fears, joy, laughter and sometimes tears. It is also based on teachers, students and school leadership taking calculated risks for learning rewards. The messiness is not easily documented, often learned experientially, and/or through post-event reflection. For example, direct observation of teachers at work, with the aim of discovering and perhaps modifying practice, is gaining in popularity (Sandt 2012). However, this practice is based on a fundamental trust between the observers and observed. Unless the observer/observed relationship provides increased security for teachers, it is more likely to raise teachers' anxiety, and, as outlined above, negatively affect student learning outcomes (Grissom 2013).

## Developing self and others through person-centred approaches

Person-centred education is based on the work of Carl Rogers who developed the constructs in the counselling environment. However, it was rapidly transferred to an educational psychology model (Rogers 1951, 1983, 1990; Rogers et al. 1989). It is premised on the idea that positive relationships facilitate optimal, holistic learning. Rogers equated learning with 'the function which may hold constructive, tentative, changing, process answers to some of the deepest perplexities which beset man [sic] today' (Rogers 1951, p. 105). He saw learning as the facilitation of the whole person, a fully functioning citizen in a democratic society. His theory fits well conceptually with constructivist learner-centred models of student learning and suggests a continuum where student, teacher and leader's learning is inexorably intertwined.

In a meta-analysis of over 1,000 articles, synthesising 119 studies from 1948 to 2004 with 1,450 findings and 355,325 students, Cornelius-White (2007) found 9 independent and 18 dependent variables associated with the approach. He also found 39 moderators, demonstrating that the teacher-student relationship for learning is a truly complex phenomenon. While there was considerable variation among the correlations between variables ( $r = .1 - .83$ ) the mean correlations ( $r = .31$ ) 'were above average compared with other educational innovations for cognitive and especially affective and behavioral outcomes with students' (Cornelius-White 2007, p.113). Correlations between .3 - .49 are considered medium strength and suggest a significant relationship between the variables. Given that the correlation between the person-centred approach to teaching and the positive student outcomes are achieved independent of instructional practices, it appears to be a powerful generic teaching strategy.

## Professional community through learning leadership

### Teachers as leaders and followers

Developing self and others for learning leaders is based on the centrality of leader-follower relationships. A feature of educational leadership that differs from many other similar roles lies in the nature of teachers' work. Teaching is also a form of leadership, as teachers are the leaders of their classes. This means that formally appointed educational leaders actually lead leaders, not followers. Yet for their leadership to be effective teachers must be followers also, at least to a certain extent. This structure creates a number of challenges for educational leaders and for the teachers as leader-followers. This complicates the dynamics involved in leading learning, when principals necessarily spend most of their day outside the classroom. Learning leaders matter because they model behaviours for others, and for the development of their own understanding of the struggle that incorporating new learning engenders in those who have to teach: either students in classrooms or teachers in staffrooms with the principal as lead learner, facilitating professional learning among staff (Gallant & Riley 2013).

### **Creating a safe environment for risk taking in learning**

Learning leaders who wonder about the impact that emotions have on the way teachers approach their work are more likely to promulgate the learning culture where all learners can safely take risks in order to develop. Experienced teachers know the power of emotions in the classroom but until recently emotions were usually overlooked and more emphasis has been traditionally placed on learning theory and cognitive processes (Newberry, Gallant & Riley 2013). Therefore developing self and others as leaders of learning, both by example and as an intense emotional experience, suggests adequate training in how to look after one's self and the learners, be they students or staff, during moments of intensity, is necessary to deal with the strong emotions when they inevitably arise in learning contexts. Helping teachers to deal with the emotional aspects of their work is best achieved by understanding the underlying processes of emotions (Neville 2013). This is the hidden curriculum identified by the Ingvarson et al. (2005) meta-analysis of professional learning programs and Cornelius-White (2007) in his review of the person-centred approach.

### **Benefits of participant research**

Skillbeck and Connel (2004) identified a need to move 'beyond induction, into a broader framework connecting early professional learning and the evolving policy framework for education' (p. 20). This assists the development of evidenced-based practitioners (AITSL 2011). 'Researchers can become agents of development and change in the process while the research is being done' (Hall 2005, p. 8). Participant research allows all learners to have immediate and consistent feedback, as a consequence of results being collaboratively analysed. This form of methodology is 'research as engaged practice' (Hall 2005, p. 7).

## **Relationships: the key force driving the development of self and others**

The relationships teachers form with students are unique and complex and this is an important factor in student achievement (Cochran-Smith 2005; Onwuegbuzie et al. 2007; Sava 2002). Therefore it makes sense for teachers to learn about the unique dynamics of the relationships they form with students. In the same way it also makes sense for school leaders to understand the forces that are driving the professional collegial relationships within schools. By examining the contextual specifics confronting teachers from the more universally human perspective of relationship formation and maintenance, both teachers and school leaders can be better equipped to deal with their professional interactions.

In 2007 the OECD conducted an extensive analysis of school leadership across 25 countries, determining that, more than ever before, the role demands principals to be effective managers of complex, multiple-stakeholder relationships (Matthews, Moorman & Nusche 2007).

A number of educational researchers have been drawn back to the centrality of the relationship between teachers and students in predicting student progress. Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of teaching without reference to relationships. The environmental scan returned 2,276 peer-reviewed articles. Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis reported the mean effect size of positive teacher-student relationships was 0.72, ranking it twelfth in list of 138 influences drawing on 229 studies listing 1,450 effects on student learning outcomes. However the eleven higher influencers all rely on relationships to be effective. The centrality of relationships is clearly fundamental to the education process.

Attachment theory provides a rich source of material to help leaders of learning to understand their own and others' approaches to learning through relationships. When leaders increase their knowledge of attachment processes, they are more able to use their daily emotional reactions as a source of understanding the relationship dynamics of developing others through building professional community.

## Attachment theory

### Teachers as significant others

Attachment theory is one of the leading approaches to researching interpersonal relationships and organisations (Shaver & Mikulincer 2011). The theory proposes a motivational system that guides relational behaviour. Attachment has two developmentally sequential, theoretical models: childhood (uni-directional) and adult (bi-directional). An initial attachment style is formed as the child seeks care from significant others, who provide, or fail to provide, adequate care (Bowlby 1969/82). The adult model differs only in that individuals develop to become both caregivers and care seekers, dependent on circumstances (Cassidy 2008).

### Inner working Models of self and others

One of the key concepts of attachment theory is The Inner Working Model (IWM). IWM covers three broad dimensions: representations of *self*, the *physical world* and *others* (Knox 2003). They form a cognitive map of the world and a set of implicit rules, beliefs and expectations for survival within it. When it comes to relationships they are used to predict the attitude and behaviour of others (Holmes 1993). 'Once built, evidence suggests, these models ... tend to persist and are so taken for granted that they come to operate at an unconscious level' (Bowlby 1988, p. 130). The child uses the inner working model as a prototype for subsequent relationships they forms, including relationships with teachers when they reach school. They are relatively stable into adulthood, also shaping the relationships teachers form with students colleagues and leaders (Popper 2004; Riley 2009, 2011).

### Attachment styles

Attachment styles are a useful way for principals to conceptualise the relationships they form with teachers and why some of these relationships seem more difficult than others. The IWM is used to navigate the world of relationships: predicting, identifying and understanding others. This relies on *mentalising* and *reflective function*<sup>2</sup> (Fonagy, Gergely, Jurist, & Target 2002; Fonagy & Target 1997).

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<sup>2</sup> The terms are often used interchangeably with metacognition and Theory of Mind (Cortina & Liotti 2010).



### **The Secure Base Phenomenon**

There are various different types of attachment styles and this section will focus on *The Secure Base Phenomenon*. This phenomenon, or safe haven, is a predictable, emotional home base, from which the child leaves to explore the world and returns to for comfort, nurture and safety when needed. Consistent responsiveness to the child's emotional as well as physical needs promotes the feeling of the secure base in the child (Ainsworth 1982), and increases the level of curiosity about the world (Bowlby 1969/82). Effective leadership based on the principles of the secure base has been increasingly reported (Popper 2004). In eight separate studies, Gillath and colleagues (2010) found team functioning improved with secure leaders even when the leader was not present during the assessed task. In the school context, learning leaders increase curiosity, the pre-condition for learning, by providing a secure base to those around them. This means consistency of approach and therefore predictability of the leader by subordinates. In effect it is similar to the principles of good parenting.

The research conducted with teachers supports the emerging literature on leadership conceptualised as good parenting (Amit, Lisak, Popper & Gal 2007; Popper, Amit, Gal, Mishkal-Sinai, & Lisak 2004; Popper 2004, 2012; Popper & Mayselless 2003; Popper, Mayselless & Castelnovo 2000).

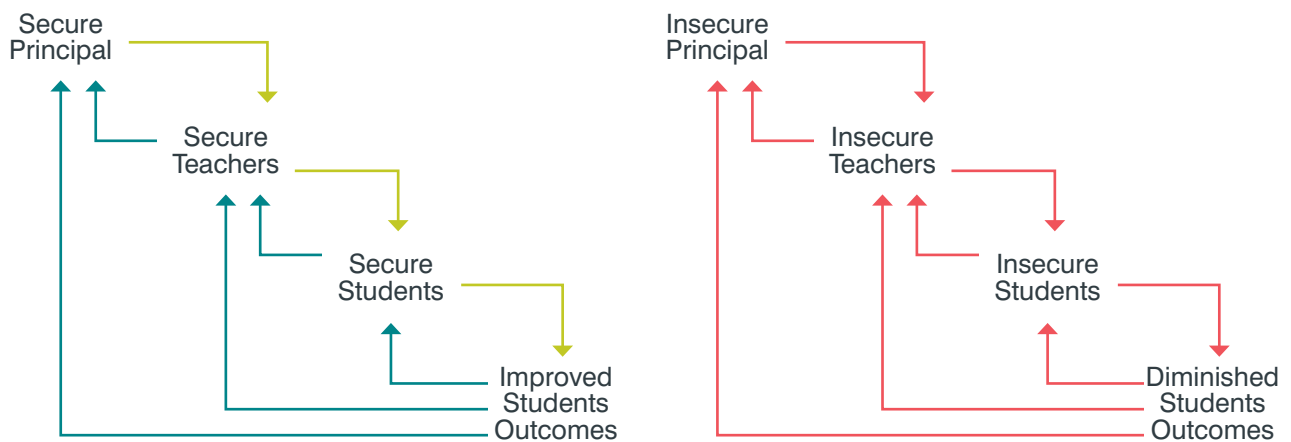
For a full discussion of the secure base phenomenon and its relationship to learning leaders see Riley (2011).

### **Managing student misbehaviour**

A recent study of student misbehaviour management in 3,500 schools in England, by Ofsted (ISQ Briefings 2007) listed common features of classrooms where student misbehaviour was well managed. One of the protective factors for students was the level of support teachers perceived as coming from their principals. A qualitative finding was the more visible and supportive principals were, through the development of a positive ethos, the lower the incidence and intensity of student misbehaviour. This suggests a concurrent increased focus on learning, creating the cultural conditions for sustained development of self and others (ISQ Briefings 2007). The report also suggests teachers who are given support by leadership are able to respond earlier and more appropriately with students.



The implications for school leadership are very important. Teachers feel secure when supported by leadership which leads to better teaching. Therefore, in developing a culture of learning in a school, it is important that leadership imparts a feeling of security and that they too feel supported by their superiors so that they can also perform optimally. This appears to have flow-on effects on the inner working models of the whole community involved in the school. This is hypothesised in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: Hypothesized model of circular effects of attachment security and insecurity on the Inner Working Model of the members of the school community and the relationship to student learning outcomes**

### Impact of ongoing security

An ongoing job adds to security of beginning teachers, leaving them with more emotional resources to deal with the actual duties of teaching. This is therefore a leadership issue also, and central to the building of a sustainable learning culture.

It would appear to be wise to implement and/or adjust induction mentoring programs for new teachers by ensuring mentor-teachers have at least five years of experience. These teachers are likely to have significantly lower levels of both anxiety and avoidance of close relationships and thus would be better able to form sound relationships with new teachers. Hence they are better placed to begin providing the corrective emotional experiences that some new teachers are seeking (Riley 2011).

Research investigating the combination of leadership, collegial and teacher-student relationships, while complicated in design, offers chances to explore the complexity of the teacher's school experiences. New ways of analysing dyadic information also offer a number of possibilities for discovering meaningful connections between members of school communities (Gonzalez & Griffin 1997; Kenny, Kashy & Cook 2006). This holds a great deal of promise for the transformation of individual teachers and whole school communities. The leadership, as secure base from which security flows throughout a school, is likely to provide the conditions for many teachers to reduce their unhelpful avoidance strategies and more fully experience the potential joys of classroom relationships by supporting teachers in ways that they need.

## Issues arising from the literature review

### **Multiple approaches and theories**

There is no accepted standard for developing either self or others in the literature, and much dispute about the best way to go about it. Therefore, the resources outlined cover the range of key philosophical, ontological and epistemological arguments so that readers can decide which 'style' of self-development most appeals.

### **Is the self-other continuum a useful concept?**

The idea of developing self or developing others in a vacuum is becoming increasingly challenged in the literature with the realisation that all learning is context specific and interdependent (Hudson 2012). However, it does serve as a reminder of the priorities and interconnectedness of professional learning and highlights the opportunity for future research into models of leadership learning.

### **Are professional relationships the key driver of educational leaders' work?**

This is an area of considerable dispute in the literature: a divide between sociological and psychological standpoints on the role of leader. On the *sociological* side of the argument, leaders are drivers of *systems* (Hargreaves & Fullan 2012), but from the psychological standpoint, leaders are drivers of *people* (Popper 2012). While both standpoints are important, the literature almost invariably takes one side or the other, leaving the individual to make the connections between the two standpoints. Again, there is an opportunity for the academy to engage more directly in translating good research into practical orientations that cover the field from a practitioner point of view. The annotated bibliography includes resources from both standpoints.

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