

 **Briefly**

- Collaborative leadership and new strategies will ensure quality teaching.
- All teachers have leadership capabilities and the potential to contribute.
- New leadership models will energise and motivate teachers and directly benefit students.

Sharing the future

School leadership models have created a generation of stressed-out, over-worked principals with little time to concentrate on educational leadership. About 80 per cent of principals say they experience high levels of stress, according to a survey commissioned by the Victorian Education Department in 2004. Needless to say, this is not a good recruitment advertisement for teachers considering a leadership position.

"You don't get anywhere without the right leadership," says AEU federal research officer Roy Martin. Leadership can provide invaluable motivation to teachers and students, and that motivation creates more pathways to learning. In short, the right leadership framework can enable people to do great things in the classroom and that will ultimately have a positive impact on the whole community.

For Martin, leadership is central to a discussion of the future of education. While the teacher remains the most critical factor in the learning process, school

Collaborative leadership and an increased focus on quality teaching are essential for the 21st-century school, reports **EMILY ROSS**.

leaders are involved in setting the structure of schools, they manage people and set directions that can have a significant influence on how a school functions and its quality of teaching.

...the right leadership framework can enable people to do great things in the classroom...

An important contribution to the debate on leadership and quality teaching in our schools has been the AEU's 2006 report on the future of education, *Educational Leadership and Teaching for the Twenty First Century: A Desirable Scenario (ELaT21)*. The report has given Australian

teachers, principals, academics and union representatives the chance to discuss the type of leadership they would like to see in the future and how this will benefit student learning.

Martin says that part of the report's goal is to get people talking about the future of education. "It is about leadership, not just within schools but throughout the whole system," he says. "The whole system needs to be thinking along the same lines. Without that happening we won't see the changes in our schools."

Empowering more teachers

Many Australian public schools already embrace collaborative leadership policies, but their work has not been acknowledged, says educational leadership specialist at



Sergiovanni in Victoria

In Victorian schools, initiatives have been introduced to increase leadership capacity and promote a shared, common understanding of leadership throughout all schools. Central to this is a set of leadership values that was developed by Dr Thomas Sergiovanni, an internationally recognised writer and researcher on educational leadership.

Sergiovanni has specialised in the many facets of educational leadership and how they interrelate. In his latest book, *Strengthening the Heartbeat*, he argues that it is the principals, teachers, parents and students working together that make the difference in the struggle to build quality schools.

All Victorian principals are working with this framework that encourages a shared understanding of leadership, enhancing collaboration rather than competition in schools.

The Sergiovanni framework emphasises a balanced leadership, where time is committed to:

- continuous professional learning and mentoring
- accountability for student learning and social outcomes
- competence at managing budgets and resources
- operating ethically
- engaging with the wider community
- creating a positive culture of learning that benefits not just the school, but society as a whole.

Similar initiatives to increase the leadership capacity in schools are happening nationwide.

Monash University's faculty of education, Professor Peter Gronn. "It is the armies of competent people across organisations that make them work, not some heroic leader," he says. "The reality of life is that you need lots of competent people in a complex organisation to make it work—that includes lots of people with common or 'garden-variety' expertise."

The ELAT21 authors support a dispersed leadership approach that allows for the professional empowerment of more people in the teaching community. The report emphasises that teachers should "individually and collectively feel they have a say in what and how things are taught, the way funds are spent,

and other matters of school policy".

A collaborative approach helps solve problems of leadership succession and improves opportunities for teachers in schools, says the report. More collaboration allows more teachers to take on responsibilities in their teaching careers. Access to new career opportunities also creates more satisfying careers.

The link between effective, collaborative leadership and quality teaching is clear. Leaders who look for genuine teacher input will reap the rewards. "Teachers thrive on opportunities to share their knowledge," says Gerry Tickell, former president of the Australian Teachers' Federation (now the AEU). "Thriving teachers create thriving classrooms that

Your say

Paul Rose, principal, Ballarat Secondary School, VIC

Principals always say that school leadership is really important and teachers just say 'get out of the road and let me teach'. But it's about putting teaching and learning at the centre. Our goal is to have every classroom operating so that everything is humming along.



Kevina O'Neill, head of English, Indooroopilly High School, QLD

The biggest challenge around teaching is always around time. Time to work with my colleagues and time to reflect are really important to me as a teacher. Quality teaching is about working collaboratively with colleagues and making good curriculum and teaching choices.



School reform cannot succeed unless it creates conditions in which teachers can teach and teach well. This is no easy task.

Positive learning

At Yakamia Primary School in Western Australia, there used to be a lot of burnt out, cynical teachers, according to Year 5 teacher Kate Bunney.

All of that changed five years ago when the school adopted the Tribes learning approach, developed in California in the late 1970s by Jeanne Gibbs. Gibbs wanted to create a school environment that would improve academic results, manage student behavioural problems and stop teachers from leaving the profession.

Based on a desire to create positive learning communities, Tribes is now being used in schools in the US, Canada and Australia. It works on the understanding that children learn in different ways and can benefit from cooperative, shared learning. Tribes encourages problem-solving, goal-setting and a democratic school culture rather than a hierarchical one. Both teachers and students must take responsibility for their learning. "It has changed our school," says Bunney. "Now we have a common language to speak with."

Teachers, administrators and families aim to work together as a learning committee. All school staff at Yakamia Primary School have been involved in ongoing professional development. This has eliminated what Bunney calls 'the secret code' between teachers that excluded other parts of the school community. All staff take part in the 'community circle' where everyone can have their voice heard.

To ensure that everyone in the school gets a chance to contribute, there are also smaller forums. The goal is to create a culture where there is a willingness to share problems and solutions, learn from each other and work together.

There is still a principal in the school but other teachers, such as Bunney, take on leadership roles as well. "There is a need for ongoing development and learning for all teachers who have the potential to become formal leaders," says Bunney. "Leadership has to be about empowering and motivating teachers, setting the vision and developing people."

create thriving students and thriving school communities."

"Teachers need to feel responsible for their work, in the sense that they are accountable and that they are trusted and have the scope to make genuine professional decisions," says Tickell. Reducing the teacher's role to being a technician, being constantly monitored through a series of tests and other devices, makes teachers feel less responsible, he says.

New roles are liberating

Collaborative learning communities create a challenge for the traditional principal, who must now empower others to take up leadership roles without feeling their own position is threatened. In practice, this has proved liberating for principal Nick Finlay from Avoca Primary School, Tasmania, who is also a member of the AEU Principals Committee.

Finlay still deals directly with a parent on a serious issue, for example, but when it comes to curriculum development and school planning, he strongly believes that all stakeholders should be involved. He does this by identifying strengths in his staff members and giving them opportunities to stretch their abilities.

A major part of his role as a school leader is to be a facilitator, a good communicator and someone who can develop the leadership potential in his people, he says. And there are added benefits. "It can lead to more constructive relationships between teachers, administrators, government and bureaucracies—not just within your own school."

Another benefit of sharing leadership is that it gives other members of the school a greater sense of ownership in the decision making. As a result, "decisions made have a lot more credibility," he says.

Sharing the load also reduces the stress on principals who can otherwise be overloaded with administrative work with no time to focus on educational leadership. It also

encourages other staff to step up and aspire to leadership roles.

Making best practice 'contagious'

Rather than schools competing with one another, initiatives such as 'clustering' and teachers spending time in other best-practice schools encourages collaboration, networking and the sharing of skills and experiences that can improve the quality of teaching in the classroom. This aims to eliminate the current cycle where well-run schools attract better teachers and certain schools gain reputations as places where teachers do not want to work, which isolates both teachers and students.

"We need to make best-practice contagious," says Martin. This would see the focus shift from a culture of blame and 'why aren't you doing that', to exchanging information and sharing the learning.

There are many factors that influence the quality of teaching. External factors such as geography, family circumstances and economic conditions are clearly beyond a school's control. Other factors include class size, access to technology, best-practice curriculum frameworks and professional learning opportunities for teachers that support quality teaching.

School reform cannot succeed unless it creates conditions in which teachers can teach and teach well. This is no easy task.

Concentrate on teaching well

The executive director of teaching and learning, in WA's Department of Education and Training, Kevin O'Keefe, has spent three decades in the teaching sector. From his perspective, the role of leadership is to make sure that teachers are well supported, that there are opportunities for teachers to be exposed to successful practice and have access to ongoing professional development.

Programs such as WA's 'Getting it Right', where highly

experienced teachers go into classrooms to help other teachers, are working to raise teaching benchmarks. O'Keefe is fiercely proud of the success teachers are having in his state's schools, particularly with students from disadvantaged backgrounds. "I believe it is important to create learning cultures that send out a message of high expectations for every kid," he says.

Teachers are doing their work in an intensely politicised environment. In O'Keefe's experience, teachers have never been more vilified, with campaigns to undermine and demean the quality of the work they do. "That is going to be a continuing reality," he says. "So teachers shouldn't get distracted by the debate. Concentrate on teaching students well and make sure you are supported to do that."

The public debate around quality teaching can sometimes

sound as if there is no quality teaching going on in schools. "They talk about it as if it doesn't happen," says Queensland Teachers' Union vice-president Julie Brown. "Quality teaching is continuing. 'Time' is what our members tell us they need—time to assimilate new curriculum, time to test things out and see if they work."

Teachers need to feel responsible for their work... and that they are trusted and have the scope to make genuine professional decisions.

For Brown, what will ensure quality teaching can continue is recognition for teachers as experts in the field of education, improved resources and inspiring leadership. New teachers need access to such resources as

mentors, extra time for planning lessons, and more time for understanding the syllabus.

Brown's ideals echo the directions that ELAT21 promotes. "The whole idea is for teachers to talk about what is possible. We should be involved in the debate because we are the ones that have to implement it." •

EMILY ROSS is a freelance writer.

This is the third story in our current series on Educational Leadership and Teaching for the 21st Century.

Resources

- **Educational Leadership and Teaching for the Twenty First Century: A Desirable Scenario: download a summary and order form at**
www.aeufederal.org.au or
phone (03) 9693 1800 to purchase a copy.

Low cost banking for AEU members



Members Equity Bank offers AEU members:

- A 5 star* rated Home Loan with no hidden costs
- Cheapest Credit Card awarded by Money Magazine 2006[^]
- Cheapest Personal Loan awarded by Money Magazine 2006[^]
- High Interest Savings Account



Members Equity Bank
The Super Funds Bank

Call today on **1300 654 993** or visit membersequitybank.com.au

*CANNEX Mortgage Star Rating: March 2006. ^2006 Best of the Best Awards, Bank Category. Applications are subject to credit approval. Fees and charges apply. Terms and conditions available on request. Please consider if the InterestME Savings Account is right for you with a Product Disclosure Statement available from Members Equity Bank. 39047 LIB_AD18Awards/0806