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## Leading Educational Redesign

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*Abstract: This research investigated the question: 'What are the characteristics and conditions needed for effective leadership of educational redesign?' The focus on the importance of educational leaders who see continual improvement as a key part of their brief has been evident in the recent spate of literature about 'transformational leadership' (Hallinger, 2003), 'invitational leadership' (Novak, 2005) and 'constructivist leadership' (Lambert, 2002). In the main this literature has focused on school leaders and redesign at the local level. Little has been written about the role of project leaders in educational redesign initiatives even though the impetus for redesign often comes from schools' participation in funded projects. This paper explores the roles of both the Project Manager and a number of school leaders in the South Australian educational redesign project Learning to Learn. The research aimed to illuminate the characteristics of leaders of educational redesign and the conditions which sustained them. A qualitative research design was used with data collected through interview, written survey, document analysis and field notes. The findings revealed eight characteristics of participants' leadership and related conditions that will be presented in this paper.*

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Educational Reform

### Introduction

**I**N AUSTRALIA AND in many other countries there is recognition that the education system is still failing some children despite several decades of educational reform projects aimed at achieving more equitable outcomes for students. According to Fullan (1999) the failure of most reform endeavours is the growing alienation and burnout among teachers in the face of the 'overwhelming multiplicity of unconnected, fragmented change initiatives' (Fullan, 1997 p. 217). There is general agreement that leadership, both at the local and system level, is a key factor in improving schooling (see for example Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley & Beresford, 2000; Fullan, 2002; Peters, Dobbins and Johnson, 1996) but as Fullan (1996) pointed out 'it is a tribute to the complexities and dilemmas inherent in this topic to realise that much of the message remains elusive' (p. 112). Some theorists have suggested that some of the past failings of educational redesign projects are linked to constructions of leadership as 'technicist and managerialist' (Thrupp, 2003) where 'improved performance ... is pursued through the manipulation of formal mechanisms such as rules, procedures, structures, rewards or changed evaluation' (Goldspink, 2007, p. 28). For instance, Gunter and Raynor (2007) were critical of leadership styles that have positioned teachers as 'responsive followers' (p. 52), while Rapp, Silent and Silent (2001, cited in Brown, 2004) drew on a study of educational leaders in the United Kingdom to conclude that 90% emphasised the technical aspects of their work above the moral;

(They) fail to validate the cultural, intellectual and emotional identities of people from under-represented groups, they avoid situations where their values (e.g. sexist, racist, classist, homophobic), leadership styles, and professional goals are challenged and dismantled, and they use their positions of power to formally and informally reaffirm their own professional choices. (p. 96)

According to Stoll and Fink (1996) 'the changing and unstable forces which shape education require a style of leadership that is quite different from that which has been promoted in most educational jurisdictions' (p. 117). In recent years terms such as 'transformational leadership' (Hallinger, 2003), 'invitational leadership' (Novak, 2005) and 'constructivist leadership' (Lambert, 2002) have been used to describe school leaders who adopt styles that are 'quite different' to more technicist approaches. They capture the move from a single leadership position to some sense of shared leadership.

Despite the plethora of literature about such approaches, Brown (2004) argued that 'few scholars offer ground-breaking, pragmatic approaches to developing truly transformative leaders' (p. 77). A further deficiency in current literature is that, in the main, it has focused on school leaders and redesign at the local level. Little has been written about the role of project leaders in educational redesign initiatives even though the impetus for redesign often comes from schools' participation in funded projects.



According to Kerzner (2004), effective project management is central to organisational change endeavours and is receiving increasing emphasis in the world of business. This paper addresses these gaps in the literature by exploring the approaches of both the Project Manager and a number of school leaders in the South Australian educational redesign project Learning to Learn. The research aimed to illuminate the characteristics of these leaders of educational redesign and the conditions which sustained them.

## Background

Learning to Learn (L2L) is a redesign initiative funded by the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) since 1999. It is under-pinned by constructivist learning theory and its goal is to change the way teaching and learning are conceptualised and provided to the students of South Australia. In particular it aims to move participants away from an 'existing picture of schooling' rooted in the industrial paradigm of 'teaching as telling' to a new 'conceptual picture of schooling' of teaching as creating 'the conditions for involved learning' suited to the complex demands of the future (adapted from Harpaz, 2002, pp. 1-26). Schools in the project receive funding to send school leaders and groups of teachers to a Core Learning Program provided by educational theorists from Australia and overseas and to participate in regular cross school Learning Circles. These experiences provide the stimulus for whole school programs aimed at re-designing the learning environment, opportunities and outcomes for teachers and students.

To date over 200 schools (including primary and secondary schools and pre-schools) have participated in L2L in four successive phases. Extensive data collected in Phases 1 and 2 of the project and reported in the document *Assessing the Impact of phases 1 and 2; L2L 1999 – 2004* revealed;

...that sites engaged in deep learning about constructivist learning theory and pedagogy have registered significant improvements in student engagement, retention, progression and attendance, as well as staff effectiveness and morale (Stratfold, Mellowship, Barratt & Foster, 2004, p. 6).

The Project Manager for L2L has been involved since its inception and the authors have worked closely with her as project colleagues and researchers since that time. Given the significant impact of L2L in South Australia, we were keen to capture some of her insights, and those of the school leaders with whom she has worked, about leadership for educational redesign and the conditions which support it.

## Methodology

This research investigated the question; '*What are the characteristics and conditions needed for effective leadership of educational redesign?*' The findings in this paper are drawn from data collected in two small empirical studies. The first study focused on investigating the perceptions of eight leaders from L2L schools. The data collection procedures were;

- an individual taped interview with six of the leaders (approximately forty minutes in length); and
- a group taped interview with five of the leaders (approximately ninety minutes in length).

The second study focused on investigating the perceptions of the Project Manager of Learning to Learn. Data collection procedures included;

- an individual taped interview with the Manager of L2L (of one hour duration);
- an anonymous on-line survey emailed to a sample of 45 principals/pre-school directors who have participated in L2L since 1999 (and responded to by 15 of them);
- field notes taken by the researchers in Learning Circles over a five year period; and
- L2L project documentation.

The studies were qualitative in nature. Creswell (1994) described a qualitative study as one 'which is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting' (p. 2). A grounded theory approach was used in the analysis of the data whereby theory was inductively derived from the data (Bernard, 2000). A process of coding and categorising of the data led to the themes that form the basis of this paper. The steps used in this process were similar to those summarised by Bernard (2000) as the mechanics of a grounded theory approach for analysing text based data;

1. ...read through a small sample of text.
2. Identify potential *analytic categories* – **that is, potential themes** – **that arise**.
3. As the categories emerge, pull all the data from those categories together and compare them.
4. Think about how categories are linked together.
5. Use the relations among the categories to build theoretical models, constantly checking these models against the data – particularly against negative cases.
6. Present the results of the analysis using *exemplars* – **that is, quotes...that illuminate the theory** (p. 443).

A collaborative approach to the research occurred in which the key informants were consulted at all phases of the research. This process enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of research data (Merriam, 1998, p. 205).

### **Leadership for Educational Redesign**

Analysis of the data revealed eight characteristics that were common to the styles of leadership developed by the Project Manager and school leaders in this study. The study revealed that these leaders;

- focussed on redesign rather than reform;
- ensured teacher/leader learning was at the centre of redesign efforts;
- challenged teacher/leader worldviews;
- invited participation;
- developed reciprocal learning relationships;
- shared leadership;
- managed proactively and responsively;
- addressed the emotional nature of redesign work.

In the following section the findings about each of these characteristics, and the related conditions, are presented.

#### ***Focussing on Redesign Rather than Reform***

It has been common for funded reform projects in Australia to require schools to identify, implement and evaluate minor reforms to existing structures thereby risking the ‘unconnected, fragmented change initiatives’ of which Fullan (1997) warned (p. 217). In designing L2L the Project Manager and her line managers at the time were not interested in recreating another project focussed on small scale reform. They began from the assumption that education needs to be radically different if it is to better meet the needs of all children. The Project Manager explained their thinking at the time as follows;

I think in the beginning one of the things that was incredibly fortunate was a belief that if schools could have found the answer - if there was a reform answer or the perfect solution it would have been found by now because there was so much money invested in reform over decades. So there was a strong commitment ... (that what) we would do is actually engage in a learning process with the schools and then from that we would find powerful ways forward. (Interview)

It was decided to use the term ‘redesign’, rather than ‘reform’ to describe L2L’s main goal of reconceptualising the possibilities for schooling in order to implement more holistic redesign initiatives. Schools

joining the Project were not expected to quickly identify and implement changes in practice, but were asked to spend the first year engaged in the Core Learning Program before developing a shared vision and redesign plan. The Project Manager recognised that real change, based on new learning, takes a substantial amount of time. She coined the term ‘18 monthness’ to describe the amount of time most schools need to ‘start to think about what else is possible’, as opposed to ‘let’s do the task and tick it off’, and estimated it needs up to 5 years ‘for a school to do rich whole school reform work’ (Interview).

School leaders in this study involved their schools in the project because they too were committed to improving learning opportunities for their students, as can be seen by this comment;

If I was to strip it bare, I had a mindset that said, ‘Students are our core business and everything we do is about improving student learning. And if we had an issue with a child the question is, ‘How do we change the system... in order to move that child forward, engage that child’. (Leader D, Interview)

However, most had been involved in previous reform projects and so came into L2L expecting that they would have to set short term reform goals and meet accountability dead-lines. Some were initially uncomfortable with the expectation that they would spend at least the first year engaged in a leaning program that would enable them to develop a shared vision for redesign. This unease tended to dissipate towards the end of the first year as they and their teachers reached a point where they could begin to engage in planning for redesign. They came to share the Project Manager’s view of the amount of time needed with one stating; ‘I think now we are at innovation ... but that’s two years down the track’ (Leader E Interview).

#### ***Ensuring Teacher/Leader Learning was at the Centre of Redesign Efforts***

The Project Manager realised that for school leaders and teachers to be able to reconceptualise possibilities for new ways of educating, they would need to be exposed to cutting edge thinking about teaching and learning. She explained her thinking as follows;

When we talk about the pedagogy of L2L we try to say that the pedagogy is a learning pedagogy – what we do is immerse (learners) over a period of time in learning experiences but learning experiences which are deliberately not telling you what to do, learning experiences which nudge thinking, to provoke questions

which quite often creates a bit of discomfort for people in the first year or two. (Interview)

Teacher/leader learning was placed at the centre of the initiative and the Core Learning Program was designed which comprised leading educational theorists from around the world providing intensive learning programs for school-based participants. What was different about this program compared to other 'expert driven' professional development, was that project funding meant that schools could provide time and learning opportunities at the local level for teachers and leaders to make sense of new learning and how it related to their students' needs. The Project Manager's perception of the role of L2L was that it provided the conditions to support participants' learning;

I am very convinced that you can provide the conditions and you can absolutely maximise the opportunities for real learning for people but you cannot determine what it is they will learn from experiences and what it is that they will take from it, but that it happens anyway. (Interview)

The conditions provided through L2L included the Core Learning Program, Learning Circles for school leaders and other leaders of learning in each school, the latest readings about teaching, learning and redesign, access to Thinkers in Residence, school led professional development sessions and the funding for schools to provide the release time and learning opportunities for teachers to explore new educational thinking and the implications for their practice. The onus was on the Project Manager and school leaders being learners themselves as well as supporting the learning of teachers. For this reason principals' attendance at Learning Circles was mandated. The Project Manager explained why;

L2L doesn't have many rules but one of the rules that we have stuck with through all the phases has been that principals' participation is mandated.... You can't expect there to be any whole school reform if the leader is not intimately involved in the learning. (Interview)

The Learning Circles were specifically constructed to enable principals and other change leaders from several schools to meet together several times per term with each other and members of the project team and university colleagues. The purpose was to support each other and share and grow their learning about leading educational redesign in their schools. In turn, the insights from Learning Circles informed principals' work in schools. Below can be seen one leader's understanding of what it meant to have

teacher/leader learning at the centre of the redesign process at her school;

... a facilitative process of engaging staff in thinking and articulating their conceptions about what effective learning was and thinking/reframing their role as a teacher and as a learner. Setting up a culture where teachers were able to talk through issues of teaching and learning; and where teachers wanted to engage in discussions about learning and teaching. (Leader C Interview)

### **Challenging Teacher/Leader Worldviews**

One of the beliefs underpinning L2L is that changing teaching involves changing the person who is the teacher. This belief recognises that the way people teach is largely determined by their life experiences and the ways these have shaped their world views - the beliefs, values and assumptions that inform their practice. The Project Manager would constantly stress to L2L participants that participation was 'about nudging professional identity' (Field notes, 20/11/03), and explained this notion further as follows;

When teachers start investigating their work and researching what they do and seeing new things, you actually give them a new pair of eyes - you reframe their professional identity (Interview).

In the Core Learning Program and in Learning Circles the focus was not only on introducing cutting edge theories, but also on engaging participants in processes that involved examining, challenging and, if necessary, reframing the assumptions, beliefs and values that informed their practices. Reframing occurs when participants realise that their worldviews and practices are at odds with current theory about practices that maximise engagement and success for all students. In achieving such reframing, the processes used have been as important as the key ideas conveyed. One principal summarised the process in this way;

The connections through direct contact through the Learning Circle has meant that our leadership group has benefited directly from inquiry and deep questioning about what, why and how we decide to do what we have done and continue to do. We have been challenged directly by the Program Manager and supported to find new solutions to blocks and new ways forward through some significant challenges. (Survey)

At the school level, leaders supported teachers, students and parents to develop the shared values that were to underpin all aspects of the school's learning environment and then to identify and address any discrepancies in structures and practices. One principal described the process used at her school as follows;

We started with a pupil free day .... We did a lot of questioning of children. Every child had input. Then there were parents, governing council and gradually we honed down to six core values which were cause for great debate but again once we got beyond the debate and beyond the conflict we got to the ownership, which was really good. And then a vision and mission statement. (Leader E, Interview)

That participants did achieve shifts in their professional identities is clear from an evaluation conducted in 2004, in which Stratfold, Mellowship, Barratt and Foster reported;

The most commonly reported outcomes identified by L2L participants was the transformative power of the Core Learning Program and the subsequent reconceptualisation of their role from one of 'teacher' to 'leader of learning'. (p. 14)

### **Inviting Participation**

Proponents of invitational leadership have identified key characteristics such as 'trust', 'optimism' and 'respect' and conveying consistent messages of 'invitation' in all forms of communication (Stoll & Fink, 1996). These qualities are reflected in the Project Manager's view that;

Leadership is about ambiguity and uncertainty – for yourself and for your teachers. A genuine invitational stance is letting go of control. It's not manipulative. It's about being able to learn. (Field notes 11/3/04)

She also introduced another dimension in the following definition of invitational leadership; 'Invitational leadership refers to invitation into *learning*. It's not about the managerial aspect' (Field notes, 29/7/05). It was clear that principals agreed that her stance was invitational through their references to her 'faith in participants' learning', providing 'inspiration and optimism' and 'leadership through professional respect' (Survey).

Over the course of the project principals too found there were benefits in adopting an invitational stance within their schools as they came to understand through involvement in L2L that there was little point

in 'mandating change' (Fullan, 2003). Rather they recognized the need to involve their whole school community in a process of co-construction. One principal reflected on the changes in her understanding of leadership over the time she spent working in a L2L school;

I discovered that part of my job, a big part of it, was actually the co-producing and creating rather than arriving with the paradigm of problems and solutions and work hard, get better productivity... (Leader A Interview)

The assumption underpinning involvement at all levels was a respect for the professionalism of all teachers and the need to recognise their different experiences, needs and rates of learning by providing multiple entry and exit points.

### **Developing Reciprocal Learning Relationships**

A central idea in the constructivist learning theory underpinning L2L is that learning is a social process which is enhanced by opportunities for interaction with other learners. The Project Manager and school leaders agreed that the basis of successful interaction was the development of trusting and respectful relationships. One leader who moved into a new setting part way through L2L summed up this realisation as follows;

... to try really hard to adopt a position where you value everyone who has gone before you and know and trust that everyone has worked with a spirit of intent of wanting the best. (Leader A Interview)

A characteristic of the relationships fostered within Learning Circles and L2L schools is reciprocity (Le Cornu, Peters & Collins, 2003). By reciprocity we mean the development within learning communities, be they classrooms, schools or the Learning Circles, of learners' commitment to and responsibility for their own learning as well as that of the other members of the community. All participants are positioned as co-constructors of knowledge and co-learners, with an emphasis on the reciprocal nature of the learning process and the development of reciprocal ways of working. The opportunities for the development of reciprocal learning relationships were provided through the Core Learning Program and Learning Circles and in the professional development opportunities that L2L funding made possible within schools. The power of these learning networks can be seen in the following comment from one of the principals;

The Learning Circles encouraged us to develop professional networks and to build a professional learning community – a model that we have continued today, many years down the track. (Survey)

The term ‘learning conversations’ (Le Cornu, 2004; Le Cornu et al, 2003) has been used within the project to capture the rich dialogue about learning that occurs at the school and wider project level. As the Project Manager explained; ‘If learning is dialogic, we need to have conversations. This is very different to the telling mode’ (Field notes, 11/3/04). One of the school leaders noted that ‘many times the conversation is actually what brings out what is valuable’ (Leader D, Interview).

At the school level, there has been a strong emphasis on the development of learning communities for students and staff. School leaders provided the opportunities for staff to engage in learning conversations in local learning circles, through the creation of learning teams and peer mentoring relationships and by providing release time for them to attend the Core Learning Program. Leaders also found that a key part of supporting reciprocal and collegial relationships was through the development of explicit structures to enable effective communication with and among members of their school communities;

That consultative process and making sure everybody feels valued and they’re listened to. Communication is a number one, a huge thing. You can never do enough of it. And what works for one doesn’t work for another. (Leader B Interview)

### **Sharing Leadership**

The leadership style promoted in L2L was not restricted to a hierarchical model based on prescribed status but embraced the notion of all participants as *leaders of learning*. This descriptor embodies the view that all learners should be leaders of their own learning while also contributing to the learning of others. The Project Manager and school leaders believed that to ensure congruency between L2L principles and actions ‘leadership for learning’ needed to be modelled by participants at every level of L2L. This included project managers, the project colleagues who contribute to the Core Learning Program and Learning Circles, school leaders, teachers and students. For instance, the Project Manager was very clear that when it came to choosing project colleagues for the Core Learning Program, she wanted ‘people who had something powerful to share but who didn’t give a recipe or a prescription’ (Interview).

The leaders in this study certainly accepted the challenge of developing shared leadership of learning

in Learning Circles and their schools. Their descriptions of the many strategies they developed in themselves and others included; analysing; questioning; processing; co-producing; collaborating; directing; facilitating; articulating team thoughts into central directions; building relationship with all members of the school community and providing professional development, resources and feedback. That leaders were successful in building cultures in which the responsibility for leading learning was shared can be seen in the following example from the survey data;

... the thinking and practice that was developed is still impacting on teacher practice and tells its own story of success. The circle of influence in our district has been larger with many teachers who were involved in Learning to Learn now being leaders in their new schools, either principals, curriculum leaders or AST (Advanced Skills Teachers) teachers. (Survey)

### **Managing Proactively and Responsively**

Although the Project Manager and school leaders saw themselves first and foremost as ‘leaders of learning’ they also had responsibility for many other organisational aspects that are more typical of managerialist interpretations of leadership. The Project Manager described some of these functions;

There is a very large organisational layer which is about just setting up the various groups, the selection process and managing that and working with the districts for schools to be identified. Then there is setting up of the Core Learning Program which is the constant liaising with the project colleagues group and ... getting the core learning pieces happening in the calendar ... a year ahead. (Interview)

Fortunately, the project was given a significant yearly budget to fund the involvement of school and project colleagues and the Project Manager was also given considerable autonomy by her line-managers. Once again she aimed to match the autonomy that she experienced to the autonomy that schools experienced and so she tried to minimize the prescription provided to schools. Although schools had to enter into a ‘service agreement’ with L2L in terms of how they accounted for the grants they received, she was very careful in the framing of these agreements. She explained; ‘In the service agreements with schools, we try to frame accountability as mutual responsibility for sharing learning’ (Field notes, 10/11/04). The proactive and responsive nature of her management is reflected in these comments by school leaders;

Excellent co-ordination, flexible, creative, inspiring.

It has been an inspirational leadership which gained the confidence of so many whilst forging special relations internationally with such high level support for education in SA. (Survey)

School leaders too realised that they had to attend to the managerial aspects of leadership as well as having a focus on learning and redesign. One described it as;

...the importance of doing some of the 'small things' eg rosters, routines etc really thoroughly to ensure that people trust you enough to broach the bigger picture things like learning and curriculum. (Leader C, Interview)

One important part of the managerial role played by the Project Manager and the school leaders was to manage the changing circumstances and contexts throughout the life of the project. During that time there were several changes of leadership and considerable restructuring within the system and each time this happened the Project Manager found herself needing to justify her approaches and expenditure anew. There was also increasing pressure to provide hard data, in the form of quantitative measures of improved student achievement, and for the participating schools to contribute to a variety of system initiatives and materials production in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy development. The Project Manager and school leaders negotiated these challenges at the system and local levels in ways which had minimal negative impact on teachers leaving them free to get on with the work of redesign. One leader acknowledged the role the Project Manager had to play in the wider arena; 'Dealing with the political...so the rest of the participants can focus on the learning' (Survey).

### ***Addressing the Emotional Dimension of Educational Redesign***

The important role of emotion in redesign work was constantly acknowledged and addressed by the leaders in the project. There were several aspects to it but the most overt were the gamut of feelings that were associated with challenges to professional identity (for both teachers and leaders) and the challenges and dilemmas of managing redesign initiatives (leaders).

All leaders reported experiencing some feelings of self doubt, anxiety, frustration and upset as they were confronted by uncomfortable aspects of their own learning and the many challenges and dilemmas of managing redesign initiatives amidst increasing financial constraints, system restructuring, leadership

changes and a climate of testing and a 'proof agenda'. The comments below provide some insight into how leaders felt as they participated in L2L;

I had lots of discomfort and having at some weak moments and uncertain moments questions about my style. (Leader A, Interview)

My hope cycle turns into a despair cycle very quickly. (Leader B, Interview)

The development of learning communities at the project and local level meant that L2L teachers and leaders found themselves increasingly in cultures that helped them to accept and manage the uncertainty associated with change and to cope with their own levels of discomfort. One leader described the support she received as follows;

Support from community, from the supportive staff at school and from personal and professional networks. The district team were also really helpful with the concrete challenges and in providing moral support. (Leader D, Interview)

Leaders also used processes of intellectual analysis to manage any feelings of discouragement and look for ways forward;

The process is what you focus on and I tend now to more and more say, 'What is the issue and then, how are we going to go about investigating it?' I think using that notion of enquiry rather than saying, 'I've got the solution and we're all going to put it into place.' (Leader E Interview)

Through these processes of intellectual analysis, leaders were able to 'reframe' their perceptions of difficult and upsetting experiences as learning opportunities. This enabled them to continue to move forwards, albeit slowly, in negotiating the kinds of leadership roles and learning cultures they valued.

In addressing the emotional dimension of redesign work, the leaders were also realistic about the extent to which teachers have the energy to sustain a high level of engagement. The Project Manager summed it up in this way; 'In my experience schools just need some respite sometimes and you can't expect them to always be engaged. It is almost like we have to become so much smarter about the humanness of it' (Interview).

Finally, there were also positive feelings of excitement and passion that provided a balance for negative emotions and the enormous time and energy demands. Leaders acknowledged that the excitement of working with people and knowing that the work was making a difference to students and teachers' experiences far outweighed the time involved. The

Project Manager's assessment was that despite some initial feelings of anxiety about the unknown, the predominant emotion felt by participants was 'passion to make a difference' and that this passion had an amazing power to energise;

I think the power of peoples' engagement has really surprised me. I would say really confidently and I do say it in lots of forums that the greatest untapped resource within education is teacher passion. (Interview)

## Discussion

The findings of this research revealed eight characteristics that were common to the participants in the study as they lead educational redesign at the Project and school levels. It also illuminated some conditions that supported them to lead in these ways. Key insights will now be discussed in the light of current literature in the field of educational leadership.

### ***Characteristics of Effective Leadership of Educational Redesign***

These leaders displayed a number of characteristics that can be found in three of the models of leadership that theorists have used to describe innovative leadership in schools. Firstly, some aspects of their leadership are congruent with the style defined by Lambert (2002) as 'constructivist leadership' which is not surprising given that L2L is based around constructivist learning theory. They presented themselves as leaders of learning who were most interested in 'the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meaning that leads toward a shared purpose of schooling' (Lambert, 2002, p. 44). They created the conditions that enabled leaders and teachers to confront and reframe their worldviews in new ways resulting in new learning and changes in their practice.

Secondly, there are also characteristics of their leadership that fit with what has been termed 'transformational leadership'. Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) identified three aspects of such leadership that are reflected strongly in the participants' approaches – setting directions (via shared understandings and goals that 'undergird a clear sense of purpose or vision'); developing people; and redesigning the organisation (pp. 38-39). The Project Manager's vision of the need for radically different education set the direction for L2L as first and foremost a learning experience focused on the development of people and aimed at holistic whole school and system redesign, rather than as a project aimed at small scale educational reform. Her belief that the reform based projects of the past had achieved little lasting im-

provement in learning opportunities for many children is congruent with the views of other theorists who have argued that reforms 'fail because our attempts to solve problems are frequently superficial' (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 746).

Thirdly, there is little doubt that the participants appeared to be what Stoll & Fink (1996) and Novak (2005) described as invitational leaders – leaders who incorporate the four components of optimism, respect, trust and intentionality. They have argued that invitational leaders function on a very clear set of principles which guide the choices they make and this certainly seemed to be the case for the leaders in this study.

Overall it can be seen that the leadership approaches developed through L2L, both at the school and Project levels, were different to more managerialist models of leadership that have tended to be hierarchical, controlling and bureaucratic in nature. In contrast, these leaders demonstrated leadership that was characterised by a focus on learning, innovation, invitation and respectful and reciprocal relationships. Unlike the leaders in the United Kingdom featured in the study cited earlier by Rapp et al (2001, cited in Brown, 2004), these leaders were strongly focused on the moral as well as the technical dimensions of their work. Their commitment to redesign and the strategies they employed to achieve it appear to have been driven by ethical concerns and values of caring, trust, optimism and justice.

### ***Conditions that Supported Effective Leadership of Educational Redesign***

Theorists such as Sachs (2000) have identified the important role played by contextual conditions in the success or otherwise of educational innovation;

The future challenge is to create the political and professional conditions where new cultures can emerge in schools, education bureaucracies and faculties of education... (p. 93)

It appears that one of the most significant conditions for participants was their involvement in the learning culture that was developed around the Learning to Learn project. This finding is consistent with the findings from the literature on school leadership which highlight the key role played by the learning culture in a school (see for example Le Cornu, Peters, Foster, Barratt & Stratfold, 2005; Wood, 2005). Seymour Sarason (1990, cited in Grossman et al, 2001) recognised years ago that 'we cannot expect teachers to create a vigorous community of learners among students if they have no parallel community to nourish themselves' (p. 993). The teachers and leaders, and indeed, university colleagues (see Le Cornu, 2004) were nourished by the learning culture

that was developed around L2L. It provided a high degree of intellectual and emotional support. That is not to suggest that the leaders in question did not possess critical personal qualities such as passion, drive and commitment to social justice, nor that their prior experiences had not contributed to their development, but it seems that involvement in L2L supported them to thrive and develop further.

It must be acknowledged that at a purely practical level the amount of funding provided to the project and participating schools was a critical condition as was the trust and autonomy granted to the Project Manager and school leaders by their respective line managers who acted courageously in supporting a learning centred approach in times of high system accountability. Other significant conditions can be seen to have some congruence with a model for the development of transformative leadership pedagogy proposed by Brown (2004). She depicted the essential conditions informing the development of what she described as 'leadership for social justice and equity' (p. 77) as comprising critical reflection, rational discourse and policy praxis. Elaborating her model she argued that being critically reflective as a leader involves the two processes of critical inquiry and self reflection;

Critical inquiry involves the conscious consideration of the moral and ethical implications and consequences of schooling practices on students. Self reflection adds the dimension of deep examination of personal assumptions, values, and beliefs. (p. 89)

The research revealed that L2L leaders, through their involvement in Learning Circles, the Core Learning Program and school based professional development, developed their ability to both engage in these processes themselves, and to facilitate others' engagement in them. Rather than focusing on changing practice, L2L engaged participants in experiences that required them to make explicit and examine their own worldviews and challenged them to consider the extent to which these shaped practice that was exclusive of some students. Farson (2002) argued that 'predicaments' in the form of 'permanent, inescapable, complicated, paradoxical dilemmas' are intrinsic to leadership at higher levels (p. 6). He suggested that whereas problems can be solved, predicaments can only be 'coped with' through 'interpretative thinking' which he defined as to;

Put a larger frame around a situation, see it in the sweep of history, understand it in context. (Leaders) must be especially alert to deeper paradoxical influences and therefore the possible unintended consequences of any decisions that flow from that interpretation. (p. 6)

It appears that L2L provided leaders with the tools and opportunities to 'put a larger frame' around the dilemmas and challenges intrinsic to educational redesign.

In conjunction with critical reflection, Brown proposed that transformational leaders need to be participants in rational discourse which she described as ongoing conversations that 'evolve over time into a culture of careful listening and cautious openness to new perspectives' (93). The goal of such discourse is not consensus but arriving at a deeper understanding of biases in oneself and others. This depiction of rational discourse is very similar to L2L leaders' valuing of and engagement in *learning conversations*. These structured conversations with Project Colleagues, other leaders and teachers appear to have engaged them in deeper ways than ordinary conversations in that they enabled them to negotiate new meanings and deeper levels of understanding. They reported that it was the opportunities for dialogue in Learning Circles, the Core Learning Program and learning teams that provided the stimulus for changes in beliefs and assumptions which in turn prompted changes in policies and practices. Feldman (1999) argued that conversations are a form of inquiry which enable people to 'work through the dilemmas, quandaries and dissonances that relate to their living and being in the world' (p. 137). Through our work in Learning to Learn we have found that such conversations do not just happen but are dependent on learners having the time, opportunity and meta-cognitive language, skills and processes to engage in them (Le Cornu et al, 2003).

The final process identified by Brown is that of policy praxis which she defined as using 'inductive and deductive forms of reasoning' and dialogue 'to work for social change and social justice' (p. 96). This process accords strongly with the L2L focus on redesign aimed at improving learning opportunities and outcomes for leaders, teachers and their students. Through engagement with the Core Learning Program and each other, leaders were confronted with the gaps between their espoused commitment to inclusive practices and the reality of educational policies and practices at the system and school levels that discriminated against some students. Through the project funding and professional development opportunities they were able to work with teachers, parents and students to redesign the learning environment along more inclusive lines. A critical condition for the L2L version of policy praxis was that schools were given an extended period of time in which to effect change.

A gap in Brown's model is her lack of acknowledgment of the affective dimension of transformational leaders' work. Although she briefly acknowledged that leaders need to have 'emotional muscle' to

manage the potential conflict and discomfort in change agendas she did not address the importance of relationships or emotional intelligence in transformational leadership. This research revealed both to be critical. In developing their own and others' leadership around educational redesign the Project Manager and school leaders reported that relationship building was one of the most significant factors. This finding has been supported by most recent studies of effective leadership (see for example Day et al., 2000; Moos, 2003; Peters & Le Cornu, 2006) and might appear to be common sense, but most of the leaders reported that it was easy to underestimate the amount of time and effort that should be spent on building relationships in the face of the many other competing priorities. By building trust and respect as their highest priority, they were able to move forwards once relationships had been established.

Beatty (2000) suggested that a paradox of leadership exists in the contradiction between the complex emotions it can invoke and the expectation that strong leaders should not show emotions. As they grappled with the many challenges, the leaders experienced a wide range of exhilarating and potentially debilitating emotions. The emotional component of school leaders' work is beginning to receive attention in the literature with acknowledgments that to be effective leaders need 'to combine practical intelligence, analytical intelligence and emotional intelligence' (Davies & Davies, 2004, p. 35). Higgs and Dulewicz (2000, cited in Day et al, 2000) found that one of the core elements common to more than a hundred successful leaders was 'an awareness of their own emotions; an ability to recognize and acknowledge them without being swamped; driven by a degree of self belief' (p. 73). Fortunately, the leaders in this study were able to share emotions with trusted others. Through such sharing they were able to sustain their 'self belief' through times of great anxiety and stress.

Finally, a critical condition in any consideration of leadership is that of sustainability, both of the leadership and redesign initiatives (Hargeaves and Fink, 2003). This study revealed that the Project Manager and school leaders had a great deal of personal influence on the success of redesign outcomes at the system and local levels. This raises the issue of whether redesign initiatives would have floundered if any of them had moved out of their leadership roles. Although this was not put to the

test, Hargeaves and Fink (2003) identified two features of sustainable leadership that were found to be present in this study. The first is that of 'leading learning' whereby leaders 'put learning at the center of everything they do' (p. 695). The second is 'distributed leadership' whereby 'leadership 'comprises a network of relationships of people, structures, and cultures (both within and across organizational boundaries)' (p. 696). The styles of leadership demonstrated by the Project Manager and school leaders appeared to operate in these sustainable ways indicating that redesign should have been able to be continued by others at the system and local levels once they had moved on.

## Conclusion

This study suggests that courageous and informed leadership at the system and local level had a significant influence on educational redesign initiated through the Learning to Learn Project. Leaders in the study shared eight characteristics in that they;

- focussed on redesign rather than reform;
- ensured teacher/leader learning was at the centre of redesign efforts;
- challenged teacher/leader worldviews;
- invited participation;
- developed reciprocal learning relationships;
- shared leadership;
- managed proactively and responsively; and
- addressed the emotional nature of redesign work.

It is clear that certain conditions were needed to enable such leadership to thrive and these were related to the development of a learning culture for all participants (ie children, teachers, leaders, community) at all levels (school, education department, policy). The Learning to Learn Project appears to have provided those conditions for the leaders in this study and in doing so offers insights for how this might be achieved more widely in South Australia and elsewhere.

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