

Professional Leadership – Mucking In

*HODs Technology- TENZ Conference, Christchurch, 4 October 2005
Presented by Margaret Kouvelis*

Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou kaota!

How many of you have watched “Mucking In” that Sunday night programme on TV One where Jim Mora finds an unsuspecting small town unsung heroine or hero to reward with a makeover of their garden?

I want to suggest to you today that Professional Leadership is about Mucking-in.

The kind of professional leadership we need today in our schools is the kind where teachers are mobilized to address the important challenges facing their students’ learning and their own teaching practice.

Mucking-in leaders don’t hesitate to get stuck-in making a difference where they see a real need for improvement. They believe in working together with their colleagues to bring about transformational change in the lives of teachers in their department, school or professional organization – and their enthusiasm, their energy and their behaviours are infectious.

Places where I have been mucking-in lately have been in China facilitating change in professional practice through curriculum review and more recently in the Middle East, in a major education reform of their schooling in Qatar.

I have been privileged to muck-in with many HODs across curriculum areas over the years, in developing more coherent and consistent professional practice, when I was an adviser at Massey and as a national facilitator of NCEA in 2001.

Change is the order of the day and professional leadership calls for a different mind set in teachers where much of the past certainties have given way to new and uncertain frameworks.

One thing is certain, according to Stoll & Fink in their insightful book *Changing our Schools* (1996)

- *“if we go on doing more of what we’ve always done, then we are preparing our students for a world that is rapidly disappearing”.*

I’m not suggesting we throw away our content knowledge, far from it; what I am suggesting is that we take a new look at the *way* we do and *why* we do it, and is it what our students need?

One parent was concerned that his son’s school did not teach the important lessons that he learnt when he was at school. The teacher replied: “I have to make a choice. I can prepare your son for *your past* or *his future*- which would you prefer?”

It is one of the roles of professional leaders in schools to interpret and *make sense of future realities* for colleagues, students and parents. We are very good at looking backwards but not so good at looking forward.

How confident are *you* that the students you are teaching now will have the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute and benefit from the kind of society they will inherit in 10, 20 and 50 years time?

Here’s where we need to start mucking–in. The lucky recipients of the dramatic change in their environment will be our students. We need a dramatic transformation of their backyard if we are to create a learning environment that is going to enable them to grow and take their place confidently in their futures.

Mucking-in leadership is *invitational* and *all* teachers are encouraged to join in as leaders in their own right. Transforming our students' backyard is about transforming *our* perceptions of teaching that will result in changed teaching behaviours in the classroom.

It will require us to engage in professional learning activities that will inject new and more powerful ways of teaching that will connect more effectively with different learners' needs.

It is interesting to observe the way we do things in education- we have spent years on the *curriculum for learning*, then we have spent more years on *assessment for learning*, yet the one area that really can make the difference is the one that we haven't spent anything like the emphasis on, which is the *pedagogy for learning*, yet we know that teachers make the most significant difference to learners.

Right enough of that- we need to get on with the mucking-in. First we need to get the students out of the way – no problem that's already happened- they're on holiday and you are all here- ready to muck-in. Part of your mucking-in leadership is being part of this HOD's day and the conference starting tomorrow. Keeping yourself up to date with new developments within your professional area is like putting in a prominent water feature in the 'new' backyard.

As HODs technology you are at a real advantage compared to many of your other colleagues in other subject areas because you already have seen the plans for transforming your students' backyard. You've already had to work across different subject areas, with *Beacon Practice* you are now moving across schools sharing best practice and with *Futureintech* you are working across the school/industry interface.

You've been struggling over the years not only to get proper recognition for technology but also to find the best way of enabling your students to become self regulated learners. You've got your technological practice pretty sorted now with the components of practice, brief development, planning for practice and outcome development and evaluation. You've got the plans and how to go about it, but you've also got the FFP quality control check– 'fitness for purpose'. In fact you are well on the way to being professional FFPers- *Fully Fit Professionals* – you've left behind the days of what I call MMP or *more muddled practitioners*.

So let's see- *who* do we need to invite to get the job done?
We haven't much time as the students will be back soon.

**We need the right people, with the right qualities and the right know-how.
Remember! Mucking-in teams 'know how-can do!'**

First we need some **landscape architects**- these are the professional leaders who see the big picture and can map out the back yard in a new and exciting way- they are pretty much in touch with the clients' needs and have a fair idea of what will work best.

Some of them are here already. There's Vicki Compton from ACE, researcher and curriculum developer in technology education, and Niall Dunning Project Manager for GIF in Technology Education, and Cliff Harwood from Massey University College of Education, researcher, adviser and Professional Support Facilitator for Beacon Practice. There's Glyn McGregor, leading the Enterprise for Education Project and there's Grant Miles adviser, here in Christchurch.

Then we need to invite the team from *Playmakers*, with centres all over the country-and most of you are here - some of whom I've been privileged to meet and work with - professional leaders like Carole Rimmer a Playmaker from Havelock North and Robert Young a Playmaker from Okato. As HODs of technology you are all hands-on experts, ideally suited for mucking-in leadership.

What do we need to get the job done?

First we're not going anywhere without the right gear. Mucking-in is messy and pretty dirty at times and if you're not careful you can get poked in the eye, cut your foot, rip your pants, and get burnt if you don't wear suitable clothing. What we put on is our *personal attributes* or *competencies* that we bring to the job in order to perform well.

First of all you need your '**know yourself' gumboots**. One for each foot- 'know yourself personally' and 'know yourself professionally' so you can stand firmly on the ground. You're not likely to topple over when you're wearing gumboots and you can trample underfoot any harmful weeds that might spring up from time to time, threatening to overtake our students' learning needs.

Now there's the **apron of trust**. It holds most of our essential tools for working with others. There's quite a lot of pockets in these aprons for collecting bits of integrity and goodwill that have snuck in there from previous mucking-in jobs. If we leave this apron off, we are liable to get mud thrown at us. It is an essential garment for invitational leaders, enabling others to come on board with us.

Two more things: - your **optimistic cap** so you don't get burnt when things warm up. Optimism is what keeps us going in the face of difficulties – it is about resilience, not giving up under negativity, being proactive not reactive and taking initiative. It is also about creating hopeful possibilities for the future.

(This reminds me of the story of the two sales reps from a shoe company in UK who were sent to a remote part of Africa to see if they could market their shoes. Very soon after arriving one rep sent an email back to his boss " Nobody here wears shoes- returning immediately" the other guy sent one too saying " No-one wears any shoes here –staying on indefinitely, good opportunity for some business!")

Next! your **intentional sunglasses**. Being intentional means you are more willing to see things through to their completion, to stay focused and on task. It's about stickability.

Finally there's your- **gloves of respect** – a pair is needed for handling people with care – you'll be dealing with right-handers and left-handers. These gloves are a protection for you when you come across some prickly customers or sharp objects. With the palm grips they enable you to get a good grip and keep on holding on.

Now that we've got the right gear on for mucking-in leadership, we need the **tools for change**. Remember that it's about changing the students' learning backyard. So we need tools that will bring about changes in our own and our colleagues teaching behaviours.

First there's the **ruler for professional growth**. Mucking-inners are always whipping our their rulers – checking to see if the new professional learning structures they have designed will fit perfectly into the new spaces they've created for them. As professional leaders we are obliged to grow professionally by reading, relating, reflecting and researching. We need to be up to date with the educational literature, to have credibility to promote professional learning with our peers. We need to be able to stretch our thinking and that of our colleagues and base our practice on research that has proven indicators of success. According to Stoll & Fink (1996) "*If leaders, like schools are not getting better, then they are getting worse.*"

Then there's **the loppers for managing the change** process. Sometimes trimming back some overhanging branches so that other plants can flourish is all that's required. At other times more severe pruning is needed so new growth can be generated. Of course some people are tempted to become lopper stropky and if they don't understand the change process – when to act and when not to – they can find they've cut off the very thing they wanted to encourage.

Professional leaders must monitor the context they and their colleagues are working in. More often than not managing in change is messy, ill defined, and problems arise that have no apparent solutions. Then it's about knowing when to make courageous decisions and when to be cautious.

The third tool used for mucking-in leadership is the **hammer for building relationships** with colleagues. This is the most important tool and yet in the wrong hands it can do a lot of damage - used well it can hold people together for a life time. It's a discerning tool –leaders need to know when to drive home a point and when to make a friendly tap. Professional leaders need to know the right kind of nail to use and where to use it.- It's about having a good eye for spotting and hitting the nail right on the head. We need a lot of practice with this tool as we are inclined to miss our targets sometimes. We need to spend time with our colleagues building relationships so we can rely on them to do the joint work of professional leadership- we simply cannot do it on our own if we want to make a difference to the lives of all our students.

The fourth tool is the **glue gun** for making **coherence**. (Selley's "No more gaps" works just as well). Coherence is the 'glue' that permeates and adheres to good practices and processes. It's about identifying and retaining those practices and processes that work well-in different contexts. Coherence comes when people know what to focus on to improve their practice and align it with the overall school purposes. They walk their talk instep with their colleagues. Coherence lifts the level of quality in teaching practice across all classrooms.

How we define mucking-in leadership will determine how much people will enjoy participating in it. When we all share professional leadership together we are creating an environment where what we say as leaders *is* what we do; where every teacher matters, where every colleague has the right, responsibility and is capable of leadership. This belief matches our conviction that all children can learn.

But it's not all beer and skittles – this is about **intentional joint work**, it's about rigour – not rigormortis! –it's about invitational challenge - not control; disagreement is expected and opposition is not seen as a threat. But we need to be secure enough to keep our eye on the horizon and at the same time, be able to live with the feeling at times of possible loss of control.

Mucker-inners know that the quality of ideas and creative thinking is greater when we purposefully share our professional work with our colleagues.

Professional leadership is about organizing ways in which we can improve what influences student learning, to engage in important work on the way we teach. How we know we are teaching well, and how we know our students are learning well.

"Educational change depends on what teachers do and think – it's as simple and complex as that" – Fullan (1991) Leading for Change.

It's about doing what we do well with our students, but with our colleagues instead. For instance

- As teachers we seek and value students' points of view.
- As HODs *you* seek and value teachers' points of view.

- As teachers we structure lessons to challenge students' suppositions.
- As professional leaders *you* structure the concept of leadership to challenge teachers' belief systems.

- As teachers we recognize that students must attach relevance (meaning) to the curriculum
- As professional leaders *you* support colleagues to construct meaning through reflection and dialogue with colleagues

These parallels suggest that professional leadership is the cumulative process of learning through which we achieve the purposes of the school. Which is about what? (ask them) –yes, preparing our students for life long learning. Remember they are in school 9% of their lives and 91% out of school if they live to 70 years of age!

Now what are the structures that the mucking in team will set up for changes to the pedagogy for learning.

There's the

- decking – for observation and feedback
- archways - for peer coaching
- garden seats - for critical friends
- outdoor lighting - for action research

Professional development and professional learning is the way to put these structures in place.

Let's look at some of these more closely. Firstly - decking. This is great for expanding horizons in transforming backyards. It's the most common structure and most widely used especially with those new to teaching. It's about opening the doors of our classrooms with safe places for teachers to stand tall and walk about confidently. It's about taking what's inside outside and whole new vistas open up to us then. It's about 'deprivatisation'- if we don't do it we deprive our students and ourselves! This decking is reasonably high off the ground and a number of steps are required for getting up to it.

1. Decking for Observation and Feedback

- **Step 1: Pre-conference with teacher-**

This is to determine the reason, the purpose, the focus of the observation as well as the method and time

- **Step 2: Observation of classroom teaching**

The time to follow through on the understandings of the pre-conference. Descriptions of events and interpretations of the events are kept quite separate at this stage.

- **Step 3: Analysing and interpreting** the observation and determining conference approach. The observer does this on their own away from the teacher. Sometimes videoing may have been the method of recording the events. Observer chooses an appropriate method of feedback:

- **directive approach** by presenting the observations and interpretations, asking for teacher input, setting a goal and telling the teacher what actions to take;
- **collaborative**, allow the teacher to present his own interpretations and negotiate a contract for future improvement
- **non-directive** and explain the observations and encourage the teacher to analyse, interpret and make his own plan.

Some observers allow the teacher to review the data in advance and bring their own preliminary interpretations to the post-conference.

- **Step 4: Post-conference with teacher**

The post-conference is held to discuss the analysis of observation and produce a plan, if needed, for improvement. It is important to let the teacher in on the recorded notes and impressions., then the observer may follow the chosen approach; directive, collaborative, nondirective, directive-informational.

- **Step 5: Critique of previous steps**

The purpose of this step is review whether the format and procedures were helpful and whether revisions might be necessary. What was valuable? What was of little value? What changes do we need to make for next time?

The archway of peer coaching is where the focus is on the one being coached, rather like mentoring. Like the archway, the two people involved are complementary and supportive frameworks can be set up.

2. The archway for Peer coaching

Peer coaching is where *teachers conduct observation and feedback with each other* with the overall coordination of a facilitator/leader.

1. Teachers to discuss how a proposed peer coaching programme would fit in into the professional development goals of the school and then to decide on the specific purposes of the programme. If the purpose is to **acquaint teachers with each others' teaching strategies** then less preparation is needed than if the purposes is to provide teachers with **feedback on their teaching** of a particular topic, method or procedure then to assist them to **develop an appropriate action plan**.

Before implementing this structure, preparation of teachers needs to include **training on understanding the purpose and procedures of peer coaching**, holding a **pre-conference to determine the focus of observations**, **conducting and analyzing an observation** to distinguish between observation and interpreting classroom events and conducting two post-conferences with **different approaches for developing action plans**- such as nondirective and collaborative.

This is a really valuable way of establishing professional leadership in colleagues. Teachers should be **paired** with each other so they are **comfortable** together but not necessarily at the same level or experience or competence. It's best to **match people who are different but still can respect and communicate easily** with each other. The leader/facilitator is necessary to monitor peer progress and monitor the needs of the peer teams, answer questions and provide resources and step in to help as needed. Sometimes videoing the progress can be helpful and the facilitator can be used to do that as a form of monitoring teams.

For this to work, it is often best to **use a relief teacher** to cover the teachers doing the coaching and to allow for the post-conference feedback and action planning. It's important to ensure that teachers can participate without great personal sacrifice.

3. Garden Seats for Critical friends- (quality learning circles)

This is all about courtyard design. Critical friends or collective inquiry offer strategies to build a *purposeful group of teachers* (5-8) who with a facilitator (internal or external) look at **samples of students work** or **problems or concerns about teaching practice** together over the course of a year. Each teacher might bring *samples of student work* as indicators of 'not achieved', 'achieved', 'merit' or 'excellence' or progress towards achievement standards, to a pre-arranged meeting, explain the concern with the work and then listen carefully as colleagues analyse and suggest possible improvements.

Critical friends groups typically include a peer coaching component for teachers to become familiar with each other's classrooms and to follow up on particular classroom changes individual teachers have committed to accomplish.

Protocols need to be established so that everyone understands the structured guide to be used and the facilitator and the members will keep the conversation from straying from the teaching goal. The conversation will provide both **'warm' feedback** – suggestions about what the teacher is doing well and should continue and **'cool feedback** – ideas and critiques about teacher inconsistencies and areas for change. By determining who speaks when, the protocol ensures that only the teacher who is seeking feedback on her teaching and student work is allowed to speak, providing all the necessary background information and questions she wants the group to answer.

During the time for feedback, only group members speak; the teacher listens. This is all done to prevent entanglements, tangents and defensiveness and confusion.

4. Outdoor lighting for Action Research teams

Throwing light on specific interventions or strategies is very much focused on student evidence and how it reflects your teaching practices. These can be useful ways for following a cohort of students through a specific learning topic which includes different learning strategies. It can be used in whole school professional development to join with members from other departments or faculties that focuses on a school-wide teaching priority that applies to his or her own classroom. eg co-operative learning, higher order thinking skills. Whole days are set aside for each team for planning which involves

1. reviewing their *common goals*
2. establishing their *own research agenda* to study student learning, via readings, visits to classrooms, team teaching, videotaping their own and others' classrooms. visits to other schools, seminars or conferences.
3. establishing their own *classroom action plans* consisting of changes in their current teaching, assessment and learning activities and the needed resources or assistance from study group members
4. Collecting ongoing *student evidence* to determine progress being made
5. Making *progress reports* on individual work to the study group and school as a whole.

In all these approaches and structures, professional dialogue becomes the order of the day as teachers feel free to trust their colleagues and form partnerships and alliances for professional growth.

Back to our mucking in. What difference will we notice as a result of our mucking in leadership in ourselves and our peers in terms of the technology plans the landscape architects have drawn up?

As HODs you will become better at

1. establishing an environment that encourages and supports *teacher* innovation
2. providing structures for *teachers* to undertake professional learning in order to improve their teaching practice
3. supporting *teachers* in accessing resources for their professional learning
4. providing opportunities for *teachers* to form partnerships with key stakeholders in the wider community to improve their professional knowledge and practice.

If all of these activities are set up to take place then when the students 'return' your components of practice will work well.

You and your colleagues will become better at

1. establishing an environment that encourages and supports *student* innovation
2. providing a context for *students* to undertake initial research in order to establish an appropriate context and issue suitable for technological practice
3. supporting *student learning* as they structure and plan activities as required to enable them to undertake their technological practice to develop an appropriate technological outcome.
4. supporting *students* in accessing resources
5. providing opportunities for *students* to access key and wider community stakeholders in a safe and appropriate manner.

Then over time the students may notice their learning environment has taken on a new look and feel. Then just quietly and over time the students

just maybe will say "Wow- that lesson was fantastic"
just maybe they will be more motivated to achieve
just maybe they will be able to identify their own learning strategies
just maybe they will take more responsibility for their own learning
just maybe they will feel valued

only then will our professional leadership truly matter.