

Beyond the power of one: Redesigning the work of school principals

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A growing body of national and international research suggests that teachers are deterred from applying for principal's positions - and some principals leave their positions - because they see the job as too onerous, intrusive of family life and geared inappropriately to managerial, rather than educative tasks (Brooking, Collins, Court, & O'Neill, 2003; Cooley & Shen, 2000; Davis, 1998; Forsyth & Smith, 2002; Jones & Webber, 2001; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). In our ARC funded study of the declining principal supply in Australia, we have been exploring the normative construction of the principal position through policy, selection practices, and public representations of the job. We came early to the conclusion that rather than spend time asking how teachers might be made more interested in the principalship, and/or how schools and school systems might build a cadre of aspirant principals¹, one of our particular contributions would lie in thinking about how the principal position might be redesigned (and rearticulated). We have argued elsewhere (Blackmore & Sachs, forthcoming; Blackmore & Thomson, 2004; Thomson, Blackmore, Sachs, & Tregenza, 2003) that this is necessary in order to attract not only more applicants but also a more culturally diverse group, given the homogenised Anglo, male images generally associated with school leadership, particularly in secondary schools (e.g. Baskwill, 2003; Breischke, 1993; Smith, 1999; Walker, 1992).

We are not alone in thinking that principal's work needs to be changed. Mulford's (2003) review of the changing role of school leaders, the OECD (2001) scenarios for the future and Glatter's (2002) models of school governance for example also indicate the need to redesign the job to meet future needs.

In this paper, we consider five ways in which the work of principals has been explicitly redrawn: distributed pedagogical leadership, co-principalship, shared principalship, multi-campus principalship, and community-based principalship. We examine the organisational systems that have been established to allow a stronger focus on pedagogical leadership given that current managerial systems are often seen to be more an impediment to focusing on teaching and learning. We begin by considering the notion of 'redesign' and go on to signpost some key issues about principals' work, leadership and management. We conclude by raising some issue that matter when redesigning principals' work so that it also supports significant changes for teachers and students.

¹ This is not because we do not think that this is useful, but it is work that others are doing (D'Arbon, Duignan, & Duncan, 2002; Dorman & D'Arbon, 2003a, 2003b; Lacey, 2003). We did not want to duplicate this effort, but rather do something complementary

Design and designing

In an important article on modes of making meaning, The New London Group (1996) suggested that 'design' should provide a dominant meta-language and semiotic mode for the times. They argued that the idea of multimodal design allowed the complex tangle of working, public and private lives to be brought together, re-thought and re-formed.

We take from the work of the New London Group the following points about design:

(1) Design is both a process and a product.

Design is a concept that does not pit means against ends, and outcomes against processes, in an unfortunate and myopic binary. Rather, 'design' suggests that there is a necessary relationship between the two. Discussions about design need to consider questions of what, why and how all at once.

(2) Designs work with available resources and ideas.

The New London Group argued that we are surrounded by designs – these are the resources for creating meaning. New designs do not spring from a vacuum; there is no blank canvas or green field site on which the work of designing can occur. Every design is in reality a redesign, a hybrid. This notion has two implications:

in designing, existing resources must be critically examined so that the work of reshaping and remaking does not simply reproduce undesirable process/product. (Re)designing is thus a process of working on and working over resources so that they are (re)produced and transformed because redesigns are hybrids and are 'inter-textual', that is they always refer to other designs and redesigns – they will also be partially familiar. The idea of innovation as being something entirely new is an Enlightenment hangover that dogs policymakers in their quest for interventions and models that appear unique.

Redesigning the principalship then is a task which works with, from and over what we already know and suspect about schools, teaching, work, leadership and management. It must also at the same time attempt a break with the status quo. This is easier said than done.

As part of this research project we conducted interviews with focus groups of serving principals. We asked them: 'What if you could redesign the job of the principal, what would you do?' Many found this particularly difficult, because we had, as a starting point, suggested a 'greenfields' approach, establishing a new school and new jobs. Most of the principals could not extricate their thinking from the constraints of the existing systems, cultures and practices that constituted their experience in their current and particular school. Indeed, the conversation regressed in many instances to what was problematic about the current job rather than how it could be significantly reconstructed. This both confirms our notion of 'design' as hybrid and raises important issues about how to avoid the reproduction of past practices that do not work.

We now consider some of the ways in which we and our colleagues in the field are trying to rethink the idea of principals' work.

Rethinking the principal-ship

There is a body of critical educational administration literatures that carefully delineates some of the features of principals work which need to change e.g.

- the hours of work involved
- the push for ever increasing and unrealistic levels of performance
- the difficulty of sustained focus when the work requires rapid switching from one task to another
- the impossibility of marking out a private family life, the personal toll of the emotional labour unrecognized but exploited by employers
- the fused fabrication of image of school and principal (Collard & Reynolds, 2005; Gunter, 2001; Reay & Ball, 2000; Thomson, 2001, 2004)

This 'problematization' clearly indicates specific targets for redesign. However, in itself, this list is insufficient. What is required as we have suggested already is some sense of how the job might be different. Marion Court (1998; 2003b; 2004) has been examining existing models of principal-ship and seeking some way of defining these differences. She suggests that there is a 'continuum of leadership' (2003a) that she describes as:

- *Sole leadership*

In sole leadership, one person, as the real and titular head, has the dominant voice and leadership is not shared.

- *Supported leadership*

Supported leadership (characterised sometimes as the 'patron' approach, or consultative leadership) exists where the recognised single leader draws on and acknowledges input and advice from a wide range of people.

- *Dual leadership*

Dual leadership involves a partnership between two people, both recognised as the leaders.

- *Shared leadership*

Shared leadership is diffuse – a property shared to some degree by all persons and groups involved in the collaboration. According to Court, this is what Gronn (2002 in Court) describes as 'fully shared leadership' which is conjoint, holistic and purposive, and concerted action that is more than the sum of its part (p. 6)

While we think that some of these distinctions are helpful, particularly in highlighting the autocratic power embedded in the position of principal, this construction, along with others such as 'distributed leadership' generally does also discursively support an unhelpful separation of leadership and management (Gronn, 2003; Gronn & Hamilton, 2004; for an exception see Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). This separation is not upheld by principals themselves nor by many scholars in the educational administration field, but the idea of leadership is currently very dominant in international policy. The current problem-solution for reforming schools has problems sheeted home to the imbrication of principals work in particular kinds of management systems and social 'structures' such as gender and race, while proposed solutions are attributed to leadership (Blackmore, 1999).

We suggest that the notion of design might go some way towards addressing this duality. The emphasis on design as both process and product points to a way of thinking about how management systems and leadership might work together – and how redesigning might need to work on, with, from and over both at once. But, as noted, design is not just a matter of critically examining meta-rhetorics and familiar propositions. It is also about working productively with available resources.

Finding resources to guide redesign

We have been searching for various ways in which principals have tackled their work differently. In this paper we present five cases that we argue provide helpful clues about how the job might be redesigned. They illustrate: (1) sharing pedagogical knowledge construction, (2) sharing responsibility and resources to provide greater access and equity, (3) co-principalship for a family friendly workplace, (4) multi-campus restructuring, and (5) community-based leadership. These cases are built from multiple data sets, including documents, observations, interviews and researcher knowledge.

(1) Sharing pedagogical knowledge construction

We present two instances of shared pedagogical responsibility. The first features a small primary, *Beachside K-7*, serving a lower middle class seaside suburb. The principal, Joe, has well over twenty years experience and has been in the school for over a decade. He is nearing retirement. He is regarded by his younger colleagues and line managers as somewhat idiosyncratic since he persists in doing things his own way rather than in whatever construct is required by the latest policy articulation.

For a long time Joe has seen and organised school and teacher development as a classroom action research programme. At the beginning of every year each teacher gets a small cash budget and some release time in addition to their normal non-contact time. At an early staff meeting teachers work in groups to clarify their single or collaborative research projects (they have the choice of either). They negotiate when to take the research days they need in order to work on data collection and analysis. At regular intervals during the year, staff report to each other at staff meeting how their research is progressing. Joe makes each research project the focus of at least one individual principal-teacher planning meeting during the year. At the end of the year, there is an extended staff research conference in which the results of each project are discussed. Implications for wider school policy and action are decided upon.

While this deceptively simple process could be described as distributed or shared leadership, or ongoing professional development, or creating a culture of inquiry, we think that this example fleshes out and perhaps goes beyond these terms by showing:

- the importance of a predictable sequence of events, a rhythm across the school year, and from year to year
- how professional trust and responsibility are created and maintained through the allocation of funds and time
- how the structure of meetings supports critical dialogue, joint accountability and joint learning
- how teachers are positioned as pedagogical/curriculum/assessment knowledge producers and the principal as a co-producer
- how the continued development of specific school research changes the school and classrooms together year by year (process and product)
- developing a shared 'identity' narrative of teachers-as-researchers to which all can sign on

The second example is of new 7-10 government school which re-opened after community pressure 10 years after its closure due to restructuring. The highly media-ted demise and revival of *Gumville High*, both in terms of politics, parental involvement, media and opposition from some local secondary schools fearing loss of enrolments, led its ministerial mandate to be 'innovative', 'community

based' and 'networked' ie to be unique and different, and to 'justify' its existence within the locality. Established as part of the school is a teacher professional learning centre that is to encourage networked learning communities within the region. Jeff, the principal, attracted to the school because of its profile, was confronted with a planning document that elaborated in some detail the general aims and principles of the schools' pedagogical and curriculum approach, and did not have a blank slate. He was selected because of his capacity to understand, extend and enhance the vision already articulated in terms of general principles by the various community stakeholders (parents, teachers, academics and department representatives). He was left to sort out the details that would animate the vision - daily organization, structure, curriculum and pedagogy - including an implicit sense that these would be interdisciplinary, flexible and student centred.

To meet these demands Jeff selected staff who were able to address the whole child through their capacity to be flexible across disciplinary areas while maintaining a focus on pedagogy, as well as having depth in specialist areas (although this was not as important). Three cross disciplinary teams, each with a Leading Teacher as mentor, coach, facilitator, and also member of the Lead Team (the school executive) now form the basic organisational structure responsible for staff, leadership, curriculum and pedagogy. A teaching aide handles administrative tasks for teachers and the principal and a retired assistant principal is employed to administer buildings, grounds, yard duty etc. This allows both teachers and the principal to focus on teaching and learning, building community networks and pastoral care. A psychologist, rather than welfare coordinator, is appointed for one day a week.

The teams have two 85 minute time allotments in the weekly schedule - one to plan curriculum, the second to focus on students and pastoral care. Students, with parents and their pastoral care teacher, negotiate individual learning plans, and also a personal learning time each week. The curriculum is student centred, multidisciplinary, and theme focused, without texts and with considerable reliance on teacher team work and skills, supported by an integrated learning technology infrastructure. Classes vary according to team planning - from small groups (e.g. 5 for reading and numeracy) through to large (50), dependent on the task and needs in each 80 minute session. In addition, there is professional development each week on e-learning, a joint staff discussion using online websites, and activities for staff to develop their own professional development portfolios. Most recently, each staff member, as part of the review and professional performance appraisal required by the system, is undergoing a process of classroom observation where the principal and team leader focus on what students do, not how teachers teach, and provide feedback. Student reports are in the form of portfolios and performances.

What distinguishes this approach is the

- focus on student centred learning and holistic approach to educational development via pastoral care and individualised learning plans
- the use of teams as organising principle for students and teachers
- significant staff development supporting individually tailored and collective learning
- time for planning, discussion, ideas, reflection
- mentoring, supporting and mutual accountability based on respect and trust
- an executive focus on student learning
- architectural design to support learning eg small discussion spaces, integrated technologies, staffrooms as team rooms

But more particularly there is a high level of trust and respect of professional expertise that is evident between staff members in teams, but also evident in how the principal allows the teams to take responsibility for curriculum development, pedagogy etc. Jeff works and teaches in each team on occasions, provides infrastructure and also ideas in various forms through professional development.

(2) sharing responsibility and resources to create greater access and equity

The schools in this example are in a rural wheat and wool region that is declining in population and economic prosperity. There are five towns spread across some two hundred square kilometres, each with their own high school or area school (an area school is a combined primary and secondary). Each of the schools struggled to provide the range of curriculum students expected of their public school. Face to face teaching, particularly in the senior years and for specialist subjects such as language other than English, was supplemented by the state distance education provision, which had advanced considerably since pedal wireless and correspondence lessons, but which nevertheless, was seen by local families as a poor second best to what was routinely on offer to students in the city.

The school principals and local district Superintendent organised a series of meetings with governing bodies and local communities and won agreement that they should become a formal curriculum and staff sharing network – the *Northern Regional Consortium*. Their goal was to offer the range of learning experiences to country students equivalent to that available in the city. In practical terms this meant:

- (a) appointing curriculum middle managers to the cluster but based in one school with cluster 'faculty' meetings held once per term rotating around each site. Some middle managers also changed their base school site every second year
- (b) wiring each school so that there were audio visual and internet connections between each site such that it was possible to teach across sites using distance methods
- (c) harmonizing timetables across sites by building the five timetables through cooperative negotiation
- (d) appointing subject specialist teachers to the cluster so that they could run extended classes of viable sizes. Distance technologies were supplemented with regular combined face to face whole classes and teachers were able to move sites often enough to ensure that each site had some face to face teaching during the year
- (e) establishing some joint administrative procedures to share timing of school renovations and all but emergency repairs, and joint purchase of equipment and supplies
- (f) establishing a shared budget for cluster activities e.g. additional travel between sites using school buses
- (g) running shared governance meetings once per term, establishing cluster working parties and holding joint principals meeting once a month. Joint whole school staff development was also undertaken regularly. A cluster student advisory body was formed and through regular meetings, lobbied successfully for a greater range of cluster based sporting and cultural activities.

The cluster soon offered a wider range of subject choice than any single site in the city. Principals avoided having to make any staff redundant and turned around the views of a country community fast becoming very disillusioned with

their public schools. From feeling that the job was one of managing an unpopular decline, the principals collectively redesigned the educational provision, and in so doing, aspects of their jobs.

This example is important in three ways:

it disrupts the notion that principals' work is/ ought to be confined to one site and suggests that in some circumstances, looking inside the school for solutions may not be what is required. It offers the idea that shared leadership may be horizontal (across schools) as well as vertical. the importance of establishing new systems to build new ways of doing things is very clear. Without changed arrangements for staffing, finances, time, buildings and governance the cluster would have failed. Without building in various kinds of meetings, movements around schools and particular kinds of conversations, the cluster would have failed the significance of the goal was a key to bringing about change. This was not a 'vision' per se, nor a mission. Rather it was a profoundly pragmatic exercise around which there were huge emotional investments and a remarkable confluence of needs. The cluster provided a solution for the different problems of teachers, students and their families - and the state system which managed to more efficiently attract, induct and retain teachers in a country location, and demonstrate improved student achievement through the cluster arrangement.

And again redesign was both the process and product.

(3) co-principalship for a family-friendly workplace

The school in question, *The Holy Cross*, is situated in a leafy green suburb of a city. Housed in graceful Victorian redbrick buildings, it is run by a Catholic order, which includes Australia's near saint, Mary MacKillop. These particular nuns have a strong commitment to social justice. Their constitutions state

... we are called to live justly ...

Commitment to the poor is commitment to conversion and mission.

It is a call to encounter God in the many faces of the poor,

to learn from them,

to receive from them,

to support them in their struggle for justice and equity. It requires of us a simple lifestyle

and calls us to promote justice

in our local community

and in the wider community (Order of St Joseph Constitutions 17)

Teachers in this school do not develop a vision or moral purpose. They sign onto one that already exists.

One of the tenets of the order relates to the importance of family. Thus it was hardly surprising when, faced with the task of shifting the principalship of the school from the religious to the laity, an immediate concern was about the impact of the position on the family life of the new lay incumbent. The retiring head of the school reasoned that her successor could not be expected to devote her life to the school in the same way as a religious could be expected to, or indeed, as the job demanded. One possible solution then was to have two people share the position so that each of them could also spend time with their own families. And

perhaps, if one of the people was male and the other female, the school itself could become more family-like².

The two existing Deputies were approached separately and asked if they would be prepared to work as co-principals of the school. They agreed. In order for the scheme to work effectively, some specific systems had to be put in place:

- (a) the common narrative told by the co-principals is that where one is present, both are.
- (b) the two retained their previous portfolios of Curriculum and Administration, but share the tasks formerly undertaken by the principal
- (c) each co principal kept their former office and the former principals office is retained for co principal work either singly or together
- (d) the joint secretary to both co-principals acts as a significant conduit of information
- (e) no new Deputies were appointed, but the number of middle managers were increased and they form the senior management team with the co-principals. The middle managers have reduced teaching commitments.
- (f) after hours and weekend work is shared between the two principals equally
- (g) each principal is able to take a negotiated sabbatical at regular intervals to replenish, revive and reflect

The co-principalship scheme is acceptable to parents and students, is cost neutral and has allowed each co-principal to have time to spend with their own families. In addition, middle managers have taken up greater responsibilities and while they receive no additional remuneration for this, they are certainly well placed to compete for promotion positions in other schools.

This is a redesign which does not affect teaching learning programmes although it has changed the pastoral system in the school, as students are no longer sent to Deputies but are seen within the flattened leadership-management structure. However it has significantly shifted one of the major problems of the principalship namely the intensity of the work, and the resulting lack of private 'down time'.

We now turn to another instance of co-principalship in a religious order, the Brigidines. When a male principal, Chris, when appointed to a P-12 girls school, *Sister Brigid College*, he considered that it was appropriate symbolically to also have a female principal. The Brigidines had already well- established practices of co-principalship, as well as a mentoring scheme for succession planning in through associate principalships. They encouraged the advertising, selection and appointment of his co-principal, Mary, a teacher at the school with a long term leadership role.

The co-principalship developed through negotiation, although certain organisational principles were established early on, and took a spatially collaborative and shared approach viz:

- there was a shared office and secretary in a large room, with desks on each side facing a long meeting table.
- both answered requests regardless of issue
- there was no division of labour although one tended to focus on curriculum and the other on administration, but these foci were swapped each year

² We note the heteronormative nature of this thinking, but it congruent with the overall view of the Catholic church. Despite the historical example of the rebellious Mary Mackillop who was excommunicated for her support for the education of 'fallen women and illegitimate children', the same (or perhaps more) courage cannot reasonably be expected of her successors. This is a systemic belief.

both attended the major events with both speaking, while distributing smaller events that were less symbolically important between them, reducing their workload
both recognised their differences and respected them, but had overall consensus about the aims of the school and its educational philosophy
either could sign forms although they consulted on important issues
there was no deputy principalship, although when Chris was seconded one day a week, an associate principal was able to move to 'learning on the job' at his desk
all communications were signed jointly whoever wrote them

This democratic and shared approach has significant symbolic meaning, and the perception of the co principals is that it has filtrated into teacher perceptions of the role as being more appealing. It has also changed the ways in which teachers and students worked. There is a sense of collaborative decision making and shared leadership throughout the school where teams and co-leaders are utilised in staff and student committees, projects and groups. Parents also see that leadership is more openly accessible, and they appreciate their capacity to choose, as with staff, who they approach. Despite this, there is a significant gender division of labour that has emerged as staff, students and parents all see the female co-principal as more person friendly. This example is more about the alignment of the principalship with the Brigidine philosophy of shared governance and democratic living.

(4) multi-campus restructuring

This case is drawn from the experience of what were originally seven schools, one high school and six primary schools. The high school and two primary schools were located in a regional country town while the other four primaries were in neighbouring small villages. Despite a viable wine growing, olive oil and gourmet food industry in the region, the enrolments of all of the schools was dwindling. The customary procedure in closing schools in the state system was to develop a district plan developed through consultation with parents and other stakeholders. In this case one of the possibilities explored was to retain all of the sites but to restructure them into one K-12 school, *Olivegrove College*. This was by far the most acceptable option for the communities who were most concerned about young children traveling significant distances on school buses.

The multicampus school was formed and a school principal position was advertised across the state. When appointed, the task of the successful applicant, Bill, an experienced secondary principal, was to design the management and leadership structure and systems. The result was a complex mix of staffing, meetings and systems:

- (a) There is 1 principal, 7 campuses and 5 sites, There are 7 deputy principals/campus leader-managers.
- (b) There is also 1 school Business Manager (a new and higher level of administrative position was created for this school), and 7 finance officers on each site. The business manager handles all accounts and cash flow, and brings together campus requirements for equipment and bulk supplies. A system of school credit cards (one for every teacher) allows for budgets to be highly decentralised.
- (c) Each campus manager has one K-12 educational development responsibility as well as specific site everyday management responsibility
- (d) The senior managers (principal, campus manager and finance managers) meet weekly. The agenda is fixed: good news, staff issues, finance (no more than 15 minutes), curriculum, development projects, other administrivia (15 minutes at the end of the meeting). Responsibility

for leading the curriculum item is rotated around the campus managers, while the principal is responsible for leading the development issue. He also monitors the balance of the meeting to ensure that time is not eaten up by everyday issues

(e) The principal is not replaced when on leave for any time: then campus leader-managers are all given an additional financial allowance. The principal is heavily involved in professional associations (state, national and international) and in system work and this leave happens quite frequently but does not disrupt everyday school life

(f) The curriculum is a mix of locally taught face to face and distance provision for some secondary subjects

(g) There is joint staff development including in K-12 key learning areas as well as in age specific issues e.g. early years, middle school.

(h) There is one governance body with parent, student and teacher representatives drawn from each site

This redesign was driven in the first instance by strong political and moral considerations but was realized by a combination of staffing decision and infrastructure provision, and maintained largely through the 'meeting agenda' which forces educational issues to the fore, allowing Deputies to bring their K 12 leadership into a shared space and dialogue. The Principal is sanguine about its success and suggests that after five years of multi-campus operation, it may be time for a change to maintain energy and commitment and to prevent a residual slide back into separate sites, rather than a one school orientation.

In a second multi campus school, *Brownhill College* in a middle class suburb of a large city, the amalgamation of four government high schools was a consequence of declining enrolments, in part due to the demographic decline of an age-cohort and increased competition (there were a large number of private schools in the vicinity and other public schools under new funding arrangements based on rezoning and enrolments). The new structure was based on three 7-10 'feeder' campuses and a senior secondary college. With the introduction of global budgets, greater flexibility was possible across four campuses. The senior college was to attract students back from the private sector as these were the years when many moved to the private schools in this region. The organisational structure was of

(a) three campus principals and a senior College principal, located at the senior school

(b) one office manager with assistance on each campus

(c) weekly meetings for at least three hours of the four principals in which issues such as curriculum planning, budgets, staffing etc were discussed

(d) all principals sat on school council

(e) there was no division of labour as each campus sought to create a market niche dependent on their neighbourhood catchments as they dealt with the localised market

(f) While all discussions in the principal team were open, the final decision rested with the College principal rather than voting, although consensus was sought through long sessions and strategic planning.

(g) There was little shared teaching or curriculum provision across campuses.

Due to funding arrangements based on enrolments, the school bore the cost of maintenance of any under-use of each campus. There was also a sense of distance between the leadership team (principals) and staff, although this varied in each campus, in part due to size but also personalities. Teachers at the junior campuses were somewhat disgruntled as the senior campus was more readily able to capture a market because of its comprehensiveness and size - it had

pooled four schools' senior students. They also felt that their campuses were continually under threat.

(5) Community based leadership

This case is of a P-12 community school in an indigenous community. Given the lack of a pool of experienced indigenous principals, and community dissatisfaction with white principals, but also a commitment to community involvement in the governance of local indigenous schools, the administrative solution was a principal mentor program. A white principal with experience was appointed as a mentor for the indigenous community, and their task was to negotiate cultural relations and differences between the school community and the white education bureaucracy.

The indigenous principal Judy was not seen to have any authority other than what was given to her by the leaders and elders of the community. She was recognised as having special responsibilities and tasks delegated to her as a community member with regard to the principalship, but it did not give her any higher authority. She was obligated to listen to the teachers, workers at school, parents and community leaders, and she looked to the community leaders for guidance about major decisions concerning administration, funds, curriculum and the daily organisation of schooling eg. non attendance. She was not 'the boss' (Ngurruwutthun & Stewart, 1996). The white principal mentor, whose role became more of an advocate for the community to the bureaucracy but within government requirements and regulations, was caught between community expectations of being a constant presence (and then symbolically being seen to be in control) and not being 'known' to the community.

This case is insightful as it indicates important cultural differences about understandings of leadership, community and education. In this case these emerged in administrative forms that were not structurally hierarchical but with value systems that were based on 'both ways learning', mutual engagement and respect, but with different social ordering around the role of elders.

Educational futures

These five cases support the truism that one size does not fit all when it comes to reshaping schooling and schools. But while there is no singly template for redesign, there are particular trajectories that can be draw from these cases. There is a complex ecology of leadership and management implicated in redesign: it includes

- ❑ *Spatial practices*: the use of architectural space and community as a pedagogical space
- ❑ *Temporal practices*: time allocated for research, reflection, planning and dialogue
- ❑ *Cultural practices*: attention to the symbolic, identity work, recognition of expertise and experience
- ❑ *Structural practices*: this ranges from minimal structures, looser coupling and more networking on a contingent basis both within the organization and externally, as nodes of networks, to more multilayered structures
- ❑ *Communication practices*: where the focus is on knowledge production and dissemination, then processes of exchange, sharing experience, ideas, accessibility then communication systems focus on these aspects. Where the issue is about cost efficiencies and survival, then it is on a need to know basis, and is more top down. When democratic

deliberation was central then communication tended to be shared on the grounds of ownership

- *Social practices*: Leadership is a collective endeavour, and while this aspect tends to be ignored in current principal position descriptions, our investigation confirms the centrality of relationships to any redesign project. Indeed, we suspect that how any redesign fosters collaborative and productive relationships that impact on learning may well be the key normative benchmark³

We do however wish to highlight three important aspects that have emerged from our cases. It seems that what appeared most likely to influence the process and product, the form and effect of how leadership was reconstructed were:

(1) the purpose and rationale for undertaking such a fundamental change.

For example, *Gumville High* was established with a particular mandate that meant focusing both on holistic student care and learning as well as teacher professional learning communities. The co-principalship at *Sister Brigid College* arose out of concerns about representations of leadership and also the philosophical underpinnings and system supports for such a model. *The Holy Cross* redesign was connected with a commitment to equity, fairness and family, and *Olivegrove College* and the *Northern Regional Consortium* were both committed to saving a rich and diverse local educational provision in rural areas. The sense of purpose was translated into a narrative to which a broad cross section of staff, students, families and local community could accept and support. By contrast, the suburban multi-campus senior/junior school *Brownhill College* was created in response to external market, demographic and financial threats and indicated a greater sense of fragmentation.

(2) the capacity to develop infrastructure to support and shape the redesign

Gumville High was designed with curriculum and pedagogy, team work and shared leadership as the focus and the technical and architectural infrastructure of the school supported it. The suburban multi-campus model *Brownville College* however lacked technical infrastructure, and some of the junior campuses were rundown, thus draining resources. This sense of competitiveness was intensified as each junior school was offering 'choice' through a different profile. The key issue that distance produced within the multicampus model was distancing also between principals and staff. However, both *Olivegrove College* and the *Northern Regional Consortium* had highly sophisticated ways in which money, decisions, appointments, teaching via ICT and face to face events cemented the continued to build the joint endeavour. In several of the cases the capacity to appoint staff and to vary the staffing mix was important to success – in each case this was not effected by caveat of a principal but through processes which included the state system and local governance structures.

(3) the extent to which the leadership approach was central to the philosophy of school and community life

This was most evident in the co-principalships and the indigenous community approach. Here there was an imbrication of ways of being and ways of doing that are harder to replicate in mainstream secular state schools with highly diverse

³ This however is a particular empirical deficit in leadership scholarship, and while we reject those kind of projects that establish causal models between leadership and student learning, we do think that there is a need for much more nuanced, detailed and ethnographic work about how the connections are made

populations. However it is important to note that in three of our examples, a rural identity was the fulcrum around which the changes were built. Both Starratt (2003) and Sergiovanni (1992) discuss the notion of moral purpose and its importance, but they do not differentiate between different kinds of schools and their different resources, capacities and capabilities. Some schools may be better positioned than others by virtue of their governance, history or political imperative (e.g. Johnson, McCreery, & Castelli, 2000). Some, on the other hand, may face severe limitations to the degree of philosophical coherence they can achieve, by virtue of their location, levels of local competition, and local histories of dispute (Thomson, 2002). We suspect based on this, and other work, that there are between school differences that make a difference here.

In conclusion we want to draw attention to another important difference in our cases. Some were driven in the first instance by the need to change the school, others the principalship. It is our view that those which focussed firstly on the question of principals' work, looking firstly at co-principalship, with effects flowing from the changes, were much more limited in their effects than the former. These schools looked at the whole and the redesign of principals' work was an integral part of a larger enterprise. Consequently, the work of leading and managing became both process/product and leader/follower of change. However, one of our examples showed how easily thwarted were attempts to redesign schooling on a large scale without a coherent and meaningful ethical and political (spiritual and moral perhaps) purpose. We are drawn to the views of Elmore (2000 p.3) who argues that

the logic of large scale instructional improvement leads to differences in kind rather than differences in degree. If public schools survive, leaders will look very different from the way they presently look, both in who leads and in what these leaders do

It is this kind of redesign which we think matters most, principal shortages notwithstanding. Design of the organisation necessarily focuses on the whole, as well as the parts, on the outcome as well as the process, and on the social reasons why change is needed. Our cases do provide some clues about how this might occur. As the principal of *Olivegrove College* remarked at the end of his interview,

I think sometimes people look at different models and say that's not transferable and our structure isn't because it's the only multi-campus rural school of its size... But the belief structure that underpins it, the cultural stuff, it is helpful in thinking how you might redesign things...

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He argues that the administration of education in the last decades has traditionally not been about the management of what happens in classrooms – pedagogy and assessment- but more the structures and processes around the core work ie ‘de-coupling’ reliant upon individual ‘idiosyncracies’ and ‘volunteerism’. He suggests that administration should therefore not seek to control but invest in the knowledge that resides in the teachers who actually are the agents of improvement, and that principals activities and role flows from this eg direct and distribute resources, energy and time in ways that lead to reciprocity of accountability but capacity. He also argues that it is not merely about selecting the right people to do the job, but that it is about learning to do the right things. Improvement therefore is a property of organizations