



## Growing the next generation of leaders

by Annette Wilson



extends far past this though. Last year we counted fourteen people who served as part of this decision-making group. This is no accident. We have most consciously identified those people who are interested in taking on leadership roles, negotiated areas of interest with these teacher leaders, identified projects or other leadership tasks which

would be appropriate areas for action and fertile ground for learning the lessons of leadership, assigned mentors to each teacher leader and then used all opportunities to create real jobs for people.

**Annette Wilson** is principal of Kimberley Park State School, a large school in the Logan-Beaudesert District just outside of Brisbane. Prior to this Annette was Principal Personnel Officer in the Centre-Leadership Excellence. In this role Annette:

- managed the development and implementation of the Assessment Centre to select principals for band 10/11 schools.
- assisted the research program on the work of leaders in Queensland schools and supported the writing of the **Standards Framework for Leaders**; and
- was a member of the state-wide review group to investigate the recruitment and selection process for principals.

For many years, administrators have been told that there is an emerging leadership shortage. As we 'baby boomers' move into retirement it seems not enough people are sufficiently interested in our jobs to replace us. However, very little is done either at the system level or at the local level to grow these future leaders.

I can think of no more important job for educational leaders than growing the next generation of leaders. This is more than identifying people who may be interested in such roles. It means deliberately and purposefully providing opportunities for these aspirants to have meaningful opportunities to take on leadership roles and to develop their leadership competence.

This brief article gives some insight into the practical steps that can be taken at the school level to ensure the development of the next generation of leaders. We are fortunate at Kimberley Park State School that we are a large school (1,050 students) and therefore support a larger administrative team – a principal, three deputy principal positions and a registrar. Our leadership team

This practice of course is informed by a commitment to participative management practices. All workplaces are better places in which to work when we are able to draw on the hearts and minds of those who share a stake in the community to determine the way in which things will be done. I also draw on the research work from the *Centre for Creative Leadership* (CCL) which states that it is the experiences that each of us has that ensures that we develop the skills we need to be effective leaders. I also draw consistently on the work of Michael Fullan.

In his most recent book *Leadership Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action* (2005) Fullan labels this new breed of leader as the 'new theoretician' and describes them as leaders at all levels of the system who proactively and naturally take into account and interact with larger parts of the system as they bring about deeper reform and help produce other leaders working on the same issues.

At Kimberley Park we take every opportunity for teachers to take on leadership roles. We also ensure that individuals do not simply take on more work in addition to a full-time load. Where individuals accept significant leadership roles we look at our flexible staffing options to provide time for people to address these leadership tasks.

We also take every opportunity that movement in our designated leadership roles provides. We have, for example, a deputy principal who is a mother of young children. In her time at our school she has taken two twelve-month periods of family leave and returned initially two days a week and then three. Whilst this deputy has been on leave we have taken the opportunity to 'split' this position and provided opportunities for a number of people

to take on either part or all of a deputy principal role. Currently Michelle is working .6 whilst two other teacher leaders act as deputy principal one day a week to lead in their chosen area. One of these leads our task force on assessment and reporting whilst the other co-ordinates our special need programs.

In the role that these people have as deputies we ensure that they experience the reality of an administrator's life. Whilst they have one priority area on which to focus they also act as a member of the leadership team with the resultant understanding that successful leaders keep their purpose in mind whilst they move through their daily activities. They come to realise that while they will be constantly interrupted, while there will be many people who want just a minute of their time(!) they have to organise themselves such that they act on their own priority areas and achieve the expected outcomes.

Fullan suggests that it takes 'about ten years of cumulative development to become a highly effective school leader'. Our process has been to give individuals an opportunity of being a member of a task force or a group that is convened to review an area of our strategic agenda. Individuals who manage these tasks well and express an interest in the role of leader then are usually given a management task such as designing the specialist timetable or managing the non-contact timetable or allocation of teacher aide time. If these people then express an interest in progressing we identify components of our strategic agenda which lend themselves to leadership by a person with this level of experience.

My role as principal is to structure these learning opportunities; to give individuals an opportunity to explore the task, to think about what is possible, to negotiate expected outcomes for the end of the project and any resources the person may need in order to complete the task. This includes providing contacts for these people who will be useful in the project that they have chosen to lead. I then meet with them regularly to discuss their progress and to help them identify the way forward in their activity. Personally I think it is important not to tell people what needs to be done. My experience is that people who are closer to the action in the first place usually come up with better ideas. My role is just to help them to do what they think ought to be done.

The interesting bonus is that many other people within our school understand the demands of leadership. Instead of having a clear separation between the roles of administrator and teacher, we have many people who live

in both worlds and who can readily explain what we are doing at a point in time and why. The pay-off has been a very positive organisational culture. We recently had access to our school opinion data. Members of staff were overwhelmingly supportive of all that we do with staff morale in the highly satisfied category and scores in excess of state and like-schools benchmarks. Data that demonstrates that not only do these processes work, they also have a positive impact on all that a school does!

Another, and perhaps unexpected bonus, is the personal support that I derive from this wider leadership team. In another article in this journal, Brenda Beatty suggests that being a principal can be a very lonely role and that principals must give time to ensuring that they build networks which provide emotional support. This has certainly been my experience at Kimberley Park. As we have moved further into a distributed model of leadership I have realised that many more people understand my role and appreciate the demands that I face. I have a greater sense of emotional support from members of this team which sustains me.

To date we have been reasonably successful in growing future leaders. We have had one of our deputies promoted to Band 9 principal, one of our teacher leaders (acting DP) promoted to principal Band 6 and another two to substantive deputy principal positions. More important than this perhaps is that in doing this we have established a highly productive and positive organisational culture – one which continuously embraces change – even searches for ways to continuously enhance what we do.

Other researchers would suggest that the main mark of an effective principal is not just his or her impact on the bottom line of student achievement, but also on how many leaders he or she leaves behind who can go even further. I am very proud of the number of people in our school who have expressed an interest in leadership roles and for whom we have crafted opportunities to learn the skills of leadership. Hopefully when the time comes for me to retire there will be an extensive pool of people who will apply for my job and I will have confidence that there are many people who will continue the work that I have valued.

## References

Fullan, M. (2005) *Leadership and Sustainability: System Thinkers in Action*, Corwin Press, California.

The Centre for Creative Leadership: [www.ccl.org](http://www.ccl.org)