



School leadership: back on track?

A National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership has been established to enhance the effectiveness and standing of the teaching profession in Australia. FRAN HINTON explores the importance of school leadership and looks at some points of focus for the Institute.

School leaders are the opinion formers for the next generation.

THIS IS an exciting time for school leadership. For the first time in Australia we have a national body with the explicit purpose of advancing school leadership—the new National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership (NIQTSL).

The Institute provides a national voice and support for the teaching profession, encouraging excellence and helping lead Australian

education by supporting and advancing the effectiveness of teaching; strengthening the profession; and research.

Part of its genesis lies in increasing recognition of the importance of the teaching profession, school leadership and the role of the profession in guiding the future development of education.

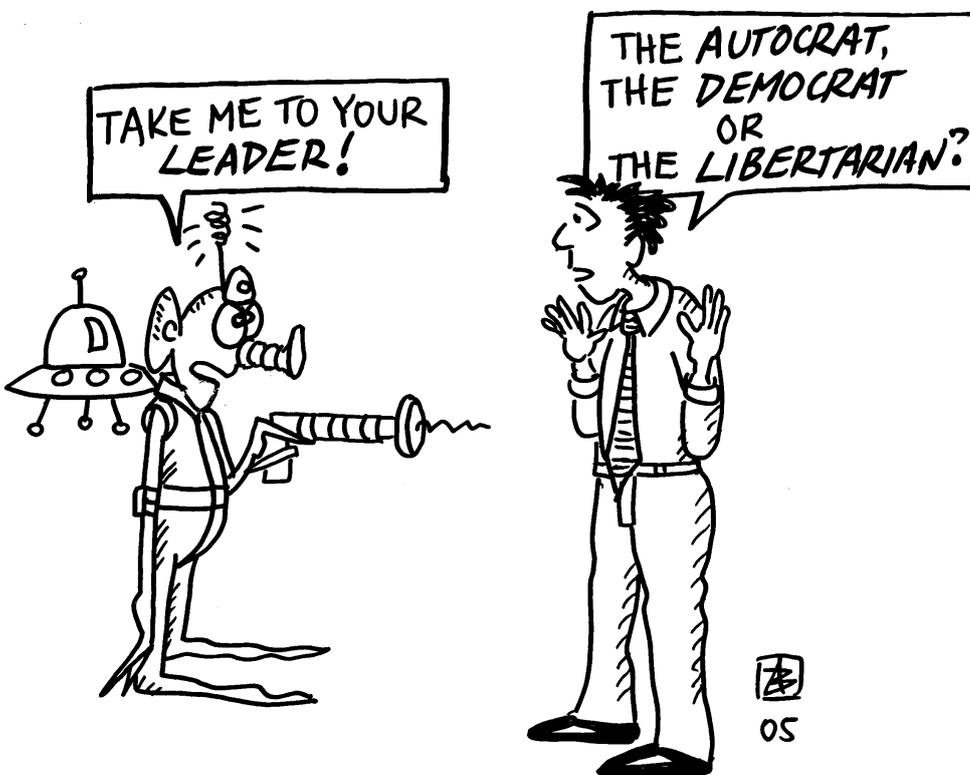
Board member of the Institute and president of the Australian Primary Principals' Association,

Tom Croker, believes there has been a decade of neglect in terms of leadership development. This lack of leadership development is now making it difficult to attract applicants let alone fill vacancies with those who possess effective leadership qualities.

'Fortunately the emphasis is now turning to a sustainability that identifies succession planning as a critical factor in the equation. Turn-over of leadership is not the problem; rather whether there is any attention to continuity of direction. Successful leadership should not be judged only on how a given leader affects the workings of their school but on how many effective leaders the leader leaves behind,' he said.

There is well established support for the importance of school leadership. A comprehensive review of evidence on school leadership by researchers from the Universities of Minnesota and Toronto concludes that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning.

At the recent Australian Secondary Principals' Association conference many people spoke about the importance of leadership, including international lawyer and corporate social responsibility specialist, Jason Yat-sen Li.



'School leaders are the opinion formers for the next generation. Young people always remember the quality of the teaching they had. School leaders also need to be the dreamers—for the young people,' he said.

The importance of school leadership has been picked up by educational authorities and professional associations in Australia and overseas. An increased emphasis can be seen in programs at State, system and individual school level on standards of school leadership and professional development. The Australian Government-funded Dare to Lead program is a good example. The program 'supports Australian school principals to improve Indigenous education outcomes and to work for reconciliation in their schools'.

Another example is the Australian Principals' Association's Professional Development Council's 'Learn Lead Succeed' strategy which will 'support principals and their associations in building the leadership capacity of their schools, and Australian schools generally'.

What is particularly interesting about the current situation is that professional associations, particularly principals' associations, are at the forefront, driving the agenda for more explicit national standards for teaching and school leadership and more support for developing school leaders of the future. Many of these professional associations were involved in the development of the Institute.

The Australian Secondary Principals' Association sees success of the NIQTSL as essential for the development of the profession of school leadership and administration, and the revitalisation of quality teaching in our schools.

The Australian Science Teachers Association sees the Institute as



having the potential to improve the professionalism of teachers and produce better outcomes for students in our schools.

Member of the Board and practising teacher, Anne Tumak, believes all teachers are school leaders in one context or another.

'Teachers engage in leadership in a variety of situations that need to be recognised and fostered. For example, professional teaching association activities, extra curricula projects, welfare projects, union activities and community activities. Leadership should not be perceived as a 'positional' attribute,' she said.

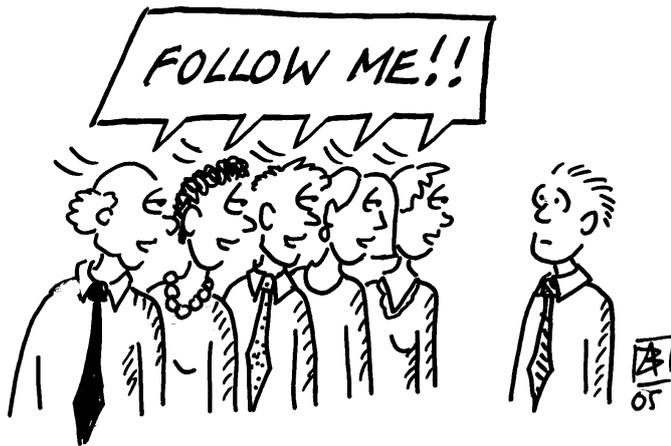
Anne feels that with generational changes and many new entrants to the profession, a more active approach to leadership development in educational contexts is needed.

'We need to understand how to develop participation and create structures that allow teachers to work and learn together and share leadership responsibilities. Leadership is about contributing to, learning from and influencing the

learning of others. However it is also about creating the opportunities for others to learn. Leadership needs to be defined to involve strategic leadership that encourages and nurtures quality teaching and enhances student learning,' she said.

School leadership comes in many guises. At one level the concept is relatively simple. It's about knowing what needs to be done and why, how to do it and who needs to be involved and having the perseverance and commitment to see it through. At another level, it is one of the most complex of roles, involving a large range of people—students, teachers, parents, a community with differing views, aspirations, circumstances and challenges.

Working at these different levels requires great skill. Research by the Universities of Minnesota and Toronto shows that many factors decide what it is to be a successful leader. Good leaders take into account class size, level of schooling, geographical location and the like. They use a variety of



leadership styles and techniques according to the circumstances. They have an intuition for what needs to be done and how to best go about it.

'The principalship is the kind of job where you're expected to be all things to all people. Even with growing demands and increasing expectations, the problem is not just the sheer amount of work but it is also the inconsistent and ambiguous messages. Take control, but follow directives; make improvements, but run a smooth ship,' Tom Croker says.

Fostering leaders at various levels must be a key strategy for this decade. The work of the NIQTSL is critical to addressing the issues around sustaining the level of leadership required for our schools.

The environmental slogan 'Think globally, act locally' offers food for thought in school leadership developments. The importance of education to Australia's economic and social wellbeing gives a real imperative to the notion of thinking nationally with a global dimension. At the same time, the importance of responding to individual needs and local issues, and providing the opportunities that promote innovation gives the imperative for acting locally.

The Institute was established to

enhance the effectiveness and standing of the teaching profession. An early initiative will be the introduction of a national school leadership learning program. To be developed in close association with the relevant education professional organisations, it will be offered (from 2006) as an ongoing leadership development opportunity for high performing teachers and school leaders drawn from schools around Australia.

The Institute is fostering work on leadership standards that will apply to teachers and principals in their performance of leadership functions in both primary and secondary schools. It also has a strong focus on standards for highly accomplished teaching.

As the recent Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) survey shows, by international standards Australian schools are high achievers. The strength of Australian education lies in a continual quest for improvement. National leadership standards will help maintain focus and avoid complacency.

Craig Deayton, principal at MacKillop College in Tasmania and a member of NIQTSL Interim Board, said 'the opportunity that NIQTSL provides for a national approach, bridging the many divides in the education community

and uniting the profession through its shared wisdom, is an historic one'.

Chair of the Board of the Institute, Dr Gregor Ramsey, believes the Institute will play a vital role in education. 'The Institute will work collaboratively with professional bodies to contribute to the quality, reputation and standing of the education profession in the interests of achieving the best possible educational outcomes from Australia's schools,' he said.

To find out more about the Institute's projects and activities visit www.niqtsl.edu.au or email niqtsl@niqtsl.edu.au.

The National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership is made up of a Secretariat, Interim Board and Interim Advisory Council. The Interim Board comprises 15 voting members and 4 non-voting members. The Interim Advisory Council comprises 11 members and has been appointed to advise the Interim Board. The members cover a broad spectrum of key education professional associations, organisations, universities, government and unions.

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