

SPECIAL SECTION

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP . . .

JANE STRACHAN AND JAN ROBERTSON

Department of Professional Studies

Educational Leadership Centre

University of Waikato

This special section of the journal focuses on educational leadership. It brings together many of the concepts and ideas, that we, the guest editors, have worked to develop in the School of Education at the University of Waikato, both in the postgraduate leadership programme and through the work of the Educational Leadership Centre. In 1990 we established New Zealand's first university-based educational leadership centre at the University of Waikato. The guiding vision of this initiative was to develop a structure to provide for educational leadership development at the interface of research, theory and practice. The Educational Leadership Centre has been involved in conducting professional development and research contracts, providing seminars and workshops on current leadership issues, establishing networks for the support and development of educational leaders, and providing national and international links between practitioners and researchers.

We introduce the articles in this special section, not in the order in which they appear, but rather in how they contribute to and illustrate key aspects of the educational leadership programme. Over this past decade we have worked with our colleagues to establish a leadership development programme, through both qualifications and professional development, based on the following important key principles.

Firstly and most importantly, we consciously, and not without controversy, moved away from a paradigm of education management and administration to one of *educational leadership*; a concept that we view as action, change and acting on the system morally and ethically, rather than a concept enshrined in a 'formal' position. Thus the Educational Leadership Centre is not a Principals' Centre or "training for principalship" although our postgraduate programmes certainly prepare educational leaders for this responsibility. We have consciously worked to broaden people's understanding of what leadership is and what it is to be a leader (see McConnell, Robertson & Strachan, 1994) so that participants in our programmes see themselves as leaders, and recognise the importance of this leadership responsibility when they are working in their context, whether it be in health, in higher education, private training organisations or schools and early childhood centres. To date, there has been little literature and research that explores leadership in an early childhood context. Cushla Scrivens's article is therefore particularly timely as she explores the tensions, dilemmas and constraints for those leading kindergartens within a neo-liberal education context.

Secondly, the *mentoring* of graduate leaders and writers has been an important part of our practice. Dr. Charles Webber, from the University of Calgary who has close links with our work in the Educational Leadership Centre writes with Brenda Spencer, one of his postgraduate students to highlight the impact of current reforms in education and the implications for leadership learning. The

work of some of the University of Waikato postgraduate students is also featured in this special section on educational leadership. Noeline Wright, Sherrin Jeffries, and Peter Grootenboer have all studied leadership through our programme and have been mentored in the writing and publishing process through their studies. Noeline Wright's critique of the 'blame women' discourse for boy's underachievement challenges educational leaders "to do a much better job of grappling with issues of gender". Sherrin Jeffries explores the concept of curriculum leadership. She comments on why we need good curriculum leaders in Aotearoa today, particularly with the introduction of the seven new curriculum documents. In his article on teacher appraisal, Peter Grootenboer suggests that educational leaders need to review their appraisal systems and identify the assumptions about teachers, and the teaching task, upon which appraisal policies are based.

Thirdly, our commitment to *social justice* has guided us throughout this journey, to examine power relations and ways of knowing and working with people (Robertson, 1997; Strachan, 1999a, 1999b). We have sought to challenge the taken for granted understandings of what it means to be a leader so the voices of those often absent from theory making, such as women and Māori, are heard. The focus on social justice has challenged us in our teaching in the educational leadership programme as we have sought ways to be more inclusive. Marian Court's review of Blackmore's (1999) *Troubling Women: Feminism, Leadership and Educational Change* highlights the importance of working at both the individual and collective levels to challenge exclusionary practices of educational leadership.

Fourth, our belief in linking theory with practice has always been important. All of the contributions make links between theory and practice as it is our belief that *theory and practice must inform one another*. Helen Wildy conducted research through the Educational Leadership Centre earlier this year and her article, with Bill Loudon and Jan Robertson, argues that the use of critical incidents in which principals make decisions in their everyday work, together with a set of dimensions on which performance varied, can be to establish standards for principals' performance.

Fifth, we have a commitment to *honouring leadership in different contexts* and through different cultural lenses. Many of our graduate students studying educational leadership work and live in very different contexts. So, we need to be mindful of the contexts our students are returning to and work to make their learning as relevant as possible. And, finally, we are committed to working in ways that encourage leaders to become *lifelong learners*, researchers and seekers of new knowledge, starting with ourselves.

We hope you enjoy this special section on educational leadership and that it helps to strengthen networks between educational leaders worldwide, no matter what position, what context, what gender and what ethnicity. We also hope that it informs and supports you in your own leadership practice.

REFERENCES

- McConnell, R., Robertson, J., & Strachan, J. (1994). The professional practice of teaching. In C. McGee and D. Fraser (Eds.), *The professional practice of teaching* (pp.228-251). Palmerston North: Dunmore Press.
- Robertson, J. (1997). A programme of professional partnerships for leadership development. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 3, 137-152.

Strachan, Jane.(1999a). Feminist educational leadership: Locating the concepts in practice. *Gender and Education*, 11(3), 309-322

Strachan, Jane. (1999b). Feminist educational leadership in a New Zealand neo-liberal context. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 37(2), 121-138.