

Chapter 6

School Leadership and Pedagogical Reform: Building Student Capacity

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the journey of one Australian primary school that participated in an internationally renowned school revitalization project, where the nature and quality of leadership and results of change are able to achieve and sustain pedagogical reform and improve and enhance student achievement. It illuminates the nature of school change and examines its impact on pedagogy and learning. Through mapping a school's journey and a focus on research, changes in practices such as use of frameworks and protocols, teacher professional learning, and the compilation and use of assessment data are explored, as are the vital roles of both teachers and students in achieving change. The inclusion of students in the process, combined with leadership in school-wide pedagogy, is shown to have contributed to building students' capacity for learning besides that of teachers to implement a school-wide approach to pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers how one particular long-term school revitalization project known as IDEAS impacted on pedagogy and students' learning and engagement. It takes the view that a process such as that implemented in this project is necessary for a school community to successfully address an improvement agenda, achieve significant pedagogical improvement and ultimately improve student engagement and learning outcomes. The inclusion of students in the process of reform com-

bined with leadership in schoolwide pedagogy and practice is shown to have contributed to building students' capacity for learning as well as that of teachers, to implement a schoolwide pedagogical approach that assure consistency in practice. In this exploration an attempt is made to reconceptualise pedagogy to come to grips with the nature of a pedagogy that appeared central to the outcomes of this reform – 'GAMMA pedagogy'. It argues that for schools to develop students as independent lifelong learners, who are successful and have confidence and aspirations for their futures, there

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6591-0.ch006

needs to be a shift away from the traditional view of teachers as ‘transmitters of information’ and students whose task it is to remember what has been ‘taught’. In contrast, 21st century students are seen as ‘active learners’ who can readily engage in the classroom dialogue and are able to discuss and justify why they are doing what they are doing in terms of their learning.

MAIN FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

Through a focus on research the chapter moves beyond the typical description of a social constructivist approach to learning to one that is in keeping with that of Mayer (2012) who exemplifies a more in depth portrayal of the democratic classroom. The notion of third space is utilized to help illuminate the resultant construction of ‘GAMMA pedagogy’. The objectives of the chapter are to describe the school’s change process, show how it impacts on leadership and pedagogical reform, investigate the nature of students’ learning and engagement, and synthesize emergent messages for reconceptualising pedagogy as a capacity building phenomenon. The chapter provides the essential background context of the research in terms of understanding the need for and kind of school reform in the context of Australia, and the nature of and role of the education system applicable to the school under study and the kind of leadership involved. It will conclude with a discussion of how the notion of GAMMA pedagogy is reflective of the kind of change in school practices that will more effectively equip students to embark on a lifelong learning journey. By elevating the discussion to hypothesise the notion of ‘a third space’ (Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo, & Collazo, 2004; Oldenburg, 1999; 2000) in which to reconceptualise pedagogy and learning for the 21st century, the nature of the change needed becomes clearer.

BACKGROUND

The Chapter View

The importance of leadership in education to enable school reform that can lead to improved student achievement is very well established, but there remains a question about what schools might do to successfully achieve this. The stance taken here is that in order to reform pedagogy and improve student learning and engagement the need for improvement should be acknowledged by all stakeholders in a positive light. School leadership needs to facilitate change through working with stakeholders, so that all are involved in collaboratively designing, owning and implementing their vision for the future. This includes teachers taking leadership of pedagogical reform and students developing the capacity to engage in and discuss their learning (Healy, 2008). Furthermore, it is argued that pedagogy for 21st century learners needs to be reconceptualised as a capacity building phenomenon for both teachers and students, where the language of learning and thinking, classroom dialogue, teacher-teacher dialogue (Isaacs & Smith, 1994), interactive tools, strategies and strategic use of resources to achieve explicit goals are mutually understood, and applied for students to continue learning and adapting to our dynamic, globalised world. School leadership in this sense is seen as a shared responsibility where leadership is distributed throughout the school according to various roles and responsibilities, such that teachers take leadership of the school’s pedagogical approach to provide quality and consistency in practice and creativity in delivery. The principal is seen as a metastrategic leader (Behn, 1991; Crowther, Andrews, Morgan & O’Neill, 2012) who is able to facilitate change through incorporating transformative leadership practices that recognise the need to collectively build pedagogical knowledge (Schuh, 2003) in

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