

# Growing Motivated, Leaderful Teaching Teams

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Recently I had the opportunity to have a conversation with several of the teachers from a highly motivated, leaderful teaching team. Often one of the questions I hear from leaders, managers and centre owners is how do you create a team that is motivated, passionate and committed to life long learning? “Leaders need to understand the importance of influencing the manner in which people work together to create an organisational culture where people have an intrinsic need to do their best”, (Burns, 1978). I am going to call the owner of this centre, the licensee, as she is not the sole leader. “Leadership truly belongs to every one”. (Sergiovanni (1994) This is one of the quotes that ELP have embraced when thinking about leadership. This centre has embraced the ideal of leadership belonging to everyone and have made it a part of the the has centre's culture.

As I spoke with the licensee and the teachers I asked them to explain how they had created a highly motivated team. We weren't too far into the conversation when I felt it was like asking which came first, the chicken or the egg?



I did suggest to the team that from what I was hearing they had created a sandwich. Teachers practice was sandwiched between the Pou Whakahaere (governance and management) structures that created the freedom for motivated teachers to work. Added to this is the notion that the same values which are held for children's learning are mirrored for teachers, who as a result are able to stretch their own learning without fear, and mistakes are celebrated and analysed as learning opportunities. So was it the licensee's vision or the image of the child

that teachers held, that came first to create this community? Leadership is based on what the team collectively values for children's learning and maybe that is the answer to the question. The licensee explained how over time, by listening to new ideas presented by teachers, aspects of practice and the environment are changed. This sharing of ideas builds a deep understanding of how the community of learning and teaching works. Just as we see exploration gain momentum as passionately interested children gather a group around them, we see the same momentum occur for a learning and teaching culture as teachers articulate their ideas to their colleagues and their commitment and enthusiasm rubs off. A vibrant learning culture grows as the team researches their ideas further. Teachers are trusted and encouraged to take the lead just as the children are. They have many opportunities to articulate their practice such as when new families are shown through the centre - each and every teacher has the opportunity to talk about the teaching and learning practice. This is how it should be as every teacher should be able to articulate their practice and be so deeply connected to the kaupapa/philosophy of the centre that they would be able to share this with families and colleagues. Fullan, (p.82) says that “intrinsically meaningful experiences equals ownership.”

The team has been part of a Centre of Innovation research project which as we know creates a shared understanding about wise practice. Self review is certainly one of the best methods of team building in early childhood. This will have impacted on the teachers owning the centre's way of being and doing, as they have reflected on and shaped what it means to teach and learn there. Teachers have shaped the teaching practice just as a child shapes their learning while being supported by listening teachers. The licensee has created a space where everyone can fly and feel supported to share ideas and passions. The teachers are respected for the knowledge and passion they bring to the learning environment. What does

this mean - teachers have the freedom to fly again just as children have.



I do not think there would be a metaphorical bucket of cold water on site that would be used to put out a teachers or children's passions and ideas. Rather everyone is listened to and respected - no one is fearful about sharing ideas, and no one is afraid of making mistakes as they are seen as learning opportunities. Einstein said two important things about trying new ideas and being a reflective thinker they were, "Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new" and "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

When teachers are being responsive to individual children, whānau and colleagues then they will continually reflect on their practice not choosing to remain static but rather thinking about how they can be responsive to individuals. For this to happen effectively everyone within the centre needs to be able to share ideas and the work of being a reflective centre.

Toffler said, "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write but those that cannot learn, unlearn and relearn." To me this is at the heart of self review as it is the ability to continue moving forward in pedagogical thinking and understanding as we stretch ourselves into new ways of being and doing.

Obviously high quality, motivated teachers are employed in this centre, ones that understand the words of Parker Palmer who said: "In every class I teach, my ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood—and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning". It is the ability of this team to embrace not knowing all the answers to every question but to be a learner on a journey alongside colleagues and children that makes the learning and teaching culture so engaging.

Thoughtful reflective teachers have considered how children feel when they are new to the centre and have created key teachers. Then the team asked, "How do teachers feel when they are new to the centre?", and as a result created support teachers to assist new teachers in unpacking the way teaching and learning unfolds. They have considered how children are passionately engaged with learning when they are driving the learning themselves - this same principle is used for the teachers. Teachers drive practice as they research and stay on the cutting edge of teaching and learning. This is something that is embraced by the teachers who are supported by the licensee through teacher research time so they can reflect and write thoughtful Learning Stories. Children are described as curious learners able to hang out in the fog of uncertainty and play with ideas (Claxton,2002 ). Children and teachers alike are given the opportunity to learn through play. Teachers are encouraged to play with new ideas, based upon current research, even when the path is uncertain. Uncertainty is embraced as a way of continually being at the cutting edge of education.

One of the teachers was describing a child's play and said that she was not necessarily leading as a leader but being 'at the heart of the play'.



These words describe their view of leadership within the centre. Leadership is not held by one person, the boss, but by everyone. Everyone is at the heart of the centre and everyone has the children at the heart of every decision. "Shared or collaborative leadership is opened up when leadership is defined as the product of the endeavours of an interconnected group of individuals" (Rodd,J. 2006, p.16).

So was it the chicken or the egg? Ownership of the centre obviously came first and created the structure to foster a highly motivated teaching

team, however, the teaching team also shaped and continues to shape the governance. Maybe it is not a matter of the chicken or the egg but rather the making of a wonderful sandwich that has quality ingredients that come together to create an education, taste sensation. To answer the question then, how do you create a highly motivated, leaderful teaching team?

- You put together a governance structure that considers first and foremost the best interests of children within a community of learners
- Acknowledge that everyone has ideas that can be shared
- Know that one leader's ideas are not the only way to think which means everything is up for discussion
- Add qualified, reflective teachers



When everyone involved in the centre continues to be open to reflective practice then teaching and learning can become alive and vibrant. "Leadership is a complex process, which is multifaceted and based on reciprocal relationships" (Morgan, 1997). This centre models reciprocity in every relationship - there is not one, single view, but multiply views and thoughts that are collaboratively woven together. Lambert (1998,p.5) said, "When we equate the powerful concept of leadership with the behaviours of one person, we are limiting the achievement of broad based participation by a community or society". Broad based participation by everyone at the centre, teachers, whānau and tamariki, is very evident in their day to day practice as you would expect.

"We can no longer afford a system of education that refuses to get engaged with the mess. We must be willing to join life where people live it. And they live it at this complicated intersection.....So with that acknowledgment of

the mess on whose edge we stand, let me move ahead" (Parker Palmer cited <http://www.couragerenewal.org/parker/writings/heart-of-a-teacher/>).

Leadership involves becoming engaged with the mess, not standing on the edge looking in.

"Leaders aren't born they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work."

-Vince Lombardi

Warren Bennis, a well-known writer on leadership, was quoted as saying, "The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born-that there is a genetic factor to leadership." (Warren Bennis cited <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/w/warrenbenn121715.html>) He goes on to say that this is in fact nonsense and that leaders are "made not born". Fullan (2011. p.82) wrote that great leaders assist others to become leaders. Fullan has a flow to growing leaders which includes,

- Giving people *experience* and building on it.
- Developing *skills*.
- Acquisition of skills increases *clarity*.
- Clarity stirs *intrinsic motivation*.
- Intrinsically meaningful experiences equal *ownership*.
- Doing this together with other generates shared ownership.
- *Persist* no matter what, being flexible as you learn more.

In conclusion for centres thinking about growing a leaderful teaching team and creating wonderful learning environments for children you could start by taking a leaf out of this centres book. Think about the principles of Te Whāriki, the

values you hold for children and questions that Carr, May and Podmore asked:

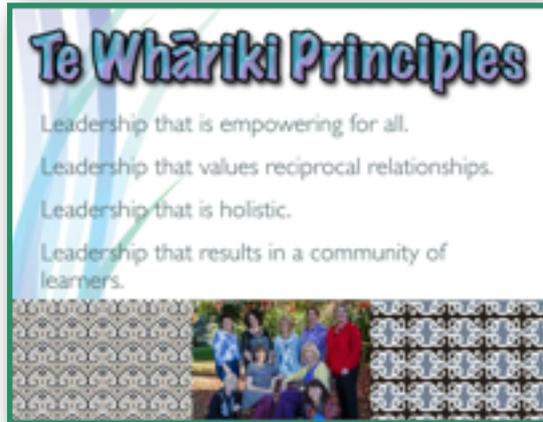
“Do you know me?”

“Do you let me fly?”

“Do you hear me?”

“Is this place fair for us?”

“Can I TRUST YOU?”



Using the questions of Podmore et al. (2001) to reflect on teaching and learning is a good place to start. These questions sit within the frame of Te Whāriki and invite you to “explore your practices from the child’s perspective”. I think this is what this team have accomplished. As they have used the perspective of responding to children for many of the aspects of professional leadership practice. This highly motivated team would ask these questions for all members of their early childhood setting -teachers, tamariki and whānau with the desired outcome of everyone being able to answer yes to each question. Most importantly professional trust is the basic ingredient of cooperation and this can lead to improved team collaboration, therefore growing a motivated leaderful teaching team.

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