Abstract

Teaching new principals how to lead and manage change: signposts from experience

Principals are pivotal to school reform agendas and to reinforce this fact governments across Australia have launched major professional learning programs, leadership standards and performance planning schemes for school leaders. A prevailing message is that successful principals will manage significant, sustained change in schools, which will be measurable through improved student learning outcomes. At the same time, researchers who study organisational change claim that most second-order change programs fail to achieve the improvements intended by their initiators. It is interesting to note, therefore, that despite the array of new leadership development initiatives being rolled out by governments, the topic of managing change is rarely mentioned directly, and is certainly not explicated in any way. It appears that there are few means by which school principals can learn about this challenging area of their work other than through hard, lived experience. This paper focuses on advice from experienced principals at a short-course series devised for newly appointed principals. Although every school and change initiative is different, there are remarkable similarities in principals’ reflections and understandings about leading change. These learnings are discussed in the context of experiences from which they emerged. From these stories of experience, salient signposts are distilled.

Keywords: change management, educational leadership, principals’ induction.