

Aspiring Senior School Leaders

Many teachers aspire to the senior leadership positions in schools. These leadership roles are defined on this continuum as being that of a deputy principal or principal. Aspiring school leaders may be teacher leaders, who in their schools hold an informal leadership role, are members of communities of practice and have availed of opportunities to lead on certain projects in their schools. Aspiring leaders could also be middle leaders who have specific areas of responsibility in schools. Both groups may aspire to move towards senior leadership roles.

In the McKinsey report (2010)¹ the authors suggest that around the world that school systems rely on three types of approach to unlocking and developing future leadership talent:

1. Self-identification by the potential leader and informal mechanisms by which these leaders are coached and are given opportunities to develop in their own schools
2. Providing potential leaders with the opportunities to take programmes/courses to build their leadership capacity
3. Proactively guiding the careers of future leaders by offering them new roles and a myriad of opportunities in their schools along with guidance and support

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (aitsl) (2016)² state that there is;

“No single, defined and common pathway to becoming a principal. Leaders develop in part through individual, on the job development activities such as mentoring and coaching, taking on additional responsibilities or shadowing and observing a principal in a school. Most leaders also develop through formal principal preparation programmes.”

In another aitsl (2017)³ paper they write about the importance of offering;

“Extended experiences that involve learning within the context of work” to “allow individuals to practice and refine their skills in real situations”

In a report commissioned by the Wallace Foundation (2007)⁴, the authors examined worldwide exemplary leadership development programmes. All of the leadership programmes shared the following:

- A curriculum aligned with professional standards
- A philosophy and curriculum which emphasised instructional leadership and school improvement
- Active student centred instruction that integrated theory and practice and stimulated reflection

¹ McKinsey (2010) Capturing the leadership premium. How the world’s top school systems are building leadership capacity for the future, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/capturing-the-leadership-premium>.

² AITSL (2016): Evaluating your Principal Preparation Programs: A Practical Guide.

³ AITSL (2017): Leading for Impact. Australian guidelines for school leadership development.

⁴ Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., & Orr, M. (2007). *Preparing school leaders for a changing world; Executive summary*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

- Social and professional support in the form of mentoring and advising by expert principals
- Vigorous, targeted recruitment and selection to seek out expert teachers with leadership potential
- Internships which allowed participants to engage in leadership responsibilities for substantial period of time under the tutelage of expert veterans

In an article by Davis and Darling-Hammond (2012)⁵ which examined five innovative principal preparation programmes, they concluded that these programmes contained several common features:

“Each is driven by a theory of action that locates instructional leadership at the heart of school reform and where effective school leadership is best developed through the integration of practical and problem-based experiences and research-based knowledge. Each program is also highly selective, under the theory that exemplary leadership best emerges from the cultivation of highly experienced, dedicated, and instructionally competent teacher leaders with strong motivations to become school administrators. And each program provides either full time or part time mentored internships at school or district office sites other than the candidate’s school of employment.”

Research appears to indicate that future senior leaders should be identified and developed. However, according to an OECD Report (2012)⁶, many countries rely on self-selection to fill training and development programmes. They state that “While this approach rewards initiative, it can be inefficient Self-selection does not address a school’s or a jurisdiction’s specific needs for succession planning.”

Some countries in the world do take a proactive approach to identifying and developing future leaders. In the Mc Kinsey Report (2010), which describes how the world’s top school systems are building leadership capacity, the authors maintain that:

“High performing organizations identify potential leaders early and have mechanisms for developing their talents over time, for example, by providing them with opportunities to gain leadership experience, rather than expecting them to emerge or send them through training programmes just before they assume leadership responsibility.”

The importance of professional development of aspiring senior leaders is evident in school systems throughout the world. The research is indicating that these teachers need opportunities to develop in their own schools, experience internships in other settings and be supported by senior leadership preparation programmes. These programmes should admit high potential candidates, and school systems around the world need to find a fair and equitable method of identifying the most suitable candidates for senior leadership

⁵ Davis, S. & Darling-Hammond, L. (2012) Innovative Principal Preparation Programs: What works and How we know. *Planning and Changing Vol. 43, No. 1/2, 2012, pp. 25–45*

⁶ Schleicher, A. (2012), ED., *Preparing Teachers and Developing School Leaders for the 21st Century: lessons from around the world*, OECD Publishing.

positions in schools. These programmes should also place an emphasis on the importance of leading learning as a core activity for senior leaders.