

MONASH POSTGRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION: A REFLECTION OF AN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper is about a reflection of my experience during the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (Leadership, Policy and Change) course at the Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia. This course prepares school leaders to build dynamic, caring learning communities that are resilient, responsive to the importance of skilled decision making. The aim is to assist the participants who undertake this program to become transformational leaders within their educational context. The two academic units of the postgraduate study and leadership seminars provide an extensive knowledge on topics related to leadership, organization, management and change. At the same time I was also exposed to the development, progress and performance of the government schools in the Victorian Education System. The Mentor Shadowing Program without doubt gave me an invaluable experience on developing my leadership qualities in my present school organization.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The role of the principal has changed significantly in the past few years as a result of high stakes accountability in schools. Principals need to develop the skills to survive the changes, the school reforms, and the high-stake accountability that schools are facing. Wave after wave of change flows over the school, at times, never allowing full implementations and success before the new wave of change inundates teachers, classrooms and the school as a whole. The parade of school reforms never seem to cease or end. Hence, being a principal is not only a matter of promotion from an ordinary teacher to a head teacher but more important it is about acquiring new knowledge and skills.

As a newly promoted principal, thus a novice, I need to acquire additional training by attending courses, seminars and workshops on principalship. Thus the offer from the Ministry of Education to attend the Post Graduate Certificate of Education Course at Faculty of Education, Monash University was indeed a golden opportunity to gain new knowledge, skills and experience in school leadership. The Post Graduate Certificate of Education on Leadership, Policy and Change program commenced on the 21st October and ended on 14th December 2007. Thirteen secondary school principals, five senior assistants and two coordinators from IAB attended the program.

This paper will insight on the experience, knowledge and benefits that I've gained from the program. The program not only renewed my spirit, energy and passion for my work in my school but also helped me keep my actions focused and aligned with the vision and mission of my school. In short, this paper is about the reflection of the course or my experience during the two months journey.

2.0 CONTENT OF THE PROGRAM

The two months Postgraduate Certificate of Education was conducted at the Monash University, Clayton Campus. The program prepares school leaders to build dynamic, caring learning communities that are resilient, responsive to the need for change and attuned to the importance of skilled decision making. The main focus of this program is Educational Leadership and School management. This innovative program is based on principles of educational leadership where performing and aspiring school leaders or educators are challenged to realize the potentials within themselves. Since school leaders of today's global context affect changes in their organization at the deepest level, they require appropriate knowledge, skills, exposures and dispositions. It is hoped that through this program, the participants will become transformational leaders within their educational context.



As the first cohort, we were extensively exposed for two months to the curriculum system, innovation and professional development related to the Victorian Education System in Australia. We were given the opportunities to build our capacities as education leaders and change agents in our school organizations. As participants of the program, we were fortunate because the Faculty of Education is experienced in organizing and managing high quality education programs. In addition, the faculty also conducts educational researches and has experienced in managing large groups of participants such as teachers, students, client organizations, as well as other stakeholders.

The program is built on the methodological principles of:

- Stakeholder participation
- Reciprocal relationships
- Leadership from within
- Capacity building
- Mentorship, shadowing, network and partnership
- Quality assurance
- Student focus
- Leadership for change
- Technical expertise
- Flexibility and transferability

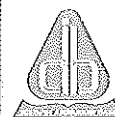
3.0 FEATURES OF THE PROGRAM

The specific features of this program includes:

- A five 4-hour face to face sessions for eight weeks
- A mentor shadowing project where participants were assigned to shadow a current principal mentor/networking relationship was monitored and encouraged.
- Each week there were leaders seminar with invited guest from the Victorian Education Department on various topics such as :
 - i. School leadership in Victoria
 - ii. Human Resources Management
 - iii. Global Budgeting
 - iv. Selecting staff
 - v. Accountability Data
 - vi. School reviews
- Strategic Implementations
- Negotiated workshop based on participants input (a follow up sessions in Malaysia)

4.0 CONTENT OVERVIEW STATEMENT

The course builds learning in a cumulative developmental way. The two units that were offered assisted school leaders to integrate personal, professional and scholarly learning through readings, peer and instructor collaborative teaching and learning approaches, and the requirement of both traditional formal and reflective writing practice. Advanced theories of knowledge management and organizational system and practical approaches to creating dynamic collaborative cultures were provided. A range of curricular, pedagogical, technical, legal, local and global perspective from to view the work of the principalship were considered through variety of lenses conceptualized as environments.



Participants were empowered to become active change agents in their own environments and develop a grounded understanding of the organizational knowledge in their setting, exploring researchable challenges, examining and developing possible action plans in collaboration with student peers, professional colleagues, and their mentors by beginning to review appropriate empirical and theoretical literature. The culmination of this progression will be in a variety of assessment task including an individual Strategic Implementations Plans (SIP). This assessment task enabled the participants to put into action the theoretical understanding in practical senses in their own school context. A valuable component of this was the follow-up sessions in Malaysia (possibly at the time of formal Graduation) where participants would review the development and reportage on SIP action plans with academic staff. In addition, a series of negotiated workshop based equipments of the participants group were offered.

There was a two unit lectures that we had to attend during the eight week course. These lectures, have provided us with so much input towards educational leadership and management in our present school organization.

4.1 UNIT ONE: EDF 6822 LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATION

Taught by Mr. Paul Forgasz, we learned the definitions of leadership and models of organizational leadership within educational settings. The topics include leadership information and leadership as a career, the values and styles mission statements, the identities of leaders, succession, selection and induction processes, heroic and post-heroic models of leadership, including distributed leadership and leadership standard.

The lectures gave us a better understanding of the nature of leadership as a content-bound, attributed status; leadership as a socially and institutionally constructed phenomenon, the typical means by which leaders learn and acquire their leadership and construct career trajectories. We were also exposed to current issues, topics and recent trends in leadership theory and practice, particularly as these apply in a variety of policy contexts, educational settings and the demands and challenges confronting all types of leaders in a variety of context and workplaces.

4.2 UNIT TWO: EDF 6823 MANAGEMENT AND CHANGE

Under the dynamic Dr Zane MaRhea, we studied the theory and practice of managing change in a range of organizational contents but focusing on educational institution. To achieve effective change, particular consideration is given to strategies for managing the effective development of organization and human resource capability. Through her highly unique approach, we managed to explore and understand the nature of organizations practices associated with the managing people and issues of power and authority in a complete globalize context. The lecture also includes topics on human responses to change and a variety of processes concerned with decision making, problem solving and organizational learning and knowledge management.

The unit proved to be beneficial because we have acquired a vast and detailed knowledge and understanding of the major trends in theories of organizations. We also gained invaluable understandings and critical appreciation of new organizational forms and organizational processes; skills in devising a range of strategies and approaches to change management. Apart from that, the unit also provided us with knowledge on team leadership and the enhancement of team-based and organization wide learning and knowledge and skills. Such understanding is required to formulate our own understanding of our own organizational practices.



5.0 LEADERSHIP SEMINARS

The Leadership Seminars proved to be a thought-provoking and a mind opener platform for the participants to know and understand in depth about the practices and performance of schools within the Victorian Education System. These seminars provided the participants with the opportunity to lead beyond their own context and encourage them to make a contribution as system leaders in their own organization. For a new principal such as myself who is preparing for leadership and requires support in gaining better understanding of leadership roles and responsibilities, I found out that the seminars were beneficial in providing a high quality development opportunity. They helped in enhancement of my leadership capacity building. Below are the topics discussed in the Leadership Seminars. School Leadership in Victoria

- ⇒ This topic introduces the principles to the school structures within the Victorian System. In particular, the responsibilities and duties of the modern principal and the autonomy and responsibility of the school principal were discussed in detail. Recent developments in and across the system as to leadership development strategies and development Framework for principals were also discussed.

Human Resource Management

- ⇒ This topic introduced the participants to details of HR (Human Resource) responsibilities and in particular the "hiring and firing" possibilities. In addition we were also provided with knowledge on the work that needs to be done to manage HR issues and staff accountability, professional development, annual performance plans and review processes.

Global Budgeting

- ⇒ A special feature of these topics was how a principal manages and plans strategically within a global budget framework. We also gained insight on how such an approach would work in real practice.

Selecting Staff

- ⇒ Issues such as how a principal goes about advertising and the process of selecting and appointing new staff was addressed in within this topic. This includes discussion regarding the processes involved, the checks and balances that need to be in place, interview techniques, and range of other aspects that need to be considered by principal when selecting staff.

Accountability Model

These topics explained an accountability framework, the implication and its importance across a system such as the Victorian Department of Education.

School Reviews

- ⇒ This topic defines what a school review is and how the model works as part of the Victorian Accountability Framework. The use of evidence/data and how these contribute to the success of such reviews and what review reports look like and how principals see them was covered as well.



6.0 MENTOR SHADOWING PROGRAM

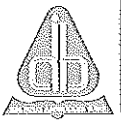
One of the most exciting parts of the course was the Mentor Shadowing Program. This activity was designed to link learning from the two academic units and the Leader's Seminar to the day to day work of experienced principals. The program had given us the opportunity to observe how some of Victoria's senior school leaders work with their teachers to improve learning as well as managing their school organization. We also observed the range of responsibilities that have been given to principals in their "self-managed" school environment. Through this experience the Malaysian Principals are expected to develop their Strategic Implementation Plan (SIP), organizational change and leadership and personal change. The participants had a deeper understanding of what it is like to be a principal of a self-managing school and the difference to the practice in Malaysian schools.

During the program, two Malaysian principals were allocated to a school, once a week from 9.30 am - 4.30 pm. The principal of the school acted as our mentor or a trusted guide or counsellor. The mentor's role is to assist the protégé to develop new professional insight into their professional role. I was partnered with Dr. Aziz Md Nor, a senior lecturer from IAB. For seven weeks, we were at East Doncaster Secondary College (EDSC), a high performing school with Mr. Phillip Gardner as the principal.

From the beginning I strongly believed that principalship should be emphasized as the pivotal role of the principal for school improvement. There is a crucial correlation between school leadership, school culture and student learning. During my Mentor Shadowing Programs at EDSC in Melbourne, Victoria, I was exposed to the idea or philosophy of quality leadership that goes hand in hand with quality learning which was well developed and advocated by Professor Micheal Fullan in 2006. I understand this idea better through the discussions with my mentor, EDSC's principal, as he is a staunch believer of Fullan's idea. I also did additional reading on Fullan's paper, *Quality Leadership Quality Learning, Proof Beyond Reasonable Doubt* (2006). Now, I feel more confident and capable as a principal, not only because I am more knowledgeable and have wider experience but more so because I feel that I am on the right track from the beginning on the philosophy of principalship.

EDSC is a high performing school and is successfully developing its students' skills and values required to make them a functioning member of an increasingly complex society. During the Mentor Shadowing Program I have made some observations and found out some interesting findings about EDSC especially concerning the effectiveness of the teaching and learning processes.

- Teachers at EDSC use multiple sources of data and feedback as part of reflection and evaluation of the effectiveness on their work. They made an analysis of the feedback forms part of the annual performance review process. All teaching staffs meet in groups under the guidance of a leading teacher to plan for their professional development and performance plans. Each teacher has an interview with the principal to discuss their work and to analyze students' performance data and the result of multiple sources of feedback on their performance.
- The provision of technology throughout the college has increased access for students and teachers. Computers, data projectors, and digital cameras were utilised to enhance students' learning outcomes. The development of the college intranet has been pleasing and more staffs and students use it to access class materials.
- The students at EDSC were supported by a highly professional student management team consisting of Year Level and Sub School Coordinator, Career Teachers, Students' Welfare Coordinators, and the Assistant Principals. And extensive co-curricular program provided opportunities for academic enrichment and the development of relationships and a sense of connectedness to the college.
- The college has also devoted considerable resources to improve student learning outcomes for all students including those who perform below and significantly above expected levels. For examples :



- i. All subjects courses outline have been re-written to include extension activities to cater for individual students needs.
- ii. All teachers belong to professional learning teams which focus on research and developments in curriculum and pedagogy.
- iii. The Corrective Readings Program is provided with 20 teaching periods per week to help student with reading difficulties.
- iv. ALPHA (Advanced Learning Programs for High Achievers) was developed in 2006 and introduced in 2007 to cater for high achieving students beginning with one class in year 7.

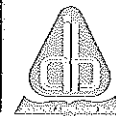
According to the Principal of EDSC, the college is committed to developing an educational environment where all students can achieve their personal best. To achieve this ongoing goal, the college must continue to develop a stimulating learning environment where student feel encouraged and are supported by teachers who are empathetic and enthusiastic. The college is also committed to further professional learning to support staffs in their work. The encouragement of high quality professional interaction which leads to improved performance and student outcomes is a key element of the school goal.

EDSC is also fortunate to have Mr. Phillip Gardner as the principal because he is a committed and dedicated person in matters pertaining to his responsibility as a school leader. He feels that a great strength of EDSC is that it is more like a family than an institution. A good family cares about its members, wants the best for them, and supports members in their achievement of all these values and goals. According to Mr Gardner, they should enjoy each other's company and celebrate achievements together. Whether they are students, teachers, support staff or administrators, they have special talents which when combined together make EDSC a strong and confident community. He believes that each member has a responsibility to himself to maximize these opportunities while at the same time helping others to achieve theirs.

Through the Mentor Shadowing Program, I have observed that Mr. Phillip Gardner has excellent quality leadership and management that are much needed for a school to be effective. According to his Senior Assistant of Operation, Mr. Keith Butler, Mr. Gardner is a person who reflects on every action and decision that he made for the school. He treads carefully before making the final decision or judgment. As a leader, he has set a clear mission and vision for EDSC and wants nothing but only the best for everyone in the school. With the cooperation and supportive collaboration from the School Board of Councils, EDSC has proven to be one of the excellent schools in Victoria and was awarded the Accreditation Award as a Performance and Development Culture school on 30th November 2007. The ceremony was hosted by EDSC and officiated by the Minister of Education of Victoria, Ms. Lesley Bronwyn.

As a new principal, I have learned and gained invaluable knowledge and experiences by having Mr. Gardner as my mentor although for just seven weeks. Through one of my interviews with him, he gave me some tips on how to be a good principal:

1. Should care about the place and people
2. Must have personal pride in doing the job for the school
3. Must develop an understanding about leadership in the school
4. Stay calm when facing problems or any crisis
5. Be aware of our emotions
6. Get an understanding of what makes good teaching
7. Enjoy the variety of the work one is doing because not one is the same to another
8. Education is for all
9. Be different and yet not get carried away in whatever things we do
10. Take the opportunity to enjoy ourselves despite the hectic schedules.



7.0 THE BROADER CONTEXT: VICTORIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The two months sojourn at Clayton Campus and mentoring at EDSC had given me the opportunity to learn about Victorian State Education System especially in the areas of teaching-learning and leadership development program.

I became a more learned person by being exposed to the set of three core beliefs of OSE in Victoria. First, I learned that all students should be given opportunities to learn. Secondly, I strongly believe that all students can learn if they are taught by highly effective teachers and they will learn and make progress. At the same time, the students have to work hard and get smart. If the students invest effort into their learning and are exposed to targeted interventions, they will improve their performance on time. Thirdly, failure is not an option. If we expect and only accept students' best work and they are supported to deliver it, progress will occur.

During the two months program, we were also provided with knowledge as to the manner in which the Victorian Department of Education [DoE] improves the performance of every government schools. The Blueprint for Government School 2003 has created a sense of urgency about the differential quality of the educational experience in the government schools. The Blueprint was also considered as the catalyst for generating a systematic response to this challenge and is founded on the belief that every student is entitled to a quality education.

- i. The Blueprint identified three critical areas for reform: Recognizing and responding to diverse student needs.
- ii. Building the skills of the educational workforce to enhance the teaching-learning relationship.
- iii. Continuously improving school

Thus, a comprehensive reform agenda that drew on international evidence-based strategies would most effectively build the capacity of the Victorian school education system, hence delivering improved student outcomes in three areas namely:

- Student learning
- Student pathway and transitions
- Student engagement and wellbeing.

In the leadership/principalship development, I observed that a distinguishing feature of the Victorian school improvement strategy is the focus on investing in the knowledge base of their new leaders. They have the mentoring system for the new school principals who are being guided professionally by senior principals. The new principals were paired with senior principals to impart knowledge, skills so as to develop greater understanding of the nature of leadership required for school improvement. In this manner, the new principals would be well prepared for the roles and responsibilities in their school organization. Such preparations include attending seminars, workshops and professional development programs conducted by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

8.0 THE LAST WORD

The reflection that I had after attending the course is that learning is the essential fuel for the leader, the source of high-octane energy that keeps the momentum by continually sparking new understanding, new perspectives, new ideas and more urgent challenges. It is absolutely indispensable under today's conditions of rapid change and complexity. Whether we are novices or senior principals, we have to keep learning about principalship in order to keep in phase with the new development in school leadership and management. Mastering the changes, challenges and complexities of principalship is never an easy task. The school's stakeholders such as students, parents, local communities and government are always demanding that the school should be run efficiently and produce good results in the national examinations.



The task requires a competent and capable principal. In my opinion, the objective of creating the Malaysian High Performing Principals through this course/program have being fulfilled. This course/program have taught me that the most important step in establishing an effective principalship is creating the school as the community of learners who work together to achieve the desired outcomes (Sergiovanni 2007, 84-85). A high performing principal should be able to organize everyone in his/her school in ways that they could achieve the goals. In this sense, the student's growth is closely related to teacher's growth. Most probably nothing within the school has more impact on the students in terms of skill development, self confidence or classroom behavior than the personal and professional growth of their teachers. The key to professional growth for teachers is based on the relationships developed within the school teacher and the principal and between the teacher and their colleagues.

The quality of adult relationship reflects the quality of instruction, the character of the school and the achievement of the students. When the atmosphere of collegiality is created, it is reflected in its positive culture where the people in the organization share their knowledge and skills and help each other to enhance the development and progress of the school organization. As a principal one needs to initiate, model, promote and engage in learning and at the same time create a learning environment in order to build a community of learners in school. This is what is defined as high performing principal.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Ministry of Education Malaysia for making me part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education at Monash University, Australia as it gave me lot of knowledge and experiences. The Mentoring Program has benefited me beyond my expectation. While the courses at the faculty gave me pure knowledge about leadership and principalship, the mentoring aspect gave me the experience. In short, this postgraduate program had given me both; the concept and the reality of being a school principal in improving an educational organization.

References

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