



Leading effective Goal-Setting to Improve School Outcomes



TLRI grant holders: Dr Frauke Meyer, Dr Linda Bendikson and Dr Deidre Le Fevre
The University of Auckland

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Introduction

This research collaboration between three researchers and three principals will identify barriers and enablers to goal-setting and school improvement in two secondary schools and one primary school. Using an inquiry approach, principals will identify ways to improve schools' goal-setting practices and the alignment of improvement strategies, ultimately creating more equity in student outcomes. The project will map schools' improvement efforts and identify potential links between changes in practice and student outcomes.



Aims

Our first goal is to understand what is currently happening in the three schools in terms of goal-setting for school improvement. Secondly, we aim to identify enablers and barriers to effective goal-setting in these schools. Our final goal is to develop more effective practices in these schools with the aim of improving outcomes for priority learners. The project will test the theory that where within-school leadership is strongly goal focussed, improvement is likely to occur.

The overarching research question of this project is:
How can school principals lead goal-setting effectively to improve equity in student outcomes?

The project will be guided more specifically by the following sub-questions:

1. What is the nature and quality of goal-setting and school improvement processes evident in the three schools?
2. What enables and constrains effective goal-setting and school improvement processes in these schools, especially in view of improvement in priority learner outcomes?
3. What changes in the nature and quality of goal-setting and school improvement processes are evident over the course of two years in these schools?
4. What leadership actions are the most important contributors to school improvement over the two years?

Why is this research important?

Previous New Zealand research indicated that barriers to greater school improvement seem to lie in a lack of goal clarity, misalignment of improvement strategies to goals, and a limited capacity in schools to keep a sustained focus on their progress against the goals. Our project is important because there is little detailed information about how leaders enact this goal focus in their day-to-day work with their team and teachers, i.e. what behaviours help to motivate the team, and what detracts from this focus? Our research will provide actionable advice for practitioners in gaining more equitable outcomes.



What we plan to do

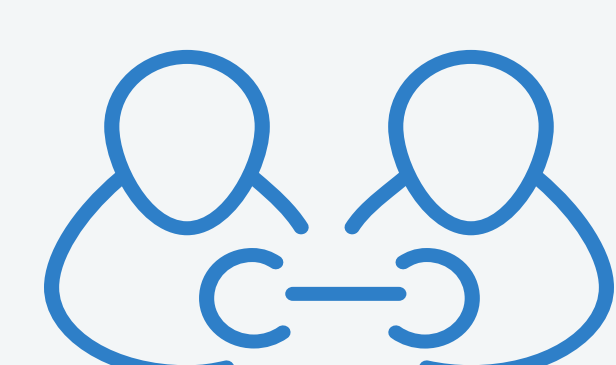
The project has four phases:

Mapping Phase: We examine the extent, focus and quality of current goal-setting and strategic planning in the schools through thematic analysis of transcripts from interviews with principals, senior leaders and teachers, and from planning meetings. We also analyse schools' strategic plans and Education Review Office reports. School achievement data is collected as a baseline. Through the analysis, we identify constraints and enablers for school improvement in each school.

Design Phase: We decide on foci for practitioner inquiries that principals will lead in their schools on the basis of our constraints analysis. The focus is on leadership practices that address identified constraints and gaps in schools' processes and practices and build on identified enablers.

Inquiry Phase: Principals implement the collaboratively designed practitioner inquiries and explore if changes in practice improve the goal-setting process, alignment of strategies and sustained goal focus.

Inquiry and Evaluation Phase: We replicate phase one processes to map changes in practice and outcomes and identify potential links between them. Lastly, we disseminate the findings to policy, practitioner and academic audiences.



Our Partners

This partnership between Frauke Meyer, Linda Bendikson and Deidre Le Fevre and principals Kelly Slater-Brown, Tom Webb and Ngaire Ashmore builds on previous professional relationships through different projects. Thus, we share a philosophical approach to leadership and draw on a shared theoretical framework.



Dr Frauke Meyer



Dr Linda Bendikson



Dr Deidre Le Fevre



Kelly Slater-Brown
Principal Bucklands
Beach Primary



Tom Webb
Principal Mangere
College



Ngaire Ashmore
Principal Auckland
Girls' Grammar