

Transitioning to a meaningful appraisal process: One principal's journey

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the role of the principal in establishing a meaningful appraisal process. The journey of one urban primary school is explored from the perspective of the principal as the teaching staff transition from an ineffective system to a process that has teacher growth and learners' achievement at the centre. We acknowledge that the leadership team and teachers played an important role in implementing any changes, however, the key focus of this paper is the principal's actions. Audio-recorded interviews with the principal and five teachers, followed by three years of participant observations of regular meetings and conversations recorded in field notes, chart the principal's journey. We argue the principal's leadership strategies developed a community of practice supporting teacher professional development, which in turn paved the way to shift teachers' perceptions and produce a meaningful appraisal process. This shift is evidenced in surveys taken at the beginning and end of the three-year period which show a marked change in teachers' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the appraisal purpose. We conclude with implications for school leaders interested in revising their appraisal process.

Keywords: *School principal; appraisal, leadership; community of practice*

Introduction to the teacher appraisal landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand

This paper reports findings from a larger study that examined teachers' perceptions regarding the purpose and the usefulness of their appraisal process (Offen, 2015). During the study, we identified River Rise Primary (all names are pseudonyms) as being on the way to creating a new appraisal process within their school. Jayne, the principal, set the challenge for appraisal to have a direct impact on *both* teacher practice and student learning outcomes and to move away from an exclusive focus on compliance.

Using teacher appraisal to influence teacher practice *and* student learning is fraught with difficulties. These difficulties have been accentuated since the inception of the education policy set out in *Tomorrow's Schools* (Department of Education, 1988) when many teachers lost a sense of autonomy in the classroom, combined with intensified accountability in the guise of reporting to the community and the government (Piggot-Irvine, 2000). Research suggests one of the key factors behind the call for administrative reform in schools during this time was a high level of public dissatisfaction with teachers and student outcomes (Fitzgerald, 2009). As part of these reforms, teacher appraisal became mandatory.

Teacher appraisal consists of an annual process designed to demonstrate to the Board of Trustees that teachers have met the Professional Standards as set by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 1998). The process may differ from school to school, but generally includes teaching observations by an appraiser, frequently the principal, and evidence-based documentation. In the early stages of mandatory appraisal, schools were provided with training and funding to ensure appraisal took place. At the time, many schools reported that appraisal had made a difference to teacher professional development and was working successfully (Piggot-Irvine, 2000). When the funding and training diminished, so too did the commitment of many schools to prioritise the development of quality assurance systems. McLellan and Ramsey (2007) observed many schools used an appraisal process that had evolved from a business model of performance management used by executives to establish goals and targets. For many in education, however, performance appraisal felt like an example of

needless surveillance (Fitzgerald, Youngs, & Grootenboer, 2003). Challenging the concept of performance appraisal in primary schools, McLellan and Ramsey (2007) claim that many schools were only interested in appraisal if they were legally obliged to have some sort of process in place. Moreover, to add to the complexities of appraisal, schools are required to address two sets of contradictory criteria within the process.

The Professional Standards (Ministry of Education, 1998) were introduced with the explicit purpose to ensure clear and consistent expectations across each school. Furthermore, the document creates a clear link between performance and pay. To further complicate the appraisal landscape, the New Zealand Teachers' Council (2009) introduced the Satisfactory Teacher Dimensions (subsequently, from 1st January 2018 "Our Code, Our Standards"), which were focused on the professional development of teachers. While the purpose of these two initiatives appeared to undermine each other, many schools combined them within the overall teacher appraisal process. Indeed, this is where the journey of River Rise Primary begins; using an appraisal process based mainly on mandatory compliance requirements that incorporated two conflicting sets of criteria for teachers.

In this paper, we ask: What was the role of the principal in establishing a meaningful appraisal process at River Rise Primary? We begin by examining teacher professional development within a community of practice (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002), with special consideration of the role of the leader in connecting professional development to appraisal. The research design used for this study is next explained, followed by analysis of the surveys. The latter give context to the discussion as they show a marked positive change in teachers' attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the purpose and process of appraisal. We provide an overview of the existing system at River Rise Primary, and then track the initiatives and actions of the principal that resulted in change. Finally, we offer suggestions for how leaders might apply these strategies into growing a meaningful appraisal practice in their school.

Locating the leadership within teacher professional development in a community of practice, and appraisal

In this study, the principal began with a professional development initiative, which later formed the basis for meaningful teacher appraisal. She initiated a community of practice to support teachers to investigate their literacy teaching and the students' literacy learning. Teacher professional development is increasingly developed with a community of practice structure (e.g. Akerson, Cullen, & Hanson, 2009). First developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), communities of practice refer to both intentional and incidental learning that takes place when people of varying levels of expertise come together to solve problems. A community of practice shares three important characteristics (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

The first characteristic is the *domain of interest*. This means the group has a common focus or goal they are working towards (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Although much of Wenger's (2000) work is focussed on informal communities of practice that spontaneously develop within a business or institution, it is possible for leaders to cultivate a community of practice (Printy, 2008). In the context of River Rise Primary, the principal identified the domain as developing teacher practice to enhance literacy learning outcomes for students. Leaders enact a role as "agenda setters" when they select the focus for teacher learning, set expectations for professional development, and ensure teachers have sufficient time to engage with the professional development initiative (Printy, 2008).

The second characteristic is *community*, which describes the social dimensions of a community of practice (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Learning is social, relational and reciprocal (Printy, 2008; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Regardless of the level of expertise of the community members, the relationships they develop allow them to learn from one another and share knowledge. In addition, learning in a community of practice involves mutuality (Printy, 2008). In other words, the members of the community of practice benefit

and contribute to the development of practice. Learning in a community of practice requires trust (Palincsar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford, & Brown, 1998). Members of the community are more likely to trust one another and capitalise on learning possibilities if they share the responsibility for co-constructing understandings as they develop practice, also demonstrating the community members' interdependence (Palincsar et al., 1998). In this study, the principal supported the teachers to work collegially towards coherent and shared understandings with a specific focus on literacy. Leaders act as a "knowledge brokers" and "learning motivators" (Printy, 2008) when they construct safe environments for teachers to enhance relationships, share knowledge and develop practice.

The final characteristic is *practice* (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Practitioners with shared interests develop novel practices, solve problems and create new knowledge in communities of practice (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Through prolonged membership in the community, members develop "a shared repertoire of resources" (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2) they can draw upon to address problems of practice. Reflective practice provides a means to learn from experience and is an important element of a community of practice (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003). While there are a number of definitions of reflective practice (e.g. Hatton & Smith, 1995), we use the term to refer to ongoing interrogation of one's beliefs and practice, including attention to the micro and macro contexts of education, in order to refine future practice (Buysse et al., 2003). For River Rise Primary, practice developed as the principal and teachers were involved in cycles of inquiry focused on literacy teaching, which incorporated the use of reflective journals (Ministry of Education, 2007). Reflective journals can act as boundary objects (Printy, 2008), which support the transfer of learning from one context to another. In this study, the reflective journals initiated by the principal served to enhance professional learning *and* provide evidence for appraisal. Finally, leaders can nurture communities of practice when they make explicit their own learning and development as they contribute to the shared repertoire of developing practices (Printy, 2008; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

Leadership and appraisal

We argue the role of the leader at River Rise Primary school was critical to the success of the appraisal process that developed at this school (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009; Timperley, 2008). Researchers claim that teacher inquiry into the impact of teaching practice on student achievement has great potential to provide the basis for meaningful teacher evaluation, or appraisal (Danielson, 2016; Sinnema & Robinson, 2007). Teacher appraisal may act as "the missing link" (Tuytens & Devos, 2011, p. 892) between teacher professional development and enhanced teacher practice. Piggot-Irvine (2003) maintains successful appraisal is evidenced by improved teaching and learning. We suggest the leadership elements that foster a community of practice can also nurture fruitful appraisal (Robinson et al., 2009). These key leadership elements include mutuality and trust.

Mutuality involves leaders not only promoting and supporting appraisal that is linked to teacher professional development, but also modelling their own appraisal processes and illustrating how these are linked to their own professional development (Piggot-Irvine, 2003; Robinson et al., 2009). For example, leaders who participate in the same professional development as teachers develop a deep understanding of the initiative that enables them to support teachers as they make sense of new knowledge. When leaders share their own professional learning, they have the potential to enhance their relationships with teachers by increasing trust and openness (Piggot-Irvine, 2003).

Trust is a key element for leaders to attend to and cultivate to enhance the appraisal process (Piggot-Irvine, 2003; Tuytens & Devos, 2011). An appraisal is conducted in relationship between a leader and a teacher (Piggot-Irvine, 2003), and trust is a key element of any relationship. Trust can be strengthened when

leaders position appraisal as formative and focused on teacher learning (Tuytens & Devos, 2011). Leaders can also enhance trust when they model the values they espouse, in other words, when they walk their talk.

In summary, leaders can deliberately construct communities of practice to support teacher professional development. These communities of practice, in turn, can form the basis of meaningful teacher appraisal. Leaders can act as “agenda setters”, “knowledge brokers” and “learning motivators” (Printy, 2008) where they evidence mutuality and seek to enhance trust to benefit teachers and their students.

Research design

River Rise Primary is a year one to six (children ages 5-11 years) urban primary school with a relatively low teaching staff turnover, and a roll of around 350 students. At the time of the study, the teaching staff comprised 16 classroom teachers, including leaders of the three teams and the teachers who were employed to release the team leaders. All 16 teachers and the principal participated in the study reported in this paper, which took place over three years. The project used an explanatory design methodology (Punch, 2009) to construct a rich portrait of River Rise Primary's appraisal journey. In this mixed methods design, qualitative data gathering methods were used to complement and enrich quantitative data gathering methods. Data gathering methods included: surveys, interviews, observations and field notes.

The project began with the teachers completing a survey to gather evidence of their perceptions of appraisal, including perceptions on a range of related issues such as the purpose of Registered Teacher Criteria and Professional Standards, the usefulness of appraisal, what teachers did to prepare for appraisal, and emotional reactions to appraisal. For the purpose of this paper, we focus on the survey statements that directly relate to the purpose and relevance of appraisal (see Table 1).

While the survey was based mostly on a five-point Likert sliding scale, there were also open-ended questions. The advice and guidance of a statistician was sought to ensure appropriate language and accurate loading of questions within the survey. The survey was administered again at the end of the project and compared with the initial survey results to measure changes in teachers' perceptions and understandings of the appraisal processes. These changes are reported in the form of percentages and descriptive statistics. The open-ended survey questions were analysed by the first author thematically, informed by the literature on appraisal (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

At the time of the first survey, five teachers gave consent for a follow-up interview. The first author conducted interviews with the five teachers and the principal. The interview format consisted of standardised open-ended questions constructed after the initial analysis of the survey data (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The interviews offered deeper insight into the survey responses and included questions about how teachers would know if appraisal had impacted on their practice and student learning outcomes, what they thought effective appraisal needed, and what they valued about appraisal. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis by the first author. The first author initially analysed the interviews, following the same procedures as the open-ended survey responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The second author endorsed the key themes through an independent analysis of a random selection of transcripts (Tuckett, 2005).

Other data gathering methods included observation and field notes by the first author during multiple meetings with the principal over the three years of the study. The first author also engaged in discussions with teachers at two staff meetings. Field notes included, but were not limited to, general progress of the appraisal process, how teachers gathered data for evidence, and teacher and principal comments regarding perceptions of effectiveness of appraisal. Additionally, Education Review Office (ERO) reports from River Rise Primary pertaining to appraisal were examined. Specifically, we compared the 2011 ERO report prior to the study and the 2014 report, from the end of the study. The ERO reports were also analysed thematically by the first author (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To maintain confidentiality of the school, we cannot cite ERO reports directly.

Table 1. The appraisal process: Perceptions of purpose and usefulness

This section explores your perceptions of the purpose and usefulness of your appraisal process. Remember, this is your perception, and there are no right or wrong responses.

Circle the number that is the closest to your opinion for each statement using the following scale:

1 – strongly disagree 2 – disagree 3 – not sure 4 – agree 5 – strongly agree

	Strongly Disagree - Agree				
The appraisal process helps me become a better teacher	1	2	3	4	5
The students in my class benefit from my teacher appraisal	1	2	3	4	5
I can show evidence that the appraisal process benefits my students	1	2	3	4	5
I actively work towards my appraisal goals throughout the appraisal cycle	1	2	3	4	5
The appraisal process is aimed at my needs	1	2	3	4	5
I can confidently explain the purpose of our appraisal system	1	2	3	4	5
I am actively involved in all stages of the appraisal cycle	1	2	3	4	5
The appraisal process has my students needs as a priority	1	2	3	4	5
The purpose of the appraisal process is to help me grow as a teacher	1	2	3	4	5
Appraisal is only necessary for beginning teachers	1	2	3	4	5
We have an appraisal process because it is mandated by Government legislation	1	2	3	4	5
I think our appraisal system needs to change	1	2	3	4	5
I don't do any extra preparation for my appraisal observations	1	2	3	4	5
My appraiser fully understands the purpose behind appraisal	1	2	3	4	5
My appraiser is constructive in his/her feedback	1	2	3	4	5
I look forward to my appraisal cycle	1	2	3	4	5
Our appraisal system meets my needs	1	2	3	4	5
The appraisal process does not impact on my teaching practice	1	2	3	4	5
The appraisal process is closely linked to the Professional Development Programme	1	2	3	4	5
The time the appraisal process takes is a good use of my time	1	2	3	4	5
I feel threatened by the appraisal process	1	2	3	4	5
The appraisal process helps me identify what I need to work on	1	2	3	4	5
The appraisal process highlights the things I don't do very well	1	2	3	4	5
The appraisal process strengthens my relationship with my appraiser	1	2	3	4	5
The appraisal process is empowering	1	2	3	4	5
The appraisal process celebrates my successes	1	2	3	4	5
Requirements for pay progression are a major purpose of teacher appraisal	1	2	3	4	5
I model my best teaching practice during appraisal observations	1	2	3	4	5
I am more prepared than normal when teaching during appraisal observations	1	2	3	4	5
Appraisal causes feelings of stress and anxiety	1	2	3	4	5
Appraisal is unnecessary for experienced teachers	1	2	3	4	5

Next, we begin at the end of River Rise Primary’s appraisal journey to set the stage to examine our research question: What was the role of the principal in establishing a meaningful appraisal process at River Rise Primary?

Beginning at the end: Arriving at meaningful appraisal

The final survey demonstrated an overwhelming positive shift in teachers’ perceptions and understanding of the purpose and process of appraisal at River Rise Primary (see Table 2). By the end of the study, teachers perceived appraisal as purposeful. They articulated how it influenced their teaching, and how the students benefited from the appraisal process. For example, “My appraisal... [impacts on the students] because it helps me get better” (Teacher 1 (T1)); and, “in the old days, appraisal was them coming in and observing, and you did the most spectacular teaching you’ve ever done, but it’s not real. With appraisal now building the quality of [my] teaching, that will benefit the children” (T2). Appraisal becomes useful if teachers view it as purposeful (McLellan & Ramsey, 2007). This positive shift in perceptions of appraisal was even more pronounced in the surveys.

Table 2: Survey statements (agreement and disagreement)

Statements participants agreed with	Initial survey %	Final survey %
Appraisal helps me become a better teacher	40	100
Students in my class benefit from my appraisal	50	100
Appraisal is aimed at my needs	40	100
Appraisal has my students’ needs as a priority	25	100
My appraisal goals are closely linked to professional development	40	100
Appraisal is a good use of my time	40	90
Statements participants disagreed with		
Our appraisal system needs to change	8	100
I feel threatened by appraisal	40	100
Appraisal results in feelings of stress and anxiety	33	70

The final survey indicated an improvement in teachers’ attitudes towards appraisal and an improvement in perceptions of the usefulness and purpose of appraisal. In this survey, teachers showed they believed the newly revised appraisal process focussed on their practice and placed student learning needs at the core. Notably, 100% of teachers at River Rise Primary disagreed with the statement “Our appraisal system needs to change” compared to only 8% in the initial survey. We suggest this means that the changes Jayne implemented met teachers’ requirements and were more closely aligned to teachers’ beliefs about meaningful appraisal. The significant changes between the initial survey and the final survey are illustrated in Table 2.

The statements made in River Rise Primary’s 2011 and 2014 ERO reports also reflected a positive change, that we argue is associated with the improved appraisal system underpinned by the development of a community of practice. The 2014 ERO report included commendations regarding evidenced collegiality amongst staff, the success of teachers’ reflections in identifying their next steps in teaching, and teachers’ willingness to share ideas with each other. The report also included reference to the level of collegiality among staff benefitting *all* students.

In contrast, the previous ERO report in 2011 included recommendations based on the panel’s observation that effective teaching practices were not evident in some classes. The report also suggested leaders should not only review indicators for best practice, but also measure how evident they are in daily practice. The report recommended that leaders set and monitor expectations for teaching and learning. Importantly, it was also recommended that leaders inquire into the effectiveness of the appraisal process.

The change of teachers' perceptions about appraisal led us to create a timeline of events and initiatives that potentially contributed to this positive swing in teacher attitudes and beliefs. While acknowledging the important roles the leadership team and the teachers themselves played in implementing change, we noticed that Jayne's role as principal was critical to each step of the journey. As we follow the journey of River Rise Primary toward more meaningful appraisal, we highlight the actions and role of the principal, and identify actions that explicitly lead to the improvement in teachers' attitudes, engagement and perceptions of the appraisal process.

Back to the beginning: Inheriting an appraisal system

Not long after assuming the role of principal, Jayne's discussions with teachers led her to become acutely aware of teachers' perceptions of appraisal as an area needing attention. Appraisal at this time did not impact teaching or learning, and had a focus on mandated compliance (Piggot-Irvine, 2000). In order to streamline the appraisal process, part of the inherited process included a "check list" incorporating both the Registered Teacher Criteria (New Zealand Teachers' Council, 2009) and the Professional Standards (Ministry of Education, 1998). Teachers were required to "tick off" what they had done towards the criteria and standards and gather evidence ready to report to the principal during "appraisal week".

Jayne conducted mid-year and end-of-year interviews with teachers, accompanied by scheduled classroom observations as part of this inherited process. Teachers set goals at the start of the year, followed by progress checks and evidence that was recorded at the interviews. During these scheduled interviews between Jayne and the teachers, it became apparent that in many cases teachers had not actively worked towards their goals and, in some cases, could not even remember what their goals were. We suggest this is because the teachers did not view appraisal at this time, as purposeful (McLellan & Ramsey, 2007). The lack of purpose for appraisal is also evidenced in the initial survey, and interviews with the teachers and Jayne. Jayne stated, "If I just left them to it, when I'd say at the mid-year appraisal interview, 'Tell me how you're going' they're thinking 'Help I haven't written in my journal for a while. What am I going to say?'" (Principal interview). Her observations were confirmed in interviews with teachers, with one teacher stating: "It would come to my appraisal meeting and I would think 'crikey what are my goals?' I didn't even know what they were, never mind what I had done towards them" (T3). The initial survey results also reflected concern around the lack of effectiveness of the appraisal process at that time, where only 30% of teachers indicated that they actively worked towards their goals or prepared for them prior to appraisal meetings. This is further evidence, we believe, that teachers did not view appraisal as a useful exercise (see also Piggot-Irvine, 2003).

In addition, Jayne could not see any evidence that this tick-box approach to appraisal impacted on student learning outcomes or teachers' practice. The initial survey data supported this belief, where 40% of teachers thought their practice improved because of appraisal and only 25% thought that students' learning outcomes improved because of appraisal. Teachers also commented that teacher practice only changed when teachers were naturally reflective, not because of appraisal. Comments by teachers included "Appraisal only works if teachers are reflective" (T2); "Reflective people change their practice whether or not they are appraised or reviewed" (T3); and, "When you are reflective [appraisal] is just paperwork" (T4). The teachers did not view appraisal as a means to encourage reflection and thus shift practice. Jayne noted that the Registered Teaching Criteria and the Professional Standards had very different purposes. Although the appraisal process was largely based on compliance, nonetheless it did try to encompass both sets of criteria (Field notes). Thus, the combination of an apparent lack of engagement by teachers, the "tick box", compliance approach, and the 2011 ERO recommendation to add rigor to the appraisal process, led Jayne to consider how she could enhance purpose and relevance to the process, alongside mandated requirements.

Re-purposing existing initiatives

As she pondered her appraisal challenge, Jayne recognised that her ultimate goals were to implement a process that would engage teachers, support them to reflect on their practice in the classroom and have a direct impact on student learning outcomes. This led her to consider what teachers were currently doing that might meet these criteria.

Prior to redesigning the appraisal system, the principal initiated school wide professional development to improve the literacy learning outcomes of students. Teachers developed a shared understanding of what literacy “looked like” at River Rise Primary as part of targeted professional development. Teachers explored the delivery of the literacy programme through the teaching as inquiry model (Ministry of Education, 2007). This model involved teachers reflecting on, critiquing and discussing their practice in both staff and syndicate meetings. Over the two years of targeted professional development within the writing component of the English curriculum Jayne observed changes in teacher practice, an improvement in student outcomes, and an openness between teachers to discuss what they were trialling in their classrooms. Importantly, the targeted professional development provided a context for the teachers and principal to develop a community of practice where they developed trust and mutual respect based on co-constructing shared literacy goals (Wenger, 2000).

Led by the principal, the management team at River Rise Primary decided that the teaching as inquiry process they had developed within their literacy programs would become the basis of an appraisal process at the school. By using student learning outcomes in literacy to guide appraisal, Jayne implemented criteria for a meaningful appraisal process whereby appraisal was directly linked to student learning outcomes, classroom practice and a shared understanding of what these criteria should “look like” (Piggot-Irvine, 2003). As an agenda setter (Printy, 2008), Jayne initiated specific requirements to provide a framework for teachers to change their approach to appraisal and connect with what they were already doing as part of their literacy professional development.

As part of the appraisal process, Jayne directed teachers to maintain a reflection journal as evidence for teaching as inquiry. Initially teachers at River Rise Primary were reluctant to engage in reflective journals and viewed this process as another job that needed to be done on top of their already busy workload (Field notes). As an agenda setter and learning motivator (Printy, 2008), the principal made this initiative non-negotiable. To alleviate the perceived burden by teachers, however, time was allocated in syndicate meetings for teachers to reflect on their practice and to record in their journals (Tuytens & Devos, 2011). Jayne noted the teachers at River Rise Primary were “collegial by nature” (Principal interview), and the act of reflecting in syndicate meetings fortified this trait. When Jayne listened to teachers’ critical reflection on their workload and acted on their concerns, she strengthened mutual respect, trust and collegiality (Printy, 2008), as she cultivated the community of practice at River Rise Primary.

Another change Jayne made to the appraisal process further enhanced the development of a community of practice. The relatively formal interviews previously led by the principal, were now referred to as “mid and end-year chats”, and were led by the teachers. The reflection journals acted as the focus for discussion and provided evidence of teachers’ engagement with ongoing appraisal goals. Furthermore, during appraisal “chats” Jayne perceived a growth in reflective practice for those teachers she had previously considered to be evaluative rather than reflective (Field notes). She stated: “It [appraisal] is far more meaningful now and in the mid-year chats that we just had, teachers were... more reflective and they know what they want to talk to me about in the meetings” (Principal interview). Jayne’s observation indicated that teachers no longer viewed appraisal as something that was “done to them”, and were now active participants in a process that allowed for reflective practice to develop. Furthermore, Jayne also noted “There is a high trust model that has developed among the professional conversations and teachers aren’t afraid to voice something that isn’t working [in the classroom] and [teachers] are more open to taking advice from others” (Principal interview). The combination of mutual

respect and high trust between colleagues further supported the development of meaningful appraisal (Piggot-Irvine, 2003).

The principal walks her talk

It is critical to note that as the teachers at River Rise Primary progressed through the development of curriculum and appraisal, so too, did the Principal. When the teachers participated in professional development to establish shared understandings of good literacy practice, including reflecting on how they might improve practice and outcomes in their classrooms, Jayne also participated in her role as literacy leader. This meant she was actively engaged alongside teachers in developing a shared vision of excellence to ensure consistency and cohesion across the school and between syndicates (Robinson et al., 2009). Jayne actively engaged in expectations established for teachers as part of the professional development by incorporating teaching as inquiry (Ministry of Education, 2007) into her own appraisal process. While the teachers were aiming to increase the learning outcomes of target learners regarding writing, Jayne worked toward developing consistency in teacher expectations and increasing student agency in writing across the school. In this way, the principal was participating in the same process and focus as the teachers (Robinson et al., 2009). Specifically, Jayne was using teaching as inquiry with a focus of improving writing as a base for her own appraisal process, and recording her progress in a reflective journal. As such, Jayne modelled mutuality (Printy, 2008) and interdependence (Palincsar et al., 1998) as an active participant and learner herself within the professional development initiative (see also Robinson et al., 2009).

The reciprocal nature of the community of practice and the revised appraisal process was significant; in our view. Jayne's leadership enabled the teachers to see how the community of practice and appraisal informed each other to strengthen their teaching practice and enhance student learning. For example, Jayne shifted the appraisal interviews significantly from the "tick sheet" approach described earlier to a focus on the teaching as inquiry process. The teachers now led the discussions with the ongoing reflection journals linked to the daily practice of teaching becoming the evidence. Through a cycle of inquiry, appraisal goals became active, ongoing, teacher-research based, directly related to teachers' immediate teaching concerns and, as such, highly relevant to teachers (Piggot-Irvine, 2003).

Further evidence of the reciprocal nature of the community of practice and appraisal was found in Jayne's participation. As part of her leadership role Jayne was responsible for teacher appraisal. As she read teachers' reflections and listened to discussions at appraisal meetings, Jayne was actively gathering evidence for her own appraisal goals related to the cohesion of literacy expectations throughout the school, and adding rigor to the teacher appraisal process. We argue that Jayne's authentic participation in literacy development, including using a reflection journal as evidence for her own goals, not only served as a model (Robinson et al., 2009), but also addressed negative feelings teachers demonstrated in initial survey responses (see Table 2) and interviews about appraisal. During the interviews and in the open comment sections of the initial surveys teachers identified principles of high trust and mutual respect as critical to effective appraisal. For instance, "Relationships and respect are imperative for appraisal to work" (Teacher initial survey comment). By working authentically alongside teachers, and adopting similar practices in her own appraisal, Jayne clearly demonstrated mutuality (Printy, 2008), interdependence (Palincsar et al., 1998), and contributed significantly to the community of practice, which resulted in some unexpected outcomes.

Unexpected outcomes

Jayne's original goal was to facilitate a meaningful appraisal process that impacted on teacher practice and student learning outcomes. In pursuit of this goal she created a strong community of practice, thus establishing a vital connection between the purpose of appraisal and the purpose of professional development; a result she

did not anticipate. Jayne set the agenda (Printy, 2008) for the domain of the community of practice by selecting the literacy professional development as the focus. She allocated time to build the environment where the community of practice could flourish (Printy, 2008). And she herself was an active participant in both the appraisal process and the community of practice (Robinson et al., 2009).

Another serendipitous result of the appraisal process initiated by Jayne was the development of reflective practice by teachers. Developing skills in reflection not only supported teachers to grow their practice, but also the development of productive relationships between Jayne and individual teachers. Jayne described appraisal meetings where teachers explained: “others gave me ideas of what I could do... which helped me be more reflective about what I was trying”. Jayne noted teachers who developed reflective practice, also developed confidence to participate more willingly in staff meetings and in appraisal “chats” (Principal interview). As discussed earlier, reflective practice is an important element of the shared repertoire developed in a community of practice (Buysse et al., 2003). We argue Jayne’s observation of the increase in reflective practice in the teachers at River Rise Primary also contributed to a growing sense of collegiality and further strengthened the community of practice amongst all staff. Furthermore, an appraisal process using reflection based on teaching and learning tightly aligned with the Registered Teacher Criteria.

When Jayne was confident the reflection journals and appraisal “chats” provided rich evidence for the Registered Teacher Criteria she looked for ways to also address the Professional Standards. Jayne found the revised appraisal process provided evidence for the compliance aspect of the Professional Standards. That is, the close connections between the community of practice and the appraisal process jointly focused on providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on their literacy teaching and their students’ learning, and inadvertently provided evidence for the Professional Standards. An unexpected outcome was meeting the requirements for Professional Standards without adding to teachers’ workloads. Furthermore, teachers no longer approached appraisal as a compliance exercise but rather found value in the experience with its clear connections to their community of practice.

Summary and implications for educational leaders

We argue Jayne’s leadership strategies were critical to the success of the appraisal process at River Rise Primary. Her practice offers four key insights for school leaders seeking to develop a meaningful appraisal process at their own school.

First, we suggest leaders examine the current priorities when considering revising the appraisal process: What are teachers already engaged in to shift their practice and improve student learning outcomes? The findings at River Rise Primary suggest an appraisal process focused on curriculum development has great potential to also impact positively on teacher practice and student learning outcomes. Jayne began with the school-wide focus on literacy learning and established a strong community of practice around this initiative. We wish to stress that this was an area the school was already developing, not a new priority for the purpose of appraisal. The literacy-focused community of practice enabled the teachers and Jayne to co-create a shared vision of excellence and cohesion of literacy expectations throughout the school. These shared understandings, in turn, supported the revised appraisal process where the teachers recognised the benefit of appraisal for student learning as a result of constructive dialogue and reflection.

Second, we argue it is vital for leaders to engage in the same professional development and appraisal activities they are asking of the teachers. Jayne also took part in the literacy professional development and subsequent practices such as keeping reflection journals, and incorporating goals into her appraisal from the curriculum development focus. This process meant she could understand and support the teachers as they engaged with the new appraisal process; further developing mutuality, trust and interdependence in the community of practice.

Third, for appraisal to become meaningful, leaders will find ways to support teachers to keep their goals alive. One means to achieve this is to incorporate appraisal goals into the core business of teaching and learning. In this case, Jayne provided multiple opportunities for teachers to reflect and discuss their ongoing literacy teaching and students' literacy achievement within a community of practice. Importantly, when the teachers noted they did not have sufficient time to complete the reflection journals, Jayne listened. Responsive leaders take account of the barriers teachers encounter, and take action accordingly. Jayne provided time for teachers to explicitly engage with their appraisal goals on a regular basis through allocating time to write in their reflection journals. This not only kept the goals active, but also maintained the community of practice.

Finally, meaningful appraisal can be underpinned by a community of practice reinforced with mutual respect and trust. Jayne acted as an agenda setter, knowledge broker and learning motivator to deliberately construct a community of practice, which in turn formed the basis for meaningful appraisal. By purposefully shifting the dynamics of the appraisal interviews from principal-led to teacher-led, Jayne created spaces where trust, mutual respect and collegiality could flourish. Teachers found the appraisal process less threatening and less stressful. In addition, teachers came to view appraisal as supporting their own professional development and in turn, student learning outcomes. We suggest other leaders have much to learn from Jayne's success at River Rise Primary, where meaningful appraisal and a community of practice mutually sustained each other.

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