Many of us may be dreaming of traveling, in a far-off future.

This article explores the essence of the program Leading Educators Around the Planet (LEAP), the research underpinning the program and the benefits/outcomes of participating in the program, as reported by numerous Principals from participating locations (including BC).

by
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Australian LEAP group on the Nanaimo ferry (October 2018)
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LEAP is an innovative Australian-based international peer-shadowing program which enables Principals and Vice-Principals to experience the excitement, exhilaration and professional growth that comes from collaborative learning with colleagues across the globe. The program began in 2009 and has attracted approximately 600 participants, connecting educational leaders from Australia (NSW) with Canada (BC, Ontario, New Brunswick), the UK, Finland, and the USA (Alabama).

There are two phases to the program:

Phase 1:

BC participants visit Australia for two weeks during their summer holidays while NSW schools are in session (late July/early August). Based on matching applicants, peer-shadowing participants engage in a hosting/billeting arrangement. The educational program, comprised of school visits and professional learning workshops, is augmented by a social program and sight-seeing.

Phase 2:

NSW participants return to their BC partner during their summer holidays (September/October) for a reciprocal two-week hosting/billeting experience while BC schools are in session. In BC, the program is supported by the BCPVPA, which facilitates professional learning and a school visitation program.

The program encourages the formation of HUBs where local Principals and Vice-Principals (from a geographical area) collaboratively plan action research topics, travel arrangements, professional learning activities, and social functions. This model encourages collaborative professionalism and Collective Principal Efficacy [1].

International research consistently emphasises the importance of Principals learning collaboratively [2]. Further research points to the fact that Principals judge collaborative networked experiences as the most impactful leadership professional learning as it builds 'Collective Principal Efficacy' [3].

Research [4] conducted in Australia with experienced school Principals sought to locate what Principals see as the best professional learning. The result was that Principals most highly valued networking and collaboration with their colleagues, as the most effective, beneficial, and relevant professional learning. Networking needs to be initiated and managed by the Principals themselves, and not imposed on them by the employing authority. In a climate of trust and confidentiality, networking not only supports professional development, renewal, and wellbeing, it also supports self-efficacy: the belief that as a Principal, they can succeed and make a difference in their school.

Such a network of Principals – who believe that as a group they can succeed and make a difference in their schools – creates collective efficacy. Harnessing this power within a network through deep reflection and professional dialogue, Principals can effect positive change. This concept of the collective efficacy of Principals – or Collective Principal Efficacy (CPE) – validates networking as a creditable, effective, beneficial and relevant professional learning strategy.

Opportunities for Principals to engage in networks at an international level are viewed by experienced Principals as an essential component of their professional development portfolio in today's world. It offers them opportunities to enhance, reinvigorate, extend, and renew their principalship. The reconceptualizing of networking into self-initiated and self-managed networks 'by, for and among' Principals, is the philosophy which underpins the LEAP program.

We asked Principals from around the world about the impact of participation in the LEAP Program on their leadership:

Canadian Principals

"My LEAP experience was the best professional learning experience I have ever had in 28 years as an educator."
Tina Pierik (SD #61)

"My LEAP experience…allowed me to recognize and celebrate the strengths of both educational systems, and now I amable to use these in my daily practice as a Principal."
Steve Dalla Lana (SD #57)

"The LEAP program allowed me to experience professional learning in a very personal and meaningful way. The LEAP peer relationship is created when two educators become colleagues, mentors, friends and family. Some of the absolute best professional development I have been privileged to be part of."
Michele Reid (SD #43)

"Through the deep peer-shadowing relationship, you collaboratively identify school procedures and programs that were authentic and valuable rather than just being showcased for a one-off visit."
Margaret Mary Deck (SD #43)

"LEAPing" to Australia was, by far, the most valuable professional development experience I have ever had in my 30-year career…The reciprocal experience of LEAP was truly inspiring and re-energizing…Thank you for providing this invaluable, international, professional learning for administrators."
Heather Groves (Ontario, Canada)

Australian (NSW) Principals

"The LEAP program has provided me with global insights…has strengthened my self-reflection and highlighted the importance of contextual factors. The friendships I've made with international colleagues will stay with me always. What a privilege."
David O'Connor

"LEAP has allowed me to take the best of so many great education systems and make these contextual to our school. The connections with colleagues around the world have been beyond all expectations, and it is an experience I will forever value in my leadership".
Therese Corben

"The LEAP Program has developed my skills as a more sophisticated and reflective leader, able to lead changes that are sustainable."
Leonie Stevenson

"LEAP is truly a peer-to-peer experience with true deep sharing. I have learnt how other countries grapple with Indigenous education, and I have been challenged to look at how we meet the diverse needs of our students."
Sharon Tollis

International Principals

"The 24/7 discussions during the LEAP visits have given me an understanding of how different ways of leadership must be used in different educational systems and school cultures. And, of course, it has given lifelong friendships!"
Marjo Rantanen, Finland

"LEAP encourages the sharing of ideas, collaboration & friendship amongst education professionals across the globe. To meet with and listen to colleagues in different contexts and systems…is the key strength of the program."
Will Ryan, Ireland

"The LEAP Partnership has had a huge impact on my leadership…I came back to the UK renewed and refreshed with a clear idea of how to improve outcomes for children…I would fully recommend the LEAP experience to colleagues across the globe. I wish I had embarked on this much earlier in my career."
Julie Hogan, England

If you are a 'risk-taking' leader, keen to engage in internationalised collaborative learning with like-minded global Principals, consider taking 'the LEAP'.

Principals and Vice-Principals interested in learning more about the program and possibly forming a HUB to participate in the LEAP BC-NSW LEAP program in 2022, contact LEAP or the BCPVPA by March 2021.

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References

1 Lazenby, 2018

2 Professor Andy Hargreaves, Collaborative Professionalism, 2018; Dr Jenni Donohoo Collective Teacher Efficacy, 2017; Professor John Hattie Collective Teacher Efficacy, 2015 and 2009

3 Lazenby, 2018

4 Lazenby, 2018

Resources

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L-R Warren Marks (Australia), Barbara Novinec (Slovenia), Suzanne Lazenby (Australia), Nives Počkar (Slovenia)