



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2017

COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING

THE SLIPPAGE BETWEEN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION



This paper considers the expectations underlying the implementation of Communities of Learning and the experience of implementation in practice. It finds a gap between the two which is undermining the development of Communities of Learning, identifies the reasons and calls for changes at government, ministry and school leadership level in order to return to the original intents of the initiative.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the report be received.
2. That this conference of NZPPTA re-endorse the underlying principles of the communities of learning
 - a) A move to a more collaborative model of schools
 - b) Community-based collaboration focussed on students
 - c) The right to choose if and when to belong to a COL and which one to belong to
 - d) Flexibility in organisation of the COL to best suit the community
 - e) COL selection of its own achievement challenges and measures of progress
 - f) The inclusion of teachers, parents and wider community in the consultation processes at each stage of COL development.
3. That PPTA urge the ministry and minister of education to recommit to the underlying principles of communities of learning and:
 - a) Allow schools to join together and develop at their own pace and free from external pressures, including not being identified as part of COLs when they are only in the investigation phase.
 - b) Organise, working with sector organisations, regional hui to explain the expected aims, processes and outcomes of communities of learning.
 - c) Give more support for, and greater guidance around, the processes of vertical consultation and collaboration with teachers and with the parent community.
 - d) Give greater flexibility to COLs in filling the leadership role.
 - e) Allow COLs to determine their achievement challenges and the nature of the evidence they use to determine progress, and shift the approval for these to the secretary for education rather than the minister.
 - f) Provide COLs with more face to face guidance, more access to models of what works and more coherent (and more accurate) advice, including working with sector organisations to organise regional hui for principals and teachers in COL roles.
 - g) Provide adequate resourcing to meet the costs of back-filling COL roles.
 - h) Give COLs the space and time to develop and fulfil their originally agreed purposes, and allow any future additional functions to evolve naturally from within the COL network itself.

4. That PPTA urge the ministry to defer signing memorandums of agreement of new COLs until they have evidence that there has been genuine consultation with parents and teachers about the formation of the COL and about the achievement challenges.
5. That PPTA urge principals to engage in active consultation with:
 - (1) Their parent communities and with teachers about whether to be part of a COL;
 - (2) Their parent communities and with teachers in the development of the COL achievement challenges;
 - (3) Their teachers in planning and preparing for the introduction and integration of the COL teaching roles.
6. That PPTA executive report back to the 2018 Annual Conference on progress on the above recommendations and any other developments.

CONTENTS

Recommendations.....	2
Contents.....	4
1. Background.....	5
2. What was expected in the formation of Communities of Learning.....	6
3. What has happened in practice?.....	7
4. What PPTA members are saying.....	9
5. Summary.....	11
Appendix - Post - IES Working Group processes and agreed documents.....	12

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. In January 2014 the National-led coalition government announced it was introducing a package of educational changes which were clustered under the banner of the IES (Investing in educational success) initiative. Part of the package was the notion of Communities of Schools with three new associated roles: the Community of School Leadership role, the Across Community of Schools Teacher (ACT) and the Within School Teacher (WST).¹
- 1.2. The original model proposed was rejected by the sector almost universally. However, the initiative had a number of expressed purposes which were felt by PPTA executive to be worth pursuing, including:
 - 1.2.1. New classroom-based career pathways for teachers, and
 - 1.2.2. Greater collaboration between schools and within schools based around a focus on student outcomes and shared achievement challenges.
- 1.3. These reflected established PPTA policy, for example the Within School Teacher career pathway is a close reflection of the SCT position developed by PPTA in the 2004-2007 workstream process, and PPTA has long-established policy opposing the competitive behaviours that tend to be encouraged by the Tomorrow's Schools environment. Additionally, the Cabinet committed to working with the unions to negotiate the design of the roles according to the good faith obligations of the Employment Relations Act, with a view to building them into the collective agreements. This was unusual but welcome.
- 1.4. All key sector organisations agreed to be represented in an IES working group established to provide advice to Cabinet on how to action the proposals. PPTA's goal was to progress the best aspects of Cabinet's model and remove or modify the more destructive elements of it. There was a degree of tension in this process as the discussions were treated as part of the budget process and confidential to the participants. It was in this context that PPTA's existing policy framework proved to be an essential guide to our representatives (along with the clear statement that our ultimate position on the initiative would depend upon the final model proposed and subject to the ratification process with our members).
- 1.5. The report² from the working group set out a number of common positions on the initiative and proposed significant changes, which were largely accepted by cabinet in mid-2014.
- 1.6. The process led to a set of understandings about how the communities of schools would operate. (These were later renamed 'communities of learning' or COLs to better reflect the idea that they extended beyond the school gates.)

¹ The other components were the Principal Recruitment allowance and the Teacher-Led Innovation Fund (TLIF)

² <https://education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Investing-in-Educational-Success/Investing-in-Educational-Success-Working-Group-Report-3-June-2014.pdf>

2. WHAT WAS EXPECTED IN THE FORMATION OF COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING

2.1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLS IS ABOUT BEHAVIOUR CHANGE IN SCHOOLS AND THE PROFESSION.

The initiative has been described by some as the biggest change in education since the Second World War, requiring behavioural change rather than merely structural change to be effective.

The shift in behaviour had to be towards highly collaborative relationships within and between schools in the COL. A shift from competitive, institution-focussed practice to collaborative, student-focussed behaviour was seen as central to successful communities of learning.

2.2. COMMUNITIES WOULD FORM FREELY AND IN THEIR OWN TIMEFRAME.

The only real resourcing constraint on the number of COLs is the number of leadership roles (currently limited to 250). Other resourcing is roll-based. Funding for the COLs initiative is an ongoing baseline funding increase which can be accessed by individual COL whenever they form. Working with schools with which you share a common parent community, and developing the trust, confidence and commitment of the principals, boards, parents and teachers all require freedom to associate (or not) and time. Some communities would need longer to get to the point of being ready than others.

2.3. COMMUNITIES WOULD FORM THROUGH A PROCESS REQUIRING BOTH VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL COLLABORATION.

The need to develop the communities after consultation with parents, teachers and the wider community was identified as essential to developing truly collaborative communities with wide buy-in and support. The working party report contains a warning that they should not be “principal filtered”. While it was accepted that the development of a COL locally would almost inevitably be driven by the principals, it was recognised that this still required genuine consultation and collaboration vertically as well as horizontally. Given that this is time-consuming and resource-demanding, freedom around timeframes and adequate resourcing (including advice, guidance and preparatory local meetings) needed to be in place to support the principals.

2.4. COMMUNITIES WOULD CHOOSE THEIR OWN ACHIEVEMENT CHALLENGES.

Working with parents, teachers and other schools to develop common aims was seen as an essential element in building trust and confidence and commitment to those aims.

2.5. COMMUNITIES WOULD SELECT THE EVIDENCE THEY WOULD USE TO MEASURE PROGRESS AGAINST THEIR ACHIEVEMENT CHALLENGES.

A wide range of possible evidence was identified by the IES working group. The intention was that from this ‘basket of evidence’, schools could choose what best suited to measure progress against their achievement challenges.

2.6. COMMUNITIES WOULD BE ABLE TO ORGANISE THEMSELVES IN WAYS WHICH SUITED THEM. THERE COULD BE FLEXIBILITY IN THE LEADERSHIP ROLE.

While the most likely model was to have a single leader who was a principal, alternatives which better suited the COL (or which were required because no single principal was available or prepared to undertake the role) were to be available if the community chose them.

2.7. THERE WOULD BE ALTERNATIVE PEDAGOGICALLY-BASED CAREER PATHWAYS FOR TEACHERS

These would be alternatives to the middle leadership and pastoral care pathways which currently existed. The pathways would be comparable and should not disrupt existing pathways.

Careful integration, particularly with the SCT and middle leadership roles, was an important expectation.

The trust and confidence of their peers in those holding the COL roles was an essential expectation and the appointments processes should ensure that this existed, through consultation about the roles and their purposes, and through clear and open appointments processes.

2.8. DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITIES SHOULD BE SUPPORTED FROM THE CENTRE AND THE ORGANISATIONS WOULD MODEL COLLABORATIVE BEHAVIOUR.

The ministry undertook to model collaborative behaviour and support the roll-out of the initiative, with STA providing agreed advice and guidance for boards.

3. WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN PRACTICE?

- 3.1. PPTA executive continues to support the COL model and its underlying principles. There is a desire to make the model work: it is seen to be in the best interests of students and teachers where it can be made to work effectively.
- 3.2. However, PPTA members and other leaders in the sector have identified a range of concerns about the way in which the actual implementation of the COLs is occurring.
- 3.3. It is clear that the responsibility for these implementation problems must be widely shared. From ministerial level, to ministry of education national office and regional teams, to individual school leadership, the people and organisations responsible for making COLs come to fruition have not consistently managed this complex change process well.
- 3.4. These concerns, which are seen to be undermining the IES initiative and likely to create long term issues in most COLs, are detailed below.

3.5. PRESSURE ABOUT COL FORMATION

Many principals are reporting that undue pressure is being placed on schools in a variety of ways to join communities of learning and for COLs to establish rapidly, and for COLs to

form that are quite different in format from what schools see as their natural communities. This is seen as counter-productive to the development of the collaborative and consultative approaches that are intended across and within schools that are forming COLs. This pressure includes such things as suggestions that schools will not be able to access PLD if they are not in a COL, pressure from local ministry to join, or being publicly identified as in a COL when merely asking for information about them.

3.6. INADEQUATE CONSULTATION WITH KEY PLAYERS

- 3.6.1. Key players are being excluded from the development of COLs, and defining of the roles and achievement challenges.
- 3.6.2. Parents, the wider community and teachers are often partially or totally excluded from consultation on whether to be in a COL and what the achievement challenges should be. Teachers are often excluded from discussions about the COL roles, particularly the WST role. What we are seeing is that the consultation is very often horizontal (i.e. between principals) and not vertical (i.e. between community, board, principals, and teachers).
- 3.6.3. The fact that this consultation is often not happening is partly a consequence of the pressure placed on COL to form quickly, partly through poor communication of expectations and partly through inadequate support from the ministry for the implementation process.
- 3.6.4. The IES working group discussed (and noted in its report) the need to avoid a principal-filtered process. The IES workstream developing the processes for COL formation agreed that consultation needed to be extensive, and vertical as well as horizontal, and much of the resource material produced to support the development of COLs is focussed on achieving that.
- 3.6.5. In the implementation process the ministry has abandoned any practical commitment to identifying and encouraging the expected behaviour changes. This has allowed an environment in which schools which already had good consultative management practices have applied these to the COL development, and those which had poor consultation practices and top-down management styles have simply continued with those practices.

3.7. BARRIERS PUT IN THE WAY OF AGREED FLEXIBILITIES

- 3.7.1. There are mechanisms available for alternative leadership structures, but the ministry are perceived to rarely allow these to be used and considerable pressure is applied to COLs that want to operate more flexibly around how they organise their leadership. Weaknesses in the current 'default' model of COL leadership are being seen and pose risks to individual communities in the future.
- 3.7.2. There has also been considerable pressure applied to developing COLs to accept certain types of achievement challenges and to use quite prescribed measures of achievement. This is seriously undermining the credibility of the challenges for many people and undermining a central purpose of the COLs.

3.8. INADEQUATE SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

- 3.8.1. There was no provision made to bring schools and communities together locally or regionally to explain what the COLs were about, what the expectations around them

were, how they were expected to operate, how they were to be developed, how they were expected to bring about relational change, etc.

- 3.8.2. Many of those in COLs or leading the development of a COL feel that they are all reinventing the wheel and suffering from limited support and assistance (and often incorrect advice and information) as they try to establish the COL. There has been a lack of coherence to date in the ministry support provided and no active development of understanding amongst principals and boards of the underlying expectations about consultation, and vertical collaboration.
- 3.8.3. Recently the ministry has appointed 'expert partners' and 'change leaders' to work with communities, to recognise some of these challenges. However, these positions are currently only funded for two years.

3.9. CHALLENGES BACK-FILLING COL POSITIONS

Problems are becoming evident with back-filling COL positions, and these vary according to the size and type of schools. The problems range from the practicalities of releasing classroom teachers in small schools, through to the significant extra costs for larger schools of back-filling positions as a result of employing people in COL roles. These problems are compounded by (and feed into) the underlying shortage of secondary teachers across the country.

3.10. COLS AS VEHICLES FOR OTHER POLICIES

Many COLs are at quite a fragile stage and the system as a whole is still embryonic. The ministry and minister are now signalling expectations that COLs will pick up a whole range of additional responsibilities and functions in the near future that were never part of the original agreement by the sector. The impacts of such expectations are destabilising and counter-productive.

4. WHAT PPTA MEMBERS ARE SAYING

4.1. FINDINGS FROM PPTA SURVEY OF MEMBERS IN COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING

- 4.1.1. Earlier this year PPTA surveyed members and principals in schools identified by the ministry as being in a community of learning.
- 4.1.2. Amongst many findings in the report was that there was quite strong support for the principles underlying the development of communities of learning.
- 4.1.3. Another positive was that some teachers and school leaders were seeing increased collaboration and consultation in the development of their COL.
- 4.1.4. Referred to twice as frequently, however, were problems with, and a need for improvements in, consultation and collaboration.

4.2. OTHER WORRYING RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY INCLUDE:

- 4.2.1. Most teachers who are in schools in a COL are not aware that they are in a COL or don't know anything about the COL.

- 4.2.2. Most teachers in COLs have not been consulted about being in a COL, or about the achievement challenges or the new roles that are to operate in the school and how these will work and integrate with existing roles.
 - 4.2.3. There is little consultation with parents about being in a COL or about the achievement challenges.
 - 4.2.4. There is a low level of buy-in to the achievement challenges or their relevance. (For example, only 12 percent of teachers who knew they had achievement challenges felt a sense of ownership of them.)
 - 4.2.5. There was limited awareness of the written resources provided to assist schools in developing into consultative and collaborative COLs.
- 4.3. Many of the responses in the survey suggest that the appointments processes for the WST roles are often being poorly managed. This is contributing to resentment amongst teachers (and particularly middle leaders) about the new positions and confusion and a sense of 'reinventing wheels' across schools. For some teachers this is also leading to an 'us' and 'them' view of the COL roles. There is considerable resentment expressed through other channels too by a number of members (particularly those in middle leadership positions) about the disparity between the pay and workload of middle leaders and those with the COL roles. This is particularly so when the COL roles remain largely a mystery to the staff generally and are seen to be doing very little, and where appointment processes are poorly managed and opaque.

4.4. WHERE THINGS HAVE GONE WRONG

- 4.4.1. There is a cascade effect evident in tracking back the failings in the implementation process to date (but noting that some COLs have been much more successful than others in following the expected development processes).
- 4.4.2. Political pressure has been felt in:
 - A politically driven timeframe;
 - Ideological constraints within the model;
 - Unwillingness to free up resourcing to support schools through the implementation phase and to meet participation costs to schools;
 - Limited options for achievement challenge and measures of progress;
 - Too close involvement by the minister's office in operational matters.
- 4.4.3. The ministry of education has been seen as:
 - 'Operationalising' the political failings;
 - Abandoning in the implementation phase the agreed principles for successful development of the COL and the roles;
 - Not allowing the time to develop the underlying principles and expectations of practices in the sector and pressuring schools to meet politically driven timelines;
 - Not ensuring that schools were engaging in genuine consultation with their communities and teaching staff.
- 4.4.4. School leaderships have often been seen as:
 - Not engaging in genuine consultation with the teaching staff;
 - Not genuinely consulting parents;
 - Rushing to COL status for the resources or because they are under pressure;
 - Not engaging their teaching staff with the purpose and development of the COL;
 - Not preparing adequately for the integration of the new roles;
 - Not engaging with the expectations and requirements around the new roles.

4.4.5. The effect of all this is that within the schools:

- Resentment is building in some schools towards teachers in COL roles;
- Many teachers are feeling isolated from the COL development and its outcomes;
- Relativities between COL roles and middle leadership roles in terms of time and remuneration are wildly askew, which is creating resentment amongst many middle leaders already struggling with excessive workload demands.

5. SUMMARY

- 5.1. Support for the intentions and principles of communities of learning remains high and PPTA executive wishes the initiative to be successful.
- 5.2. However, there are major issues in respect to the implementation of COLs to date.
- 5.3. Many of these issues are associated with the ministry's failure to adhere to, support and promote the agreed intentions and expectations of the working group in the implementation phase. While to some extent this is what we have, unfortunately, learned to expect from a ministry that is notoriously poor at implementation, it can also, in part, be attributed to the political pressure that was applied by the previous minister of education, and her micromanagement of many aspects of the process.
- 5.4. There are also strategies that principals could take to ensure a greater degree of buy-in by teachers to this initiative. For example, they need to ensure that they are familiar with the IES advice and guidance booklets, the agreed guidelines on COL roles and the collective agreement provisions before making appointments to those roles. PPTA's Education Change Management Toolkit³ is an invaluable resource for any principal to use when considering major change.
- 5.5. The recommendations of this paper propose changes which would improve the acceptance of the COL model and make the development process more effective and efficient in terms of building strong, cohesive and collaborative COLs.

³ <http://ppta.org.nz/publication-library/education-change-management-toolkit/>

APPENDIX - POST - IES WORKING GROUP PROCESSES AND AGREED DOCUMENTS

1. The IES work streams were technical groups mostly consisting of PPTA, NZEI, a principals' representative, NZSTA and the ministry of education. The key ones for the purpose of this report were those that focussed on how the communities were to develop, the expectations around that development and the support required; on the role requirements and expectations; and on the professional standards and appraisal for the roles. They produced:
 - a. Guide for schools and kura
 - b. Tips and starters
 - c. Guide to writing the memorandum of agreement
2. The collective agreement variation negotiations between the MOE/STA and PPTA around the new roles tied down for secondary schools the employment conditions of the role and the resourcing to be provided to schools and, importantly, the provision for alternative arrangements to be made to the 'standard' model of the leadership role. They produced:
 - STCA variation and terms of settlement
 - SPCA variation and terms of settlement
 - Joint guidelines for:
 - Within School Teacher roles
 - Across Community Teacher roles
 - Community Leadership roles
3. The NZEI-MOE working party on IES implications in the primary sector, which subsequently led to the NZEI-MOE/NZSTA negotiations for the primary collective agreements. They produced:
 - PTCA variation and terms of settlement
 - PPCA variation and terms of settlement
4. The area schools collective agreement revisions negotiated by PPTA/NZEI and the MOE/NZSTA. They produced:
 - ASTCA variation and terms of settlement
 - ASPCA variation and terms of settlement
 - Joint area school guidelines for:
 - Within School Teacher roles
 - Across Community Teacher roles
 - Community Leadership roles