Principled narrative

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This article provides an overview of the ‘Carpe Vitam: Leadership for Learning’ project, accounting for its provenance and purposes, before focusing on the principles for practice that constitute an important part of the project’s legacy. These principles framed the dialogic process that was a dominant feature of the project and are presented, explained and illustrated in the article. The account concludes with a brief discussion about the use of principles and illustrative vignettes as resources for further development.

Introduction

This article is written from our perspective as the Cambridge team who led the Carpe Vitam: Leadership for Learning project, maintaining an overview and providing central administration and support to the participating research teams.

In most narrative accounts the beginning is only a continuation and the end is only the beginning. This is of particular relevance in educational research, which tends to intervene briefly in the ongoing life of a school or schools and, where it can lay claim to an impact, helps chart a new course or sets the narrative off in a new direction. In planning this project we hoped that it would be the beginning of a process for the schools involved rather than, as happens in so many projects, a summary end marked by a sigh of relief as participants return to the business as usual mode. Involvement in school improvement projects made us acutely aware of how easy it is for schools to slip back into old habits once researchers have packed their bags and published their findings. The Cambridge team’s longstanding affiliation with the International Congress on School Effectiveness and Improvement...
(ICSEI) has witnessed a progressive questioning within the movement of some of the earlier tenets of both effectiveness and improvement. We recognized the futility of trying to collect attainment or value-added data in eight country sites over a three year period and the potential diversion of energy in pursuing such measures as proxies for comparative improvement. We saw building capacity for learning-led, sustainable change as requiring new departures in methodology and outcomes, which would be farther reaching than the endpoint of students’ schooling. The outcomes we sought were insights into improvement more broadly conceived, a form of scaffolding, a legacy of principles for practice that would continue to serve schools, school boards and local authorities in networked learning. We hoped to offer principles of procedure for critical friends who might work with school staff and students in the future, supporting them in realizing their own agency, in leading learning and learning to lead.

The project was conceived in January 2002 at the International Congress on School Effectiveness and Improvement. It brought together researchers from Austria, England, Denmark, Norway and the USA, all of whom shared an interest in leadership, all of whom were concerned that in their respective countries leadership needed to be more closely concerned with what really mattered in school improvement—a focus on learning. An agreement on the key research questions, on research methods, on the participation of schools and on criteria for their selection led to the design of a three year study, which was launched in Cambridge in the summer of 2002. It was then that observers from Australia and Greece joined the group to make it seven countries and eight sites (two from the USA, Seattle, WA in the west and the state of New Jersey in the east). The three broad research questions were:

1. How is leadership understood in different contexts?
2. How is learning understood and promoted within 24 different schools and policy contexts?
3. What is the relationship between leadership and learning?

These research questions provided the starting point for discussion, testing and reshaping at the Cambridge conference in June 2002. This conference, which proved to be the first of four (to be held subsequently in Innsbruck, Copenhagen and Athens), brought together three schools from each of the participating countries—each school represented by a member of the senior leadership team plus up to three or four teachers and, where possible, a parent or member of the school board. While students were seen from the start as key to the process, a number of logistical considerations and the danger of their only token participation led to a decision not to involve them in the international conferences. However, we saw students as playing a key role in their own schools, for example by providing the initial baseline portraits of each school and through inquiry strategies such as photo evaluation.

The Cambridge conference was the beginning of an inter-country dialogue that was to last for nearly four years, a slow process of trying to find common ground and coming to terms with what proved to be extremely challenging research questions. It took time to become accustomed to differing
cultural, historical and linguistic conventions and it was to prove, at times, uncomfortable and disconcerting for leadership practice to be subjected to close scrutiny. Seeing things through a different lens can shake the foundations of our thought world, the basic assumptions that are taken as axiomatic: ‘it is assumed that they exist, that they are shared by the majority in the field and their presence is evoked whenever a practice is challenged’ (Czarniawska 1997: 68).

We hoped, however, that through an ongoing dialogue with our 24 schools, within and across countries, we would be able to tell a story of change, one of heightened awareness leading to enhanced practice, perceiving the meeting point of leadership and learning in new ways. We hoped that through a process of co-construction we might arrive at a theory which would have something powerful and resonant to say to teachers, senior leaders, school boards, parents and students. We also wanted to be able to offer something to researchers which would help to illuminate the continuing quest for a better understanding of where leadership and learning meet.

Three and a half years on we were to end with a story recounted from the researchers’ viewpoint, a meta-narrative, drawing a multiplicity of accounts into one compact and coherent whole. From the schools’ perspective, however, the ‘Carpe Vitam’ account was at best a subtext to their own continuing story, one acutely sensitive to the policy environment in which it was set, with external pressures to be accommodated and preconceived outcomes to be delivered. In a sense, the evolving ‘Carpe Vitam’ narrative ran in parallel with the schools’ own stories, converging at certain points along the way, more or less significant in its impact, depending on a willingness by participants from the respective schools to admit challenges to their existing practice.

We were aware from the start that if the project were to have an impact it would not be by direct influence or intervention of the research team, but by exposing participants to one another’s thinking and practice. The project would, in effect, create conditions in which people could, however briefly, step outside their own assumptions and convenient truths. Bringing participants together at key points in the three and a half years of the project allowed them to stand back and extend their line of vision. The informal networking between schools which this led to, across barriers of language and culture, was probably where the most powerful impact lay. This willingness to venture beyond the safety of one’s own comfort zone was described by Czarniawska (1997) as ‘outsidedness’, a form of knowing that comes from confronting difference rather than by identifying similarity: ‘It aims at understanding not by identification (“they are like us”) but by the recognition of differences—“we are different from them and they are different from us; by exploring these differences we will understand ourselves better”’ (p. 62).

At the culmination of the project many of the participants attested to a powerful reframing of ideas. As one Australian principal put it, describing the impact on his staff: ‘a significant change in their mindset about being in the school and what’s important’ (Principal interview, May 2005). In Seattle the research team reported that, two years into the project, intercultural travel, both geographical and intellectual, had helped to dislodge many
of the preconceptions that principals and teachers had brought with them. The dialogue had helped them to see past ‘cursory practice’ to more fundamental underlying principles.

This process was described by the Danish research team in the language of an experiential learning model (Richards 1992) with four phases—first, the separation from everyday practice in which systematic reflection creates a distance from the everyday; secondly, an encounter with new ways of doing things that challenge preconceptions; thirdly, the homecoming, in which new conceptions and the new experiences are brought back into everyday practice; finally, a process of disembedding or restructuring of practice.

There is a rich and varied terminology to describe disembedding. Nystrom and Starbuck (1981) rendered it as intentional unlearning. For Huyssen (1995) it was ‘creative forgetting’, while Drucker (1999) advocated ‘organisational abandonment’. In their different ways, all argued for a radical reinterpretation of reality, an acceptance that no matter how long cherished our conceptions of the world, they are open to question. Learning may be a more subtle and complex process than we had previously understood. Leadership may not simply be exercised at the apex of the organizational pyramid. Leadership and learning may be conjoined in ways we had never previously given thought to. Creative forgetting does not, however, necessarily imply organizational abandonment, because schools are locked into practices which are so mutually reinforcing that it requires a risky act of will and a strength of conviction to simply stop doing what you have always done.

We understand ourselves better when we have the space, the support and scaffolding to reframe our experience. It takes both will and skill to contest what Alfred North Whitehead (1929) termed ‘inert ideas’ and to let go of inert practice. If those principals and teachers who participated in the ‘Carpe Vitam’ project events were not to retreat to the comfort of familiar practice there needed to be some systematic way, when they were back in their schools, of spotting the learning moment, of recognizing leadership in the day-to-day current of activity, identifying strategies for releasing inhibitors and removing logistical constraints.

As new insights and strategies emerge it is crucial to document them and keep them alive. The hope that schools would appoint a chronicler, a resident narrator who would capture the unfolding story, was perhaps too ambitious a notion for busy, driven schools whose political overlords looked for a different kind of account, a story told in numbers, percentages, levels, targets and trajectories of improvement. However, from a researcher’s point of view we could not easily let the ebb and flow of intellectual and moral discovery slip through our fingers.

One narrative form that served our dialogic purpose was the vignette, a short description of practice which could be written down, shared across national boundaries, problematized and revisited with an enhanced level of understanding. These were not exemplars of the good or the ‘best’, but stories of practice laid out for scrutiny and theory building. Where the illustrated practices were so deeply embedded in a specific policy and logistic context as to defy simple transfer, they did at least point to deeper lying principles that could be subscribed to. It became clear that, through these vignettes, we could begin to develop a set of common principles.
Portraits offered another medium through which schools could illuminate the quality of learning and leadership. While portraits, comprising images of school life collated by students and teachers, freeze the school in a moment in time, they may be seen as only the first frame of a moving image through which the story of growth is told. These portraits were rich in implicit, but often untheorized, principles.

Questionnaires, interviews, shadowing of school staff, conversations and workshops with critical friends all served to lead us on to firmer ground on which to begin to articulate a set of propositions as to the nature of leadership, learning and their interconnections. These flowed from the research questions we set out to interrogate, and the principles we arrived at were our best form of response.

Five principles

We developed a set of propositions about leadership for learning that we came to describe as principles. These propositions had a long gestation and an even longer and continuing evolution. Their multiple origins can be found in theoretical perspectives on learning, leadership and learning communities gleaned from the literature (Mitchell and Sackney 2000, Knapp et al. 2003, Perkins 2003), inputs on leadership and learning at the annual conferences, participants’ reflections and contributions, quantitative and qualitative data gathering and the collective understanding and expertise of the research team. After the first two conferences, ideas about leadership, learning and their interrelations were synthesized into a paper (MacBeath and Moos 2004) and by the third conference in Copenhagen in October 2004 we had prepared the first draft of what, from that time onwards, we referred to as ‘principles’. These are normative statements, serving as a vision for successful leadership for learning, a reminder of what is important, but also a foundation for reflection on action in practice and as guidelines for planning activities. In a sense, they may be seen as aspirational benchmarks against which practitioners can test what they do and measure the distance between what they aspire to and the degree of shortfall experienced.

The principles were the backdrop of our third annual conference, providing a framework for discussing practice. Testing them out through dialogue and a series of group activities, the principles were themselves refined. This iteration continued through work with project schools nationally, at international research conferences where we made public our developing thinking for critique and feedback and through debates among the research teams. As a group of researchers, all with a background in leadership and school improvement, we did not approach this venture with a blank slate. The compass of our combined reading and experience might even be described as encyclopaedic and theorizing was in our blood. Yet it would have been anomalous if we did not approach this task as learners, with a high degree of confident uncertainty (Claxton 2000).

We decided to use the principles as the framework for the analysis of data at the national level, so that each team in their own country and with data in
their own language would feed into the meta-analysis across the whole project. The principles were thus both an outcome of our research and collaboration with the schools and the basis for analysing outcomes country by country. In working closely with the principles in this way we became aware of a need for further development to enhance their coherence and wider applicability. This enabled us to take a more robust version to the final conference in Athens for comment and feedback from our practitioner colleagues.

If principles are to be meaningful and achieve longevity they have to grow from within and so deeply infuse thinking that they become transparent in daily decision-taking about learning and about leadership. So our key principles, at some time four in number, at other times six and currently five, grew, in part, from practice, in part from theory. Over the last year and a half of the project principles emerged, formed, reformed and provided the framework for other research projects, for in-service professional development and school improvement planning.

The proof of these as living principles lies in the myriad forms which still exist. It is difficult to pin down the definitive set, because principles are not, like commandments, set in stone. They have a mercurial quality, continually in evolution, as new forms emerge and transmute, not simply in the literal manner in which they are expressed, but through the subtle shifts in nuance which different languages afford. The way in which principles play out and are tested in New Jersey, Seattle, Athens or Brisbane, and acquire new meaning, is a testament to their living and evolutionary quality.

As attempts to capture the essence of how leadership and learning apply in schools and classrooms, this process of trying out and testing is important. In New Jersey small groups of teachers set off to visit schools, each small group armed with one key principle and a camera, in order to visually record exemplars of that specific principle in action. Their remit was to ascertain the robustness of that principle against the exigencies of day-to-day life in classrooms. That the principles emerged largely unscathed is a testimony to their grounding in day-to-day practice.

The first principle: a focus on learning

A focus on learning was our first guiding principle. The problem with such a statement is that it can be taken as too self-evident. Learning is, after all, what schools are for and ultimately what school leadership should be about. Yet the vocabulary of learning has proved as often to inhibit thinking as to promote it. It has become blunted by familiarity and habit, rendered unproblematic by convention. This is, in part, due to its co-option by politicians and policy-makers, being treated as synonymous with what can be measured in the weak currency of performance on tests and examinations. Expanding a focus on learning in order to give it a finer, more cutting edge, we arrived at five elaborations on the principle, expressed as follows.

Leadership for learning practice involves maintaining a focus on learning as an activity in which:
• everyone (students, teachers, principals, schools, the system itself) is a learner;
• learning relies on the effective interplay of emotional, social and cognitive processes;
• the efficacy of learning is highly sensitive to context and to the differing ways in which people learn;
• the capacity for leadership arises out of powerful learning experiences; and
• opportunities to exercise leadership enhance learning.

However obvious these statements may appear on the surface, they are subversive of much of current policy and conventional wisdom, as teachers were to testify in their reflections on the impact of the project for them personally and professionally. After the final Athens conference, for example, a Norwegian teacher wrote:

I have become more focused on learning in my own teaching, and I know that influences my work. I have also seen how important it is that we as teachers have time and space for discussing our teaching with colleagues, with a focus on learning. So much time is used on organization, administration and frustration. I think at my own school we focus too much on problems instead of opportunities and solutions.

It has provided an improved and extended perspective on my own work and means that I am asking different questions compared to before taking part in the project.

Focusing on learning had, for this one teacher at least, changed priorities and mindset. It led her to ask different kinds of questions, ones that led directly into re-evaluation of leadership, both her own and that of her colleagues.

Seeing oneself as a learner and not just a teacher is one of the hallmarks of a learning community (Mitchell and Sackney 2000), a transparent openness to learning for all its members. How can children learn if there are not models of inquiry, reflection, risk taking, empathy and moral courage to be emulated? David Perkins, our critical friend to ‘Carpe Vitam’, offered us the following four litmus tests:

• Me the teacher. How do I model thinking? How do I make my own thinking visible?
• You the student. How do I make my students’ thinking visible?
• Space. How is the environment of the classroom organized to help facilitate thinking?
• Time. How can I give thinking more time in my classroom? How does thinking change over time?

As thinking is made more visible, so leadership can be made more tangible in the behaviour of teachers and their students. Opportunities for learning enhance leadership and set in motion a virtuous circle. Opportunities for leadership enhance learning.

The second principle: conditions for learning

We articulated the second principle in the following terms to again underline the importance of conditions, context and culture.
Leadership for learning practice involves creating conditions favourable to learning as an activity in which:

- cultures nurture the learning of all members of the school community;
- everyone has opportunities to reflect on the nature, skills and processes of learning;
- physical and social spaces stimulate and celebrate learning;
- safe and secure environments enable pupils and teachers to take risks, cope with failure and respond positively to challenges; and
- tools and strategies enhance thinking about learning and the practice of teaching.

Learning is a social activity, as our first principle claims, but it has to be modelled in a milieu within which we observe and internalize norms, in which learners both catch and spread ideas. Knowing and remembering occur because knowledge and memory are invested in, and accessible from, the behaviours and intelligences of people with whom we share and create ideas.

In the first meeting of staff from the 24 schools the metaphor of the dance entered the ‘Carpe Vitam’ discourse. Michael Schratz, leader of the Innsbruck team, talked about the dance of change, while Archie McGlynn (formerly Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector in the Scottish Executive Education Department) posed the question: ‘how do you tell the dancer from the dance?’ It took three years of work with schools before these ideas came to have real meaning, as the dance of change came to be perceived and identified less in persons and roles and more in the dance itself, the flow of activities in which a school is engaged (Gronn 2003).

In a Brisbane school it was said that prior to the arrival of the new principal ‘nobody knew how anyone did anything. It was all done by word of mouth and ad hoc and by the seat of your pants’ (Principal interview 2004). The recognition of this communication lacuna gave rise to trans-disciplinary learning teams, designed to increase the learning exchange across the school, within an explicit leadership for learning framework. It was underpinned by a conviction that changing the professional mindset is a necessary prelude to changing the student mindset, putting the oxygen mask on your own face before putting it on the child’s face.

The second principle also lays emphasis on tools, because tools give leverage to practice. They directly address the problem of enactment (Kennedy 1999). Developing, sharing and modifying tools to widen teachers’ and students’ repertoires was one of the project’s main activities and one of its key contributions to the fusion of theory and practice.

The third principle: dialogue

Following from the second principle, the third emphasizes the role played by dialogue—the process by which learning and leadership are made explicit, not only conceptually, but in practical application.

Leadership for learning practice involves an explicit dialogue which:
• makes leadership for learning practice explicit, discussable and transferable;
• promotes active collegial inquiry into the link between learning and leadership;
• achieves coherence through the sharing of values, understandings and practices;
• addresses factors which inhibit and promote learning and leadership;
• makes the link between leadership and learning a shared concern for all members of the school community; and
• extends dialogue internationally through networking, both virtually and through face-to-face exchange.

*Diá logos*, as a constant quest for meaning in the original Greek, goes beyond conversation, discussion or debate. It is a rare commodity in schools, where the passing on of knowledge is the essential paradigm, captured in the American terminology of instruction. Within the instruction metaphor there is little apparent room for agency—the impulse which gives rise to leadership. As Elmore (2005: 8) pointed out: ‘The transfer of agency from teacher to student is minimal because the nature of the task locates the knowledge with the teacher and the obligation to learn with the student—knowledge is transferred, agency over learning is not’.

In contrast, the emphasis within our third principle embraces the concept of dialogic teaching (Alexander 2004). This is a form of interchange at the classroom level, in which knowledge is conditional and discussable and overflows the boundaries of classrooms to permeate dialogue in staffrooms and in the informal exchanges in the interstices of the school day. Dialogue need not be an oral process, as the following example from one of the English schools illustrates:

At Barnwell School the challenge was to make practice visible on a large scale … . The strategic team constructed a mock-up of a brick wall on a notice board at the entrance to the staffroom … . Whenever a teacher used a post-it to record an observation it would be posted on to the wall. Soon, posting observations took on a degree of competitiveness and it was clear which departments were contributing most because of the colour of the post-its. As the wall grew, members of staff found that it was worthwhile to stop and read the post-its as they passed on their way into the staffroom. These classroom observations therefore became the catalyst for cross-cutting conversation about teaching and learning. (Frost 2005: 21–22)

Dialogue assumed a significant place among the five principles because, as the Barnwell example and many of the school vignettes illustrate, knowledge about learning is created and shared through the talk and critical reflection on practice. So, if the links between learning and leadership are problematic and hard to grasp, it is only through a mutual teasing out that their relations become clear. In many instances the catalyst for the discussion was a critical friend. In some cases it came through networking among schools locally and/or internationally. Sometimes it was through extended time for reflection afforded by the international conferences and workshops, which provided a forum for more extended and in-depth interchange of ideas.

The whole ‘Carpe Vitam: Leadership for Learning’ project itself could be viewed as the development of an extended dialogue, a forum or forums
for the meeting of minds. In the earlier stages of the project dialogue was originated and structured by the research team, through the discussion of data as it was fed back to schools and through the sharing of school portraits, critical appraisal and the testing of tools. With time and developing trust the impetus for dialogue came from teachers and senior leaders themselves, creating their own discursive spaces for deep reflective discussions with colleagues from their own and other schools.

By the time of the Copenhagen conference in 2004 enough exchange and interchange had occurred to allow the schools to begin to relate their own and other schools’ experience to an embryonic set of principles, subjected for the first time to systematic scrutiny of all conference participants. The examples provided were around how their schools, and others, compared and differed from the principles, rather than cursory practice-to-practice comparisons.

The fourth principle: shared leadership

We came to the project with a belief in distributed, or shared, leadership, but it was only through the journeying between theory and practice that we began to get a firm grasp on what this means and what principles might flow from it.

Leadership for learning practice involves the sharing of leadership by:

- creating structures which invite participation in developing the school as a learning community;
- symbolizing shared leadership in the day-to-day flow of activities of the school;
- encouraging all members of the school community to take the lead as appropriate to task and context;
- drawing on the experience and expertise of staff, students and parents as resources; and
- promoting collaborative patterns of work and activity across boundaries of subject, role and status.

Shared leadership was something that most of our ‘Carpe Vitam’ schools aspired to, but it was understood quite differently in different settings—in some cases distributed as in delegated, in other cases as initiative spontaneously exercised and in other interpretations as teamwork. Each of these differing conceptions reflected the cultural and organizational context in which they were embedded. The more hierarchical the structures of the schools, the more distribution seemed to rest on a downward flow, a trickling down which might not ever reach the lowest layers of the organization. In this respect, historical inertia played a part. In Greek schools, for example, there was initially a strong resistance to upsetting the status quo, in which the distinction between leaders and followers had long been institutionalized and accepted as the immutable reality of school life. Nor was it easy for English schools initially to risk loosening the structures which maintained effective control and held school regimes tightly together.
A Seattle principal, speaking towards the end of the ‘Carpe Vitam’ project, acknowledged shared leadership as a slow and pragmatic process, feeling out the strengths and weaknesses of staff and learning the importance of flexibility and fluidity:

As a leader, you must be flexible and fluid … and [able to] go with the flow. Every day is different. It’s important to involve everyone in leadership … to know the staff, recognize their strengths, build on their strengths, move them in a direction you want them to go or they want to go, in moving forward teaching and learning. We’re on the right road … but still need more shared leadership. In some ways, I feel like we’re just beginning.

Spillane and colleagues pointed out that for those who have eyes to see it leadership is already distributed. It is inherent in what he calls ‘reciprocal interdependencies’ (Spillane et al. 2001: 34). Whether taking action, innovating or creating knowledge, individuals play off one another. What A does can only be fully understood by taking into account what B does, and vice versa, each bringing differing resources—skills, knowledge, perspectives—to bear.

In Denmark this was exemplified in the fluidity of leaderless, self-governing teams:

In the self-governing teams there is no formal leader. Instead, they make use of everybody’s resources by talking about teaching, students and learning. (Denmark country report)

In the discussion of shared leadership a major theme was the role of students as decision-makers and leaders. In both Brisbane and Seattle student leadership was also a key theme, as an Australian teacher described it:

There are a lot of students in this school and a lot of students in a leadership role, which is very impressive, and they take it on quite well too … it’s not just at the top, it’s spread throughout and there are various leaders at various levels. (Teacher, Brisbane school)

In Denmark student leadership was described in terms of student initiative in leading their own learning and that of their classmates. As one student claimed in an interview:

We have great freedom and take responsibility for our own learning … . The independent responsibility for learning makes me inclined to learn more … . We choose what we want to work with on our own, but the teachers keep tabs on you if you start reducing the demands you make on yourself. … If somebody gets a good idea in relation to the task or has some kind of insight beforehand, it seems natural that he or she takes on the leadership for a period.

Reflecting on the leadership for learning journey at the end of the Athens conference a Norwegian teacher wrote:

I have gained an understanding of the way of conceptualizing leadership with a focus on many people [who] can take part/initiate leadership in many contexts, and that leadership is focused on the core activities within the school, i.e. learning. Learning happens in the interaction, and that’s why it is so important with sharing.

The fifth principle: a shared sense of accountability

The fifth principle emerged late in the ‘Carpe Vitam’ project. It was less an afterthought than a reminder from David Green and his team in New Jersey
to make explicit what we understood by the term ‘accountability’ and its relation to the other four principles. It has assumed a number of different forms and the following may be seen as the latest developing formulation.

Leadership for learning practice implies accountability by:

- taking account of political realities and exercising informed choice as to how the school tells its own story;
- developing a shared approach to internal accountability as a precondition of accountability to external agencies;
- maintaining a focus on evidence and its congruence with the core values of the school;
- reframing policy and practice when they conflict with core values;
- embedding a systematic approach to self-evaluation at the classroom, school and community levels; and
- maintaining a continuing focus on sustainability, succession and leaving a legacy.

Understanding accountability means coming to terms with the political context and discriminating among the differing forms accountability can take. In some places accountability carries strong negative connotations, while in others it is met with varying degrees of incomprehension. When introduced at the Athens conference words such as ‘delicate’, ‘challenging’, ‘complex’ and ‘worrying’ were all used to describe the term, as it did not translate easily into other languages, either literally or conceptually. Accountability was widely perceived as a matter of external pressure, rather than as integrally related to leadership and learning. Yet, paradoxically, telling the school’s own story to its immediate stakeholders with concern for evidence and effect was acknowledged as a professional imperative. What became increasingly clear was how the language of accountability could obscure, and work against, construction of authentic narrative.

Internal accountability is measured by the degree of convergence among what individuals say they are responsible for (responsibility), what people say the organization is responsible for (expectations) and the internal norms and processes by which people literally account for their work (accountability structures) (Elmore 2005). This is a form of self-evaluation in which schools speak for themselves, with a focus on what really matters. It is not about counting the numbers, ticking the boxes or completing the dreary and formulaic audit process which much inspection and quality assurance frameworks presuppose.

Self-evaluation is the process by which schools make explicit their intellectual and moral journey, measuring the distance they have travelled not in the simplistic trajectory of aggregated attainment scores or summative tools that say little about deep learning. The tools of authentic, professionally driven self-evaluation, in contrast, are set in a social context. They encourage dialogue. They serve a primarily formative purpose. They are congenial, flexible and adaptable to new situations and new challenges. They are not restricted to what happens in classrooms or to students’ learning. They apply to teacher and organizational learning. They measure how teachers are progressing in their thinking and practice and how the
school is developing as a community of learners. School leaders relish accountability because it is the platform for telling a story rooted in evidence of the most profound kind.

Self-evaluation is implicit in the strong internal accountability enshrined in the fifth principle, developing coherence among leadership activities and demonstrating how they have an impact on learning. The confidence that flowed from grasping the value of this is attested to in reports from many of the ‘Carpe Vitam’ schools. In Trenton, for example, it was reported by the US (east) research team that a focus on learning as a fundamental aspect of accountability had led to significant changes at the school level. Involvement in the project had clarified the importance of a focus on learning and the conditions for learning as a counterbalance to a focus on statutory standard assessments alone. In the report from the Trenton schools it was said that ‘focusing on deepening learning through engaging students in meaningful activities and exciting conversations’ had provided the impetus to develop a shared approach to internal accountability, paving the way for a more intelligent accountability at district and federal policy levels.

**A principled approach**

We have struggled throughout the process with the most appropriate way of expressing the principles. Originally separate statements were grouped to acknowledge similarities among them and to render the whole more manageable and memorable. In this way, we arrived at a handful of key principles. Each headline key principle is elaborated through a number of bullet points. The danger of this approach, however, is fragmentation and an implicit assumption that each bullet point could be individually and separately matched to a discrete practice. Leadership for learning practices are, in fact, multifaceted processes. Principles are separable only in the abstract and in practice are expressed in the interweave of their individual parts. The challenge has been to express, present and use the principles of leadership for learning in ways that reflect richness and complexity, yet remain understandable, digestible and memorable. The current form of the principles is open to similar criticisms as have been levelled at standards frameworks for school principals (Louden and Wildy 1997), which tend to be fragmentary, decontextualized and imply a standard to be reached (or not). Perhaps, though, the analysis and breakdown of leadership for learning into somewhat separate elements is a necessary precursor, both in production and use, to arriving at a synthesis.

As we found when country teams worked on illustrations of the principles—short descriptions of practice that acted as examples and illuminations of aspects of the principles—examples of practice invariably related to more than one principle. As these examples of practice, which we call vignettes, were written, discussed and refined the principles began to take shape as something tangible rather than abstract expressions. Vignettes are an alternative approach to performance standards promoted by Louden and Wildy (1997: 99). In the ‘Carpe Vitam’ project, the use of vignettes may not have
been developed to the same extent as by Louden and Wildy, but their use has been extended beyond senior leaders, to make visible leadership for learning practice by all members of the school community. The continuing evolution of the principles could include reference to a growing bank of vignettes that together would provide a framework for the further development and support of leadership for learning.

It is through a focus on learning, the conditions for learning, an extended dialogue, a willingness to share leadership and a sense of mutual accountability that there was a slow but accelerating movement to some common ground, despite very different starting points. In spite of the diverse features of the ecological niches which these schools occupy and their unique histories, they came together with a common purpose and a shared desire to learn more about themselves. The principles spoke to them in ways they could understand and relate to their own practice, however different in application in their own contexts. With the five principles as a guiding frame, as a holistic and integral statement of purpose and values, principals and students are able to construct their own narratives and further their own and our understanding of leadership for learning as a multifaceted and continuously evolving concept and set of practices.

References
