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Uplifting School Leadership and the Townsend/Adams Seven Powers: A Study of Leadership Growth in a Small Rural Primary School in New South Wales, Australia

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This article presents a rich account of school leadership development within the North Coast Initiative for School Improvement program in New South Wales, Australia. The focus is the school leader at a small rural school, whose engagement with generative dialogue and collaborative inquiry results in a growing confidence in engaging her school community. The study demonstrates the power of narrative as a mode of inquiry and leadership development as represented in the school leader's own account of her changing relationship with her school and her developing sense of professionalism. The study evaluates the success of the approach against a model of Seven Powers derived from the work of David Townsend and Pam Adams in Alberta, Canada, that includes the positive effects of carefully constructed and managed teams, professional relationships and processes, and the use of inquiry, reflection, collaboration, modelling and narrative in supporting the professional development of a school-based leader.

Cet article présente un compte rendu riche du développement du leadership scolaire dans le cadre du programme North Coast Initiative for School Improvement en Nouvelle-Galles du Sud, Australie. L'accent est mis sur le leader scolaire d'une petite école rurale, dont l'engagement dans le dialogue génératif et l'enquête collaborative se traduit par une confiance croissante dans l'engagement de sa communauté scolaire. L'étude démontre le pouvoir du récit en tant que mode d'enquête et de développement du leadership, tel qu'il est représenté dans le témoignage de la directrice de l'école sur l'évolution de sa relation avec son école et le développement de son sens du professionnalisme. L'étude évalue le succès de l'approche par rapport à un modèle des Sept Pouvoirs dérivé du travail de David Townsend et Pam Adams en Alberta, Canada, qui comprend les effets positifs d'équipes soigneusement construites et gérées, de relations et de processus professionnels, et l'utilisation de l'enquête, de la réflexion, de la collaboration, de la modélisation et du récit pour soutenir le développement professionnel d'un leader scolaire.

This article presents a case study of a small school leadership growth process, predicated on practices espoused by David Townsend and Pam Adams in their work on uplifting school leadership in Alberta, Canada. The work of Townsend and Adams has been summarized elsewhere (Adams, 2014, 2015, 2016; Adams and Townsend, 2016; Chaseling et al., 2016, 2017; Townsend

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& Adams, 2008, 2009). Their model of school leadership improvement built on developing a deep and long-standing relationship between school leaders, education managers, and education academics. It was implemented through practices developed and refined by them, using collaborative inquiry and generative dialogue (McCorquodale, 2015) as the leadership development foundation. Townsend and Adams have recorded the successful combination of collaborative inquiry and generative dialogue as facilitating significant improvements in school and student outcomes (Adams, 2014, 2015, 2016; Townsend, 2015).

In the process of adapting the Townsend/Adams approach for application in an Australian educational jurisdiction, the North Coast Initiative for School Improvement project (New South Wales, Australia) examined the underlying concepts in order to understand its foundations. This Australian initiative accepted a guiding definition of the approach as "collaborative inquiry occurs when a group of individuals commit to exploring an answer to a compelling question through a cyclical process of experimentation, purposeful action, and public reflection" (Townsend & Adams, 2008, p. 55). The North Coast Initiative for School Improvement in New South Wales has worked with more than 60 participating primary and secondary schools located in the North Coast region of New South Wales.

In practice, the dual concepts of collaborative inquiry and generative dialogue are applied through a series of team meetings involving the school's Principal and a team of educators from outside the school (in this case, a State department manager, another school Principal, and a university academic), who visit the school to provide leadership support. This process is described further in other papers in this *Special Issue*. This team brings different perspectives and areas of expertise to bear on the dialogue. Meetings are scheduled regularly and have a formal structure. Discussion focuses on reporting progress since the previous meeting–with an emphasis on evidence for progress–and identification of the next move. Whatever the agreed action, the Principal will report on what he or she has done, to what extent it has worked, and how they know it has worked. The teams keep careful records of all discussions, and ongoing review of these documents contributes to the generative dialogue. It is these records that provide the evidence used in this paper.

In applying this approach, however, it has become apparent that there was a need to understand the school leadership improvement process in more detail. This paper, therefore, poses the research question, "In what way can the collaborative inquiry approach to developing school leadership be explored through narrative inquiry?"

This paper takes the opportunity to explore this question, using a study from a single school in which the North Coast Initiative for School Improvement team worked with the Principal to develop her school leadership capacity and efficacy. The paper comprises a descriptive narrative of the progression of a school leadership and improvement program at this small rural primary school. The narrative is assessed against the Seven Powers identified in another paper in this *Special Issue* (Boyd) as distilling the elements of success of the Townsend/Adams approach. The study thus provides two opportunities. First, it provides an example of the distinct and context-specific way in which the Townsend-Adams approach may be adopted, adapted, and applied to a particular set of school circumstances and needs. Secondly, it opens the possibility of considering the potential for the Seven Powers to frame the experiences of such an example.

The School

The school selected for this case study is a public school managed by the New South Wales

Department of Education (the Department). Its *School Plan 2015-2017* identified it as a primary school with an enrolment of 83 students, aged five to twelve years old. It has a diverse catchment community, with a high proportion of students requiring significant support through personal learning plans. To meet this need, student learning programs are individualized, and students requiring additional support are assisted by two learning support staff members. Parents and community members also contribute to the provision of learning support for students.

The school identified three strategic directions for the 2015-2017 triennium. The first focused on student learning, seeking creative and flexible engagement with all the students, together with an empowerment of students to achieve their potential in literacy and numeracy. Focusing on meeting the diverse and evolving needs of the students, this strategic direction was achieved through, for example, the use of creative and flexible timetabling, innovative programs, individualized learning, and excellence in teaching practice. The second strategic direction sought to lead teaching and learning through quality pedagogy, targeted professional development, and ongoing staff leadership opportunities. This direction is addressed through targeted professional development for all staff, linked to the school plan, personal goals, and enhanced student outcomes. It includes opportunities for all staff to share teaching practices for the purposes of developing best practice. The third strategic direction sought to strengthen school processes regarding the provision of support for student learning and engagement. This direction is addressed through effective and responsive communication between school and home, and the development of school-wide and classroom systems to support positive behavior and a culture of learning.

The North Coast Initiative for School Improvement involvement at the school addressed the latter two strategic directions, this being a choice negotiated between the project team and the school's leader (the Principal). The emphasis in the project team's focus was the efficacy of the Principal in supporting staff through leading teaching and learning, and through strengthening school processes, including communication. The project team from the North Coast Initiative for School Improvement team comprised the author as the academic member, a senior manager as the Department member (later replaced by another academic member), the leader of nearby large, urban school, and the Principal.

Design and Method

This investigation adopts a case study approach (Merriam, 1998), bounded by a unique example of a social situation—the development of school leadership within a specific school through the processes of generative dialogue and collaborative inquiry between 2015 and 2017. The purpose of the case study is to gain insight, through deep description, into questions of how and why a social process or phenomenon works (Yin, 2018). Although case studies typically rely on multiple evidence sources, this study focuses on one primary source, a narrative of the situation which, given the context of generative dialogue, contains on-going reflective content. Insights from this narrative are also considered through reflective commentary.

Narratives play a critical role in constructing and articulating meaning (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000). Narrative lies at the heart of generative dialogue. The account presented in this paper comprises the narrative between members of the team, and the narrative of leadership growth emerging from the discussions. It is powerful: "Our only truth is narrative truth, the stories we tell each other and ourselves—the stories we continually recategorize and refine" (Boyd, 2018). The dynamism of such stories lends itself to lively reflection and possibilities of new insights.

These arise as the narratives invent and re-invent understanding about the situation through the "restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Anon, 2018). This, in turn, allows discovery of shared narratives and collaborative moments that acknowledge an "authentic telling of the narrator's experience" (Boyd et al., 2013, p. 37). In short, a narrative-based study uses stories to describe human experience and action.

The case study combines reportage of the specific leadership growth process with reflective commentary. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) wrote that professional reflection was akin to watching a dance floor from the balcony: the trick is to find a viewpoint that provides new perspective. The viewpoint in this case study is from within the narrative. Being aware of this position is important, since it affords the possibility of a new perspective on our work (Searby & Tripses, 2011). The combination of narrative and reflection was adopted to enact Clark and Rossiter's "language-ing" of experience: "the construction of the narrative is necessary to make the experience accessible…how it is constructed determines what meaning it has for the person" (2008, p. 64). The connection between experience and narrative, through reflective writing, needs to be creative to make sense out of complexity (Jackson, 2005). In practical terms, this creativity was achieved through a shared writing of the discussions and meetings, ongoing reflection, iterative discussion, and thus a refinement of the narrative. As a member of the project team, the author has added personal reflection to provide shape and pattern to the account.

The processes of generative dialogue and collaborative inquiry both articulate key verification strategies for qualitative research as outlined by Morse et al. (2002). According to Morse et al., these should be integral and self-correcting during the conduct of an inquiry. The essence of both generative dialogue and collaborative inquiry, with their emphasis on narrative and reflection, ensures this to be so. Verification and validation of outcomes emerged as the engagement with the Principal ran its course and was expressed in the evolving and satisfactory growth of the Principal's leadership development, as acknowledged by the Principal herself. There is evidence in this work that Morse et al.'s key verification strategies are present.

Methodological coherence between the research question and the methods was maintained, that is, narrative inquiry and reflection were directly relevant to the question in hand.

1. The participant sample was appropriate, with both the Principal and the team being the participants who "best represent and have knowledge of the topic" (p. 18).
2. The collection and analysis of data ran concurrently: at the core of collaborative inquiry is the "mutual interaction between what is known and what one needs to know" (p. 18).
3. Despite a strong emphasis on practical problem solving, the study engages theoretical constructs, and, in this paper, moves "with deliberation between a micro perspective of the data and a macro conceptual/theoretical understanding" (p.18).

The Narrative

At an early meeting (June 3, 2015), the project team explored several versions of a guiding question for the Principal to work with. This followed a long discussion that set the scene. The Principal was feeling a tension between her perceived needs, demands, and self-expectations, and a sense of lack of control or power in the essential relationships between herself, her staff, the school community, and her Departmental supervisor. In essence, she was struggling with asserting her authority as Principal.

I, as the primary researcher, suggested that part of the answer may come in her creating a narrative around her work as the Principal of a school. This would provide a structure and purpose for her actions and choices, as well as a frame for collecting evidence. The focus of guiding questions was on improving her confidence. The team came up with a couple of possibilities regarding the wording. The Principal suggested, "In what way can I empower myself to achieve a successful meeting with my Director?" whereas the Department member offered, "In what way and to what extent can I demonstrate increased confidence in my operation as a Principal and enable my Director to support my future development?"

In due course, the Principal opted for a more practical and operational guiding question, reflecting her need to master a situation that she identified as limiting her capacity to fully realize her role. By the meeting of June 23, 2015 (the third meeting of the team), the Principal was able to talk confidently about the guiding question she had been using: "What would represent a more proactive role for [the Principal] in her meetings with the Director?" Strictly, this should have read, "In what way, and to what extent, would a more proactive role for the Principal look like in her meetings with the Director?" Nevertheless, at this early stage, the simplified pragmatic guiding question was important to serve her immediate needs. She had also agreed to provide an agenda she would bring to the team meeting. In the meantime, she had postponed a meeting organized with the Director, which was now to be held the day after this meeting. She described to the team, however, how she had taken control of the agenda, asking the Director to come early so that she could show him around the school. She felt much happier and confident about this approach to the meeting. Indeed, she was looking forward to it. I observed that her body language was positive. She also commented on completing her Professional Development Plan (a Departmental requirement), turning the answers into questions. This task made her feel much more confident about the process. She noted that she already felt confident as a Principal, and, importantly felt she had reinforced this confidence by taking the positive step of inviting the Director to meet her. She also noted an important attitude shift: she was "doing" the meeting for herself and the school, and not for the Director. This was, we all agreed, a huge shift in attitude, one that underlay her increase in confidence. In summary, at this stage, her answer to the guiding question for the last four weeks was that she had invited the Director into the school, she had taken control of the meeting, and she had set the agenda for the meeting.

The evidence we noted comprised three main elements: her comfort and confidence (body language), her positive anticipation for the meeting, and her ability to separate her personal and Principal roles in the meeting. She had also identified goals for the meeting: to have an early meeting (i.e., take control of when the meeting will be held), to show the Director around the school (i.e., set the agenda for the meeting), to know that she does not have to answer questions (i.e., she can control the agenda), to be comfortable with loose ends (i.e., not have to have finite answers to questions), and to be confident in her own management of the school. From the author's point of view, there was evidence, even at this early stage, of significant growth. In my notes, I commented that

> We can already see an amazing personal growth at work. While it is relatively easy from outside to see the necessary shifts and changes, I appreciate how hard it can be for someone to make these changes from within their workplace.

At this stage, the Principal was able to modify her guiding question, extending from the specific to the more generic. She posed a provisional guiding question: "In what way and to what

extent can I develop confidence in myself as Principal?" This opened a discussion around the purpose of this guiding question. Was it for her own self-esteem? Was it for the school benefit? Was it (still) seeking affirmation from and beyond the Director? The group agreed that she needed to extend her guiding question to a school improvement outcome.

By the July 30, 2015, our fourth meeting, I noted a continuing improvement in the Principal's positive body language, once again reflecting the talk about "doing," and the confidence it implied. Importantly, the Principal was responding positively to the evidence of the wider effect of her refreshed approach. In talking about how she assured herself that these activities equated to evidence that her new approach leading was making a difference, she provided several examples. This was the beginning of her use of anecdotes as evidence, although these remained for her at this time just stories. It was the team who drew her attention to these anecdotes as evidence of achievement. At the time, the anecdotes revolved around teacher responses to her. Staff were telling her that they were engaged and excited, which previously they had not mentioned. Teachers were requesting to get involved in activities, also in a way that she saw as a significant contrast to the past. Previously, she sensed a resistance to involvement, a resistance that had been of significant concern to her. She described how her modelling teaching practice in numeracy was well-received by the teachers she was working with.

By our sixth meeting, on the September 3, 2015, my sense was that we were in new territory, as the Principal was now adopting emotional intelligence as a core concept driving her change. This meeting yielded, unprompted, several stories of changes that she attributed directly to the generative dialogue approach. She was now talking about a paradigm shift—she described herself as being formerly a "glass-half-empty" person, but now she felt she was a "glass-half-full" person. She talked about having improved her work-life balance and was finding she had more to give at school, which, in her words, is better for the students. The team noted that this type of positive self-talk was a significant change from what we had been hearing a few months prior.

At this stage, she provided two anecdotes that reflected these significant changes. First, she described her involvement in a staff skit performed at the school's creative and performing arts night, the first of its type, in which she and the other staff members had dressed in swimming costumes and did a synchronized swimming sketch, much to the surprise of other staff members, students, and parents. She suggested that this action had improved staff and student feelings towards her. Next, she told a story of an end-of-term chat over a cup of tea with a teacher that she had previously found difficult to talk with. The Principal described how they both heard things they did not know about each other, and how she felt that both, after the chat, held a different attitude towards each other. The tipping point, she suggested, was being honest with one another, and being able to say confronting things to each other. She attributed this directly to her having worked on her emotional intelligence.

The Principal also provided further evidence of this successful change. She had changed the way she observed classes, using a standard form for asking teachers about what they want her to observe. The teachers, according to her, were keener for her to do classroom observations, and were more open to informal conversations in the classroom with her. She talked about what she thought of as barriers being down. She also provided another example of her being able to open the spaces for discussion and comment, and of being more comfortable with this discussion than in the past. She had been introduced to the idea of "power play." She had been struggling, she explained, to engage one parent who had issues with a son's behavior and seemed to be complaining a lot to the school. For her, there had always been a confrontational relationship with this parent. Using the idea of "power play," she had learnt to step back from the issue and to look

at the situation "objectively" (her word). The observable result of her "backing off," she stated, was that the child had become better behaved in school. She even noted that the child had commented on the change.

The team meetings during the rest of the year witnessed the Principal describing her engagement in a succession of school management situations. In all, she explained that she felt both more in control, but less controlling. She noted being acknowledged by peers, and she talked more confidently about positive student outcomes. She was developing her use of language around generative dialogue and emotional intelligence. By mid-November, the team noted that, despite following a very different path to her colleague (the other school Principal in the team), there was a convergence of sorts. Both had become increasingly confident in exploring generative dialogue and bringing the language of this approach into their respective workplaces.

By the December 9, 2015, the Principal was talking about the North Coast Initiative for School Improvement having given her a new lease on life, and that she was, as a Principal, invigorated. Importantly, her staff members, in their professional development processes, had changed their goals to guiding questions, and she and her colleagues were finding it easy to find evidence in support of their key questions. By February 24, 2016, she was comfortable to delegate roles in the school. She was also at a point of change with regards to the guiding question, reflecting her growing confidence in her relationship with her staff: "In what ways and to what extent do the skills of emotional intelligence impact on the efficacy of my staff and student outcomes?" She now recognized the link between her use of emotional intelligence with the staff and enhanced student outcomes. At this stage, she was talking widely about evidence, and seemed to recognize that there was much evidence available, from narrative and anecdote (as above), through records of meetings and agendas, quantitative data, and so on.

The team meetings became few and far between in 2016 (a convergence of personal circumstances amongst the team), and it was May 11, 2016 before the team reconvened. By this stage, the Principal was thinking she may have the wrong guiding question. The context for this doubt lay in her desire to apply for a larger school in a non-teaching role, and thus that her work on emotional intelligence may not lend itself to this personal focus. Perhaps, she suggested, a more tangible guiding question would support her growth at this stage. Her plan was to consider the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership *Professional Standard for Principals* and the *School Excellence Framework* during the following thirty days, and to assess her current guiding question against these and against her own professional development plan. By November 28, 2016, however, when the team reconvened again, the potential move had resolved itself. The Principal had remained at her school, and she had shelved ideas of a career move; she was comfortable with her position.

The collaborative inquiry process had also stalled slightly. Despite the desirable situation of a constant team meeting every month, a variety of circumstances had intervened. The team had changed: the Department member had been appointed to a neighbouring district and the other Principal had moved school and district. The meetings had lapsed, as I was overseas for much of the intervening time. The November meeting, therefore, allowed me to introduce an academic colleague as the new team member to the Principal. This meeting proved to be very interesting. It provided a chance for the Principal to update the team on her work after a long interval, and, importantly, explain her situation to a fresh set of ears. What transpired was two-fold: a story of many new projects in the school, such as innovative furniture ideas and a breakfast club, and a reiteration of the direction she had reached by the end of 2015. She described how she had now aligned her use of emotional intelligence against the requirements of the *School Excellence*

Framework. I noted how she had become aware of how she reacts to things, how other people are feeling, and that she can see things from their point of view. Importantly, she stated: “I’m doing more listening. When a staff member wanted more time for finishing a report [for example], I’m listening better, and supported her in this.” She also revisited some other changes from previously. She was, she stated, getting better at delegating. In her words

> Letting them get on with the job. It like a breath of fresh air for me. The results are really positive. Others are taking on things. Since the staff member has been able to take on a particular role, things are happening. As well, the load has lessened for me. I think I was stalling them before. I think that’s why this year has been better. Staff members offering to help each other; valuing each other. It's been a nice “fit” this year.

Her closing statement summed things up: “It’s a really different school.”

Discussion—What Does This All Mean?

How might this case study align with the Seven Powers (see Boyd’s other paper in this *Special Issue*) that reflect Townsend’s and Adams’ approach to school leadership growth? This is a relevant question simply since the case study described here only ran because of Townsend’s intervention in the region and was designed to operate directly in response to Townsend’s process. One would expect there to be parallels. What follows, therefore, is a commentary on potential points of alignment between this case study and the Seven Powers. This commentary is presented in the light of Wildy and Clarke’s observation that, “close attention to processes devoted to the professional formation of school leaders is vital to promoting a culture of inquiry rather than one of acceptance for informing school improvement” (2012, p. 63). However, considering this case against the Seven Powers is only relevant if it can be shown that the growth in leadership is genuine.

Leithwood et al. (2008) provided a framework to make such a claim by identifying seven key conditions of successful school leadership. Most of these conditions map positively against the Principal’s leadership growth. Elements of all the repertoire of practices Leithwood et al. identify as being important are present in the Principal’s emerging leadership: “building vision and setting directions, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning program” (p. 29). Likewise, the Principal’s tendency towards being responsive rather than directional in her approach to managing the school mirrors Leithwood et al.’s views. Furthermore, influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions, considered to be a significant indirect influence on improving teaching and learning, is clearly becoming part of the Principal’s approach. Widening the distribution of leadership is important; likewise, the Principal demonstrated the ability for distributed leadership, and with it a growth of power and influence across the school, as she grew. Finally, the case study demonstrates the Principal’s growth towards the situation where “the most successful school leaders are open-minded and ready to learn from others” (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 36).

The Power of Teams

The centrality of teamwork is evident throughout the works of Townsend and Adams. Townsend (2015, p. 74) also focused directly on “the power of teams” as being essential to success. Key terms

included “shared responsibility,” “collaborative” and “shared,” all of which are bounded by the exhortation to “Collaborate, collaborate, and then collaborate some more!” (Adams, 2015, p. 1). There is an important emphasis on the need for alignment of the learning of all educators in an organization.

Although the team was small and its membership clearly defined (Pisano & Verganti, 2013; cf. Morse et al.’s [2002] requirement that participants are able to “best represent or have knowledge of the topic” [p. 18]), it provides an interesting diversity of skills, expertise, and attributes. Although this narrative does not specifically note it, the contrast between the two Principals was marked. They were dealing with very different school contexts, and had very different styles, management challenges, and personalities. Nevertheless, they provided strong peer support, and both took the opportunity to evaluate their own situation against the other’s. Indeed, at times, there was surprising convergence of interests and experience. The change in the support part of the team (university and departmental staff) provided an interesting and useful dynamic. The enforced gap of connection—against the “rule” of regular visits—actually opened up some interesting reflection. Given these observations, and notably given the evidence for the success of the team despite its diversity and variation through time, it may be asserted that the team worked well since it aligned with a checklist of five basic conditions that need to be fulfilled to ensure the creation and maintenance of effective teams (Coutu, 2013). Coutu asserted that a team must be real, have compelling direction, have enabling structures, have supportive organizations, and needs expert coaching. In this instance, the team was clearly defined (i.e., was real), and the roles were understood. The team was brought together for a clear, singular, and compelling reason, and its organizational and support structures were clear. Expert coaching had been originally provided by Townsend and continued as team members supported each other. The composition of the team, however, does not provide any guarantee of success. Katzenbach and Smith (2013) provided insight into the operation of successful teams, offering parallels with the narrative here. Notable in Katzenbach and Smith’s account was (a) the importance of individual and mutual accountability (for us, monthly internal reporting and commitment to action); (b) specific team purpose, delivered by the team (the focus on the Principal’s growth); (c) collective work products (acknowledgement that the outcome was a collective achievement); (d) open-ended discussions and problem-solving meetings (evolving understanding of the problem and emerging and migrating solutions); and (e) working together (this was specifically a shared activity). The success of this team, especially in the light of Coutu’s characterization of the successful team, reinforces Townsend’s and Adam’s assertion of the primacy of a team, carefully defined and operating within clear structures and processes.

The Power of Relationship

Although relationships are inherent in the team, the nature of the relationships are what bring power to the process. Townsend and Adams both advocated for several aspects of relationships: horizontality, mutual regard and respect, and shared responsibility. They also valued differentiated and personalized approaches to professional learning. Professional development that is specifically aimed at improving student learning and is designed to align the learning of all of a school’s educators signifies Townsend’s and Adam’s preference for horizontal relationships. Creating organizational horizontality and encouraging an ethos of shared responsibility results in strong teams and productive professional partnerships.

The sense of mutual regard and respect in our relationship comes through in the way in which

the Principal felt comfortable expressing what can be described as confronting issues around power and powerlessness, anxiety, etcetera. Notman (2015), in examining the challenges of school leaders in changing teachers' thinking and pedagogical practice, observed that "building relational trust is seen as necessary to help teachers shift their thinking and to move out of their comfort zone where [to quote one of the Principals he was interviewing] "often what's comfortable is also what's safe". Building strong relationships, Notman inferred, supports leaders having 'courageous' conversations with teachers. The trust in the relationship in this case study allowed not only the team to have the courageous conversation, but, more importantly, the Principal to have courageous conversations that canvassed self-doubt, anxiety, and potential admission of inadequacy.

The power of the relationships built within the team may also stem from another direction. Dimmock (2016, p. 76) noted that the increasing importance of school leaders to "forge constructive and collaborative relationships between and beyond schools," citing a "school improvement partnership" as one such example (p. 76). Benefits cited by Dimmock look similar to those identified in this case study: "shared staff expertise and other resources, enhancement of professional development opportunities, scaling-up and sustainability of innovations, development of local cadres of leaders, and strengthening of commitment to improvement goals" (p. 76). Beyond the school, collaboration with other services promotes a "joined-up approach". Building such relationships has significant potential benefits, as described by Dimmock: "school systems that adopt an enlightened joined-up view see school improvement in a broader context of processes and outcomes, and that results … in a more coherent approach, which tends to lead to improvement becoming systemic" (p. 76).

The Power of the Process

Townsend and Adam are explicit that continuous and sustained process and control of process are essential. Process needs to be geographically and contextually relevant, and it requires commitments of time and resources. The processes of relationships and communication lie at the heart of transformation, engendering cultures of trust and social capital.

This case study reflects the impact of the North Coast Initiative for School Improvement team process–based unashamedly on the Townsend-Adams model from Alberta–in two regards. First, the process gradually helped the Principal to find her guiding question, and second, it allowed her to consider its relevance and relationship to her role as a school leader. Interestingly, the process allowed for flexibility in its application. Although Townsend did not discuss this extensively, he does allow for the school leader to use what he calls "eclectic rather than doctrinaire" approaches (2015, p. 80), inferring the need for fluidity in process. The focus in Townsend's and Adam's work is on the practices of generative dialogue and collaborative inquiry, in what Townsend describes in his verbal presentations as relentless in the pursuit of clarity and continuous improvement and refinement of achievements, and in the structures of regular and predictable school visits. Returning to the literature on teams, Katzenback and Smith (2013) provided some pointers as to why this might work. Introducing a list of approaches to successful teams, they caution that "there is no guaranteed how-to recipe for building team performance" (p. 40). Nevertheless, their approaches resonate with the narrative here. Of particular interest are five matters. First, they advocate the establishment of "urgency, demanding performance standards, and direction" (p. 40). They also advise that the team "set and seize upon a few immediate performance-oriented tasks and goals" (p. 41). The urgency of regular meetings, persistent reporting before, during, and

after the meetings, and the realization of performance (i.e., change of position and attitude by the Principal) evidence the achievement of these conditions. The persistent presence of identifying and refining the guiding question provided task and goal. Next, Katzenback and Smith asked that the team pay special attention to the first meetings and actions; the narrative provides the detail of attention paid to these. Third, with regard to meeting processes, although not specifically included in the narrative, clear rules of behavior were set (accepted from Townsend's model) and adhered to. Fourth, the meetings, furthermore, introduced challenges, fresh facts and information, and, importantly, "exploited the power of positive feedback, recognition, and reward" (p. 41). And finally, the narrative records the evolution of ideas and insights as the Principal and the team saw evidence of her leadership growth.

The Power of Inquiry and Reflection

Adams drew attention to the importance of the work being inquiry-based rather than didactic. Personal reflection is thus a distinguishing characteristic of both Townsend's and Adam's work, and, with inquiry, provides a unifying, enabling, and continuing strand through the work. Inquiry opens with a seemingly simple question, "In what way ...?", a question triggering further questions, all demanding evidence. Clarity of focus remains essential: all work is focused on improved student learning. The power of inquiry and reflection provides participants with a framework for growth through its identification of "a goal ... a guiding question ... strategies, and ... measures in the model of collaborative inquiry" (Adams, 2012, p. 74), a framework that drives evidence-based activities.

Introducing the Principal to the literature on emotional intelligence is one example of the role of inquiry in a Principal's growth through this process. The team raised the matter of emotional intelligence, provided a reading resource, but then let the Principal run with the concept, until she found a practical role for it at the core of her relationships with her staff. It may be speculated that the time afforded the Principal in the break of meetings provided opportunity for her to reflect further than if the team had continued to turn up at short intervals. Nevertheless, what became clear over time was the way in which the Principal used her growing awareness of emotional intelligence to achieve the expected outcomes of social and emotional intelligence (Talvio et al., 2016), notably self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2016).

The Power of Collaboration

Adams emphasized the value of shared responsibility, the importance of the collaborative rather the competitive, and learning being shared rather than private: "Collaborate, collaborate, and then collaborate some more!" (2015, p. 9). Important implications arise concerning the need for alignment of all school staff; school-wide transformation goals; flattened decision-making; and enabled ownership, responsibility, and acknowledgement of the collective endeavor.

Several points of collaboration are key to this case study. The confidence the team provided to the Principal to expose herself and her anxieties at the start of the project is a significant marker of the power of collaboration. Importantly, the form of collaboration is important. The intention and actuality of this collaboration was what Pisano and Verganti (2013) described as closed and flat. It is collaboration in which "a select group is invited to offer ideas" and "participants share information and intellectual property and make critical decisions together" (p. 139). This

approach offers the advantage of receiving the best solutions from a select knowledge domain but relies on identifying the right knowledge domain and the correct participants. Pisano and Verganti noted that it is most suitable with a small number of participants, and where the group knows the correct knowledge and parties to draw on. The specific focus on school leadership growth and the prescribed roles of participants make this approach suitable. In establishing this mode of collaboration, the team was well placed to draw on social intelligence skills to maximize the outcomes of collaboration: empathy, attunement, organizational awareness, influence, developing others, inspiration, and teamwork (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2013). Indeed, this case study provides an exemplar of collaboration that addresses appropriate actions of all the Goleman and Boyaztis social intelligence skills: understanding others' motivations, listening attentively, appreciating cultures and values, persuasion, coaching and mentoring, articulating a compelling vision, encouraging participation, and so on.

The Power of Modelling

For Townsend, the specific processes themselves were not as important as their predictable and reliable implementation, articulated most cogently in regular and predictable school visits. He also asserted that the power of modelling by senior staff is essential in influencing educator behavior, especially in moving beyond skill development to positively influencing educator attitudes.

There are two signifiers of the power of modelling in this case study. First, in feedback from the Principal, it was apparent that she appreciated the intellectual input that the team brought to the meetings and discussion. This was supported by the provision and sharing of scholarly and professional resources, and by the feedback the team would provide to the discussions. Although these inputs might normally be clustered under the rubric of "mentoring," the team tried to enact them as example of how the Principal herself would engage the problem solving. Secondly, and most potently, is the Principal's adoption of modelling in her everyday work, demonstrated by her willingness to enter classrooms and engage directly in teaching and numeracy demonstration. Her involvement, especially in the creative and performing arts night sketch, highlighted the power of modelling. Interestingly, despite the demonstrable power of modelling in other educational settings (e.g., Hellmundt & Bayer, 2017), reviews of school leadership development in Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia do not feature modelling as a mode of engagement between those seeking to lead leadership development and those being developed (Campbell et al., 2016; Dimmock, 2016; Notman, 2015; Torrance et al., 2016).

The Power of Narrative

Although little is explicitly mentioned of narrative in Townsend's and Adams' reports, narrative played a central role in their practices. They drew extensively on participants' narratives in their reports, which became potent evidence for participants' engagement and the growth they experienced. Generative dialogue, furthermore, is inherently about narrative, modified as a collaborative and formal mode of discussion, and the emerging narrative record provides primary evidence of the process.

The Principal's narrative grew significantly as she provided short anecdotes—narratives—of seemingly minor events, events that may otherwise in any formal evidence gathering system have escaped notice. It was only later that she talked about more formal modes of evidence. The critical

changes in her case, however, emerged as comments on her behavior, her colleagues' behaviour and her school community's behaviour.

Conclusion

This article presents one example of a way in which the structured approach to improving school leadership developed by David Townsend, Pam Adams, and their colleagues in Alberta, Canada, may be applied to the needs of a small school in an Australian educational jurisdiction. In providing a rich account of school leadership growth, with the specific focus on a school leader at a small rural school in New South Wales, Australia, the article demonstrates how engagement with processes of generative dialogue and collaborative inquiry can result in the school leader's growing confidence in engaging her school community. This success is evaluated against a model of Seven Powers derived from the work of Townsend et al.'s work in Canada and described in detail in another article in this *Special Issue* by the author. The school leader's own account of her changing relationship with her school and her developing sense of personal professionalism, reflects the positive effects of the Seven Powers in supporting professional development: carefully constructed and managed teams; professional relationships and processes; and the use of inquiry, reflection, collaboration, modeling, and narrative. The seventh power is the Power of Narrative. This record of school leadership development draws on that power to provide a practical example of progress and success in applying the twin methods of generative dialogue and collaborative inquiry, as enacted through engagement between a school leader and her guiding team. In doing so, the central importance of narrative has become clear.

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