School Change and the Challenge of Presentism

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ABSTRACT: Presentism – short-term thinking and acting – plays an inhibiting role in educational innovation and must be addressed by leaders seeking to bring sustainable change in schools. Since presentism was identified by Lortie in 1975, many attempts have been made to eliminate it, but evidence of its enduring presence in education systems remains. The Sustainable Whole School Renewal and Innovation Pilot Project was designed to overcome presentism, and bring long-term change. Based on the Schooling by Design model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007), it uses a backward design approach by defining a vision and working backward to achieve it. Participants within two schools were encouraged to develop long-term goals and work towards them, thus challenging the orientations and practices reinforcing presentism. We found a strong orientation of presentism in both schools, but had some success in engaging teachers in taking a longer-term perspective. The article concludes with implications for educational leaders about ways in which presentism can be challenged in school settings.

Introduction

The phenomenon of presentism pervades education in most Western countries, in spite of efforts by reformers and governments to minimise or eliminate it. Presentism, or short-term thinking and acting, undermines innovation in education because sustainable change requires a long-term perspective. Therefore, leaders who are serious about bringing lasting change in schools must address the problem of presentism. This article reviews the research literature on presentism, provides an analysis of presentism in the Australian context, presents some preliminary findings from the *Sustainable Whole School Renewal and Innovation Pilot Project*, which we designed to address the problem of presentism in Australian schools, and concludes with some recommendations for leaders about how they might tackle the challenge of presentism.

Presentism and Educational Innovation

Despite the best efforts of systems to reform education by increasing funding, supplying schools with student achievement data, providing professional development for teachers, and a variety of other opportunities, the way schools operate at the most fundamental levels of teaching and learning does not change. Research has shown that educational changes designed at the bureaucratic level have little impact on teaching in classrooms (Albright & Kramer-Dahl, 2009; Elmore, 2007), and have led to minimal change to the basics of schooling over a long period of time (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). One reason for this is that these kinds of reforms do not address a key problem for schools, which is presentism, or short-term planning (Lortie, 1975).

Lortie in his seminal work, *Schoolteacher* (1975), identified presentism, along with conservatism and individualism, as orientations that predispose teachers to desire only minimal change in education. Presentism refers to the pressures that lead teachers to look for rewards in the present and focus on short-term results. In his study of 94 teachers in the city of Boston, Lortie found that presentism was associated with conservatism (favouring minimal change) and individualism (an uneasy self-reliance), and that all three endure because of the way that teachers are recruited, socialised, and rewarded. According to Lortie (1975), presentism occurs because the uncertainties of teaching make teachers unwilling 'to sacrifice present opportunities for future possibilities' (p. 211), and because of the need to break teaching up into short units, such as lesson plans and units of study. Conservatism is fostered because 'young people who are favourably disposed toward the existing system of schools' (p. 54) are attracted to teaching as a career. The uncertainty of teaching can produce anxiety and teachers who are anxious are more likely 'to cling to what they know' (p. 209) and maintain a conservative outlook. Conservatism leads teachers to prefer continuity rather than change. Individualism develops because of the way that teachers are socialised; a teacher must judge his or her own effectiveness on the basis of ambiguous criteria and so tends 'to align his goals with his own capacities and interests' (p. 210). Individualism means that teachers desire only limited cooperation with others. Lortie's study showed that the orientations of presentism, conservatism and individualism led teachers to prefer only minimal change in education. When he talked to teachers about change, Lortie found that they wanted 'more of the same' (p. 184), that is, more time for productive teaching, better resources, improved facilities, and effective curricula. They also desired a greater role in decision making and higher levels of trust from principals and parents. Major changes in pedagogy or a critical review of the teaching profession were not considered by teachers, so they were unlikely to support radical and sustained reform in education.

Hargreaves (2010) reviewed the legacy of Lortie and noted that attempts to overcome presentism had not been successful, and that the endemic presentism that Lortie had observed as a natural aspect of teaching had transmuted into two new forms: adaptive and addictive presentism. Initially, Lortie's work inspired others to attempt to overcome individualism and resistance to change through building collaboration and professional community among teachers, but Hargreaves and Shirley (Hargreaves, 2010; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009) found that this was not enough. In their report on the Raising Achievement Transforming Learning (RATL) project in 300

English secondary schools, which was designed to support schools learning from other schools, Hargreaves and Shirley showed that even when teachers were given opportunities for collaboration in a project that encouraged medium and long-term perspectives, presentism was no longer merely endemic, but had become adaptive and even addictive. Adaptive presentism occurs when teachers and administrators experience increased pressure to implement multiple innovations in response to government policies of standardisation, accountability and mandatory testing. In the RATL project adaptive presentism was evidenced in short-term goals related to immediate test results, short-term funding arrangements, lack of time for reflection, and an emphasis on managing short-term concerns dictated by government policy. Addictive presentism has a sense of compulsion about it: teachers and administrators become enthusiastic about adopting short-term strategies with no consideration of the need to question existing conceptions of teaching and learning. In the RATL project schools became addicted to meeting targets, raising student achievement scores, and adopting simple, short-term strategies (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Hargreaves and Shirley's work demonstrates how government policy and system requirements can exacerbate presentism. This led Hargreaves (2010) to argue that the presentism already existing in schools is fed by the presentism that pervades the social and cultural fabric of postindustrial society and that the conservatism of Western social and political agendas must be addressed if sustainable educational change is to occur.

In another study Hargreaves and colleagues (2009) provided some hope that presentism can be overcome. They found that the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) in Canada was successful in challenging the effects of presentism on school improvement. The focus of the AISI is to improve student learning, engagement and performance. While improvements in student results on provincial tests were small, the strongest impacts were on teacher growth, changes in school cultures, and the development of distributed leadership. Three-year cycles allowed educators to engage in medium-term and long-term planning, rather than the short-term thinking that characterises presentism. The individualism associated with presentism was challenged as AISI provided increased opportunities for collaboration among teachers and schools, and as teachers joined professional learning communities and teams.

Although Lortie's work showed that teachers do not readily endorse large-scale change, and Hargreaves has demonstrated the difficulties in overcoming presentism, both also provide insights into ways in which the inhibiting influences of presentism, conservatism, and individualism may be overcome, and conditions created whereby teachers will be supportive of change. Inherent in Lortie's and Hargreaves' work is the implication that teachers are more likely to respond positively to proposed changes when the focus is on teaching and learning, and they are provided with the resources, facilities and time to develop effective curricula for their students, as well as the opportunity to influence the direction of change. Moreover, if the changes are introduced in an atmosphere of trust where teachers can explore how the changes are aligned with their own goals and interests, and there is a future perspective that encourages a long-term view, teachers are more likely to be supportive of the changes.

Successful educational innovation has the features that address presentism. Sustainable educational change focuses on improving teaching and learning practices across many sites (Fullan, 2011; Glennan et al., 2004; Levin & Fullan, 2008); such a focus encourages teachers to abandon their orientation of presentism because the change is closely aligned to their concerns

about the task of teaching. The adoption of a school-based reform agenda requires the school leadership to select from or reinterpret government mandates so that teachers are protected from the pressures created by multiple government initiatives and enabled to participate in the design of the innovation (Fullan, 2000; Goodson, 2001; Leithwood, Steinbach & Jantzi, 2002). Teacher involvement in every aspect of the innovation is essential, along with the necessary support to build teacher capacity in a climate of trust and collaboration (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Goodson, 2001; Louis, 2007; Timperley, Annan & Robinson, 2009). Data are used as an evidence-base to guide innovation and to challenge presentism, rather than promote it; that is, data analysis engages teachers in mindful and sustained explorations of student learning in order to determine the changes they need to make in their teaching, rather than using test results to create 'just-in-time interventions' (Hargreaves, 2010, p. 150; Hargreaves et al., 2009; Pettit, 2010; Timperley, Annan & Robinson, 2009). Successful innovation in schools requires a long-term perspective (Meiers & Ingvarson, 2005) of three to seven years (Smith, 2008), in order to directly challenge orientations of presentism. The role of school leaders in shaping and communicating a vision and guiding the change process is crucial (Smith, 2008). In sum, educational innovation is successful when it challenges and overcomes the phenomenon of presentism. This occurs when the focus of change is on improving teaching and learning, the reform agenda is appropriate to the particular school, teachers direct the change process in a community of trust, data are used to change pedagogy, a long-term perspective is taken, and school leaders play a key role in guiding the innovation.

Presentism in the Australian Context

Although Australia's national educational goals are long-term, the strategies for achieving them have the potential to exacerbate presentism. The Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) set the goal for all students in Australian schools to become 'successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens' (pp. 7-8). This goal is echoed in the rhetoric associated with the Rudd/Gillard Government's Education Revolution (see, for example, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010a; Gillard, 2009a). However, the policies implemented to achieve these goals are similar to those that have been found elsewhere to contribute to adaptive and addictive presentism: fast-paced reforms that focus teachers' attention on short-term improvements in students' standardised test results, and the need to manage immediate concerns dictated by government policy. The Education Revolution (ER), introduced in 2008, required teachers to implement multiple reforms at a rapid pace, and has placed the focus on standardised testing that leads to short-term temporary gains. These reforms included the National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN); the *My School* website to report students' test results; the introduction of the draft Australian Curriculum for Kindergarten to Year 10, to be implemented by 2013; provision of technology to schools: Smart Boards, computers for students in Years 9 to 12, and high speed broadband connections in schools (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2010a); and a standards-based *National Teaching Professional Framework* to guide teacher registration and accreditation, professional learning and performance appraisal (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace

Relations, 2010b). This multiplicity of reforms means that a typical primary school teacher will be implementing NAPLAN testing and analysing students' results in order to improve performance; seeking to understand the implications of the Australian curriculum for her teaching; learning to use new technology, such as an interactive whiteboard, in the classroom; and coming to terms with new standards for teacher accreditation and appraisal. In addition to this, a secondary teacher will also have Year 9 and 10 students bringing laptops to the classroom and expecting to use them. It is likely that teachers will be suffering from 'innovation overload', experiencing 'change-related chaos' (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 2509), and, with insufficient time for reflection, unable to see beyond the next innovation. In this environment principals and teachers will find it difficult to resist adopting an orientation of adaptive, and perhaps addictive, presentism.

The provision of large amounts of data to schools, while providing valuable information in relation to the progress of individual students, and in planning strategies for future school improvement, has the potential to exacerbate presentism. The Australian Government, like governments in many other Western nations, has recognised the need for educational change to be informed by data. Accordingly, in 2008 it introduced NAPLAN testing with the intention of providing information to help improve student learning (Gillard, 2009b). Teachers have been given assistance with analysing NAPLAN and other data through software packages like the *School Measurement, Assessment and Reporting Toolkit* (SMART) Data and SMART Data 2 being used in New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and South Australia. These sophisticated programs assist school personnel to analyse students' results from the earlier Basic Skills Tests (BST), NAPLAN, School Certificate and Higher School Certificate. SMART Data 2, which was made available to schools in 2011, enables teachers to examine the correlation between numeracy and reading comprehension, compare a student's results in primary school with their results in high school, and see what value has been added to students since their previous test results. This value-added factor can be compared across schools. Schools are expected to use these data to develop their three-year plans, and to make it the basis for the transformation of teaching practices. However, there are two ways in which the availability of data can exacerbate presentism. First, because most teachers do not have the skills to interpret the data they receive (Pierce & Chick, 2009), they may feel overwhelmed and see it as another reform among many that simply adds to their sense of innovation overload. Second, the requirement for data-based change can intensify an orientation of presentism if it provokes teachers, working from a short-term perspective, to be reactive; for example, teachers note that students' results are down in mathematics, and quickly devise short-term measures to overcome this.

Whole school innovation

A review of reports of educational change in Australia found some evidence of innovations that have had some success in challenging presentism. Over a four-year period, Hill and Crevola (1999) were involved in two large-scale, longitudinal projects in partnership with the Department of Education (the Early Literacy Research Project, or ELRP) and the Catholic Education Office in Victoria (the Children's Literacy Success Strategy, or CLaSS). The purpose of both projects was to maximise the literacy achievements of children in their first three years of schooling. Hill and Crevola adopted a whole school approach in an attempt to overcome the variation between classes

within schools. Students in both projects made substantial improvements in their literacy outcomes. These two projects overcame the influence of presentism and share many of the features of successful innovation, including a focus on teaching and learning, an agenda appropriate to the two schools, high levels of teacher-involvement, use of data to monitor students' progress, development of a learning community among teachers, and a long-term perspective.

Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools (IDEAS) is another whole school approach to educational innovation that appears to address presentism. Developed by the Leadership Research Institute at the University of Southern Queensland, the program grew steadily from 1997 to the present, and is currently operating in schools across Australia and further afield (Wildy & Faulkner, 2008). The goal of IDEAS is 'To inspire IDEAS schools to engage in a journey of self-discovery which will ensure that they achieve sustainable excellence in teaching and learning' (Andrews & Crowther, 2005, p. 4). IDEAS is based on a research framework that draws heavily on Newmann and Wehlage's (1995) report on Successful School Restructuring and includes cohesive community, schoolwide pedagogy, and parallel or collaborative leadership. There are five phases in the IDEAS process: initiating, discovering, envisioning, actioning and sustaining. When schools begin working with IDEAS, they create a vision for the school using data from a diagnostic survey of school stakeholders. Based on this vision, a Schoolwide Pedagogy is developed and applied by teachers in their practice. A case study of one particular school's experience of implementing IDEAS over a three-year period (Andrews, 2008) demonstrates that it is an effective model for school improvement that has challenged orientations of presentism in the school through its focus on achieving excellence in teaching and learning, its emphasis on achieving a shared vision, and engagement of teachers and leaders in shared responsibility for a new schoolwide pedagogy. Our innovation shares many of the features of IDEAS, but it differs in that it allows individual schools more flexibility in developing their own vision and means of achieving it. Our project also requires a longer timeframe than IDEAS, allowing schools five years to reach their long-term goals. This longer timeframe will enable issues of teacher frustration and resistance (Wildy & Faulkner, 2008), and orientations of presentism to be exposed and addressed.

Recently some details have emerged of other successful innovations in Australian schools, but insufficient evidence is available for replication or scale-up in other settings, or to indicate success in overcoming presentism. One example is Rooty Hill High School in western Sydney, where principal, Christine Cawsey, has been working since February 1997 to bring whole school reform. Two publications (Anderson & Cawsey, 2008; Cawsey, 2002) refer to changing the school's values, purposes and priorities, with the focus becoming student and teacher learning. Subsequent improvements in student outcomes are noted. However, to date there is no publication that describes the innovation process in the school over this 14-year period so that it could be replicated in other schools. Similarly, a document entitled, *Guidelines: Whole-School Intervention for Improvement*, (Queensland Government Department of Education, Training and the Arts, n.d.) provides guidelines for whole-school innovation programs and contains very brief case studies of how the guidelines were implemented in some schools, but again, there is no detailed, publicly available report of the success or otherwise of the programs.

The Sustainable Whole School Renewal and Innovation Pilot Project

We designed the *Sustainable Whole School Renewal and Innovation Pilot Project* to overcome presentism and bring sustainable long-term change. The purpose of the project is to demonstrate the viability of implementing an intensive evidence-based, whole-school innovation program, and thus provide a much-needed model of reform that can be adopted by other schools. The *Schooling by Design* model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007) was chosen to guide the project because it has most of the elements identified above as essential for successful educational innovation, and because its backward design techniques challenge presentism. Backward design encourages teachers to begin by defining a vision of where they want to end up, based on their school's mission and agreed principles of learning. Against this vision, they develop a realistic assessment of where the school stands in the present by analysing student achievement data and by assessing other aspects of the school context. Teachers then plan learning experiences for students that will close the gap between the vision and the reality (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). This approach has the potential to challenge presentism because it enables teachers to take control of the change process by becoming involved in site-based goal-setting, rather than being driven by short-term government initiatives and test targets. The entire process encourages teachers to be deeply reflective and to use the more effective method of analysing student data, as described by Hargreaves et al. (2009).

Working as facilitators, and using the principles of backward design, we challenged the orientation of presentism in the participating schools by encouraging teachers to create a vision of where they want to be in five years, based on their school's mission and goals. Teachers then developed a realistic assessment of the school in the present by analysing student achievement data from tests and other forms of assessment and by examining other aspects of the school environment. They set short-term goals to overcome the difference between their vision and the actual situation. Following Carr and Kemmis's model (1986), teachers, guided by the researchers, engaged in a self-reflective process of action research, setting a short-term goal and research questions, and planning steps to reach the goal. The whole teaching staff engaged in initiating action, evaluating the process of change and planning a second cycle of research.

The degree of success of the pilot project will be determined by whether teachers become committed to the process of defining a vision and working backward to achieve it, and through interviews with teachers and parents in regard to whether they consider that the innovation has helped the school to reach its goals. This will show whether the innovation has been effective in challenging presentism and supporting successful innovation.

Working with the schools

The *Sustainable Whole School Renewal and Innovation Pilot Project* is a multiple case study of two schools, one primary and one secondary school, as they implement the whole-school program. The schools were selected in consultation with the regional School Development Officer. Selection criteria included stable, motivated and energetic school leadership; stable, dynamic school staff; willingness to devote attention and time; and having a change orientation. We worked with the schools from mid-2009 to the end of 2011. The schools were encouraged to adopt a five-

year perspective, because it was anticipated that the pilot project would be scaled up to a larger, more sustained project later. Each school set up a steering committee for the project to collect and review relevant school data, set long-term normative goals, backward plan to set benchmarks for attaining these goals, design action research cycles to meet short-term goals, and review and revise the innovation in an iterative manner through the cycles of action research. Meetings of the steering committees were recorded and minutes were taken. Significant conversations in the meetings were transcribed. These minutes and transcriptions, along with other relevant documents, such as action research plans, were loaded into *QSR NVivo 9* and coded. Each school was treated as a separate case, and then a cross-case analysis was conducted. Our intention is that the results of this pilot project will be used to inform and strengthen a larger-scale implementation of the model in the other four schools in the same cluster (local area). The scaled-up project will follow a case study methodology similar to that of the pilot project.

Challenging Presentism

Preliminary findings of the *Sustainable Whole School Renewal and Innovation Pilot Project* are twofold: first, there is evidence of a strong orientation of presentism in both schools participating in the study; and, second, in spite of this, there has been some success in engaging teachers in taking a longer-term perspective.

The primary school

In the primary school the process of setting a long-term goal was protracted. The project steering committee was composed of the school executive (three teachers in 2009-10, five in 2011) and one parent representative. The process of backward mapping began with discussion of the committee's vision of the ideal graduate. Over several meetings this vision was adapted into a long-term goal. Two joint meetings held with the high school's steering committee led to the decision that complementary goals were the most appropriate. Seven months and six meetings into the process, first attempts were made at formulating a goal. Two months later the final goal was suggested, but by the next meeting it had become lost among attempts to make the goal measurable. Finally, 12 months and 10 meetings after the process began, an appropriate goal emerged: 'To build a culture of success based on our vision of the ideal graduate, in order to better aid transition from primary to high school'. Short-term goals were more easily determined. The Phase 1 goal was 'to identify consistent strategies K-6 and develop a consistent approach for data entry of results onto [computer program] and to use this data to support transition to high school'. This goal was achieved by the end of 2010 and the goal for Phase 2 (2011) was 'to focus on mathematics as an area of development across the middle years of schooling to improve outcomes and teaching strategies'.

Presentism in the primary school affected the project in several ways: arranging meetings; ability to focus on the task at hand because of other pressures; and developing a long-term goal. Arranging meetings was often difficult simply because there was so much happening at the school; for example, excursions, out-of-school professional development, report-writing, collaborating

with the high school on activities indirectly related to the project, and NAPLAN testing. When meetings were held it was often difficult for teachers to 'switch off' from the immediate pressures of the day. For example, the primary school principal began one meeting by listing the concerns she and her staff were facing that day, including multiple communications daily from the DET concerning policy implementation, a change in the computer system for managing school finance, the increased number of students in out-of-home placements, and 'kids in traumatic situations daily'. One of the researchers responded to this with, 'So this meeting basically is a chance for you to catch up, a chance for you to not have to deal with the immediate, but to deal with the long-term, which is a luxury, I suppose'. The principal replied, 'Yes, that would be this afternoon at three o'clock's long-term for us at the moment'. On other occasions meetings were interrupted by more immediate matters, for example, the need to find a box for a student who had just come into the staff room with a lizard on his arm.

During the meetings themselves, the primary school committee found it challenging to develop an appropriate long-term goal for the project. Their struggle to formulate a goal that was measurable, and the pressure of present concerns on the process, are illustrated in this comment by the principal:

> The long-term goal was what we had to look at and you wanted something more tangible, I suppose, than just 'to build a culture of success', so the girls and I sat down and we worked out, let's look at what we do and how we can measure it over a period of years. And because we're in the middle of reporting on what we're doing, I looked at the reports and I thought, well a measurable goal and data collection thing for us would be our reports ... if we aim for every child to have at least three highs on their report, high achievement, then I think we are setting out to do this 'better graduate' thing.

Notice that the thinking of the principal and her executive was strongly influenced by the fact that they were in the middle of writing student reports, and so they decided that the way to measure the building of a culture of success in the school was to aim for every child to reach a standard of high achievement in three of their subjects. The committee needed our encouragement to return to the holistic view of the child discussed previously and also include measures relating to social outcomes, such as merit certificates awarded for positive behaviour, and student involvement in extracurricular activities and school leadership.

In spite of the enduring presentism, there were some early successes in assisting teachers to move towards long-term goals. At a meeting of the primary school committee in mid-2011, teachers were clearly committed to the process of defining a vision and working backward to achieve it, and significant progress had been made towards reaching the goals. The short-term goal for Phase 1, to develop a consistent approach for data entry of results, had been met at the end of 2010, and the processes of data entry were embedded and being continually updated and modified. Teachers were working towards the Phase 2 goal of focusing on mathematics as an area of development across the middle years of schooling, through collaboration with the high school. In addition, they were well on the way to achieving the long-term goal of improving transition of students to high school. There was also evidence of the growth of a supportive community centred on teaching and learning, professional dialogue, and changing pedagogy. On several different occasions the principal voiced her concern that NAPLAN data be used to improve teaching strategies, and she showed that her vision had moved beyond the long-term goal when she said,

'We're working along the path that is getting us to teach kids of the future…So we're looking at what makes the kid of the next century'.

The high school

At the high school the long-term goal was voiced by the principal at an early meeting and subsequently adopted by the project steering committee. The steering committee was composed of members of the school executive who volunteered to participate (five teachers). A process similar to that in the primary school was followed at the high school. The committee's vision of the ideal graduate was discussed over several meetings and the staff engaged in analysis of students' results in NAPLAN, the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate. The outcome was that the committee and the school staff adopted the goal originally suggested by the principal, 'to make [this school] the school of choice', that is, the school chosen by students and their parents from the partner primary schools for their high school education. The process of reaching this goal took nine meetings and about nine months. The committee then set the short-term goal for the Phase 1 action research cycle, 'to improve students' numeracy skills across the curriculum'. This goal was achieved by mapping how numeracy was taught across the curriculum, assessing numeracy levels, identifying areas for improvement, and providing professional development for teaching numeracy.

Presentism in the high school was even more acute than in the primary school, and it impeded the project. Changes in government policy meant that teachers were implementing the Digital Education Revolution, planning for the introduction of the new national curriculum, and dealing with the change in the New South Wales school leaving age. Teachers were also struggling with analysis of NAPLAN data, which one teacher said was beyond teachers' skills. She thought teachers would like to discuss the NAPLAN data immediately, but there was no opportunity to do so. Meetings were held regularly in the latter half of 2009 and the first half of 2010, but as in the primary school, teachers often had difficulty switching from the immediate pressures of school life to longer-term issues. In the second half of 2010 staff became too busy for meetings, and so in September we met with the principal. She explained that, 'it will get worse next term too, because so many of them mark the HSC and they leave at lunchtime to get to Sydney to do the marking so, you know, but that's how schools operate…'. In 2011 the high school moved towards achieving its long-term goal of being 'the school of choice', reporting a 29% increase in enrolments of students in Year 7 for 2012. The goal for the Phase 2 action research cycle was to 'improve student achievement in numeracy to match their achievement in other areas'. Progress towards this goal was made when high school mathematics teachers met with teachers from three partner primary schools and engaged in significant dialogue about differences in the ways that mathematics is taught in the four schools. Subsequent to this meeting, the teachers visited each other's schools and classrooms to observe how maths is taught in the different settings. The principal also reported evidence of a change in the school culture, and more positive perceptions of the school in the community.

Discussion: Strategies to overcome presentism

The *Sustainable Whole School Renewal and Innovation Pilot Project* has found evidence of a robust orientation of adaptive presentism in both the primary and the high school, but there has been some success in engaging teachers in taking a longer-term perspective to set a five-year goal and work towards achieving it. We conclude that the project had this degree of success because it adopted the features of successful innovations described in the literature that enable the inhibitive effects of presentism on innovation in these schools to be overcome. Both schools focused on improving teaching and learning (Fullan, 2011) and adopted a reform agenda appropriate to their particular school (Fullan, 2000; Goodson, 2001). Each school selected a   long-term goal that was important for them: a graduate fully prepared for high school, and a school that attracted students because of the quality of education provided. The role of teachers in directing the change process (Timperley, Annan & Robinson, 2009) was more obvious in the primary school, where teachers regularly engaged in professional dialogue in regard to teaching programs, assessment, and pedagogy, and influenced decisions directly related to the project. Teachers at both schools expressed concerns that data be used to enable them to change their teaching strategies (Hargreaves, 2010; Timperley, Annan & Robinson, 2009), rather than to simply develop short-term fixes. Willingness to take a long-term perspective (Meiers & Ingvarson, 2005) was evident, with both schools setting five-year goals and, although the pilot project covered only a two-year timespan, the commitment of teachers is ongoing. The role of the principal in each school was vital (Smith, 2008): both principals made strong commitments to their goals and to the process of backward design over a sustained period of time, and their enthusiasm was a key factor in the engagement of teachers with the project.

   Although our work with the two schools was affected on many occasions by an orientation of presentism, the *Sustainable Whole School Renewal and Innovation Pilot Project* was an effective means of moving them towards sustainable change. Teachers in both schools made a commitment to the process of defining a vision and working backward to achieve it. They were able to adopt the perspective essential for setting a long-term (five-year) goal relevant to their school, then develop short-term goals and design action research plans that would guide the school towards the achievement of the long-term goal. We anticipate that the scale-up of the pilot project to include the other four primary schools in the cluster and continuing work with these two schools over the next three years will provide further evidence of successful innovation that overcomes presentism.

   These findings lead us to make some recommendations for leaders of change in schools. First, be aware of the pervasiveness of presentism, not just in education, but in the social fabric of Western society (Hargreaves, 2010), and take steps to minimise its impact on schools. Second, achieve this by creating a buffer between the external pressures of multiple government mandates and the needs of the school (Leithwood, Steinbach & Jantzi, 2002), so that leaders and their staff can develop an innovation that is appropriate for their particular setting, and be focused on long-term rather than short-term issues. Third, make an enthusiastic long-term commitment to the vision developed by the school community, so that others will be encouraged to make a similar commitment. Fourth, adopt an approach of shared leadership that encourages teachers to take initiative in developing an innovation for which they have responsibility and a sense of ownership.

This will occur more easily in an atmosphere of trust and support where there is opportunity for capacity-building and collaboration. Fifth, make it clear to the school community that the purpose of the innovation is the improvement of teaching and learning, an objective all will agree is worthy of a long-term perspective.

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