

# LEAD BEYOND HORIZONS IN THE LOOP

Issue 1 | April 2026

Leadership. Learning. Growth.

## Purpose, Practice, and the Return to What Matters

*Reflections on teaching, mindset, learning, and the enduring work of growth.*

Author: Manuj Gokul, PhD

Editorial Review:

Tanya McSwaine. Head of Special Education Services, Yeronga State High School, Brisbane, Australia

Archie Pillay. Principal, Alencon Primary School, Durban, South Africa

*Growth rarely happens all at once. More often, it unfolds through reflection, disciplined learning, courageous questions, and meaningful encounters with ideas that stay with us.*

### WELCOME

Welcome to the first issue of In The Loop, the quarterly publication of Lead Beyond Horizons. This edition invites educators, leaders, and growth-minded professionals to pause, reflect, and return to what matters most: purpose in our work, care in our practice, and wisdom in the choices that shape learning and leadership.

### IN THIS ISSUE

#### From the Field

A Return to the Classroom

#### Beyond the Horizon

Books, Writing, and Digital Learning

#### In Practice

A Simple Team Reflection Protocol

#### On the Shelf

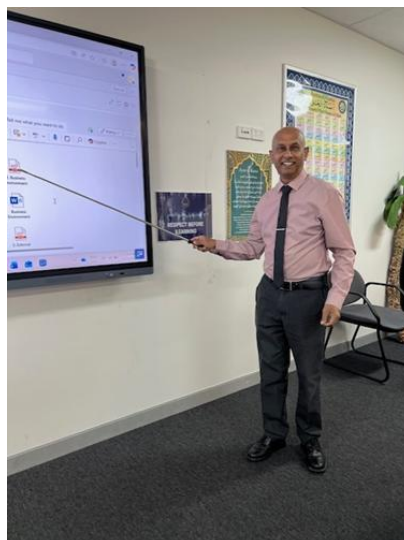
Mindset and Growth-Oriented Thinking

#### Watch & Reflect

Two International Video Features

#### Looking Ahead

Don't Finish Where You Started



## FROM THE FIELD

### A Return to the Classroom

How one term of teaching reaffirmed purpose, practice, and the people who carry the work of schools

There are seasons in life when purpose is not discovered for the first time, but quietly reawakened.

During six months of service work in South Africa, I had the privilege of speaking at a range of organisations and institutions. In those conversations with students, staff, and communities, something familiar began to stir again. The encounters reminded me that service, education, leadership, and personal calling are never far apart.

On returning to Brisbane, I stepped back into school life for one term, serving as a teacher at an independent college. It was a rewarding experience - warm, demanding, and clarifying. The students were a delight to teach, the staff were collegial, and the atmosphere carried a strong sense of shared care.

The experience also offered a fresh encounter with the daily reality of teaching. My allocation spanned multiple year levels, senior subjects, and a form class. Very quickly, I was immersed in the rhythm that so many teachers know well: the visible work of teaching in the classroom, and the less visible work that fills the hours beyond it.

Evenings and weekends were spent reading curriculum documents, revisiting content, planning lessons, preparing resources, and making necessary adjustments for students requiring additional support. It was a reminder that teaching is sustained by a great deal of labour, both intellectual and emotional.

And yet, for all its demands, there was something deeply life-giving about returning to the classroom. Drawing on high-impact teaching strategies, supported by digital tools and structured resources, I found genuine joy in the craft of helping ideas come alive.

One feature that stayed with me was the school's expectation that students write notes in their notebooks and record research in physical booklets. In an age shaped increasingly by screens, speed, and copy-and-paste habits, this practice carried educational wisdom. It supported ownership, care, and a more tangible engagement with ideas.

At the same time, the experience offered no romantic illusion. Teaching remains deeply demanding work. The pace is relentless, the responsibilities are layered, and much of the work remains unseen.

Perhaps that is why one of the clearest lessons from the term was not only about teaching, but about leadership. No teacher flourishes in isolation. The encouragement, practical support, and steady presence of school leaders — along with the generosity of trusted colleagues — can make an enormous difference to how the work is experienced and sustained. I was particularly encouraged that senior leaders reached out with thoughtful questions about how the school could improve, how teaching might be strengthened and made more consistent, and how the school could move more deliberately towards excellence. Those conversations reminded me that strong leadership is never passive; it is reflective, purposeful, and committed to enabling quality teaching and learning.

This return to the classroom deepened my conviction that teachers and leaders need more than goodwill: - they need thoughtful support, strong professional culture, practical tools, and space to reflect and grow. It also clarified why Lead Beyond Horizons matters to me. The academy is, in part, a response to what I have seen and come to believe more deeply: those entrusted with shaping learning, culture, and lives deserve to be supported well.

#### Reflection

What does meaningful support for teachers and leaders look like in practice - and how can schools strengthen it intentionally, not occasionally?

#### Key Line

If schools are to flourish, then the people within them must be strengthened - not only in skill, but also in clarity, confidence, purpose, and hope.

## ON THE SHELF

### Mindset and the Power of Growth-Oriented Thinking

Why the beliefs we carry about growth, effort, and potential matter so much

This quarter, I am reading *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol S. Dweck. It is a fitting choice for this first issue because it speaks directly to one of the most important questions in learning and leadership: how do our beliefs shape what we become?

For educators and leaders, this matters deeply. Schools are not only places where knowledge is taught but they are also places where beliefs are formed - beliefs about ability, effort, challenge, progress, and success. These beliefs shape how students respond to difficulty, how teachers approach improvement, and how leaders build culture.

One of the enduring strengths of *Mindset* is that it encourages us to think beyond performance alone. It invites reflection on how people respond to mistakes, effort, challenge, feedback, and growth. In that sense, it reminds us that growth is not only about strategy. It is also about belief.

#### This quarter's reflection

How do the messages we give - in classrooms, teams, and organisations - shape whether people see challenge as threat or opportunity?

#### For teams

What would it look like to strengthen a culture of growth, reflection, effort, and improvement in our context?

## BEYOND THE HORIZON

### Should Schools Return to More Writing, Books, and Paper-Based Learning?

A timely question about balance, attention, and the conditions that support learning well

Across many schools, digital tools are now part of everyday life. They have brought speed, access, convenience, and flexibility. Yet an important question is re-emerging: have these schools moved too quickly away from handwriting, books, and paper-based learning?

This is not a simple debate about old versus new. It is a question about the conditions that best support learning. When screens become the default, students may lose some of the habits that slower, more deliberate learning helps to build: sustained attention, careful notetaking, cognitive endurance, and deeper processing.

The issue is not whether schools should reject technology. It is whether they are using it wisely.

## THREE LENSES

Lens	Consideration
<b>The Good</b>	Technology can improve accessibility, communication, efficiency, collaboration, and opportunities for revision and research.
<b>The Bad</b>	When overused or poorly aligned, it can encourage distraction, surface-level engagement, and reduced ownership of learning.
<b>The Ugly</b>	If schools fail to ask why technology is being used, they risk confusing convenience with quality and activity with learning.

#### Questions for reflection:

Where is digital use in our context genuinely enhancing learning? Where might it be weakening attention, ownership, or retention? What balance between digital efficiency and cognitive quality do we want for our students?

## WATCH & REFLECT

# Two International Videos on Screens, Textbooks, and Learning

Curated viewing to support reflection, dialogue, and wider perspective

### 1. Student screen time: Finnish schools reverse policy on digital devices

Why it matters: It prompts educators and leaders to ask whether digital convenience is always serving student learning well.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sxo15FPGyYw&t=12s>

#### Reflection question:

Where in our own context might technology be helping learning - and where might it be weakening focus, memory, or ownership?

### 2. Back to textbooks: Denmark rolls back digital learning

Why it matters: It reminds us that the key question is not whether technology is current, but whether it is being used wisely and effectively.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKoCZKtpS3Q>

#### Reflection question:

What balance between digital efficiency and cognitive depth do we want for students in our schools?

## IN PRACTICE

# A Simple Team Reflection Protocol

1. **What do we notice?** What stands out? What patterns, tensions, or concerns are visible?

2. **Why might this matter?** What are the implications for students, staff, practice, culture, or leadership?

3. **What should we do next?** What action, response, adjustment, or further inquiry might be worthwhile?

Practice prompt: Use this protocol with your team to discuss one current issue in your context.

## LOOKING AHEAD

### Coming Soon: Don't Finish Where You Started

*A journey across horizons to a life of purpose, learning, and becoming*

By Dr Manuj Gokul

A forthcoming book exploring growth, resilience, purpose, faith, learning, and the lifelong journey of becoming. From humble beginnings in Tin Town, South Africa, to a life of service, leadership, learning, and impact across continents, this deeply personal memoir reflects on adversity, gratitude, transformation, and the courage to keep becoming.

**Expected publication: Before the end of 2026**

**Call to action: Register your interest**

[www.leadbeyondhorizons.com.au](http://www.leadbeyondhorizons.com.au) | [hello@leadbeyondhorizons.com.au](mailto:hello@leadbeyondhorizons.com.au)

*You do not have to finish where you started.*

## CLOSING NOTE

Thank you for reading the first issue of In The Loop. We hope it offers not only encouragement, but also substance - something to think about, discuss, and carry into practice.

**Lead well. Learn deeply. Keep growing.**