

LEAD BEYOND HORIZONS IN THE LOOP

Issue 2 | July 2026

Leadership. Learning. Growth.

LEGACY: WHAT ARE WE PASSING ON?

Reflections on culture, instructional leadership, belonging, and the enduring influence of educators.

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

Opening Thought

Every school leaves a legacy. It is found not only in results and buildings, but in the stories students carry, the cultures leaders shape, and the values communities choose to preserve.

WELCOME

Welcome to the second issue of In The Loop, the quarterly publication of Lead Beyond Horizons. This edition invites educators and leaders to consider a question that sits quietly beneath the daily work of schools: what are we passing on? Recent travels through Canada prompted reflection on culture, stewardship, belonging, and the deep responsibility communities carry when they choose to preserve what matters. In schools, the same responsibility remains. We do not only teach curriculum. We also teach values, habits, expectations, identity, care, and hope.

IN THIS ISSUE

From the Field

Lessons from Canada: What Are We Passing On?

On the Shelf

Instructional Leadership by Peter M. DeWitt

Beyond the Horizon

Culture Does Not Happen by Accident

Learning Beyond the Page

Two TED Talks Worth Watching

In Practice

Building School Legacy: A Team Reflection Protocol

Looking Ahead

Don't Finish Where You Started



FROM THE FIELD

Lessons from Canada: What Are We Passing On?

How travel, culture, and community invite deeper reflection on the legacy of schools

Recently, I had the privilege of travelling through Canada. The landscapes were breathtaking - from Moraine Lake and the peaks of Banff to Niagara Falls and the forests surrounding Vancouver. Yet, as an educator and school leader, it was not the scenery that stayed with me most. It was the people, the stories, and the lessons about culture, stewardship, and community.

One memorable experience was visiting the Yamnuska Wolfdog Sanctuary near Calgary. Watching the care and dedication shown by staff and volunteers reminded me of a simple truth: care changes outcomes. Young people flourish when they experience belonging, encouragement, and genuine support.

Another highlight was visiting the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre in Whistler. Through stories, artefacts, and film, I learned how the Squamish and Lil'wat peoples intentionally pass their culture from one generation to the next. Community leaders, elders, educators, and linguists have worked together to strengthen language programs so that children can learn their native languages while also succeeding in academics, sport, and the arts.

This was not a community choosing between tradition and excellence. It was a community pursuing both.

Across British Columbia, I was fascinated by the totem poles that stand as powerful symbols of identity and history. Each tells a story of people, values, relationships, and beliefs. They prompted a question that stayed with me throughout the journey: what stories are we intentionally passing on to our children?

First Nations communities spoke often about their responsibility to care for the land, waterways, and forests. Their deep connection to place reminded me that schools also have an important role in preserving what matters.

In an age focused on performance and accountability, culture, identity, and belonging remain just as important. Strong communities do not leave these things to chance - they teach them intentionally.

Key Line

Perhaps our greatest responsibility is not simply to prepare students for the future, but to help them become worthy custodians of it.

Provocations for Reflection

What values, habits, and beliefs are students learning from our school culture every day? Can students, staff, and families clearly articulate the stories and values that define our school? What legacy will remain long after current leaders have moved on?

ON THE SHELF

Instructional Leadership - Peter M. DeWitt

Why learning, engagement, collaboration, and evidence belong at the centre of school improvement

One of the books I recently completed reading is *Instructional Leadership. Creating Practice Out of Theory* by Peter M. DeWitt. What I appreciate most is DeWitt's view that instructional leadership is about far more than classroom observations or monitoring teaching practice. Instead, he places learning, engagement, collaboration, and evidence at the heart of school improvement.

First, DeWitt challenges leaders to focus on learning - not only student learning, but adult learning as well. Effective schools create conditions where teachers continually refine their practice and deepen their impact.

Second, he emphasises authentic student engagement, moving beyond compliance to ensure students feel connected, valued, and invested in their learning.

Third, he explores instructional strategies through the lens of surface, deep, and transfer learning, reminding us that learning is only complete when students can apply their knowledge in new contexts.

The book also highlights the power of collective efficacy - the shared belief that educators, working together, can positively influence student outcomes. Finally, DeWitt encourages leaders to evaluate impact through evidence, asking not simply, 'Did we implement it?' but rather, 'What difference did it make?'

Provocations for School Leaders

- Are our leadership conversations focused more on teaching or on learning?
- How do we know students are genuinely engaged rather than merely compliant?
- Do our instructional programs promote transfer, not just content coverage?
- What evidence shows that professional learning is improving classroom practice?
- When evaluating initiatives, do we measure activity or impact?

BEYOND THE HORIZON

Culture Does Not Happen by Accident

The invisible curriculum that shapes what students remember

Schools intentionally teach literacy, numeracy, science, humanities, technologies, and the arts. Great schools also intentionally teach belonging, respect, responsibility, service, identity, and hope.

These lessons are not always written in curriculum documents. They are carried through routines, assemblies, language, relationships, symbols, expectations, celebrations, and the way adults respond when things are difficult.

Culture is the invisible curriculum. Students learn what matters by watching what leaders protect, what teachers model, what communities celebrate, and what schools refuse to ignore.

Every school has a culture. The question is whether it is being designed intentionally or inherited accidentally.

Reflection Question

What are students learning from the culture of our school that we never formally teach?

LEARNING BEYOND THE PAGE

Two TED Talks Worth Watching

Curated viewing to support reflection, dialogue, and professional learning

VIDEO 1

The Danger of a Single Story

Speaker: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie | TED Talk

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r2e68vQ6gf0>

Why it matters: This talk invites educators to reflect on the stories that shape how people, communities, and cultures are understood. It challenges schools to ask whose voices are heard, whose identities are recognised, and whose stories may be missing.

- What stories about our school community are most often told - and whose voices may be missing?
- How can schools honour the cultural identities and histories of all students while building a shared sense of belonging?
- What traditions, values, or stories do we want future generations of students to remember about our school?

Leadership Insight

Leadership begins with understanding the stories that shape people, communities, and cultures.

VIDEO 2

Every Kid Needs a Champion

Speaker: Rita Pierson | TED Talk

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

Why it matters: This talk reminds educators that relationships are not an optional extra. They are central to learning, confidence, perseverance, and belonging.

- How effectively does our school balance academic achievement with meaningful relationships?
- What evidence do we have that every student feels known, valued, and supported?
- If students were asked to identify their 'champion' at school, what would their responses reveal about our culture?

Learning Insight

Students learn best when they believe that someone believes in them.

IN PRACTICE

Building School Legacy: A Team Reflection Protocol

A practical conversation tool for leadership teams, faculties, and professional learning communities

Use these prompts in a leadership team meeting, faculty conversation, staff professional learning session, or coaching dialogue. The aim is to sharpen collective attention around the legacy your school is already building.

1. Notice	What are students learning from our culture that is never written in the curriculum?
2. Name	What values, traditions, stories, and practices should never disappear from our school?
3. Listen	If students, parents, and new staff described our school, what words would they use?
4. Align	Where are our stated values visible in everyday practice - and where are they less visible?
5. Act	What is one small, deliberate action we can take this term to strengthen belonging, learning, and legacy?

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 | hello@leadbeyondhorizons.com.au

You do not have to finish where you started.

Practice Prompt

Choose one reflection question from this issue and discuss it with a colleague or team. End the conversation by naming one practical action that could strengthen learning, belonging, or legacy.

CLOSING NOTE

This edition has explored culture, learning, leadership, and impact. While the contexts may differ - from Canadian First Nations communities to contemporary school leadership - the underlying message is the same: meaningful improvement happens when we are intentional about what we value, what we teach, and what we leave behind.

People remember how places made them feel. The same is true of schools. Long after students forget particular lessons, they remember belonging, encouragement, and the adults who believed in them.

Lead well. Learn deeply. Leave a legacy.