

# Introduction

**The learning walk process described in this resource is based on a *Futures Learning Walk Process (FLeW)*, a process where the future needs of learning both within and beyond the organisation are considered.**

## THE FLeW FOCUSES ON:

**FUTURE:** *the ability to continually explore the changing needs of students and to move courageously to meet these needs. Learning walks inform what you do in the future and provide information for your next steps ... personally, professionally and globally. They aim to build on existing good practice while stretching learning to new levels through continuous improvement.*

**Le:** *Learning – it's about learning through observing, gathering information and data, reflection, feedback and action. It includes hearing the voices of students as well as adults.*

**WALKS:** *it's about focused walking, not aimless wandering ... it's about direct observation – seeing with your own eyes because you are visible where learning happens – regularly.*

There are five books following this one, each providing in-depth information about one stage of the FLeW process summarized in this resource. These books will be available for download from [www.thinkbeyond.co.nz](http://www.thinkbeyond.co.nz) as they become available.

## Prerequisites to learning walks

The development of a strong professional learning community is a pre-requisite to implementing learning walks. Setting up such a community is not as easy as it sounds. However, a culture of sharing and trust must come first. This alone, will not necessarily lead to change in student outcomes. A coherent theory of action for improving student learning must be part of this.

The starting place for learning walks is not in the learning walks themselves but in your role

as a leader. A leader needs to be credible. Kouzes and Posner (2003) describe people's need for leadership credibility as a 'prerequisite to willingly contribute their hearts, minds, bodies and souls' (Kouzes and Posner, 2003: xiii).

As a leader of a learning organisation time needs to be continually spent on developing personal character before developing organisational culture, for as Kouzes and Posner identify, "culture is the organisational equivalent of a person's character" (Kouzes & Posner, 2003: xxi).

**It is important to establish an organisational culture that supports staff while still expecting to move them forward. If the foundations of a professional learning community have yet to be developed in your school, focus on this before thinking of implementing learning walks. Read some of the literature<sup>2</sup> in this area and act on it. Learning walks are one process that can then develop professional learning communities to new heights. As a leader it is important that you are ready to be part of the change rather than a spectator on the sideline.**

<sup>2</sup>Explore the work of Louise Stoll or Richard DuFour for insight into professional learning communities.

## What is a learning walk?

**A learning walk is a regular, focused walk in and around learning areas for a brief period of time - observing and gathering data - followed by reflection, feedback and the setting of future goals.**

Learning walks involve one or more people visiting learning areas with a particular focus and then spending time reflecting back on findings. This can be done as part of a peer coaching process, by the principal, senior leadership, staff teams and even across schools. The learning walk process described in this book does not focus on the classroom alone.