

REPORT ON PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL LEAVE TERM 2 2008

“Improving perception and performance of principal leadership through conversation, observation and educational research”.

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Executive Summary

This report comprises three sections. The first is a report on my work to date with the ISSPP Project. The second section is an introduction to the project prepared as a paper for the CCEAM Conference in Durban 8-12 September 2008. The final section is a report on my visits to 8 International Schools. That section contains opinion, insight, questions and new learning.

Purposes

The main purposes for which I applied for sabbatical leave were to provide personal and professional refreshment through a programme of travel and visits to principal colleagues and to take part in an international research project to increase my skills and experience as an educational researcher. This involved research, some study and professional refreshment through visiting schools. In particular the purposes were:

1. To take part as a researcher in the International Successful School Principals' Project (ISSPP) the goals of which are to:
 - a. Collect data from a multiplicity of perspectives including those of principals, deputy principals, boards of trustees, parents, students, support staff and teachers;
 - b. Compare effective principalship in contexts ranging from small primary schools to large urban secondary schools;
 - c. Identify the personal qualities and professional competencies which are generic to effective principalship in schools;
 - d. Re-examine existing theoretical perspectives on school principalship through insight derived from new empirical research; and,
 - e. Contribute to the wider educational debate on the relationships between principalship and school effectiveness improvement.
2. To study leadership practices in a range of New Zealand and overseas schools and to observe leadership dimensions that have a particularly powerful impact on students.
3. To undertake international travel in association with 1 and 2 above and for leisure.

Subject 1: ISSPP (International Successful School Principals Project) Activities

Brief outline of project

The project is the first of its kind in the world and will result in the most comprehensive picture of the characteristics of successful school leaders in primary and secondary schools in different socio-economic circumstances in different countries. The project is under the directorship of Professor Christopher Day from the University of Nottingham. Currently, it involves eight universities in England, America, Australia, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Canada and China. The University of Otago, representing New Zealand, will be the 9th member of the international research group. The major purpose of the research study is to identify aspects of successful school leadership across a range of international contexts.

My role in the project

I was one of 6 researchers for the New Zealand phase of the project. My job involved working with a team of three people to visit schools and carry out interviews with principals, teachers, students, parents and board members. I was responsible for organising the onsite visit for one school and speaking to staff meetings about the project.

Following on from the data gathering phase we each took responsibility for coordinating the research in one school. That involved transcribing taped interviews, analysing data using a framework agreed for the project and preparing a case study for the school.

Findings

All researchers contributed to a paper that was presented at a Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management (CCEAM) Conference in Durban, South Africa in September 2008.

The six case studies will also form the basis of a March 2009 issue of The Journal of Education Policy and Practice. The journal article will carry an introduction, six case studies and an implications and summary section of the New Zealand research.

A meeting was organised where the 6 New Zealand researchers 'looked through the data' from the six case studies to find common and different strands. These will be used to inform a New Zealand chapter in a book to be published in 2010. Writing will be carried out by the leader of the New Zealand project.

Subject 2: School Leadership Activities

“Every school leader believes they can make a positive difference to the achievement and wellbeing of students” (Viviane Robinson, New Zealand Education Gazette Volume 86 Number 11 9 July 2007). An important message permeating Robinson’s research on Best Evidence Synthesis Leadership is “... the closer leadership gets to the core business of teaching and learning, the more impact leaders have on valued student outcomes” (Ibid. p12).

Most people would agree with the logic and principles in Robinson’s findings but there have been some assertions that the work of New Zealand principals, while it encompasses Robinson’s assertion, is somehow unique and is not fully acknowledged in the research and official literature. I was interested in exploring that issue.

I began by familiarising myself with reports of Robinson’s preliminary work; reviewing documents setting out expectations for principals including the Professional Standards for Principals; my job description; reviewing the Kiwi Leadership Programme; some of the official documents setting out what is expected of a New Zealand principal; and, visiting seven International Schools in four countries to carry out a comparative view of principalship.

Best Evidence Synthesis

A Ministry of Education report confirms that school leaders can make a positive difference to the achievement and wellbeing of students. However, Professor Viviane Robinson at Auckland University says emerging research clearly shows that the leadership of schools where students perform above and below expected levels is quite different. Some studies say that school leaders have a weak and indirect effect on students but Robinson says, "... if you compare the high performers and the low performers in a sample of otherwise similar schools, the leadership looks very different” (Ibid. p11).

She said, "Those studies are particularly helpful when they enable us to identify which particular leadership practices are making the difference to students” “We need to be cautious, however, as there are very few studies which have tested the links between leadership and student outcomes" (Ibid. p11) she said.

About 25 such studies have been located so far, and these are reported in one of 10 draft chapters in the Ministry's Best Evidence Synthesis on School Leadership. From this analysis, Viviane and her team have identified five leadership **dimensions** they believe have a particularly powerful impact on students:

1. Establishing goals and expectations: includes the setting, communication and monitoring of learning goals, standards and expectations, and the involvement of staff and others in the process so that there is clarity and consensus about goals. Robinson believes leadership makes a difference to students through emphasis on clear academic and learning goals. The challenge for leaders is to decide the relative importance of competing goals and activities.
2. Strategic resourcing: involves aligning resource selection and allocation to priority teaching goals. It involves looking at the data, understanding what it is saying, working out what we need to do next and resourcing that step appropriately. It includes provision of appropriate expertise through staff recruitment.

3. Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum: direct involvement in the support and evaluation of teaching through regular classroom visits and provision of formative and summative feedback to teachers. This involves direct oversight of curriculum through school-wide coordination across classes and year levels and alignment to school goals.
4. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development: leadership that not only promotes but directly participates with teachers in formal or informal professional learning. In this dimension, the leader participates in the learning as leader, learner or both. In order to support their staff with changes in such areas as pedagogy, grouping practices or resources, leaders need to understand what is being asked of their staff. The best way to do this is to learn alongside them.
5. Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment: protecting time for teaching and learning by reducing external pressures and interruptions and establishing an orderly and supportive environment both inside and outside classrooms. The purpose here is to ensure teachers can focus on teaching and students can focus on learning. The key here is to ensure a "... safe and supportive environment for students and staff through clear and consistently enforced social expectations and discipline codes". That includes a quick and effective resolution to instances of staff conflict. Also important is protecting teachers from undue pressure from education officials and parents and so allow them to "focus on their teaching and to enable a coordinated rather than ad hoc response to parental politics and lobby groups."

Official documents

To see how Robinson's views compare with official requirements for principals I firstly reviewed the dimensions of principals' work contained in two versions of the professional standards for principals. Firstly, the **interim professional standards 1998-2007** were grouped into **six key areas or "dimensions"**. These are:

- Professional leadership
- Strategic management
- Staff management
- Relationship management
- Financial and asset management
- Statutory and reporting requirements.

Secondly, the recently settled **Primary Principals Collective Agreement 2007-2010** provides a baseline for assessing satisfactory performance of the principal within **four areas of practice**.

- Culture - Provide professional leadership that focuses the school culture on enhancing learning and teaching.
- Pedagogy - Create a learning environment in which there is an expectation that all students will experience success in learning.
- Systems - Develop and use management systems to support and enhance student learning.
- Partnerships and networks - Strengthen communication and relationships to enhance student learning.

The professional standards are now aligned with the Kiwi Leadership for Principals and the New Zealand Curriculum. They form part of the principal's performance agreement, which will reflect the school /Board goals, the principal's job description and more specific objectives. Included in the development of the performance agreement will be the

identification and development of appropriate indicators. The performance agreement must also include the New Zealand Teachers Council criteria for registration as a teacher.

Thirdly, I reviewed my **job description** which combines the professional standards for principals 1998-2007 with school/board/charter goals.

Fourthly, I considered the recently released Ministry of Education “position paper, “**Kiwi Leadership for Principals**” that describes “... shared expectations of New Zealand principals now and in the years ahead” (p).

- A model of leadership that sets out the qualities, knowledge and skills required of a principal in a 21st century school
- Key principal leadership activities – leading change and problem solving
- Areas of practice as contained in the Primary Principals Collective Agreement 2007-2010

These documents, although differing slightly in terms of concepts and use of language, give us some indication of the expectations held for a typical New Zealand principal.

The comparison with Robinson’s work is obvious – there is more to being a principal in a New Zealand school than the research shows.

Key question

I was interested to know what Robinson’s dimensions look like in another school system and, if they exist there, what makes them work or not work? I chose to pursue this through visiting several International Schools where I had contacts.

Findings

My diary notes on visits to schools can be viewed at <http://sabbatical-paul.blogspot.com/>

My key findings relate to a set of similarities and differences between principals and the school systems within which they work. I found elements of Robinson’s leadership dimensions in all the schools I visited although there were also aspects of leadership her research did not cover or highlight. What was interesting was the way these were handled in each school.

System differences

The similarities were interesting but what was more interesting were some important systemic differences in the schools I visited that likely made the principal’s job different from what exists in the New Zealand.

1. The job description of one principal contained the following sections:
 - a. Pastoral and academic welfare of students including learning environment, interaction with students, maintaining behaviour, maintaining student records, student performance and outcomes, learning support, curriculum implementation, maintaining school values, overseeing admissions, ensuring out of school learning opportunities, community service
 - b. Staff recruitment, management, counselling, professional development and appraisal

- c. Facilities and resources including regular maintenance, communicating with contractors, organising transport, security and general services to the school
- d. Communication with parents and professional networks
- e. Administration and financial management including timetables, student reports, accounts, annual budget, petty cash, official documentation, record keeping, security
- f. Reporting to the directors of the school on a wide range of matters concerning the school

In many aspects the principal's job in this school was very similar to that performed by a New Zealand principal in a school with similar student numbers.

School governance and ownership

Two schools were 'for profit', five were run by trusts and one school was the equivalent of a New Zealand government school. The understanding I got from these different arrangements was that 'for profit' schools were likely to maintain a focus on enrolments, finance and ultimately profit. The pathway to this was through having a school that people wanted to send their children to. Schools run by trusts were characterised by a focus on education and learning the broadest sense of the word. While money was important it wasn't an over riding factor.

Autonomy and responsibility

Apart from the government owned school, all schools were autonomous and took responsibility for all aspects of their operation including governance, strategic direction, accountability, management, security, marketing, employment of all personnel, welfare, curriculum, funding, property and financial. They operated within the law of the land with equal awareness of and respect for the culture of the country they were in.

Accrediting agencies

Apart from the government owned school, accreditation by a recognised educational authority was considered very important. Accreditation is the school's key source of legitimacy, proof of quality, proof of capability and the basis of marketing efforts. The accreditation process is expensive; schools seeking accreditation take the process very seriously and put significant resources into ensuring a successful outcome. The criteria set by accrediting agencies are strictly adhered to.

Clarity of purpose and vision

All schools were characterised by clear statements of purpose and vision. These were evident in all areas of the school. All documentation is completed to a very high standard in terms of accurately describing the school's mission, vision, values and goals and culture. Documentation at subsequent levels, while appearing prescriptive, provides firm guidelines and expectations for teachers. A recurring feature of school documentation is that changes in personnel will not result in a hiatus, delay or deviation in learning programmes. The curriculum programme is more important than the individuals who teach it; that is reflected in the documentation and assessment procedures.

Expectations for learning

A strong framework of expectations provides clear direction for all staff and students. The framework includes the Primary Years Programme (PYP) for the schools I visited. The programme outline can be viewed at - <http://www.ibo.org/pyp/slideb.cfm>

More details can be found at - http://www.ibo.org/pyp/documents/basis_pyp_000.pdf and http://www.ibo.org/pyp/documents/schools_guide_pyp.pdf Staff are expected to collaborate in the planning and preparation of learning programme details. If a staff member leaves the curriculum framework is simply picked up by the new teacher. Monitoring the framework is easy enough to do since flexibility relates to style of teaching.

Structure, strategy, tools and resources

There is a clear structure of accountability for staff through contracts which, amongst other things, specify performance, time commitments, rewards and ethical considerations. The principal may be one of three or four sectional principals who report to a head of school who has overall authority and responsibility and who answers to the school board. On the professional team a principal usually has one or more deputy principals, several grade level coordinators, a curriculum coordinator and a range of specialist staff. Specialist administrative staff are employed for such functions as accounting, clerical, publications, enrolment, library and cafeteria. Most schools also have a range of contract services for the likes of transport, facilities management, catering and security.

The strategy for maintaining accreditation involves a clear focus on core business – teaching and learning. Classes are small, usually no more than 20 and often fewer than that. An exception was the government school which had classes of 25. Specialist teachers were employed for subjects such as Art, Music, Physical Education and Second Language Learning. Work was linked through planning with the key areas of understanding for the class or grade level they were working with.

The tools and resources for achieving the goals of the strategy are on hand when needed. Students at all except the government school pay fees ranging from \$NZ45,000 to \$NZ60,000 per year with additional contributions required for some other activities such as international class or other trips.

Recruitment, contracts and rewards

Procedures for staff recruitment are designed to obtain the ‘right people for the job’. Recruitment is carried out worldwide and the rewards for teachers and principals are generous in comparison with those available in New Zealand. For a comparison of teacher earnings see Education Review Vol 13 No. 37 October 3, 2008. In this reference NZ is 16th on a list of OECD countries when converted for purchasing power parity. However that improves to 7th when the figures are adjusted relative to GDP per capita. Principal salaries are not generally available to the public although annual earnings upwards of \$US70, 000 plus significant benefits including accommodation, utilities, travel and professional development are common.

Staff are often employed on individual contracts initially for 2 years and thereafter on a year by year basis by mutual agreement. The advantage for the school in this arrangement is that they can quickly realign their staffing to meet school needs as these emerge.

Review of accreditation and adherence to requirements

Regular accreditation reviews of schools are carried out. This is conducted at the school’s expense so there is also a financial incentive to maintain accreditation.

Assessment

Assessment practices are clearly described and the outcomes documented. This is more obvious at the secondary level than at the primary level. Most assessment was carried out on units of inquiry, cornerstone of the Primary Years Programme (IBO) used in most schools, using collaboratively constructed rubrics and/or exemplars. I did not observe a lot of assessment in mathematics and literacy learning. However, that is not to say it wasn't happening.

Responding to parents

All schools have built their curriculum and school processes as a response to the needs and desires of their often demanding school community. Each school's community has been relatively stable over the life of the school in terms of aspirations for their children and expectations held for the school. All of the International schools I visited draw on a relatively well off community and charge fees that would be considered exorbitant by most New Zealand families. Fees are used to pay for operational, personnel and capital costs incurred by the school in providing the kind of education parents' want for their children.

Marketing

This is a very important part of the school's operation. School documentation, a range of publications and electronic media are important tools in the marketing process. School history, culture, student successes, academic results and university of destination are also critical marketing tools.

Principal Similarities and differences

How is the job of principals in the schools I visited different from that of New Zealand Principals? "Kiwil Leadership for Principals – Principals as Educational Leaders" (Education 2008), describes some key areas of difference. Firstly, our system is different and so too is the context in which New Zealand principals operate. Some statements from the document will make that clear.

Our distinctive system

New Zealand's school system has a number of characteristics that distinguish it from other systems" (Ibid, p10): including the principle of "... self managing schools [where] principals work closely with their boards of trustees as the professional leader and chief executive" (Ibid, p10); wider community participation in decision-making (Ibid, p10); and that, "The principal is ultimately responsible for the quality and effectiveness of the multiple and interconnected dimensions of educational leadership and management" (Ibid, p10).

The Power of Context

See: The power of context (Ibid, p14). "Our system requires that principals work as chief executives of their board of trustees to support the development of policy, then take responsibility for carrying policy into practice".

"Context has major implications for leadership and management arrangements ... Because principals work within the fabric and politics of the school community, the leadership role extends to the wider community itself. This requires knowing and understanding what is valued by the local community. Then, using skilful relationships and communications, the principal leads thinking around how the school and community might work together to provide students with the best learning opportunities" (Ibid, p15).

Similar

The responsibilities of principals in both types of schools are similar in many ways but different in others. Both have major responsibilities for:

- Curriculum planning, implementation and assessment
- Professional leadership
- Focus on student learning
- Recruitment and employment
- Staff supervision, management and support
- Staff management
- Reporting to parents

Differences

While there are many similarities there are also some important differences.

Under New Zealand's self-managing schools approach principals in New Zealand schools report directly to a board of trustees. Principals in the International Schools I visited report to the Head of School who in turn reports to the school's board of governors.

Financial responsibility is greater for a New Zealand principal in a school of similar student numbers. In New Zealand those responsibilities include budget preparation, day to day financial management, monthly reporting and supervision of accounts for audit. Financial responsibilities in the International Schools I visited are carried out by specialist financial staff under the supervision of the Head of school. Principals contribute to the preparation of the school budget as it pertains to their section of the school.

In the International Schools facilities management, including security is overseen by the Head of School who in turn works with relevant contractors. A New Zealand principal is involved in all aspects of facilities management including contract negotiation, employment of services and acting caretaker when required!

Principals in International Schools are generally not directly involved in capital works. Their role is largely consultative with substantial negotiations carried out by the Head of School.

Community involvement and partnership building is a large part of a New Zealand principal's job. Principals in International Schools perform similar functions within their section of the school but most external work is done by the Head of School.

Implications

Robinson's research and analysis of leadership is useful to a point but it has to be seen as a model and not a prescription. The New Zealand education system and the context in which principals work means that one cannot easily work to the prescription of a pure model. The question to be asked is, 'How realistic are expectations held for New Zealand principals?'

What I learned

New Zealand principals have very demanding jobs in terms of concept and practice; they perform to a very high standard, the demands of the job notwithstanding. What is more amazing is that they do this work for a lot less recognition and reward than do their international colleagues.

MacNeill and Cavanagh (2008) refer to work by Cranston (1999, p 109) when they discuss what they see as the effects of New Public Management and Accountabilism which manifests itself in the work of school principals in this way: "... a massive increase in accountability and non-teaching administrative tasks; and as a result they have: less interaction with teachers, less direct involvement in day-to-day curriculum matters, less classroom involvement (visitations) and less interaction with students".

They describe the result as "pedagogic obsolescence" (p1) as principals balance "administrivia" with "pedagogic discourse with teachers". They cite Murphy and Hallinger (1992) who questioned the notion of balancing, and considered that it was "... impossible for one person to give adequate attention to both roles". Attempts to do so create a situation MacNeill and Cavanagh describe as "role discontinuity" where principals' are driven to focus on finance, human resource management and property management for example, at the expense of pedagogic involvement.

Robinson's Best Evidence work on leadership makes excellent reading and no-one would disagree with the concept of 'five leadership dimensions'. However, like so many writers, Robinson does not seem to recognise any discontinuity between the teaching and principal role. Better training for principals is unlikely to be the panacea for improving principal performance.

What is needed is consideration of the way our schools are structured and resourced; the principal's job has to be made possible. The role of a principal in a New Zealand school seems to fit somewhere between the principal and the headmaster or director of an international school. These schools seem to have better reconciled issues surrounding role discontinuity; improved resourcing has been a key factor in that. As a result I believe International School principals have a better chance of illustrating Robinson's leadership dimensions.

As more New Zealand Principals learn what their International colleagues do and the rewards they get, there will be a scramble for principal vacancies in International Schools as they come available. If we thought the pool of teachers wanting to be principals was thin, it could get worse yet!

Summary

Sabbatical leave gave me an excellent opportunity to participate in meaningful research into school leadership through school visits and practical research. I have attached a copy of the preliminary paper presented at the CCEAM Durban Conference. The presentation was made using MS Power Point and covered some points not noted in the conference paper.

In terms of the goal I set for my sabbatical leave, "Improving perception and performance of principal leadership through conversation, observation and educational research", I believe that has been fulfilled. However, as one set of questions is answered new ones inevitably arise.

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 - Michael Ehrhardt, American School in London <http://www.asl.org>
 - Sean Murphy, Istanbul International Community School www.iics.k12.tr
 - Peter Baker, Frankfurt International School www.fis.edu
 - Dr Mary Seppala, Munich International School www.mis-munich.de

**SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS:
FACTORS THAT IMPACT ON THEIR SUCCESS**

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A paper presented at the CCEAM International Conference
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Successful School Principals: Factors that impact on their success

Abstract: *This paper explores the concept of school leadership with particular reference to six case studies of New Zealand primary and secondary school principals. Preliminary findings suggest that factors behind their success may lie in the areas of their understanding and application of contingent leadership, authentic leadership, and their resilient capabilities.*

Keywords: Successful Principals; Contingent Leadership; Authenticity; Resiliency

INTRODUCTION

This conference paper is based on a multi national research study whose purpose is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of successful school leaders in primary and secondary schools in different socio-economic circumstances in different countries.

The educational leadership literature is replete with examples of exemplary practice within a successful school principalship. However, principals do not enact their leadership and managerial roles in precisely the same way. Some principals influence their schools by means of their personality while others demonstrate leadership capacity through the strength of their convictions. For example, in the New Zealand leadership literature, Notman's (2005) research into the personal and professional working lives of two secondary principals demonstrated the centrality of core personal values in their influence on principal leadership behaviours.

The literature also acknowledges the concept of **situational** or **contingent leadership** in the field of school leadership, whereby it is quite meaningless to study the leadership behaviours of principals without reference to the wider school context in which they operate. Contextual variables may include student background, community type, organisational structure, school culture, teacher experience and competence, financial resources, school size, and bureaucratic and labour organisation (Hallinger, 2003).

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Multi-site case study methods were employed during the research study in a sample of six primary and secondary schools that reflects the principle of ‘maximum variation sampling’ (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Two regions in New Zealand were selected in order to allow for geographical differences to emerge. Questionnaire and interview data were collected from each school principal, deputy principal, Board of Trustees chairperson, and a selection of teachers, support staff, parents and students. The process of inductive cross-case analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) provided a rich source of data about the characteristics of successful school leadership.

This paper presents initial findings from the early stages of data analyses of six schools selected for the study: two urban primary schools, one semi rural primary school; two urban secondary schools and a rural secondary school.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

School A

School A is a low decile primary school with a diverse community and student population. Maori, Pacific Island and Burmese children make up 80% of the school roll of 285 students. The male principal has been in the position for 14 years. Previously, he was deputy principal at the school for almost six years.

Since his appointment, the principal has been involved in changing the *culture of the school*. He remarks that this was “a conscious decision to change the culture of the school, based on observations and perceptions from other people [and] agencies about the school.” Subsequent discussion with community groups had advocated a number of changes to the school culture: “... a school being a safe school, being fun, having high expectations for our young students, and having the very best teachers available to be here.”

Community characteristics influence the behaviour and needs of children. There are children who have special educational needs while others have mental health issues. Some families have a strong desire for their children to do well, although there is some variation on the issue of expectations [or lack of] parents hold for their children.

The school and community present a number of *challenges* for the principal and staff. The inability of families to access resources is an ongoing problem. However, the principal believes that most family groups have a rare quality, a “reality... about the real world, not the material things.” He sees the inability of many parents to effectively carry out the role expected of a good parent as a major challenge in its impact on students’ level of achievement.

Poverty is clearly a challenge for some families and this influences the way teachers go about their work. A teacher commented: “There is a handful of families that you know, who struggle to get anything returned or money, and the kids sometimes end up missing out [on activities] if they don’t have [parental] consent.” Other challenges within the community include households with low qualifications; houses with large numbers of people; and households with large numbers of health issues.

An interesting trend is the current *public perception of the school*. It appears to have become fashionable for houses in the area to be marketed as belonging “in the A area”. The principal comments:

We also get the trendy middle class who like to see their children being involved in a multi cultural school; so we get groups... who, I think, get a kick out of saying that their child goes down to B... It is unique for our school to have that choice being made.

School B

School B is a high decile school set in a small semi rural town. The student roll of 237 is predominantly European, with 7% Maori and a growing number of new English immigrants (12%). The female principal has been in the post for six years.

Since her appointment, the principal has undertaken significant *educational changes*. First, she has unified the school and its community behind a vision of learning. This unity was achieved through an emphasis on school expectations, improved behaviour management, innovative curriculum development and the accessibility of the principal herself.

There was concern expressed by the principal that, on arrival, there was nothing in the school that indicated a current thinking education. This is confirmed by a teacher's response about school improvement:

We're continually developing and designing programmes if you like.
We're looking forward to next year in terms of how we can do everything even better than what we believe it is now.

The principal makes a concerted effort to be available to staff and believes that important leadership qualities focus on relationships, openness and humour. She has very effective lines of communication, a strong sense of professionalism, and an energy and passion for the job.

Respondent interviews also identify the principal's major *leadership achievements*. These include her innovative vision for learning and how that vision is driven by staff access to professional development opportunities. The principal is also successful in gaining the necessary resource funding to complete the school building programme: a new hall and library, a 'Professional Development' room, as well as upgrading and increasing computing technologies.

In summary, this principal has set a bold course in terms of pedagogical direction and has achieved buy in to that pedagogy from all community stakeholders.

School C

School C is a high decile co-educational secondary school for students aged 13-18 years. It has in excess of 1000 students and a staff of 97 teachers. The male principal has been in the position for seven years and leads a school whose focus is on producing a well-rounded individual with a balance of academic learning, sports and the arts.

Respondents note the *successful impact of the principal on students, staff and the community*. In the past, the school had experienced difficulties in moving forward in its strategic directions. Now there is a plan in place to ensure that this happens. Under the current

principal's leadership, the school has grown in size. In addition, the principal is viewed as contributing significantly to the unification of the wider school community.

There is a *complexity underlying the relationships that principals have with their school community*. This principal encourages a curricular balance between academic and sporting pursuits, and preparing each student for the world of work. He is extremely visible to the school community and attends nearly all school activities which is a considerable commitment. He works to build trust through consistency, visibility, a quick response to needs and the involvement of others. For example, morning staff meetings involve the entire staff who share in this responsibility.

There are several indicators that the principal is fostering *resiliency*. He develops a positive connection with educators, students and parents by being engaged with others. An example is the student programme that promotes self-reflection and responsibility.

Another of the principal's capabilities lies in *developing relationships with diverse populations*. Numbers of Maori and Pacific Island students are low because there is not a large population in the area. The principal does, however, include students and parents in decision making so that their voices are heard. One of the principal's strengths is his ability to develop trusting positive relationships across all ethnic groups.

School D

School D is an urban primary school of 350 students and 19 teachers. Its male principal has been 10 years in a school that is located in a mid range socio-economic area.

The principal's role as an *effective leader* in the school is perceived as being 'purposeful' and sincere, based on his holistic interest in the school community. He is viewed as one member of a coherent staff and Board of Trustees team, supporting professional growth and developing professional performance. His personal values and ethical approach to school leadership underpin his principalship and reinforce a deeply-held philosophical understanding of the principal's job: "I don't have a lot of time for things that seem self... it doesn't mean to sound moral but sometimes I see people who work effectively in a role, any role, they start to

get motivated in things that are in it for them... I don't certainly think about it a lot but I do really feel grounded in the morality of what I do."

Raising student achievement is of considerable importance to this principal. This impetus reflects research relating to the critical role of leadership for organisational learning and improved student outcomes. As a key direction, the principal is particularly focused on a child-centred curriculum and is prepared to build student learning around that concept: "If we have areas of data where we're concerned about academic results, children's progress, we'll actually deliberately then build our professional learning programme for the year ahead, or for multiple years, around that need."

The development of *quality relationships* is a cornerstone of this principal's leadership style. His perceived style is facilitative, consultative, and one that leads him to seek quality feedback from people. The principal also acknowledges that there is a need to offer firm and decisive leadership when required: "There are things that are not open to democratic decision. Do we want good things for our children? Can we do better? Those things aren't things you should ever take a vote on – they should be givens."

School E

School E is a year 9-13 girls' secondary school in a metropolitan area. It has a staff in excess of 50 teachers and approximately 800 students of whom 40 are international students. The female principal has been in the job for 13 years, having been promoted from the position of deputy principal.

School-wide success factors reside in the areas of positive relationships between staff and students; a regular update of staff professional development; maintenance of quality teaching staff; power sharing among staff, students, parents and trustees; and the quality of the senior leadership team.

The role of the principal in this success can be identified in her empowerment of staff and students, and her desire to build leadership capacity in both groups. Her instructional leadership, and her capacity to be self-critical of her own leadership performance, are

additional features. This is underpinned by the principal's understanding of the concept of authentic leadership: "I would go with Duignan on his authentic leadership. Be yourself. Don't fudge anything. Don't be dishonest. If you're not authentic, they know!"

This quotation leads on to particular aspects of the principal's *leadership style* such as her democratic, power sharing style of leadership, combined with an important element: "Listening is more important than speaking around here, way more important."

There are other occasions when the principal leads 'from the middle' (eg during staff meeting discussions as a participant) or adopts a very direct approach in dealing with negative attitudes. A key theme here is flexibility, moving from democratic through to autocratic stances: "So you move up and down that line according to human behaviour."

Problematic *contingent leadership* issues centre on aspects such as mental health issues of parents; in-house disciplinary procedures of the school being challenged through the courts; associated threats of litigation from disaffected parents on behalf of their children. Of concern to the staff are external barriers to learning: "It's their out-of-school activities on a weekend, starting in the second half of year 10 and going into year 11, and the failure of parents to respond to that in an effective way." Clearly, some of the challenges faced by the school, and other schools throughout New Zealand, are reflected by external influences in the student and parent world outside of the school gates.

School F

School F is a high decile and rural co-educational secondary school of 640 students aged 10-19 years. It has a national and international reputation for innovation. The male principal has been 17 years at the school, the first seven years as deputy principal.

Principal self-reflection reveals a number of *factors behind the overall success* of the school. These include a safe learning environment for all students; a strong and positive interrelationship between teachers and students; a high degree of academic success as detailed in national examination results; a high level of student involvement in extra curricular activities; a supportive Board of Trustees who are fully prepared to assume

governance and policy-making responsibilities; and positive perceptions of the school. As the only secondary school in the district, it has been able to adopt an experimental style of teaching and learning.

It is of interest to note the identified *leadership characteristics* of the principal. Initially, his focus was on management issues at a micro level. Little delegation was employed and leadership represented an understanding of detail and being involved in everything. During the last five years, however, the principal has operated at a macro level of education and of staff empowerment. He is now in the role of a pedagogical leader who visits classrooms regularly. Major leadership characteristics include excellent interpersonal skills; a strong sense of optimism in regard to students and the school's direction; personable; approachable; awareness of the community; consultative; active listener; honest; ethical; willingness to let other people try things; high profile and school visibility; and loyalty to the school.

The principal's leadership is frequently referred to as charismatic and personable. The principal himself accepts his leadership style may not be transferable to an urban school where expectations of the school are more defined by individual stakeholders and therefore may be more contested.

INITIAL IMPLICATIONS

Three focus areas suggest themselves from these initial findings of New Zealand case studies. First, there is reinforced the notion of contingent leadership and an awareness of external issues that might impact on students' level of achievement in particular. The principals demonstrate an influential capacity to promote a symbiotic relationship between school and community. School B and School C's principals are perceived to have unified the community through their school links and inclusive leadership styles. The principal of the low decile School A has gradually changed public perception to a point where it is now a school of choice for high socio-economic parents.

The literature identifies a contingent approach to school leadership as one which draws the "conjunction of the person and the situation" (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford, 2000, p. 10). The writers recommend the application of contingency leadership "which takes

into account the realities of successful principalship of schools in changing times, and moves beyond polarised concepts of transactional and transformational leadership” (Day et al., 2000, p. 456). From these preliminary findings, one can realise the importance of how school principals respond to the unique set of contextual circumstances presented to them.

A second area focuses on principal resiliency and the promotion of resiliency in others. The principal of School C demonstrates resilient qualities and seeks to encourage resiliency among his students via a learning programme that targets self-reflection and responsibility. The principals of Schools D and E possess strong deeply-held convictions about moral and ethical bases of operating a school and a surety in taking their respective schools forward in strategically planned and philosophically informed directions. Not only is the process of self-reflection and self-belief an element of leadership resiliency and a sign of one’s capacity for self-renewal (Oplatka, Bargal & Inbar, 2001), but a principal’s positive connectedness with members of their school and community groups provides meaning and value to their professional lives (Milstein & Henry, 2008).

Finally, the principals of Schools D, E and F underline authentic leadership practices in establishing a successful school through their professional self-reflection and philosophical stances – a mark of experienced principals who recognise the need to maintain high levels of self-awareness and of intellectual understandings about school leadership (Notman & Slowley, 2004). This theme of authentic leadership has been promoted, for example, by Begley (2006) in his proposal of three pre-requisites for authentic leadership by school principals: self-knowledge, a capacity for moral reasoning and sensitivity to the orientations of others.

However, there is a growing awareness that such authentic leadership is not an end in itself. There may be links between authentic leadership by principals (and teachers) and the concept of ‘authentic learning’ by students in the classroom (Duignan & Bezzina, 2004). Duignan (2006) also adds his interpretation of what makes an authentic educational leader, be they teacher, deputy principal or principal:

They name, challenge and change, if at all possible, teaching practices that promote inauthentic learning (e.g. teaching narrowly to focus on tests). They have the courage of their convictions and stand up for what they see as ethically and morally ‘right’, especially in regard to the ways in which teachers and students engage with learning content and processes (p. 131)

CONCLUSION

This paper has revealed insights from preliminary data analyses of six New Zealand primary and secondary school case studies, in which the work of effective school principals is being examined to determine possible leadership factors in their school’s success.

Despite their success, each educational leader faces ongoing challenges in their principalship. Contingencies include social and health issues of impoverished families, accompanied by pressures on the school to become the ‘hub’ or focal point of their community. Within schools, principals face leadership challenges, for example, in the form of maintaining staff motivation in light of continuing social and educational change, and the complexities of attending to teachers’ personal and professional needs.

Therefore, what kind of leaders will be needed as principals of future schools? In the opinion of School E’s principal: “Well, just your absolutely authentic, sincere, hard-working, energetic, perfect person who is really hard to find!”

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