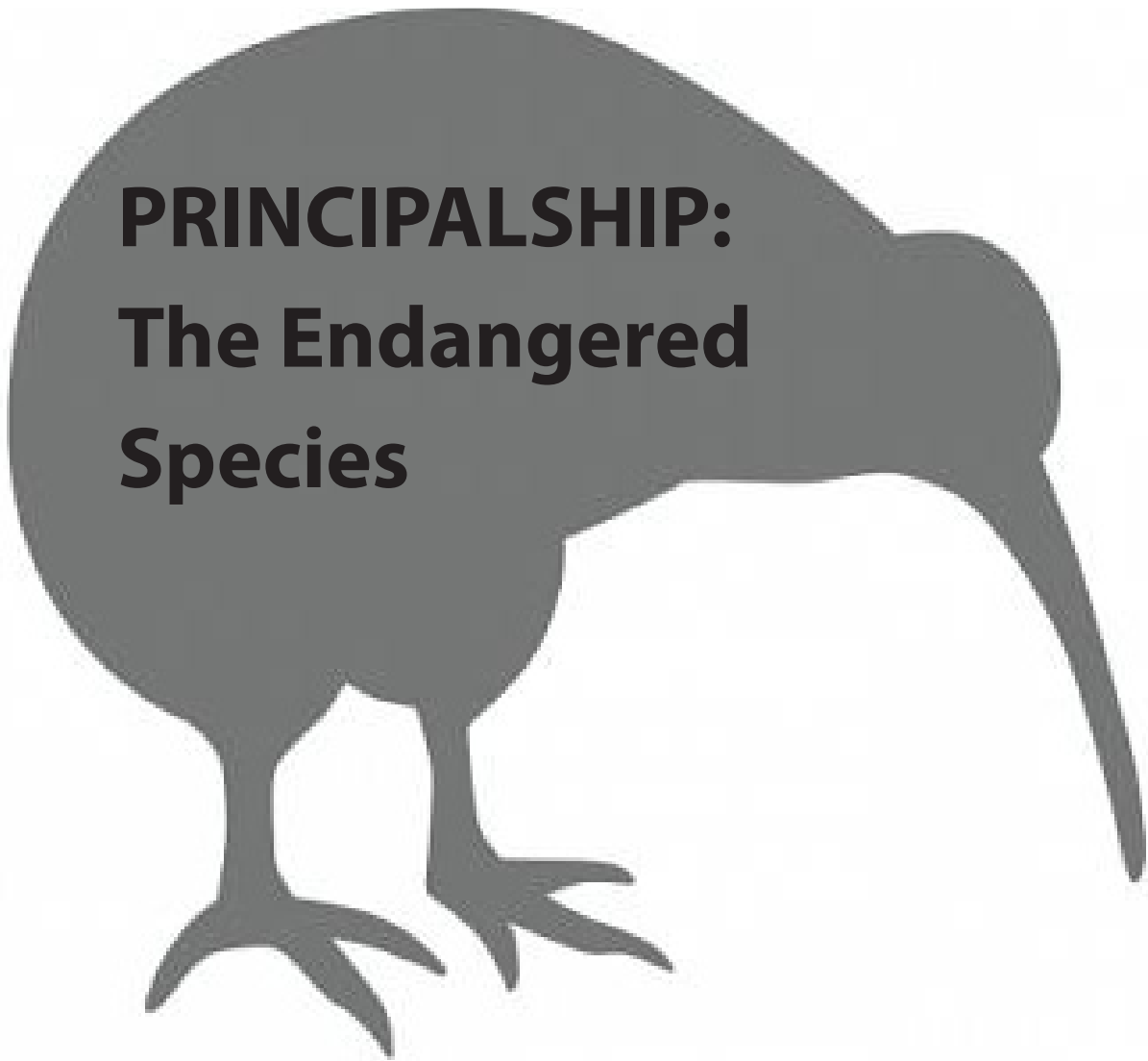


PRINCIPALSHIP: The Endangered Species



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This paper provides a personal overview to highlight to the Ministry of Education the vital importance of better professional leadership development for the immediate and long term retention of school Principals within the New Zealand education system and was completed during my sabbatical 2012.

BACKGROUND

1. We have 2559 Principals currently practicing in NZ.¹
2. We lose 10-15% of those Principals annually and this figure is growing and not just because the workforce is greying.²
3. We have 62 schools currently under “statutory management” and comparing records over the last five years this is about par for the course on an annual basis.
4. We cannot escape the fact that by natural progression the age of existing Principals is predominantly in the 55-60 plus age group and depending upon the overall economic situation, historically not many Principals are hanging on past 60.³
5. Little has been done of substance by any part of the Sector to:
 - address the attrition rate of Principals;
 - ensure uniformly strong succession plans are in place for the next generation of Principals, and
 - project forward to identify and strengthen the skill set of those successors before they ascend to Principalship.
6. Principals are leading learning well, according to PISA results. However recognizing the long tail and addressing that has been a recent development.

7. All Principals spoken to find running a multimillion business difficult and point out that course preparation for NZ Principals is seriously lacking in this fundamental area of business management.
 8. Schools are "capital intensive" businesses which include the management of and accountability for staff salaries, land and buildings, operational funding, property maintenance as well as administering locally raised funds. Tension between educational leadership and management has been recorded elsewhere⁴ yet nothing tangible that I can identify has been done to address this direct cause of stress.
 9. With a highly educated workforce and strong unions, HR matters are often problematic due to a myriad of rules and regulations often not encountered prior to Principalship.
 10. The recurring theme from data obtained is, in a nutshell, that it is not only very difficult to lead learning when the "business" side is not under control and manageable, but completely energy sapping and soul destroying when it is not.
 11. We expect so much from our Principals and yet the only prerequisite for Principalship is that the applicant be a NZ registered teacher.
 12. NZ needs to provide a realistic solution to remedy this problem for the benefit of all parts of the Education Sector and for the benefit of all New Zealanders and in the current economic climate, without costing the Government additional funding.
7. it was 219 (9%).
 7. From the data gathered "Decile rating" was not associated with any marked differences in vacancy rates but small schools, rural schools and full primary schools were over-represented in 2010. It is noteworthy that over half of the 304 Principals appointed in 2008 were first time Principals.⁸
 8. Trends of those aspiring to Principalship remain relatively constant with 30% of primary and 44% of secondary Assistant Principals and Deputy Principals interested in the role.
 9. The number of applicants applying for vacant positions on average ranged from one to 46 with a median of 10. The median number shortlisted was four.
 10. There are potentially 2559 Boards of Trustees responsible for either having convened or currently convening the appointment panels for the 2559 practicing Principals.
 11. It is interesting to note that those with the authority to appoint principals contributed to 73% of the 62 schools requiring intervention by the MoE. (26 schools require intervention for employment issues and 20 schools for BOT systems and process issues).
 12. Of the schools which advertised for a Principal in 2010, 98% of the Boards used external advice. This is reassuring in that it would indicate that Boards are becoming more mindful of the importance of securing a capable candidate. It is also misleading in that the advice sought covered a variety of topics while the advisors qualifications were many and varied.

EXPANSION OF FACTS AND FIGURES RE OUR NEW ZEALAND SITUATION

1. Principal leadership training in New Zealand has two recognizable parts and consists of the National Aspiring Principals Programme (NAPP) and the First Time Principals Programme (FTP)
2. Funding for both programmes is considerable.
3. While the above courses place emphasis on "Leading Learning" feedback from both experienced Principals and FTP's indicate that neither of them provide Principals with effective induction on "running a business".
4. NAPP inducts 230 applicants into its course annually. As at 5 July 2012: from the 2011 course 15 have been appointed and just 1 appointed from the 2012 course.⁵
5. The 2559 schools in NZ employing Principals (or under Statutory Management) vary from Decile 10 secondary to decile 1 primary and in roll size from two students to 3025 students.
6. In 2008⁶ the advertising vacancy rate of principals was 304 (11.5%). In 2009 it was 194 (7.6%), 2010⁷

WHAT THE MINISTER WANTS

1. Under the Minister's direction there is a common understanding among educators in New Zealand for the need to lift the achievement levels of Maori and Pacifica students and there are some exciting initiatives promoting this requirement. I refer mainly to the "He Kakano"(HK) and "Te Kotahitanga" (TK) programmes supported by Firstlight. I also refer to the National Standards innovation which I liken to an academic "Plunket book" for parents. The HK and TK programmes are proving effective in assisting all students to raise their achievement.
2. The Minister's target of 85% of 18 year old students to have achieved L2 NCEA by 2016 will require school leaders to possess "presence and energy" and is a new initiative.

WHAT THE PRINCIPALS SAY

1. In order to achieve Ministry initiatives our business side of the school needs to be running smoothly so that the "Leading Learning" can be effective. Comments such as "Didn't know the "Business";

“Knew how to lead learning, didn’t know the business”, “Didn’t know Principalship would be so utterly time consuming”, “No time for family”, “If I had my time over I would make sure I was more exposed to the Business before I applied for Principal”, “Just wasn’t prepared for this job despite my education experience” are common.

2. The general feeling from First Time Principals spoken to is that FTP did not provide them with the skills necessary to run the business of their school. They could not fault the emphasis on “Leading Learning” however and as mentioned PISA results demonstrate that Principals are generally leading learning well in our system.
3. Experienced Principals (more than five year’s experience) freely admitted that the step they took from Senior Management to Principalship was pretty much a “bridge too far” and all acknowledged that the skill set for Principal is so vastly different from that required as a Deputy Principal and that the business side particularly is tough and stressful. The Canterbury situation, along with the leaky building issue in Auckland, I suggest will leave little time for FTP’s or experienced Principals to lead learning?
4. Many experienced Principals wanted it pointed out that it is actually very difficult to arrange for the “on the job succession training” they missed out on and now want for their own internal aspiring Principals. Experienced Principals indicated that although the need and the inclination was present, those aspiring Principals are integral to the day to day running of the school and simply cannot be spared or taken from their own roles especially when this on the job training often required the presence of the Principal as well.

HOW DO WE REDUCE THE ATTRITION RATE?

“Leadership is essential not only in sparking reform but in sustaining it” - (Mourshed 2010).

1. Boost the Qualification Level of potential candidates:

The only requirement for principalship in NZ is that the appointee is a registered teacher. Contrast this with:

Finland:

Has a mandatory Masters requirement to teach. Therefore Principals in Finland must be a Masters graduate.

Singapore:

Operates a “Leaders in Education Programme” (LEP). This is a full time 6 months programme, mandatory, and restricted to DP’s who are selected by the MoE from applicants who have demonstrated outstanding leadership qualities and potential. Some of these candidates have also had their potential recognised early and are accelerated into principalship.

United States of America:

In the absence of a federal or national programme there have arisen diverse programmes. Although generalising, it is clear that candidates recruited have demonstrated a strong teaching background and have strong leadership potential. Graduating with a preparatory leadership qualification increased the candidate’s employability.

The first two of these three countries feature highly in successful educational achievements in world rankings.

While I am the first to agree that there is no actual empirical data that correlates the qualification level of the Principal directly with the academic achievement (or non achievement) or business success of their school it is obvious to me both from my discussions with Principals throughout New Zealand and from my own personal experience, that any qualification which involves business management will be an effective skillset tool and will prove critical in boosting retention and eliminating the attrition rates we currently face.

2. Streamline and amalgamate current courses by providing a (mandatory?) Pre-Principalship qualification

With economic constraints on all of us it seems timely to streamline the current offering which NAPP and FTP provide, both of which have some elements of worth but are not considered by any Principal I spoke with to be of great use when it comes to actually commencing managing and the running of a school.

3. Find out how a school system with poor performance becomes good. And how one with good performance becomes excellent⁹

In November 2010 Mona Mourshed, Chinezi Chijioko, and Michael Barber released a report on: “How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better” under the “McKinsey on Society” banner. Using the PISA results as the standard they compiled what they believe is the most comprehensive analysis of global school system reform ever assembled. This report identifies the reform elements that are replicable for school systems everywhere as well as what it really takes to achieve significant, sustained, and widespread gains in student outcomes.

This report identifies the reform elements that are replicable for school systems elsewhere as they move from poor to fair to good to great to excellent performance.

For example, systems moving from fair performance to good focused on establishing the foundations of data gathering, organization, finances, pedagogy, while systems on the path from good performance to great focused on shaping the teaching profession such that its requirements, practices, and career paths are as clearly defined as those in medicine and law.

This suggests that school systems would do well to learn from those at a similar stage of the journey, rather than from those that are at significantly different levels of performance. It also shows that school systems cannot continue to improve by simply doing more of what brought them past success. Across all the systems they studied, one or more of three circumstances produced the conditions that triggered reform:

- a socio-economic crisis; (resourcing)
- a high profile, critical report of system performance; (ERO)
- or a change in leadership.

In (fifteen out of the twenty) 75% of the systems studied, two or more of these “ignition” events were present prior to the launch of the reform efforts. By far, the most common event to spark the drive to reform is a change in leadership: every system we studied relied upon the presence and energy of a new leader, not only that but they found that Leadership is essential not only in sparking reform but in sustaining it.

Two things stand out about the leaders of improving systems. Firstly, their longevity: Secondly, improving systems actively cultivate the next generation of system leaders, ensuring a smooth transition of leadership and the longer-term continuity in reform goals. The stability of reform direction is critical to achieving the quick gains in student outcomes outlined above. The ability of a leader to “run the business” supports the opportunity to lead learning rather than firefighting business issues detracting from this goal.

4. Expand professional guidelines for BOTs to assist in the Appointment process.

From information gathered a Board often knows what it is looking for in the applicant (due to the strengths/weaknesses demonstrated by the previous principal).

Being able to determine whether a candidate has these attributes is confounded by the industry that has arisen around the compilation of CV's (comic books in many cases) and the lack of any preferred and recognised pre Principal qualification.

A further confounding factor is created by the variety of qualified so called advisors with little or no practical experience of principalship. Adding to all of this confusion is the increasing complexity of what a principal is actually responsible for and the rapidity with which this complexity is evolving.

Many Boards founder on whose advice to trust when making an appointment. They also look for historical reasons to appoint. How well candidate “A” performed in the past as a DP is often the selection criteria rather than that of a candidate's actual potential to deal with the evolving as well as the current issues facing principals daily.

“We don't want a Principal who.....” rather than: “we want a Principal who can run the business, lead the learning, develop relational trust and is culturally responsive”.

Boards do seek advice but sourcing competent advice which assists with selection on the one hand and finding advisors who have experience, current knowledge and proven expertise on the other is often very difficult.

Principal Leadership Training

National Aspiring Principals Programme (NAAP) and First Time Principal Programmes (FTP), both aim to prepare principals for the “step up”.

NAPP

The focus of NAPP is as follows:

“The focus of the National Aspiring Principals Programme is on developing adaptive, culturally responsive, digitally literate leaders through inquiry learning, and building their understanding of the research base around leadership. It comprises 12-months of professional learning that includes online modules, coaching, a residential hui, and a practical in-school leadership project.”

In the output data driven climate that we currently operate in, the paucity of NAPP graduates securing P's positions is not impressive. If the aim or focus of NAPP is that of middle leader development then perhaps a name change from NAPP is required. If the lack of recognition of NAPP, as a precursor to principalship is the reason for this paucity, then a marketing push with school boards is long overdue. Does the gateway for acceptance on NAPP recognize “disposition to lead” for example as a pre requisite ?

FTPP

First Time Principals Programme has long espied “Leading Learning” as their raison d'être.

“By an unrelenting focus on this core educational leadership role....”

This emphasis is further stated in a FFTP report “..to develop the key dispositions, knowledge and skills required to be a successful pedagogical leader,..”

It could be argued that the business model of running a school has for too long been neglected with: “..emphasis is currently placed on the need for Principals to be instructional leaders or leaders of learning..”

I believe this is an area long overdue for correction. Canterbury will be looking toward: “we want a Principal who can run the business, lead the learning, develop relational trust and is culturally responsive” rather than the lead learner?

In essence then the following is a recommendation:

1. Create a pre principal qualification based upon the four quadrants of:
 - a. leading learning,
 - b. business model,
 - c. relational trust, and
 - d. cultural responsiveness.
2. Keep these quadrants modular and dynamic enabling FTP's to revisit modules for refreshment as and when circumstances dictate.
3. Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater but if the required funding has to be sourced from the NAPP and FTP so be it. Sector feedback and the appointment of graduates to Principal positions indicate that "Leading Learning" doesn't satisfy "on the job" requirements.
4. Have the "pre disposition to lead" as a mandatory requirement before acceptance onto the pre Principal course and accept only candidates who are likely to be appointed in the near future. (Singaporean model) This I believe should be an absolute prerequisite before acceptance onto any leadership course.
5. Set this model at a post graduate level which would give immediacy, academic and practical rigour, international comparative standing and would also provide STA (the employing authority) with some assurance on a candidates ability with this nationally benchmarked preferred qualification when appointing prospective Principals.

Tewt's (Tactical exercise without teachers)

Offered below is an example of a system of practical training, using real life events occurring in the daily life of a school which requires the Principal's input, action and decision on. A program such as this would form part of the pre-principal course.

As an example:

Setting:

Principal's office complete with SUE report, staff contracts, timetable, Operations grant. (All taken from Kiwi Park School?)

Problem:

Deputy Principal indicates next year school roll forecast is down by 30 students.

Execution:

How does the aspiring Principal deal with this?

Possible solution:

- a. Recognizes that next year's GMFS will take a hit.
- b. Number of FTE's will reduce.
- c. Checks staff contracts to determine if any staff fixed term.
- d. Check with timetabler to determine if the delivery of the curriculum will suffer with the release of (a,

which) fixed term teacher?

Outcome:

- a. Recognizes and can apply the documentation/data in the way it is intended.
- b. Recognizes that this is important but not urgent.

Follow up:

- a. Once the staff redundancy is recognized, have the "hard conversation" with the staff member so affected.
- b. Deal with any union input that could arise,
- c. Critique the passage of information out to staff once decision made.

Scenarios such as this will expose aspiring Principal's to the myriad of "running the business" issues emerging on a daily basis. If modulated into NAG's a grading could be given on such NAGs as HR, Finance, OHS, etc. That way, should the pertinence of the topic elude the aspiring Principal ("my school will be decile 10 and have a waiting list!") the module can again be revisited when the scenario actually presents itself at a later date as it surely will! Additionally the interrelatedness of doing the business can be emphasized without compromising new initiatives and/or leading learning. At the same time, Boards seeking a Principal with financial strength can also recognize that attribute from the information on the course completion document.

CONCLUSION

To address the escalating attrition rate of Principals, or to capitalize upon it, we need to increase the mana and competency level of that position with a more recognizable academic and practical qualification which will promote the sustainability of reform. We can do this in a timely and cost effective way by utilizing current course funding and better selecting candidates while tailoring a course that better caters for leading learning, running a business, a course that is culturally responsive whilst building relational trust.

In any event we do need to better prepare and encourage selected aspiring principals to be business savvy leaders of learning capable of seamlessly making the step up.

¹<http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/directories/list-of-nz-schools>

²NCER: Principal wellbeing and stress, 16 June 2008 page 7

³Ibid

⁴NCER: Principal wellbeing and stress, 16 June 2008

⁵FTPP 6 Nov 2009 Executive Summary p8.

⁶Principal vacancies and appointments 2008-9 Cathy Wylie CER

⁷Principal vacancies and appointments 2009-2010. Sally Robertson CER

⁸State Sector Act 1988 (Part VIIA Personnel provisions in relation to education service, s77)

⁹"How the world's most improved school systems keep getting better" November 2010 | By Mona Mourshed, Chinezi Chijioke, and Michael Barber