



What is the experience and reality of CNISPA principal leadership and its impact on their wellbeing?

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Abstract

The issue of principal wellbeing has been under scrutiny in New Zealand for several decades since the dramatic restructure of schooling brought about by the Tomorrow's Schools reforms. This paper examines the context of the self-managing environment and its impact on principals wellbeing with a specific focus on the reality that secondary school principals are facing in the Central North Island region of New Zealand and how they are challenged by the stress of their work.

I utilize data gathered as part of a survey undertaken in 2018 by the Central North Island Secondary Principals Association (CNISPA) to identify some of the issues principals are facing in an attempt to affirm their reality.

Consideration is also given to factors generating this challenge and some systemic and organisational strategies which may support principals as they tackle these issues. This study does not attempt to identify approaches to support principals to manage their personal anxiety or to identify the personal psychological factors that could strengthen individuals capacity to address and manage more effectively their workload and related stress.

Purpose

The purpose of tackling these ideas and understandings in this paper has both been ambitious and challenging. This is due to the reality that principals are facing. The significantly negative impact that unrealistic expectations are having on the mental well-being of my colleagues is leading to their premature departure from the profession. While such issues are turning their own personal lives upside down it is also having a consequent and negative disruption to the achievement of students, one of the main drivers of the schooling system.

The research theme I will be focusing on relates to secondary school principal wellbeing and how they are managing stress in their work. This

study specifically focuses on the 41 principals in the Central North Island Secondary Principal Association (CNISPA).

It should be noted that all principals in the geographical region bordered by Te Kauwhata, Whitianga, Te Aroha, Taumarunui and Raglan in the North Island of New Zealand are members of CNISPA.

The majority of CNISPA members are principals from schools with Year 9 - 13 pupils. CNISPA also includes principals from; area schools (Year 1 – 13); Year 7 – 13 colleges; middle schools (Year 7 – 10), Wharekura; and Te Aho O Te Kura Pounamu, the New Zealand Correspondence School.

CNISPA is one of the nation's strongest secondary principal associations having an effective executive, administrative personnel and hosts quarterly meetings and its own regional conference every second year. It has a total of 41 members and regularly gets over 50% attendance at its hui, also encouraging Deputy and Assistant principals to attend.

The reason I have chosen this area of focus is that as a principal and a veteran member of the executive of the association, I was concerned about the number of my CNISPA principal colleagues who had exited the profession prematurely. Indeed 8 members (almost 20%) had left the profession under duress in a recent 15 month period. This observation complements recent research (Bonne & MacDonald 2019; Wylie & Stevens 2017; and Riley 2019) and affirms that managing the workload in a self-governing environment in secondary schools is a difficult challenge for principals.

My interest is beyond the personal care for colleagues. I have attempted to verify this concern and to identify the nature and extent of the issues which may have led to their departure. I also explore some possible systemic or organisational strategies which may provide support secondary principals to alleviate this disturbing trend. The departure of school leaders in such a manner also has the potential to cause huge disruption to the learning of students and for disturbing the stability of school leadership.

Introduction

Across the world, schools have been subjected to the challenge brought about by globalisation and the constant pressure for change. In New Zealand, The Tomorrow's Schools reforms transferred governance and decision-making power from the Government to each individual school, through its parent-elected Board of Trustees. Schools became autonomous entities where principals are appointed by, and accountable to, the school's board.

Boards of Trustees operate in a tight regulatory framework, however, while their primary focus is on student achievement, they have a wide variety of obligations and accountabilities which are implemented through the principal. As the restructuring increased principals have been saturated with information perplexity (Friedman 2002), an ever-increasing plethora of overwhelming responsibilities, and as a consequence, emotional anxiety.

This continuous development process has simultaneously increased the volume and complexity of work that principals are expected to manage. Within New Zealand, this change was initiated with the self-management changes generated by the 1989 reforms and has been intensified by local, national and global developments at a pace and scale never seen before. It is, therefore, no wonder that secondary principals across the Central North Island of New Zealand, and throughout the world are losing their capacity to have a sustainable and healthy work-life balance.

International Context

At the third annual Ontario Principals Council International Symposium held in 2017, the white paper produced for this event was titled Principal work-life Balance and Well-being matter. It identified that education is facing a crisis in principal well-being on a global scale that requires urgent policy and practice intervention.

Indeed the authors of this white paper identified that the educational landscape for educational leadership had changed significantly over recent years as schooling responded to the challenges of:

globalization, demographic changes, growing global awareness and rapid technological innovation which have created a demand and pressure on public education systems to respond and adapt. Over the last decade, educational change in many jurisdictions has been characterized by a rapid flow of initiatives designed to improve student outcomes. These shifts are occurring against a backdrop of structural and funding pressures that demand increased flexibility and creativity from school leaders, without a concomitant increase in, and at times a reduction of committed resources.

Pollock, K., and Edge, K., (2017). P 4

These changes have been accompanied by a growing understanding by OECD nations of the crucial importance of education for the future prosperity of their countries. With the growing number of cross-country education comparisons, such as PISA, these Western governments have been looking for ways of exercising increased central control over schools in these dynamic times. They have been advocating for 'procedures for setting a central curriculum, for inspecting schools or for assessing pupils and publishing results at a school level are all pressures that encourage school managers to conform to a well-defined set of norms'. (Mulford, 2008) p 20.

This has accompanied a loss of confidence in public schools and pressure for privatization and choice in the provision of schooling. Since the turn of this century, the pace and scale of educational change in many areas of the world have been relentless. The developments and numerous initiatives which rapidly roll off the central governmental production line are focused on improvement in all facets of education. Areas including leadership; teaching and learning; student achievement; social, emotional and health issues; and a host of other compliance features.

However, as Fullan (2008) identifies, too many initiatives and policy implementation requirements quickly result in working conditions wherein the pace of change prevents leaders and teachers from becoming fully aware and committed to an idea before a new one replaces it. He identified

that individuals working in these conditions may have difficulty sustaining focus and energy, the extent of such a pressurised conveyor belt of development increasing stress and anxiety on principals.

The constant pressure to adopt new programmes or implement new initiatives, a lack of alignment between the various reforms, and competing accountability systems all contribute to work intensification and the consequent potential for negative well-being outcomes for school leaders. While the role of principals in leading change that facilitates improvements in students' achievement is clearly apparent, there is a lack of reciprocal support for school leaders (Pollock, 2017; Maxwell & Riley 2017).

Cranston (2003) identified that among these changes has been the dominance of managerialist thinking and practices being transferred to public sector organisations like schools, having a direct impact on their systems and processes. It has also brought with it the requirement for schools to meet a wider range of accountability measures such as the implementation of mandated curriculum requirements relating to what is being taught and how it is to be assessed, curricula, nation-wide testing and more systematic forms of teacher appraisal.

Bauer (2018) noted that the educational landscape in recent years has changed dramatically because of a greater focus on school competition and the increasing pressure to improve achievement through better 'test scores'. They describe that this pressure has become more and more the sole responsibility of the principal. Friedman (2002) identified the uniqueness of this role and how the drive to decentralisation had impacted on school leaders.

The school principal continues to be the focus of attention with respect to the vital role he or she plays in the successful performance of a school. Recent trends in the Western world toward decentralization in decision-making and school-based management place greater responsibility on the principal.p.229

The accountability movement has focused attention on principals (Bauer, 2018) by making them personally responsible for school success. A constant through all of these changes are principals' sole responsibility for school outcomes and the likelihood that they make many of their key decisions, and at times in isolation.

Internationally there has been a thrust for greater accountability for school leaders in America (Wells 2003); Australia (Day 2011; Maxwell, 2017); Ireland (Darmondy 2016); Quebec (Poriel, 2012); Norway (Federici, 2011) and Turkey (Baş, 2012) are some of the OECD countries where governments have attempted to implement more direct responsibility to school leaders. Such measures have included increasing pressure to improve test scores under high-stakes accountability policies which are becoming more focused on holding principals, and their leadership, responsible for school success. These demands have continuously increased affecting both schools and leaders.

Indeed isolation, according to Howard and Mallory, 2008 (2008), while it is inherent in the culture of the high school principal, can be addressed by effective personal and professional support systems so that they can alleviate the potentially debilitating effects of professional loneliness. Inclusive of this support rests the responsibility of the central office, who must understand the degree of isolation associated with the high school principalship, to ensure their support their principals. 'A school principal cannot be treated as a bureaucratic manager associated with accountability if the principal is expected to serve as the instructional leader of the school.'

P24.

A further issue facing school leaders is that changes in technology (Wells 2013; Pollock 2017; NSW 2018) have made principals more accessible and have not only increased the pressure on principals as leaders but also their workload. This pressure comes from multiple sources including central office, personnel, parents, students, whanau and school board members who all perceive that they have "24/7" access to school leaders. Being connected via instant communication they receive email and text messages throughout their work and recreational time. Such contact poses huge

pressure onto school leaders as they attempt to implement a satisfactory work-life balance.

The changes have gone from the traditional face-to-face communication format to digital modes such as Instagram, Messenger, Twitter and Facebook. These technologies additionally complicate communication pathways and timeframes and unfortunately, these direct, potentially viral, and immediate contact strategies, result in principals experiencing high volumes of digital messages and increased organisational expectations. Couple this with shorter response times and a blurring of boundaries between work and home and the pressure can almost be constant. Further, the total volume of emails being generated has rapidly and consistently increased over time; principals are now being bombarded with more information than they can reasonably be expected to process. Much of the interactions are one-sided and are focused on information 'dumping', not dialogue. Clearly, the modern digital environment compounds the pressure on principals.

New Zealand

The policy developments in New Zealand in the late 1980s and early 1990s lead to a focus on the self-management of educational institutions, and this required a different type of educational leadership. As the first country in the world (Robertson, 2005), New Zealand moved into full-scale decentralisation. This required a new form of leadership, with new skills.

At the same time, there have been significant social changes brought about by demographic developments and social dislocation. With this comes variations to the nature and diversity reflected in school communities which in turn directly impact on the classroom. There is also greater pressure (Howard & Mallory, 2008; Kafka, 2009; Klocko & Wells, 2015) for schools to address society's social and educational inequities that are generated in a market-based environment, shouldering responsibilities that once belonged in the home or the community. At the same over the last two decades, countries around the globe have been focused on expanding education as

the key to maximising individual well-being, reducing poverty, and increasing economic growth.

In New Zealand, the Treasury Department (2013) identified education as one of the two key areas to improve the nation's economic growth and to address issues of equity. Indeed schools, and in particular quality teaching was seen by this state department as a priority for raising living standards and addressing inequity.

There is also evidence that over the last few years, these social issues have made the management of secondary students more difficult. The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), an international, large-scale survey of teachers, school leaders and the learning environment in schools, shows that between 2013 and 2018 there has been a deterioration in school safety for both students and staff in New Zealand. For students there has been 80% increase, during this period, in the reporting by principals of students being subjected to physical or non-physical forms of bullying, and, a 36% increase in the reporting of verbal abuse towards staff.

Further, since 2015 (Ministry of Education 2019) the number of standowns (temporary suspensions before a return to school) increased by 37% and exclusions (permanent ban from returning to a school) increased by 15%. In New Zealand. Principals undertake these actions when he or she is satisfied that a student's behaviour constitutes gross misconduct, continual disobedience which is a harmful or dangerous example, or their behaviour puts students at risk of being seriously harmed.

This change has occurred despite Ministry initiatives to address this matter, and their placement of significant pressure on schools not to do either standown or exclude students. The recent trends in these statistics indicate an acceleration of challenging behaviours which again are a source of conflict with the parent community and cause tension between principals and their staff.

The social environment in which our students live is increasingly becoming more challenging too. One example is the growing proportion of our

students living in poorer households. According to recent poverty statistics, the percentage of children living in households in New Zealand who fall in the low income, less than 50% median, equivalised disposable household income before housing costs, over the last decade has increased by 18%. (Department of Statistics, 2018).

A further consequence of this social change is reflected in New Zealand which has high rates of teenage suicide, and increasing levels of anxiety among students (PPTA, 2018). Clearly, with an understanding that supporting students' mental and emotional wellbeing and social development go hand in hand with helping them to meet academic goals (Riley, 2008) this is an additional challenge that is growing as together, anxiety and depression are hitting a rising number of our children and young people in our schools.

A Ministry of Health report released in November this year contained an estimate that 79,000 young New Zealanders are in "psychological distress", which means they have a high or very high probability of anxiety or depressive disorder, this is an increase by 5% in the last six years (Woulfe, 2018). That figure, up from 58,000 in just one year, equates to 12% of those aged 15-24. This number is a dramatic jump of 5% from six years ago and international evidence suggests strongly that the incidence of these disorders spikes sharply as children return for the new school year.

This burden has a direct impact on schools, they are increasingly finding it difficult to cope, and the pressure on staff and resources is having a consequent impact on principals and their capacity to care for students and facilitate their achievement.

Indeed in New Zealand, The Tomorrow's Schools Taskforce Report (2018) comments that the emphasis on self-management and competition between schools in Aotearoa New Zealand has not improved the quality of education overall and the effects have been greatest for the schools which serve our

most disadvantaged groups, and their students, who often have the least choice. Further, a large body of research has identified the unevenness of opportunity as parents come from such different social, cultural and educational backgrounds.

There is further evidence that the New Zealand schooling system is not working as well as it should be. New Zealand's student performance in OECD rankings (MOE, 2016) in international reading tests for 15-year-olds has declined since 2000. Similarly, our performance in science has slipped since 2006, and in mathematics too we have dropped since 2003. PISA data also shows that the gap between our highest and lowest performers is wide compared with other countries, and we have fewer students from poor homes who perform well.

The Report by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce Report (2018) identified that in New Zealand in contrast to many other OECD countries, there was less resourcing provided to support students who come from disadvantaged homes, about 3% of school operational funding (including staffing costs), which was approximately half the amount provided in comparable jurisdictions.

The report also identified that the current accountability mechanisms implemented by central office personnel might need to review how they direct schools to assume some of the accountability tasks. New Zealand did not necessarily lead to improvement and are often regarded by the sector as a compliance exercise. This is not to discredit the strategic goals regarding improving students' achievement, rather that such expectations are usually part of a disconnected strategy, one of the numerous initiatives all of which are accompanied with minimal resourcing and isolated support.

The impact of that on school leadership and the ability of schools to meet their accountability requirements

While the amount and complexity of accountability requirements and responsibilities are escalating for principals, it is a greater challenge for those involved in school governance. Often Boards of Trustees have members with limited skill levels and are inexperienced in the governance

roles. This burden is more than frequently picked up the principal and their leadership/management teams.

This frequently means that there are limits to the board involvement in the big picture and overall policy direction. In practice, this often means that the principal is both an employee of the board but also is very much its guide and mentor. When the direct accountability responsibilities are written as “the board is responsible for’ or “the board shall...” it usually means that the “the principal shall.” (Haque, 2017, as cited in PPTA, 2019, p.16).

The impact on the principal role as the facilitator of student achievement

One of the key weighty responsibilities facing principals is that they know that they have a crucial role in raising student achievement. Indeed several researchers (Hattie, 2017; Darmody, 2014; Kafka, 2009; Leithwood, 2005) all identify principals as one of the key critical contributors to students’ achievement. Principals also have an acknowledged role in shaping school climate, which in turn support students and teachers.

While school leaders recognise and welcome this influential and essential role that they play in supporting students to secure academic and personal success, including creating the conditions for school improvement, there are limits to their capacity to effect change. This is especially relevant with regard to their role of improving the quality of teaching and learning in their schools to raise student achievement and their ability to address inequalities brought about by, at times, a deteriorating and changing social environment.

In New Zealand principals are explicitly charged with this responsibility of raising student achievement. The Ministry of Education’s Kiwi leadership for principals (2008) training resource has affirmed this expectation.

With the self-management changing transferring governance and decision-making to each school, through its parent-elected Board of Trustees, it is the boards who are holding principals accountable for successfully implementing government policies, requirements and aspirations. These expectations, and on occasions the inability to meet such targets,

engenders significant anxiety for principals as more principals' performance (Coombs, 2009; Klocko & Wells, 2015; Maxwell, 2017) is being tied to these elements and in particular, raising student achievement.

Principals throughout the world (Hodgen 2005; Coombs 2009; Pollock, 2017; Riley, 2019;) feel that their roles remain rewarding and believe they make a meaningful difference, even while at the same time they acknowledge that their jobs are stressful. With Coombs (2009) also noting that despite generally high levels of job satisfaction among principals, they have reported increased levels of exhaustion, resulting in declining levels of physical and mental health.

Indeed Billot (2003) identified this challenge some time ago noting that there was a growing concern about the role and workload of the New Zealand secondary school principals, particularly concerning their ability to sustain work-home balance within the demands of the new educational transformations being undertaken as part of the Tomorrow's Schools developments. Since then, the time required and the pace and complexity of reforms have only increased and research (Anderson, 2009; Riley, 2018; and Bonne, 2019) has confirmed this issue and have noted that the deterioration in principal wellness has continued.

While principals are acutely aware that they are accountable for meeting explicit achievement expectations they recognise that they also have a responsibility to prepare young people to be able to access, thrive and contribute to society in the future. This entails them recognising that the current industrial model of education, full of contradictions and anomalies, will give way to an era of the 'knowledge society' and that as educators we are challenged to envision and create schools that prepare students to survive and thrive in both the present and the future. This dilemma eats away at their integrity and their ethical essence, ensuring that only the most pragmatic of principals can manage this anxiety without any personal emotional impact.

This tension, exacerbated by assessment directives from central government, mean that principals are consistently being caught in a

conundrum between lead table drivers and its compartmentalisation of learning (industrial), to a situation where they are preparing learners for a world which more and more cares about, not what you know but what you can do with what you know. Simply getting the right answer is no longer enough (Wagner, 2014).

Such a change in education has largely been left to principals and their associations to grapple with. It, therefore, has been pleasing to hear the Ministry identify that they will be giving consideration to what the schooling system will need to do to respond to the opportunities and challenges that the future is likely to bring (MOE 2018a). Currently, however, there is no sustained central government professional development strategy to support or nurture the development of practices to underpin such a future-focused response.

The Tomorrow's Schools Taskforce Review (MOE, 2018) identified that more is needed to be done to support school leaders. Piggot-Irvine 2004 noted that the self-managing environment had resulted in the principal's role evolving and changing over time, shifting from that of a manager implementing policy and practices of state departments through to a role of an instructional leader who has responsibility for every facet of the school programme. These developments have an impact of isolating principals from their board, their staff and their community. Indeed this isolation, and at times loneliness can be overwhelming. She even suggests that perhaps the role of the principal is perhaps too big for even the best of principals to survive alone.

The focus on student achievement and especially the need for additional support to facilitate accelerated progress for Māori and Pacific students' learning, and differentiating teaching for students with learning support needs, is an area of expressed need. Bonne (2018) identified that such strategies require additional external support as these needs cannot be met by asking schools to source their own advice.

There was a call (PPTA, 2018) for greater clarity about board roles and principal's role, preferably in the Education Act, and a few wanted principals'

organisations to take a stronger role in defining these. Others in submissions to the review document, have wanted to move on from the individual school board system and have some form of professional governance, or governance at the district level to replace boards.

Another challenge that has been identified by Anderson (2018) relates the tensions caused by serious employment conflict. With principals having responsibility for managing almost all employment decisions, the potential for conflict is constant. Whether the issues are between principals and the board, or between the principals and staff, the complications of union or NZSTA (they are on the opposite sides of most employment issues) involvement or otherwise, is not straight forward. Often the principal find themselves in a conflict situation with no legal or other support. Further, where there is an employment dispute, the Ministry is likely to decline to be involved. The situation can readily escalate and be very challenging.

Several principals in this situation and their families experienced extremely high levels of stress..... Others talked of the high cost of legal advice to solve some very complex situations when support from key organisations evaporated. Anderson 2018 p. 8

While there may be many valid reasons for the board to be in disagreement with the principal, some characteristics of the parent board/employer relationship which is at the heart of the self-managing process, make finding solutions more problematic and stressful than it would be in other jobs.

Wellbeing

For the purpose of this investigation, I have found the definition identified by White 2010 helpful. She describes wellbeing as a positive state, where the quality of a person's health, in a holist view, incorporates mind, body and spirit and it is centred in the person and his/her own priorities and perspectives focusing on external 'objective' measures of welfare as well as people's own perceptions and experience of life. Wellbeing is therefore seen as a dynamic state, affected by complex, interacting resources and

demands, and the intensive principal role puts its own unique demands on this balance.

Alimo-Metcalfe (2008 et al.) help clarify wellness by identifying seven facets of wellbeing at work, these include fulfilment; self-esteem; self-confidence; reduced job-related stress; reduced job-related exhaustion; team spirit; a sense of team effectiveness.

While it is helpful to understand wellbeing, it is important to be able to identify what 'poor wellbeing' looks like, as in when principals lose this sense of equilibrium due to stress or other factors. Such a situation is often referred to (Bauer & Silver 2018; Tomic & Tomic 2008; Oplatka, I., 2002) as burnout. This is a state where principals find themselves after being stressed and over time and impacted by negative physical, emotional, and cognitive job-induced symptoms, escalating to emotional exhaustion and burnout.

Tomic 2008 also identifies three dimensions which together contribute to this dysfunctional situation: emotional exhaustion, or the feeling of total mental and emotional loss; cynicism, or a mental distance toward work and the people with whom one works and lack of efficacy, or perceived own competence or lack of accomplishment. Identified among the causes were issues such as complying with organisational rules and policies, excessively high self-imposed expectations, the feeling of having too heavy a workload, increased demands, role ambiguity, lack of recognition and rewards, and decreasing autonomy. Often too, other localised factors like parents, poor student achievement or staff exacerbate these challenges. Clearly, a principal's ability to cope with these stresses, and indeed extreme anxiety is thus related to burnout.

As school principals' wellbeing declines (Maxwell, 2017) their ability to significantly impact positively on school functioning, student engagement and achievement, and inevitably whole-school wellbeing, also declines. The most significant impact of principal burnout, apart from the debilitating impact on individual principals and their families, is the consequent negative ripple effect on their schools and inevitably student achievement.

In New Zealand and Australia, principals (Maxwell 2017) face significantly increased emotional demands compared to the general population, and this is associated with poorer psychosocial health. The dominant precursors for principal burnout have been identified (Oplatka, 2002) as being due to: to role conflict; intensive workload; role ambiguity; a wide variety of complex tasks to perform; fragmented workdays; insufficient resources and rewards; problems with stakeholders; isolation inherent in the job, and feelings of being trapped. This situation is compounded for school principals working in rural areas (Baş, 2012) who identified feeling higher levels of burnout than their colleagues working in urban areas.

Currently, our system places significant demands on one individual, the principal, often to the detriment of their wellbeing. The system, through the support and professional development it provides, does not support aspiring individuals to develop and move into formal leadership positions. It also does not do enough to support and develop those who are already principals, be they in the early stages of their career or more experienced.

The survey

The local survey of CNISPA Principals wellbeing was initiated after concern was expressed at a regional hui about the rise in resignations and the forced departure of several of our principal colleagues from the profession. Some also had significant health issues and or had experienced sustained periods of duress either from internal or external sources.

The survey was undertaken through an online questionnaire which was deemed to be a valid and reliable method for educational research. The principle method of communication for the association had been through digital means, interaction almost always is via email, so there was confidence that members would be given every opportunity to participate in the survey.

The survey was sanctioned by the CNISPA executive, which endorsed both the concept and the purpose of the survey. The questionnaire included; 10 closed questions with the choice of a single answer from a four fixed option range; the eleventh question with multiple potential responses which

required a single response; and an invitation to provide additional written comments about principal wellness.

Some of the questions were similar in format to principal's surveys utilised by Wylie & Stevens (2017), and Riley (2019) and it was intended that it would take participants a maximum of ten minutes to complete.

An invitation was extended to all CNISPA principals to participate via email and the survey was distributed with the appropriate comments regarding instructions and confidentiality.

There was a good response to the survey with 26 principals completing it, this equating to nearly two-thirds of the membership.

In reviewing the results, it was heartening to see that overwhelming that (80%) of CNISPA principals enjoyed their jobs with 30 % recording saying that they consistently did so. This result affirms international research in Quebec and the United States and a recent survey of New Zealand principals undertaken by Boone (2018). However, while there was similarity in current levels of optimism, she found that fewer principals described their morale as "very good" or "good" which was recorded by 61% of respondents in 2018, compared with 77% in 2015, and 80% in 2012.

The next series of questions focused on the source of support for their leadership in general terms. There were questions relating to the degree of support from their leadership or management teams, internal school support and external school support.

A third of principals identified that they received little or no support from their leadership teams, and this was of concern. This information identifies that such a limit in key middle leaders backing would limit a principals' ability to utilise distributive leadership strategies. Distributive leadership is primarily concerned with the practice of leadership rather than specific leadership roles or responsibilities. It focuses on shared, collective and extended leadership practice which helps to build individual team members capacity for change and supports principals leadership and their roles and responsibilities, and eases their workload. This strategy has been

identified by others, (Howard & Mallory, 2008; NSW, 2018), as one of the key strategies to assist principals in coping with the workload and stress inherent in their positions.

Approximately half of the principals surveyed identified that they received sufficient support from within their organisation and from agencies and individuals outside the school. The issue, however, was that this probably left a significant group of CNISPA principals who feel unsupported and at times perhaps isolated from advice and assistance.

Further, the principal's isolation from the school's middle leaders within their school would make implementing, monitoring new initiatives and facilitating other requirements much more difficult. It also should be noted too that while it is a legal requirement to ensure that their principal receives professional development, boards of trustees (Anderson, 2019) do not appear to be particularly interested in, or take an active role in ensuring that this occurred. Often the support was found from, colleagues, NZSTA the national association supporting Boards of Trustees and the Secondary Principals Association of New Zealand (SPANZ). It should be noted that NZSTA is contracted to provide this support as well as assisting with school governance capability.

The next questions then focused on workload and stress. When asked about their workload, only 19% said it was manageable, with half identifying that it was occasionally manageable with a further 31% identifying that it was unmanageable. These results echoed the Deloitte's survey of NSW principals (2018b) which found 75% of principals said their workload was 'difficult to achieve' or 'not at all achievable' and 77% said their workload is 'difficult to sustain' or 'not at all sustainable'.p.2

Clearly, within this cohort of CNISPA principals, there are many who were working under significant duress/stress with the potential of burnout being very real for them. The longer-term prognosis for this group, as the relentless demands continue, appears to be bleak.

The respondents were then asked about their workload and its impact on their work personal life balance. Half of those surveyed said that their home

work-life was not balanced, with a further 39% indicating that it is occasionally in balance. In response to the question about if they felt their workload was sustainable, a significant 46% said that it was not, and an additional 42% indicated that on occasions, it was sustainable.

When asked directly about whether they were experiencing severe stress, 20% reported that they consistently felt that they were under duress, a further 15% indicated that they were under severe stress and 46% saying that they were occasionally under severe stress. These responses identify that CNISPA principals are challenged by their roles and responsibilities and their capacity to cope with pressures with a significant group of principals feeling that they were under consistent enormous pressure.

The next set of questions related to the source or cause of their anxiety. Their responses identified that the greatest cause of stress came from staff issues (42%), reflecting the Boone (2019) findings, followed by issues with the Boards of Trustees (12%). These two elements equated for well over half of the causes of their anxiety. There were several other areas identified which just highlighted the impact that local issues (Tomic 2008) have in generating tensions which intern have a powerful impact on principal well-being too.

This first element, regarding staff issues and the anxiety it causes, is validated by organisational psychologists (Friedman, 2002) as a common issue for leaders causing them chronic emotional strain through continuing to have to deal with the needs of others, implementing change and managing and motivating teachers for improvement. These matters, and having multiple responsibilities, were identified by these researchers as the most difficult and stressful responsibilities.

The ninth question asked about whether they felt stuck in their principal role with two-thirds of principals reporting that they did not feel trapped in this role. Recent research (Boone 2019) identified that principals were generally comfortable in their roles and a similar proportion (62%) were intending to continue in their current roles/school. There were increases in the proportion of principals (between 2009 and 2018) whose next steps were to be

retirement, those unsure of their next steps and those who were looking to change their careers.

As a consequence of this survey, and in reflecting on former colleagues recent experiences, the CNISPA Executive realised the reality and the immediacy of the situation facing many of their colleagues. As a result, Executive members lobbied the two national principals associations and the Director of Education for Waikato for support. The Executive implemented a largely voluntary role of a Principal Liaison position to informally keep contact with members and collectively members sought out colleagues who no longer attended regional meetings.

What is clear, however is that the scale of the issue both nationally and internationally requires much more than self-help strategy by a voluntary organisation of already full engaged principals.

Strategies to support Principal wellbeing

In New Zealand, it is clear that the first area principals sought for support were from their colleagues. This required principals to have a network of relationships with a range of colleagues, something that can only be achieved over time. Further, the role of competition between schools ensures that such relationships would be from principals who are further afield than local schools, as principals are unlikely to share significant and potentially damaging issues with colleagues whom they compete for students.

Internationally, state agencies have recognised the challenges that their principals are facing. Interestingly most of the nations have far less decentralised educational systems than New Zealand. In the face of mounting challenges about principal stress, New South Wales (NSW) Department of Education recognised that principal health and wellbeing was a critical issue that needed addressing not only to support principals but also for to enable the state to achieve growth in students achievement and authorised a study into specifically school principal workload and time use.

This research into principal wellbeing (Riley, 2008) was funded by The Australian Research Council (ARC) which is a Commonwealth entity and advises the Australian Government on research matters, to grow knowledge and innovation for the benefit of the Australian community. It has established its own online Principal Wellbeing website to provide ready access to agencies and support networks to assist immediately with their wellbeing.

The report identified that among the main factors they found which negatively impacted on principals effectively managing their workload were the limits of principal training and preparation for leadership roles, insufficient administrative support and lack of access to timely and quality support services, tools and systems.

Among Dr Riley's recommendations, there was a clear identification of support for principal's professional leaders. He noted that school leaders report virtually no support from their employers. Indeed he requested that the proposed review of Tomorrow's Schools includes consideration of any governance model's impact on school leaders and their wellbeing. Provide experienced principal mentors to regularly visit schools supporting leaders with the opportunity for regular debriefing of professional issue

One of the strategies the report identified that would address some of these issues was to ensure that state government identified ways to support principals' formal and informal networks so that principals received the exposure, education, experience and environment they need to be successful. Another was to encourage the Education Department to review the way they could enable principals to execute the administrative components of their role in the most efficient and effective way, particularly in relation to planning, policy, finance, compliance, risk and work health and safety. This would then allow them to able to increase their focus on educational leadership and their potential impact on student achievement.

What is clear, too is that experienced principals acknowledge that if they are to lead learning, they themselves must continue to learn and be challenged. In the absence of a national programme principals leadership programme,

they support each other through informal networks and professional learning groups that may employ an external facilitator and principals' associations. Such meetings and conferences are critical sources of support but clearly at their initiative.

Recommendations

There have been many positive examples of historical practices that experienced principals have identified as being proactive and effective ways of supporting principals in managing their roles (MOE, 2018a) with the Ministry's regional staff not seen as sources of this kind of support. Many of these centrally funded strategies were utilised at a time when principal roles were less demanding and the external factors impacting on schools, not as complex. **They included experienced Rural and Principal Advisers** who were readily accessible to support principals and because of their regular contact and their independence, their advice was readily sought after. Such resource people were also able to facilitate individual principals to access and network with their more experienced colleagues.

The situation in New Zealand is demanding because principals' ability to access Professional Learning and Development (PLD) is such a truncated process. Currently, it is almost impossible to access Ministry funded (MOEb) PLD support and will remain so for at least the next eight months. One of the only other alternatives for principals to gain professional advice is to pay for consultants, with such resourcing, especially if it was unforeseen and therefore unbudgeted, often requiring Board approval and on occasions highlighting an individual principal's shortcomings. The Ministry of Education (MOEa) have acknowledged that the system, through the support and PLD it provides, does not do enough to support and develop those who are already principals.

Historically in New Zealand, the key to some impressive change in pedagogical practice has been the quality of the professional development support. **When culturally responsive and relational pedagogy was first introduced in the early 2000s, and initially appropriately resourced, there was qualitative change to school leadership and classroom practice.** The

various iterations in subsequent years with minimal resourcing has tempered these improvements in Maaori student achievement in particular, and all students' success. One of the keys to this initial success was the quality of the facilitation and sufficient quantity of release time to imbed the identified change in teaching practices.

For experienced principals, and in an attempt to both retain and grow establish school leaders, it is vital that their morale, professional commitment, and sense of professional value and personal worth is maintained, and their creativity and enthusiasm is promoted. Chapman (2005) identified that the professional development programmes for experienced principals must provide a range of learning opportunities from which selection can be made per their specific needs. These learning experiences could include: study groups; advanced seminars; reading and discussion groups; electronic networks, presentations by current thinkers or expert practitioners; attendance at national academies or conferences; and opportunities to become coaches, facilitators, or trainers themselves. She did, however, qualify such support by noting that the facilitation of their learning should not however be haphazard or fragmented.

The NSW (2018) report identified a challenge to the state's Education Department, namely, how could they enable and support principals' formal and informal networks so that principals receive the exposure, education, experience and environment they need to be successful? One of the report's recommendations was for the state to provide specific leadership development training for all principals not only to assist their associations. Similarly, the principal association in Quebec identified that not only should the State government nurture the principal networks but that they should also address school leader well-being and work-life balance by acting as knowledge brokers, advocates and policy activists for their 'constituents'.

Also reported in this research was a call to such associations to act as advocates for policy change, work to share resources, and offer continued professional learning and support for their members and to help principals' well-being and work-life balance. The principal associations in New Zealand take on this responsibility with purpose and care. However, what is also

acknowledged is the fundamental responsibility lies, for these issues, with the policymakers.

In response to this study, States across Australia initiated a range of strategies to support principals. The Victorian Department of Education instituted free psychological counselling sessions for school principals in a bid to fight against the stress and strain of the job. In Tasmania, a well-being plan was established. As part of this strategy, two new Principal Wellbeing Leader positions will be established to begin a more coordinated and sustained approach to support principals in their roles and to assist with their principal wellbeing. With Tasmania having one-tenth the number of schools of New Zealand, such resourcing is significant. At present, there is no such resourcing in NZ.

In the Northern Territory, the state's education department now provides an annual \$600 well-being grant for principals which can go towards gym memberships and well-being programs. However, the author of the Australian Principal Health and Well-being Survey, Paul Riley commented (Henebery, 2018) that what the Department had overlooked or ignored were the key findings of his report that they had failed to reflect on looking at their processes, which principals almost universally say is a significantly stressful part of their job. He also commented that well-being has to be incorporated into all processes of the organisation. It cannot be bolted onto a system that principals do not feel supported by and "magically transform it if the existing stressors are not addressed," p.2

I trust that the final implementation of the review of Tomorrow's Schools takes heed this advice and looks at the systemic issues generated by the Ministry of Education.

Research has identified (Howard & Mallory, 2008) various strategies and practices to assist principals in coping with the stress inherent in their positions. They include spousal support; a strong sense of moral purpose; the use of distributed leadership; maintenance of social contacts outside the school; mentoring of aspiring administrators and teachers; and networking with other principals. The principals who reported the least amount of

isolation utilised all six strategies as part of their regular practice. The challenge with these strategies is that they occur independent of central government or external support and are dependent on individual principal's initiative. However, when a principal is under duress, they frequently do not have the personal capacity, confidence or willpower to initiate such actions, leaving them even more isolated.

From halfway across the world, The Alberta Teachers Association (2017) identified that additional resourcing is needed for schools so that they can address the growing impact of the changing world on teaching and learning. Specifically, there is an urgent need to provide high-quality professional development opportunities for school leaders and their staff in the areas of multiculturalism, English language learning and mental health. They also identified that schools required more resourcing for student counsellors, psychologists and mental health specialists. The commonality of this need with New Zealand affirms the truly global nature of our challenges.

Another strategy that has been successful both in New Zealand and elsewhere in the world is mentoring or coaching principals. Coaching both challenges and supports educational leaders to develop their educational practice and to assist them in identifying what is to their advantage. Indeed some identify (Sciarappa, 2014; Robertson, 2015) that all educational leaders should have ready access to "coaching organisations' with 'learning facilitators' how principals and undeniably education. From a national leadership perspective, principal mentoring is a valuable tool in both building quality school leaders and keeping good principals. There are challenges about finding funding but in actuality, supporting principals' amounts not only to good practice but to a preferred practice for the future of our schools, our teachers, our principals, and our youth. P.68 Sciarappa 2014

Currently, our system places significant demands on one individual, the principal, often to the detriment of their wellbeing. The system, through the support and professional development it provides, does not assist and develop those who are already principals, be they in the early stages of their career or more experienced.

Conclusion

The challenge facing principals regarding their wellness is not of their making. System failure and the market force approach has indeed high jacked their goodwill, their passion and their instructional leadership capacity, leaving some principals on the sidelines of education. This issue is a world-wide challenge which comes into clearer focus in New Zealand self-managed environment. This crisis is defined by a simultaneous increase in volume and complexity of work and the resulting loss of a sustainable and healthy work-life balance.

There is a common understanding throughout the world that the challenges and responsibilities facing principals and school superintendents have soared in recent years (Hawk, 2011). Indeed some say that that it is an impossible job in which even the best and the brightest confront escalating and competing demands. However, with all these challenges it is important to remember that even in the face of mounting challenges, school leaders remain both resilient and committed to their schools and communities, working very hard to make a positive difference.

This study supports the literature that identifies a crisis in education for principals and attempts to provide evidence of the serious health consequences for a significant group of educational leaders, and in turn to a potential generation of students. At the same time, I recognise that these findings are tentative and context-bound. However the challenge is real, so hopefully, my findings, which by their very nature, will be providing a fresh lens to an escalating situation and bring about some positive interventions, and hopefully the possibility for improvement in my colleagues' wellbeing.

What is clear is that there needs to be a deliberate strategy to support principals. Educational leaders require greater coherence in policy and procedures and there needs to be a greater appreciation of the value that men and women in leadership bring to their positions. The underfunding of special needs, failing learners and negative social behaviours within the classroom are clear examples of how principals and schools are being

assessed by the OECD yardstick yet are woefully resourced in comparison, making such judgements and comparisons unjust and unfair.

Building on the current best practices and experience of nations around the world, and indeed historical experience within New Zealand, there are numerous strategies that can support educational leaders so that many of the unintended consequences arising from the pace and scale of education reform can be mitigated and learning and achievement can flourish.

The Ministry (2008a) have acknowledged that more needs to be done to develop and support leaders including reviewing the responsibilities and burdens placed on leaders, and, how central government can support principals to grow, develop and sustain their leadership capacity. The school principalship of the present and future will require both participating in the hierarchy (such as the regional level), with one's peers (other school leaders), and outside community groups and networks especially if there is no substantive change to current ad hoc support for principal training and development.

Throughout the world, there is a call for more to be done to support the wellbeing of principals. It is important that when we provide additional support for principals, the focus of such assistance should be directed to helping principals to thrive and flourish not just enabling them to cope with the current demands of building leadership.

Word Count: 8595

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