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**A LOT OF MANAGING, A LITTLE LEADING: The
Work of Newly Appointed Secondary Deputy
Principals and Assistant Principals**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Educational Administration
at
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I certify that the thesis entitled **A LOT OF MANAGING, A LITTLE LEADING:
The work of Newly Appointed Secondary Deputy Principals and Assistant
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the perceptions of a group of newly appointed, New Zealand secondary deputy and assistant principals. The study is set against two dominant educational discourses of the last two decades: the reforming discourse of the 1990s, which positioned school principals as chief executive officers with business and management skills; and a leadership discourse which emphasises leadership over management and the role of the principal as the educational leader of the school. The focus of the latter is on improving student achievement and developing and maintaining an effective school. In both discourses the importance of the principal has been established and reinforced through legal and policy decisions and initiatives. The review of the literature shows, however, few studies about DPs/APs and their professional work in either discourse.

The purpose of the research is to undertake a qualitative case study of newly appointed secondary DPs/APs in 2006 and their perceptions of their work as leaders and managers as they began their new work and then six months later. The study used two questionnaires, and in-depth interviews with six DPs/APs. The first questionnaire collected demographic information about this group, as well as to their understandings of the work they would do as they took up their new positions. In-depth interviews of six DPs/APs were carried out to explore their leadership and management work six months into the job, which was supplemented with a follow-up questionnaire to the other participants. It is intended that the research will provide greater understandings of the work of a group of school leaders and managers about who little is known and whose voice is not heard in the educational leadership discourse.

Many findings in this study reinforced previous findings from a small number of other studies. In particular, the work of DPs/APs was heavy, reactive and largely managerial, although the extent of this was largely unanticipated. Many of these newly appointed DPs/APs wanted a greater balance between the leadership and management aspects of their work. The principal remained the most important influence on their professional work, which was largely learnt on the job without any formal professional development. The importance of previous experience acting in the role emerged as important in understanding and gaining confidence in the position. By far the greatest challenge facing these newly appointed DPs/APs was staff relationships, which highlighted issues of power and authority that arose moving from a predominantly teaching role to that of a senior manager.

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INTRODUCTION

No one grows up hoping to become an assistant principal. One may hope to become a doctor, lawyer, accountant, principal, or teacher, but not an assistant principal. The assistant principalship, however, is an important school position; a rite of passage for aspiring principals or a career for unique individuals (Glanz, 2004, p. xv).

This thesis has its origins in the ten years I spent as a deputy principal in a co-educational secondary school. During my interview for the position in 1993 I indicated my intention at the time to become a principal. I was told during this interview that being a successful deputy principal was the right sort of training to become a principal. This would be a job that I passed through on my way to somewhere else, the rite of passage described by Glanz. It seemed to me that I left the world of teaching behind and I entered an exciting and challenging world where no day was the same.

It was trial and error to find my place and to learn about this job. There was no mention of DPs/APs in the literature that I read and little acknowledgement of the types of jobs/tasks in my job description that I ended up doing. There were no professional courses or professional reading that I could access that were specifically focused on my new role. The literature I read during this time was dominated by descriptions of leadership by the principal and his or her vision in creating an effective school. My own learning was done entirely on the job.

I was fortunate in three ways in my choice of school. Firstly, I was well supported and accepted by a collaborative senior management team and in particular the principal, who always had time to discuss issues, debate dilemmas, and was interested in seeing me succeed. His style was collaborative and inclusive and the interests of students and their learning, he believed, should lie at the heart of our every decision. Secondly, my job description was much wider than many of my colleagues. I had leadership of curriculum and professional development in which I had considerable decision-making authority. There were opportunities within the school structure undergoing considerable change under Tomorrow's schools, to set up curriculum teams and to share decision-making within the school. In a similar way professional development teams also were developed to plan whole school professional learning and the more effective use of time and money. The principal believed that he and the senior management team had a crucial role in mediating the huge number of changes that there were a constant given in our professional lives. Thirdly, there was an expectation that senior managers in the schools and heads of department if they wished should work closely with the board of trustees

reviewing school structures and systems, developing policies and contributing to the future direction of the school. Developing new relationships with the community was a key focus of both the board of trustees and the senior management.

The impact of the new educational reforms on the school and on workload of the principal and teachers was profound. As well as the introduction of business style strategic plans and mission statements there was also the development of performance management systems, information systems, financial accounting systems and the introduction of a new national curriculum and qualification system. It seemed to me that all this work was done after school hours when the real job of making sure that the school ran smoothly for teachers and students was complete. While there were great opportunities to develop leadership skills and abilities, there was also a huge range of management and administration activities that were on going and relentless.

Although the opportunities and experiences I had as a DP influence this thesis it is my experiences when I took up a contract in 2003 with a professional development provider that particularly shaped the research focus and purpose. Leadership and management advisers had not existed when I took up my position as a DP ten years before. Part of this new job was to support principals and other school leaders, including newly appointed deputy principals. Once again I found their absence in the leadership literature that was written during this time. Support and programmes I developed for DPs/APs were largely based on my own experiences, and by adapting material and ideas from my readings of the leadership literature and about specific topics such as performance management, change management and dealing with difficult people.

My appointment as a leadership and management adviser coincided with an increasing emphasis from 2001 onwards, by the Ministry of Education on developing leadership for twenty-first century schools, a strategy which was linked to school improvement and raising student achievement (Eddy & Bennison, 2004). In particular this initiative focused on the crucial importance of principals to improve student outcomes in schools. The development of a First-time Principals programme in 2002 highlighted this policy development, with subsequent initiatives such as a dedicated website for principals (Leadspace), residential programmes for experienced principals, the commission of leadership research that supported the professional development of all principals, and the release of the Kiwi Leadership for Principals in 2008, which is both a statement about principal leadership in New Zealand, as well as a development tool (MoE, 2007). Those studying leadership of schools, reading the plethora of literature that has been

written on the subject, and following the policy directions of the Ministry of Education could easily mistakenly think that leadership resided in the hands of one person in the school, the principal. While not denying the immense value and contribution that the leadership policy development of the MoE will make to the leadership of schools, it has reinforced my decision to understand more fully the leadership of other groups, and in particular the position of DP/AP that still has much of a “cinderella” status in New Zealand schools.

Thus my thesis began as a result of my experiences as a deputy principal and my belief that it was an important position in its own right; my concerns at the absence of specific leadership and management literature about the role of DP/AP; and the requirement to provide relevant professional support and professional development, through my roles as a leadership and management advisor, and committee member of the Auckland Secondary Deputy and Assistant Association. I had the opportunity to investigate the work of DPs/APs, with a view to better assisting the professional development of newly appointed DPs/APs, while I was undertaking studies for a Master of Educational Administration degree at Massey University.

The purpose of the research is to undertake a case study of newly appointed secondary DPs/APs in 2006 and their perceptions of their work as leaders and managers as they began their new work and also their experiences and perceptions six months later. It is intended that the research will provide greater understandings of the work of a group of school leaders and managers about whom little is known and whose voice is not heard in the educational leadership discourse. The case study is set against two dominant discourses of the last two decades. Firstly, in the 1990s this discourse focused on the reforms of the education systems with an emphasis on management skills of principals (Ball, 1994; Codd, 1993). Latterly it has focused on a predominant leadership discourse, which has emphasised the role of the principal as the educational leader ‘pivotal to improving learning outcomes for all students’ (MoE, 2007, p. 4) and to school improvement and effectiveness (Earley & Evans, 2004). In both discourses the importance of the principal has been established and is paramount. There have been few studies, however, about the leadership and management of DPs/APs in these last two decades (Cranston, 2007; Graham & Smith, 1999; Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003).

In Chapter One I review the small number of studies of secondary DPs/APs conducted both in New Zealand and internationally. I discuss the four themes that emerged from this review: the managerial nature of the roles and responsibilities of DPs/APs; the lack

of knowledge about the group in the literature, particularly from a gender and ethnic perspective; the influence of the principal in every aspect of their professional lives; and their professional learning, which has largely taken place on the job. Some of the ways in which writers and commentators have suggested that the position could be reconceptualized is discussed in the last section of the chapter.

In the second chapter I discuss two somewhat competing discourses that have dominated educational administration for the last few years and have highlighted the leadership and management of one person, the principal. Firstly, I examine how the educational reforms and the development of a managerial culture in the 1990s have changed the position of principal from instructional leaders to that of chief executive officer, with managerial responsibilities. I then discuss the preoccupation with leadership, which has dominated the leadership and management discourse in recent years, examining different definitions of leadership and management, and the influence of instructional, transformational, and more recently emergent forms of leadership such as the co-principalship and the notion of leadership of learning. Finally, I consider the reconceptualisation of the work of DPs/APs, within this self-managing environment and leadership discourse.

The review of the literature and the contextual and conceptual literature has led to the research methodology and design, which I describe in Chapter Three. A qualitative case study, using questionnaires and interviews was chosen as the most appropriate approach to conducting the research. In Chapter Four I present the findings of the questionnaire. I describe the background of the 40 participants and their schools, and present the analysis of the perceptions of these DPs/APs about their work as leaders and managers, as they began their new and important roles. The detailed perceptions and experiences of six of individuals, collected through interviews is analysed in Chapter Five, along with a shorter follow-up questionnaire which was sent to the original participants. Both the interviews and the follow up questionnaires were conducted after several months into the job. Similarities and differences between the perceptions of DPs/APs at the beginning of their work and after several months as leaders and managers in their schools are highlighted in this chapter. The implications of the study and suggestions for future research as a result of this study have been included in Chapter Seven.