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THE PRINCIPAL AS A PERSON

A STUDY OF VALUES IN SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

Geoffrey Ross Notman

2005



“Sydney’s world, his wilderness where the spirit is tested and strengthened by a pure airiness, great space, is almost always unforested. Or is it? If you can locate yourself here it is in a forest of loneliness, temperamentally, where you are exposed to yourself and everything else. You need strength of purpose, of character; you need courage to stand up here and not avert the eyes. Only through distance can you find yourself. Beyond the far blue, gold, or dun hills and mountains, beneath cirrus edged with gold, there’s a self to be reckoned with.”

Brian Turner, ‘Humanity and Nature: Thoughts on the Art of Grahame Sydney’, in *The Art of Grahame Sydney*. Grahame Sydney and others (Dunedin: Longacre Press, 2000), p.94.

Grahame Sydney, *Westerly Change* (1993), printed in *The Art of Grahame Sydney*, Grahame Sydney and others (Dunedin: Longacre Press, 2000), Plate 73, p. 94. Reproduced by kind permission of the publisher.

ABSTRACT

This research explored the personal dimensions of school principalship. The study described the personal values systems of two secondary principals and suggested how such valuation processes might influence their leadership behaviours. The research was prompted by a lack of detail in the literature about why principals act the way they do and how their core personal and professional values might impact on decision-making and on school directions.

A qualitative case study approach was used to examine the personal and professional lives of an urban and a rural secondary school principal in the South Island of New Zealand over a period of 35 months. Methods of data collection included researcher participant observation and a series of in-depth interviews with the two principals and with significant others. A grounded theory approach to analysis was used that involved a systematic development of categories of meaning drawn from the data. An interpretive paradigm was selected as the research framework. Together with the perspective of symbolic interactionism, an interpretive model of inquiry lent itself well to a focus on principal thought and action, especially in regard to the concept of values-based leadership.

The findings of the research study suggested the centrality of the two principals' core personal values as a motivating force behind their leadership behaviours. The concepts of values origins, values alignment and the management of contested values were identified as influential features of the values enactment of principalship. The research suggests that reflection-on-self and interrogation of core personal values may be important for understanding the principalship in the areas of emotional and spiritual intelligences, resiliency and personal well-being. The implications of these findings for educational leadership theory and for principal self-development are discussed.

As a consequence, the thesis proposes a values-based model of principal self-development that draws on adult learning principles. The model also includes a framework for critical self-reflection that is built around a process of self-examination, the use of human agency and scholarly literature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge, with gratitude, the two secondary principals and their families who allowed me to become a part of their personal and professional worlds over an extended time period. “Helen” and “Max” were willing participants in what was a long-term process of self-examination, as was the rural principal in the pilot study. They unstintingly shared their thoughts and experiences of school principalship.

My supervisor, Professor Wayne Edwards (Massey University), provided encouraging support at all times. I thank him for his pertinent observations and advice during the compilation of this study and for ensuring that the research task was a positive learning experience. Similarly, I wish to acknowledge the wise counsel of Emeritus Professor Keith Ballard (University of Otago). His willingness to offer guidance, and to share his considerable expertise in the field of qualitative methodology, was always appreciated.

I am also grateful to my Otago colleagues, Professor Terry Crooks, Dr Peter Rich and Lester Flockton, for discussions on a range of educational leadership issues. In addition, I have enjoyed sharing professional conversations with Dr Chris Branson (Australia) whose passion for values-led principalship has been influential.

Finally, to my wife Julie and our children Iain and Danielle, I owe a huge debt for their understanding, patience and sacrifices made during the six and a half year research journey.

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