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Title:

***The Professional Learning Pathways of Urban New Zealand***

***Primary Principals.***

*A case study into the beliefs, practices, and perceived impact of  
professional learning on primary principals.*

**Anne Malcolm**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education,

Massey University, 2012

## **Abstract**

The research contributes to school leadership literature considering the role of formal and informal learning. In particular, the diverse modes of learning, varied pathways to principalship and the need for on-going learning, to include the 'novice' phase of being a principal. Urban New Zealand principals, through a purposive sample case study, identified why and how learning was meaningful to them.

An email survey was triangulated with fifteen principals' narratives and four individual interviews to determine the access to and value of principals' professional learning. The findings support balanced modes of direct and indirect learning. An articulated principalship learning pathway is required using both explicit and tacit learning approaches. Principals determined that formal learning is paramount to their professionalism and their ability to be effective in the role. They equally valued peer networks as learning environments. Mentoring at all phases of principalship provided invaluable support.

Despite the importance of developing and evaluating curriculum and student learning, principal leadership included growing future leaders, change management, day to day leadership, and management tasking. This created a work portfolio that could conceivably diminish a leader's personal time for learning. Seemingly, this was inaccurate. Principals are self-motivated adult learners challenged to study in order to improve what happens in their schools, for students, teachers and, for some, the wider community. Data analysis revealed that principals exhibit an on-going moral commitment to learning, their staff, and students.

There is no one course or method of learning that teaches all. Principals learned on the job, through reading, contact with other principals and through degree-type programmes. The First Time Principals' Programme provided consistency but insufficient recognition of experience or link to qualification status. In New Zealand, principals with educational leadership qualifications are not fiscally recognised.

The research contributes to the body of New Zealand leadership literature through the rich and real descriptions of principals' experiences. The findings identify a range of suitable learning methodologies that could be developed for principals. The research opens opportunities for further New Zealand research that develops the principals' voice.

## **Statement of Originality**

This work has not previously been submitted for degree recognition at any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the dissertation itself.

Signed

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'A' followed by a long horizontal line.

Anne Sutherland Malcolm

Dated: 23.4.2013

## **Acknowledgements**

**Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi. Engari taku toa he toa takatini**

A warrior never stands alone, but stands with many.

Maori believe leadership is about sharing success, accepting responsibility and being visible. This study combines the stories of many school principals, their 'Te Kete Tuauri' (real world). I believe their knowledge interpreted through my researcher's lens provides a powerful voice. It was my responsibility to honestly reflect their thinking. I have learnt a great deal through their openness and candour. I have an unequivocal appreciation of the multitude of ways school leaders ensure they access learning. I am thankful to a good number of people for their support.

Firstly, to my supervisors Professor Wayne Edwards and Dr. Jenny Poskitt, I have appreciated their professional expertise, and most importantly their encouragement. At times, it would have been easy to give up and take back my weekends but these two people, along with Dr. Marian Court, supported the load.

My sincerest thanks go to the group of New Zealand principals who agreed to be part of this study. Their time, their love of learning and their life stories are the thesis. I hope their beliefs support future principals in their quest for effectiveness.

My staff and Board of Trustees saw the commitment it takes to carry a full time school leader's role and study. Their belief in me was a driving force. My deputy principals, Cindy Walsh, and my friend Belinda were always there for me. My family was never failing in their belief that one day I would finish. Finally, a huge thank you to my incredibly supportive husband Brian, for his sustained support.

What will we do with our weekends now?

## **Glossary of Acronyms**

**ACEL** Australian Council for Educational Leaders

**APAPDC** Australian Principals' Associations Professional Development Council

**APPA** Auckland Primary Principals' Association

**ERO** Education Review Office (NZ)

**FTPP** First Time Principals' Programme (NZ)

**HEADLAMP Headteacher** Leadership and Management Programme (UK)

**ISLLC** Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium. (USA)

**LPSH** Leadership Programme for Serving Headteachers (UK)

**MOE** Ministry of Education (NZ)

**MCEETYA** Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

**NAHT** National Association of Headteachers (UK)

**NCLB** No child left behind policy (USA)

**NCSL** National College for School Leadership (UK)

**NPM** New Public Management (UK)

**NPQH** National pre-qualification for Headship (UK)

**NZ** New Zealand

**NZCER** New Zealand Council of Education Research

**NZPF** New Zealand Principals' Federation (NZ)

**OECD** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**OFSTED** Office for standards in education (UK)

**OSI** Official school improvement (Britain)

**PDPC** Principals' Development Planning Centre (NZ)

**PQP** Principal Qualification programme (Canada)

**PPLC** Primary Principals' Learning Centre (NZ)

**SQH** Scottish Qualification for Headship

**TDA** Training and Development Agency (Formerly the Teaching and Training Agency, UK)

**UK** United Kingdom

**US** United State of America

## **Glossary of New Zealand Terminology**

**Ako & Awhinatanga:** Maori language terms that translate to learn, study, instruct, teach, advise; guide and support.

**Contributing School:** A primary school, catering for students from 5 years of age through to the end of year 6. Children start school on their birthday. A child starting after June is classified as year 0. This student begins year 1 the following year, moving to intermediate at year 7.

**Decile:** A socio-economic rating for funding schools. A school's Decile indicates the extent to which it draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students.

**Kura and Kura Kaupapa Māori:** A state school where the teaching is in Te Reo Māori. Learning is based on Māori culture and values. Kura Kaupapa caters for students from years 1-8 or years 1-13. A key goal of Kura Kaupapa is to produce students who are equally skilled in both Māori and English.

**Full Primary School:** A school that begins at year 1 and includes years 7 and 8. Year 8 is the final primary school year before a child begins secondary school.

**Independent School:** Is governed by their own independent boards but must meet certain standards in order to be registered. They do not have to follow the New Zealand Curriculum but must follow a learning programme of at least the same quality. Independent schools may be either co-educational or single-sex. They charge fees, but also receive subsidy funding from the government.

**Integrated School:** These schools are part of the state system. They teach the New Zealand Curriculum but keep their own special character (usually a philosophical or religious belief) as part of their school programme, for example the Catholic schools. Integrated schools receive the same government funding for each student as other state schools but their buildings and land are privately owned so by law they can charge attendance dues to meet their property costs.

**Intermediate School:** A year 7 and 8 school set up in the depression as an alternative to 4 years middle schooling. The intermediate model is for students to attend a school for 2 years at ages 11 and 12. In June 2006, a middle school strategy was set up to consider the value of a school

transitioning students for two years. There has been no nationalised policy on this as at November 2009.

**Manaakitanga and Pono:** Maori language terms to express how a community cares for one another and 'Principals work together, goodness, righteousness and all things moral.

**U Rating:** The school's 'Grading Roll' as seen in this table determines the principal's salary grade.

This salary data relates to July 2009 Principals in decile 1-4 schools a

Principals in decile 1-4 schools are paid an amount in addition to base salary (NZEI Collective agreement)

Roll	Grade	Salary
50 students	U1	\$76,288
51–100 students	U2	\$82,260
101–150 students	U3	\$89,090
151–300 students	U4	\$96,071
301–500 students	U5	\$103,052
501–675 students	U6 675	\$107,042



## Figures

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
1	Comparable leadership dimensions (Day & Robinson, 2009).	19
2	A Model for Educational Leadership (MoE, 2008a, p.12).	50
3	A continuum of leadership (Kagan, 1994).	108
4	Identified sampling variables.	136
5	Data collection model.	137
6	Findings data - Years' service as a principal.	156
7	Findings data - Positions held as a principal.	157
8	Findings data- Deciles of respondents' schools.	158
9	Findings data - Roll sizes of respondents' schools.	158
10	Findings data – Types of respondents' schools.	159
11	Principals' assimilation.	160
12	Codes to concepts.	166
13	Best learning at four identified experience levels of principalship.	234
14	External and internal drivers.	240
15	Handy's (1994) Sigmoid Curve.	244
16	Diagrammatic representation of principals' learning.	245

## Tables

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
1	Profile of primary school applicants and applicants appointed to principals' positions.	46
2	Macpherson's preliminary career based learning framework.	60
3	Contradictions in the literature and potential solutions.	106
4	The research protocol.	130
5	Modified coding protocol (Saldana,2009; Webber, 1990)	131
6	Sample of coding links to the literature	134
7	Meaningful learning determined by early career principals.	161
8	Meaningful learning determined by experienced principals.	163
9	Introducing the early career focus group.	167
10	An overview of the experienced career group's diversity.	177
11	Summary of most favoured informal learning.	222
12	Progressive learning - A possible future.	247

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract	2
Statement of originality	3
Acknowledgements	4
Glossary of acronyms	5
Glossary of New Zealand educational descriptors	6
List of figures	8
List of tables	9
Table of Contents	10

<b>Chapter 1. The Nature and Scope of the Research</b>	
1.1 Introduction	16
1.2 Determinants of quality leadership	18
1.3 Appointing a New Zealand principal	21
1.4 Professional accountability	22
1.5 Strengthening New Zealand's leaders	23
1.6 Building capacity	25
1.7 Differentiating learning	26
1.8 Moral leadership	27
1.9 The tensions	28
1.10 Personal interest	29
1.11 Future options	30
1.12 What does this mean for New Zealand?	33
1.13 The thesis outline	35
1.14 Conclusion	36

<b>Chapter 2. New Zealand’s Leadership learning Development</b>	
2.1 Introduction	38
2.2 Tomorrow’s School’s reform	39
2.3 Managerialism and beyond	40
2.4 Decentralised control	41
2.5 The effect of change on what principals need to know	43
2.6 Leadership learning on a continuum	44
2.7 Informing the principal learning context	45
2.8 Current New Zealand options	49
2.9 The First Time Principals’ Programme (FTPP)	52
2.10 The Principals Development Planning Centre (PDPC) and its replacement	54
2.11 Professional learning groups	55
2.12 Other Ministry of Education opportunities for learning	56
2.13 Other provider, other options	57
2.14 Building capacity	59
2.15 Conclusion	62

<b>Chapter 3 Effectiveness, learning and needs: the “International Perspective.”</b>	
3.1 Introduction	63
3.2 <b>Theme One:</b> Understanding educational leadership	67
3.2.1 Principals as leaders and managers	67
3.2.2 Building principals’ capacity	69
3.2.3 Twenty- first skill and knowledge requirements for principals	70
3.2.4 Principals as influencers of people and change	72
3.2.5 Principals’ leadership behaviours	74
3.2.6 The influence of leadership theory	76
3.3 <b>Theme Two:</b> Professional learning focussed on principals’ learning	77
3.3.1 Professional learning	78
3.3.2 Principal’s professional learning	80
3.3.3 Time to learn	84
3.3.4 Principals as adult learners	86
3.3.5 Traits of motivation and persistence relevant to principals’ learning	89

3.3.6 Determining meaningfulness	91
3.3.7 Informal learning	92
3.3.8 Formal learning	95
<b>3.4 Theme Three:</b> Optimising learning, a focus on early and experienced principalship phases	97
3.4.1 The importance of context	97
3.4.2 Learning maturation	99
3.4.3 Phases of learning	99
3.4.4 Pre- principalship	101
3.4.5 Early principalship	102
3.4.6 Experienced principalship	104
<b>3.5 Theme Four:</b> Principals' learning challenges and tensions	105
3.5.1 Tensions	105
3.5.2 The challenge to focus on people	107
3.5.3 Distributed leadership	108
3.5.4 Supplier diversity an increasing challenge	110
3.5.5 Considering the future	112
3.6 Conclusion	112

<b>Chapter 4 Methodology</b>	
4.1 Introduction	116
4.2 Philosophical perspective	117
4.3 The qualitative vs. quantitative approach	119
4.4 Interpretivism connected to qualitative design	121
4.5 The overarching research question	122
4.6 Justification for case study design	123
4.7 The case	124
4.8 Situating the research in a metropolitan city	127
4.9 Role of the researcher	127
4.10 The research protocol	129
4.11 Sampling	135
4.12 Data gathering	137
4.12.1 Email surveys	138

4.12.2 Focus groups	139
4.12.3 Individual interviews	142
4.12.4 Taping and transcribing	144
4.13 Data analysis	145
4.14 Use of computer assisted analysis tools	146
4.15 The trustworthiness of the research	148
4.16 Ethics	149
4.17 Conclusion	151

<b>Chapter 5 Findings- Principals talk about their learning</b>	
5.1 Introduction	153
5.2 The email survey	154
5.2.1 Time served as a principal	155
5.2.2 Number of positions held over time	156
5.2.3 School deciles	157
5.2.4 U-Ratings representing roll size	158
5.2.5 School types	159
5.2.6 Experience levels of principals	160
5.2.7 Types of learning	161
5.2.8 Principals' learning shifts	163
5.3 Interview data	164
5.4 Coding	165
5.5 Early career focus group	167
5.5.1 Preparing for the job	168
5.5.2 Appointing early career principals	170
5.5.3 Early career learning needs and the FTPP	171
5.5.4 Issues and challenges to learning and doing the job	172
5.5.5 Formal & informal learning	173
5.5.6 Meaningful learning	174
5.5.7 Triangulating the email survey data	175
5.6 Experienced principal's focus group	176
5.7 Experienced career dialogue coding	177
5.7.1 Nurture or nature in your early career	178

5.7.2 Networking	181
5.7.3 Formal learning	182
5.7.4 Barriers to formal learning	183
5.7.5 Learning to support greater effectiveness	185
5.7.6 The importance of challenge	186
5.7.7 Defining a person's principalship	187
5.7.8 How, why and what stops leaders learning	188
5.7.9 Pathways for learning	190
5.8 Individual case studies	191
5.8.1 Karena	192
5.8.2 Larry	194
5.8.3 Ewen	197
5.8.4 Jenny	200
5.9 Individual interview summary	202
5.10 Conclusion	204

<b>Chapter 6 Discussion</b>	
6.1 Introduction	205
6.2 Motivation to learn	207
6.3 Optimal timing for formal learning	213
6.4 Most favourable learning conditions	220
6.4.1 Networking/Learning groups/Principal associations	223
6.4.2 Mentoring	226
6.4.3 New Zealand's Ministry of Education programmes	229
6.4.4 Formal and informal learning aligned to qualifications	231
6.5 Phased meaningfulness	232
6.6 Factors beyond principals' influence	235
6.7 Future direction	241
6.8 Conclusion	248

<b>Chapter 7 Concluding Chapter</b>	
7.1 Introduction	250
7.2 The research questions	251

7.3 Limitations of the research	257
7.4 Forward thinking for N.Z.	259
7.5 Implications for future practice	262
7.6 Possible future research	265
7.7 Conclusion	267

<b>References</b>	268
<b>Appendices Index</b>	302



# The Professional Learning of Urban N.Z. Primary Principals

## CHAPTER ONE

### FRAMING THE THESIS

*“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”*

(J. Kennedy, 1963)

#### 1.1 Introduction

This research provides voice for New Zealand’s primary school principals. Data are developed to demonstrate how practitioners determine their learning needs and their learning preferences. The thesis examines informal and formal learning pathways. The opportunities, the barriers and challenges faced by principals when choosing and accessing professional learning are integral to the discussion. Moreover, the findings investigate the phases of principalship and more importantly the methods of learning most suitable for the different phases.

A qualitative case study methodology provides the framework for understanding, “What professional learning is participated in, and perceived as meaningful, by urban New Zealand Primary Principals?” Six underpinning questions shape the thesis:

1. When and how do principals learn?
2. How do principals determine what learning best supports them as aspiring and novice leaders?
3. Do needs and the desire for learning change as principals become experienced, that is, after they

have been in the job between five and seven years<sup>1</sup>? If it does change, why does it change?

4. How do principals define meaningful professional learning experiences?
5. Which other factors influence why, how, where and what a principal learns?
6. How do principals determine the impact of their learning on their practice?

The role requirements of the school principal have increased substantially since a self-managing model of governance was introduced to New Zealand in 1989. Evidenced also is that leadership matters; that leadership impacts directly on student learning (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009).

Furthermore, there is much more to understand about developing strong educational leadership. A range of skills, knowledge and understanding are core requirements of the role as identified in this advertisement for a primary school principal in the New Zealand Education Gazette.

“The successful applicant must have:

- the ability to develop and articulate a clear vision for the school
- proven leadership skills
- experience with a consultative management style
- knowledge of the N.Z. Curriculum
- highly developed organisational and time management skills
- motivational, interpersonal and communication skills knowledge of and familiarity with information technology
- the ability to lead I.T. development in the school
- the skills to manage school finances and assets effectively”. (MoE, 2008b)

---

<sup>1</sup> See page Figure 13 p.234- Principals becoming secure in the role by 5 years and expert by 7 years. Informed by researchers Woods (2002); Gronn (1999) and data gathered from this research.

The wording makes it abundantly clear that this school Board of Trustees requires from their principal more than teaching knowledge. They require a person with multiple skills; a person accomplished in managing and leading their complex organisation. This thesis is developed to establish the direct and indirect relationship between leading, and learning how to lead, a school.

The chapter begins by outlining the qualities and skills required by effective leaders. The appointment of school leaders within a self-managing framework, which could be deemed problematic, follows. Next, the levels of professional accountability are examined with a focus on how to support, strengthen and build New Zealand's school leader capacity. The notion of moral leadership, moving leaders beyond a technical rational transactional model is introduced, along with my involvement in this study. Finally, the tensions and what this means for New Zealand's leadership future are considered, followed by the thesis development outline.

## **1.2 Determinants of quality leadership**

The Leadership Best Evidence Synthesis (Robinson, et al., 2009) outlines eight core dimensions and four knowledge, skills and disposition requirements that "school leaders need to demonstrate" (p.49). Considered alongside a recent British study (Day, Sammons, Hopkins, Harris, Leithwood, Gu & Brown, 2010) which also identifies eight dimensions (Figure 1.p.19); there is a growing consensus around what is required for effective 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership. Day and his fellow authors' interpretation places learning firmly in the centre of leadership. The leader influences what happens to the student through three affected roles :(i) determining the taught curriculum,(ii) the development of staff to implement and teach effectively, and,(iii) the conditions of learning, which includes resourcing, school culture and environment. External influences on the leader derive from the community's needs, political directives, and international trends in education.

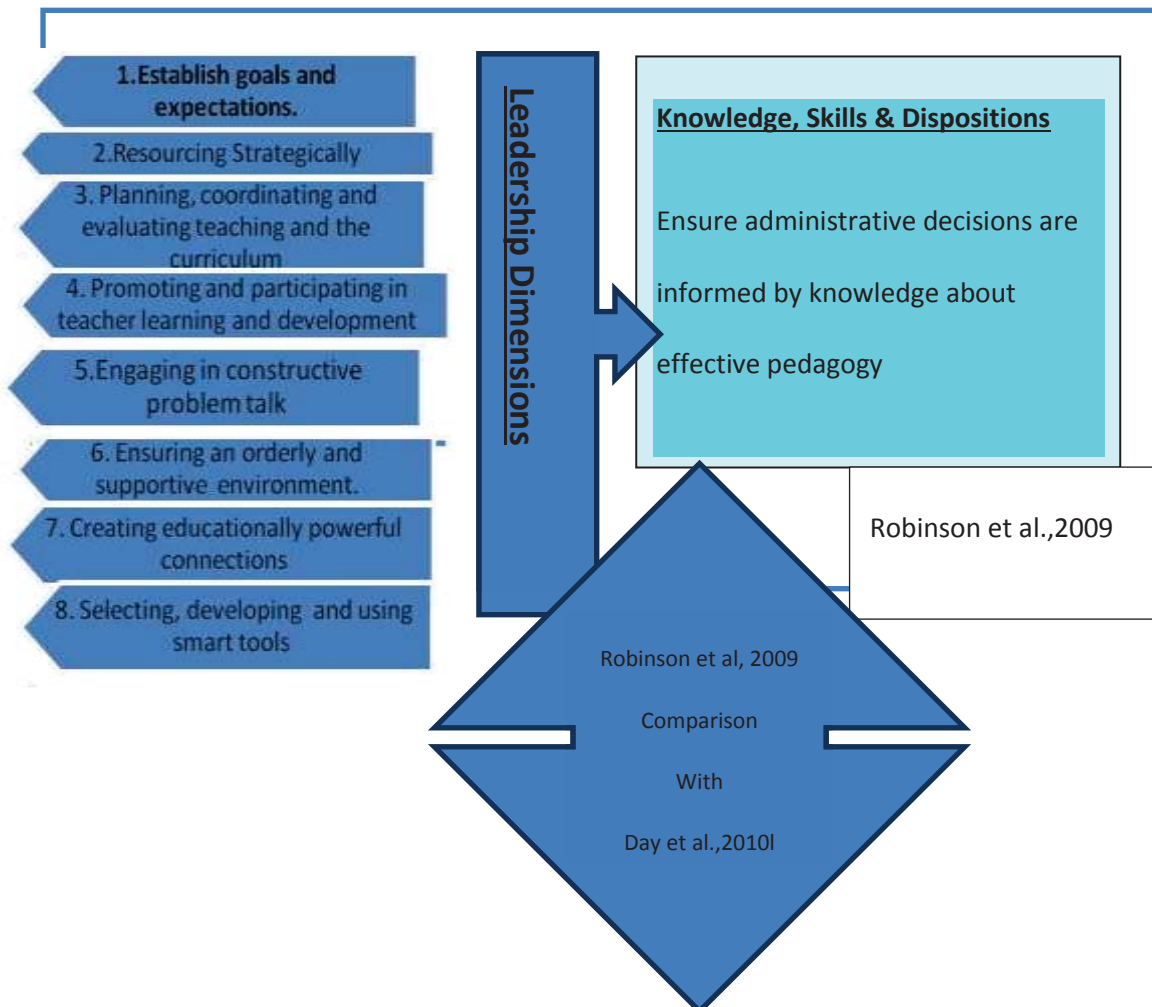
Robinson’s model in comparison (Figure 1.) is linear but again strongly supports principals leading and being a part of a school-wide approach to teacher learning. The principals’ role is one of creating powerful connections.

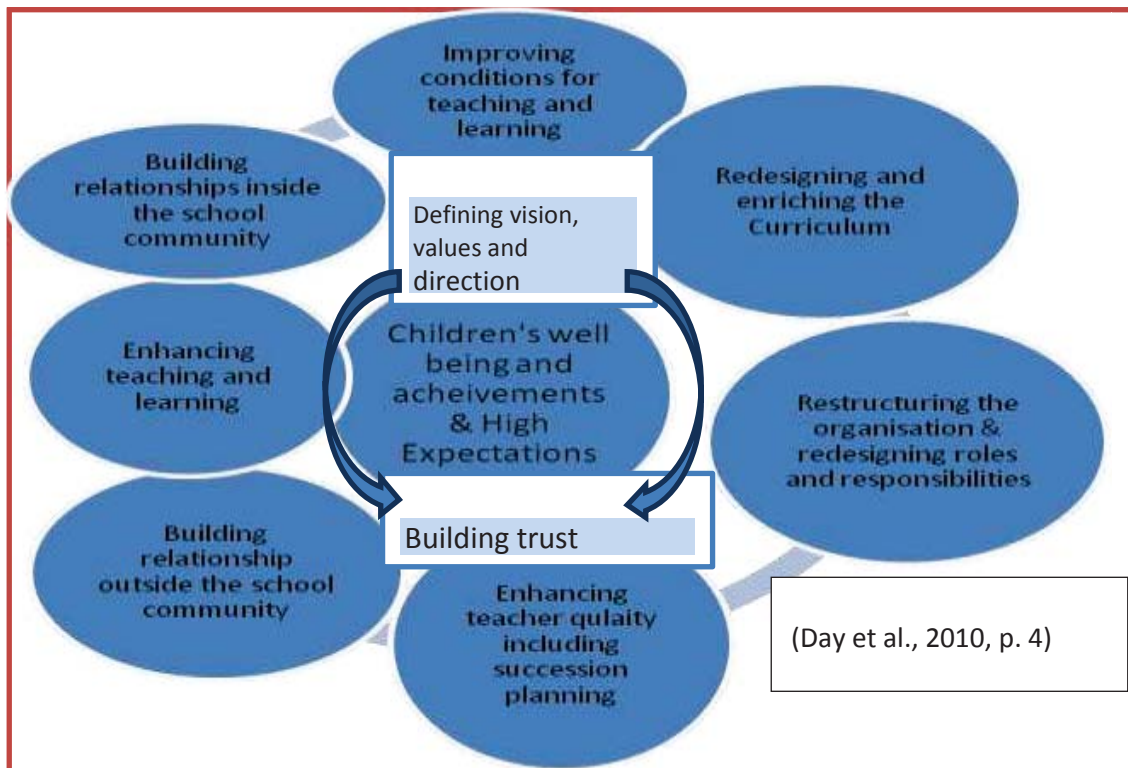
Day, addressing members of the New Zealand Administration and Leadership Society (Day, 2009), felt his study went further than Robinson’s, by recognising the moral responsibility of leadership.

Day outlines examples of effectiveness evidenced when the leader harnesses the community’s beliefs and capabilities (Day, et al., 2010). This to include, student and teacher voice, a commitment to all children succeeding, enhancing teacher’s development, and building strong motivational learning cultures.

**Figure 1 Leadership Dimensions:**

***A Comparison of Day and Robinson’s Eight Dimensions of Leadership***





Both researchers identified possible mandates that could provide explicit expectations to inform the appointment process.

The appointment process in New Zealand continues to be challenging in that there is no qualification or course pre-requisite for principals. There is no learning compulsion. Principals can be any qualified teacher. However, what can no longer be disputed is that principals have to be more than good teachers, they have to use leadership skills and knowledge to improve highly complex organisations (Gunter & Ribbins, 2002). Southworth (1995a), identifies that the international focus has shifted beyond principal skill acquisition to how best to teach the leaders. New Zealand, with its Kiwi Leadership strategy, is following suit.

Leadership has become a contested policy concept internationally and “Australasian education systems would be well advised to address the emergent crises in the quality and quantity of supply by developing integrated educational leadership development policies and programmes with particular features” (Macpherson, 2009b, p. 53). The determinants for quality leadership are wide

ranging, requiring, according to Day et al. (2010) and Robinson et al. (2009), principals to be knowledgeable of curriculum, resourcing, people and systems. Establishing the criteria to assess quality is not distinct.

### **1.3 Appointing a New Zealand principal**

The major twentieth century reform for New Zealand has been Boards of Trustees (tri-annually parent-elected parent groups) being mandated to govern New Zealand schools (Picot, 1988) A function of that role empowers Boards to appoint the principal. The difficulty is that there is no qualification reference with which to compare or define a principals' knowledge (Brooking, 2008). The Education Review Office (ERO, 2001) reports that, "Boards are faced with an almost impossible task in trying to assess candidates' knowledge" (ibid Para. 4.2, Training). What Brooking's data makes explicit is that leadership learning is having little or no influence on appointments in New Zealand with "personal qualities"(p. 6Table 4) remaining the most influential factor.

Brooking's (2008) research into principal appointments found that, although 85% of boards used a consultant or another principal to guide them in the process, 43% of appointments remain based on the person fitting the Boards' set of personal attributes which she lists as "young, male, energetic, confident and innovative"(p.6). 11% were appointed on their management skills and 8% on leadership skill. This despite New Zealand's articulated educational purpose with stated goals, competencies and principles (MoE, 2007), is concerning. Despite the reforms, despite the local control, despite many guiding reports, the same issues continue to surface. There is a reliance on intrinsic motivators to encourage leadership development. As well, the data suggests many new leaders are relying solely on stepping up from smaller roles to larger roles as their main form of leadership training.

Overall, given the heavy reliance on learning on the job, from experience as a means of preparing for all levels of leadership, it can be concluded that

this method is valued above all others and has attained the status of a professional norm in education (Macpherson, 2010b, p. 23).

Therefore, from an empirical research stance, an expected qualification, or standards that demonstrate the expected behaviours of school leadership makes sense. It is logical, that principals unequivocally ascertain what they can and cannot do. Elmore (2002) supports being able to compare the work of principals against clearly defined dimensions in order to limit variance.

Unfortunately standards are not a panacea (Gronn, 2003). Indeed, despite New Zealand's leadership dimensions (MoE, 2008a), and the use of advisors, Boards of Trustees' ability to determine effective skills and knowledge of, in particular, untried principals, remains limited. When making an appointment, whether the Board of Trustees has a checklist of the knowledge, skills and dispositions, an overview of core roles, or a set of standards that are required, the process of appointment remains imprecise, as there is no uniformity across the country. As the requirements for leadership dialogue intensify, it remains clear that boards and the government want the same outcome. They both require schools led by capable, effective principals.

#### **1.4 Professional accountability**

Frustration with government's increasing demands is creating a natural shift away from transactional-type leading to democratic and ethical forms of leadership. Some Principals are "rejecting top-down managerialism" and working with staff and parents "towards building collaborative, professionally accountable practices in her/his school" the notion of shared accountability (Court, 2004, p. 173). This aligns closely to a role where equitable and quality learning for all students is an expected outcome. What is problematic is balancing accountability to the government and the learning community.

This study of urban New Zealand primary principals recognises job expectations have increased (Brooking, 2008)<sup>2</sup> and as such interprets principals' views around their increasing obligations to learners through moral and distributive leadership. Both aspects are integral to the role, raising questions about how they are best learned.

Providing a good education cannot be left to chance; understanding how to do the job is core to the role. The demand to improve professional learning for current and future school leaders continues as a focus for New Zealand and international educational agendas (ERO, 2001; Huber, 2004; OECD, 2007). Twenty first century principals require learning that is contextualised, explicit and connected to their needs (Kochran, Bredeson, & Riehl, 2002).

### **1.5 Strengthening New Zealand's leaders**

One third of principals who left their jobs in 2008 moved to other principal positions, 15% of Boards of Trustees in 2008 re-advertised for a principal, and 20% of those said the quality of applicants was "patchy and/or disappointing." This was according to the New Zealand Council for Education Report (Brooking, 2008, p. 4) . Brooking raises the concern that New Zealand, unlike its overseas counterparts where training is compulsory, is facing two issues in the near future: principal shortages and ensuring the quality of new principals. These issues stem in part from teachers' poor perception of the job, in particular its immensity. Brooking is not alone airing concerns of supply and quality. "Principals are overloaded with work and face constant challenges and demands in their job" (Latham, 2010, p. 12). It seems logical that the job requires more appeal.

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<sup>2</sup> Research informed by both literature and this study's researcher, A. Malcolm, who is an urban New Zealand practising principal with 17 years of experiencing an increased workload.



Nonetheless, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report on New Zealand's leadership (OECD, 2007) identifies a strength in the self-managing school model:

One of the strengths of self-management in relation to improving school leadership is that it places the principal at the heart of the school's operations, and so affirms the importance of leadership. The model gives school leaders, both boards of trustees and professional leaders, substantial power and within some parameters allows them to exercise leadership as they see fit (p.71).

Additionally, the report identifies many areas to strengthen, with specific reference to principals' professional development. It recognises the multiple accountabilities of the principal to its community, to the Ministry of Education, Teachers' Council, and Education Review Office. The identified weakness is undeniably the lack of consistency. If boards and principals do not recognise the need for development there are no mandatory levers to ensure an identified principal participates in learning, "Each school is charged with developing its own systems and processes" (OECD, 2007, p. 72).

Hawk's premise is that principals require explicit knowledge if they are to understand the underlying mechanisms in their schools. A core requirement to success is to recognise when change is required (Hawk, 2008). In New Zealand's schools, there are articulated expectations but quality controls are minimalist. This is perceived as a potential flaw by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). A weakness in alignment and consistency and a strength providing local contextually based solutions:

Although schools are required to have planning, reporting, self-review and appraisal processes in place, there are few mechanisms for ensuring that these are effective and

aligned. There is wide variance across schools in the effectiveness of these systems individually and collectively.

Nonetheless,

The self-managing schools model has the potential to strengthen community partnerships and enhance local decision-making. It provides schools with the flexibility to respond to local needs and draw on local and regional resources(OECD, 2007, p. 72).

The most recently developed commitment to improving school leadership is New Zealand's Kiwi Leadership for Principals Strategy (MoE, 2008a). The document aligns school leadership with school improvement. Principals, it is stated in the document, are expected to work within "four areas of practice to lead change and to solve problems in their schools: culture, pedagogy, systems and partnerships and networks"(p. 18). The design is based on Victoria's (State of Australia) approach to school improvement through leadership development (Fraser & Petch, 2007). As the document is in its infancy, the effectiveness it provides in guiding leadership is yet to be evaluated.

## **1.6 Building capacity**

New Zealand research identifies and accepts that beginning, novice or early career principals require extended professional learning (Cardno, 2003; Hay Group, 2001). Teachers aspiring to principalship and early career principals have learning requirements that differ from experienced principals (Kedian, 2002; Woods, 2002). Importantly the early career school leaders require mentoring programmes (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Roberts, 2007) that link middle and senior management to exemplary leaders. Another option could be work shadowing; an apprenticeship model (Bloom & Krovetz, 2001). Jacobsen and Bezzina (2008) suggest new leaders have at least two clinical placements with leaders who have a track record of improving students' learning and at least one placement in a challenging school. Closely aligned to mentorship or coaching of early career leaders

is the challenge of access. To provide the learning resource requires consultancies or training programmes where exemplary leaders are available. An example, the Blue Line programme in Hong Kong provides a post-graduate qualification to its trained mentors (Walker and Qian,2006) .

The fundamental challenge, and what politicians and school principals have not established is clearly defined agreement on what is best for leaders and schools. Thrupp (2004) believes New Zealand is in a prime position to develop its own learning programmes with associated qualifiers of success.

### **1.7 Differentiating learning**

Principals' leadership requires understanding good pedagogical practice (Gaffney & Faragher, 2010; Timperly & Parr, 2009); they are a curriculum leader. There needs to be greater emphasis on principals being taught how to optimise instruction in their schools (Robinson, Eddy, & Irving, 2006) so that the priority is on student learning. As well, principals should know and understand how to build a culture of leadership; to understand and apply leadership; to distribute and grow curriculum leadership to the experts in their schools (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Sterrett, 2011). Principals as learners are diverse. The focus, consequently, has to be on developing differentiated learning for principals to provide personalisation and still maintain skill and knowledge consistency (Levine, 2005). Levine outlines a set of nine criteria to establish principal learning excellence. The purpose has to be explicit, focussed on practice and context. "Goals of learning should reflect the needs of today's leaders, schools, and student learning"(p. 48). This research supports Levine's evidence and Gregory's (2003) earlier premise determining that a range of learning options are most valued by practitioners.

Issues around consistent leadership and leadership learning are evident across the literature (Elmore, 2002; Thrupp, 2004). Thrupp and Elmore add to the learning discourse, querying the types of learning that meet individual needs, whilst retaining a level of countrywide uniformity. Aligned closely with the conversations about consistency of practice is the dialogue around the quality of

learning that principals require. The view, supported by Southworth (1995a), is that the type of preparation and sustained learning to support and improve the work done by principals has to be individualised and contextualised. Learning connected to practice meets principals' learning requirements (Davies & Ellison, 1997; Lashway, 2003b).

School leaders carry out a myriad of roles. They are human resource managers, financiers, property managers, disciplinarians and reporters. Hence, there is no unequivocal agreement on what best-fit learning looks like. There is no agreement to how it best-fits within the principals' work schedules. There is also little written about the different types of professional learning that improve school function. This is despite the successful British leadership study (Day, et al., 2010) identifying moral responsibility, value for people and respect as paramount to any leader's success.

### **1.8 Moral leadership**

The principal is the school's leader with the responsibility both legally and morally to treat all stakeholders fairly. Starratt (2004) identifies the virtues of responsibility, authenticity and care. He believes these are central to being ethical in a school. He describes how principals enhance what happens in their schools through transformational moral practices. Being ethical is a responsibility principals develop through thought and planning.

Fullan (2001) maintains all leadership has a moral purpose; it is about relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing. Codd (2005) outlines the need for moral trust and accountability that recognises the ethical obligation on the part of professionals to offer an account of (or a justification for) their actions; "High trust accountability is based on professional responsibility, with an underpinning conception of moral agency" (p. 203). From a professional learning perspective, this raises issues of how a person learns leadership values and then develops the courage to stand up for them.

Findings from a study of the beliefs of 14 leaders in the United States (Maldonado, Lacey, & Thompson, 2007) concluded that people can be educated to be ethical through moral dialogue, course work and learning on the job. Kanungo and Mendonca (1996) claim organisational legitimacy is guided by the leader's ethical principles and conduct. A moral principal will stand up against misinformation and poorly conceived policy (Thrupp, 2007). Moral leaders have to oppose loudly the common belief that lack of opportunity, for example, equates to inability to learn (Shields, 2005b) .

Leaders have a responsibility to try to expose their own biases and bottom-line values to ensure they do not carry societal prejudices into their leadership. The principal has to be able to show "professional and moral competence" (Starratt, 2004, p. 405). Recognising and being able to diffuse positional or personal power structures in a school, is a necessary aspect of leadership. The key to this is for principals to build a broad theoretical knowledge around what it means to be a moral leader. By doing so they equip and mentally prepare for ill-informed challenges.

### **1.9 The tensions**

Ideally principals provide themselves with a repertoire of skills and knowledge to explain and make meaning of their actions (Gussgott, 2004). There is, however, no 'one size fits all', when considering principals' learning. Inevitably, confusion is expected where there is a multiplicity of opinions and models describing what leadership learning should include. Robinson (2009) argues for development that is focussed on and improves student learning, whereas Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy (2005) believe the focus should be on understanding social justice.

What is established is that the best 21<sup>st</sup> century principals' learning will come from creating learning communities where sharing and collaboration are part of the programme (Kochan, Reed, Twale, & Jones, 2002). This research describes networking, sometimes involving mentoring, as informal meaningful learning. The assumption that mandated formalised or qualification programme

professional learning also supports principals to do their job more effectively, is yet to be proved (Lashway, 2003 b; Reeves, Forde, O'Brien, Smith & Tomlinson, 2002). What is recognised is that the job is complex and any professional learning requires a combination-method approach (Bush & Jackson, 2002b; Coles & Southworth, 2004; Gronn, 2003).

Portin's research, (2003) interviewing administrators from 21 schools, identifies that academic training alone has little value for school leaders but job experience and time with a guiding expert is valued professional learning. Davis, (2005) confirms the notion that a range of strategies are required; moreover, that any learning framework has to be flexible as experience in the job influences needs (Inman, 2011; Ribbins, 2008).

To summarise, there is a body of evidence suggesting a requirement for divergent methods. A combination of practical (informal) and formal learning, the principals' motivation and what they need to learn, will be different (Coles & Southworth, 2004). This research in part grew from my desire to understand how principals differentiate their learning needs.

### **1.10 Personal interest**

The literature on principals' learning is largely written by those outside principalship. The purpose of this study is to examine urban primary principals' professional learning "from the inside out." I am an experienced primary school principal with seventeen years' service. Over that time, I have observed competent and less competent principals leading schools. My interest in this research evolved from my on-going learning and two self-questions, "What and how do I need to learn to do my job better?" and, "Does my learning improve what I do?" I believe that as I gained experience I needed more knowledge about my leadership practices.

Leadership was the aspect of principalship I had not been prepared for when I was educated as a teacher. This research identifies learning deemed most meaningful from the principals' perspective.

The investigation furthermore examines the alternatives for learning that principals believe best support them to be more confident and knowledgeable as leaders.

The issue of 'barriers to learning' is fundamental to the debate, as is determining what works best and why. There is a vast amount of literature written about principals, the multi-faceted roles of management and leadership, personality traits and effectiveness. As well, competencies and capabilities are well described. Lacking nonetheless are the descriptors recounting the best ways principals learn (Blankstein, Houston, & Cole, 2009; Fullan, 2006; Robinson, 2010; Thew, 2002).

New Zealand principals are responsible for the management of finances, property, staffing and school resources (Fitzgerald, 2009; Wylie, 1997). Equally, they are the educational leaders responsible to the many stakeholders for the teaching and learning programmes and student hauora<sup>3</sup>. On-going learning seems to support principal effectiveness, particularly a combination of both formal, meaning qualification-type learning, and informal, taken to include networking, conferences, and non-graduate learning.

### **1.11 Future options**

New Zealand's research has identified learning in informal groups as meaningful (Martin & Robertson, 2003). This finding is supported by Leach (2011; Zepke, et al., 2003) who perceives value in peer-contact learning, currently found in localised networking groups where principals talk through issues and consider current research. Stewart as well, encourages networking through the principal learning communities (PPLCs), such as those he helped develop in partnership with the

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<sup>3</sup> Hauora – Maori (Indigenous New Zealander) word for health, physical and mental wellbeing.

New Zealand Principals' Federation and Massey University. They were established to provide successful shared learning opportunities (Stewart, 2000, 2001).

Formalised early career and pre-entry learning is posited as a possible direction for New Zealand's policy makers (Cardno, 2003; Robinson, et al., 2006; Thew, 2002). Campbell's thesis (2003), an in-depth study of five principals' learning in the USA, determined principals value both informal and formal learning, with group learning a decided preference. She also hypothesised that, for learning to be meaningful, it had to be contextually-based, tending towards informal learning.

Barth (1990b) advises caution with anything generic. He indicates that principals can be effective change agents only when they respond to their own vision. This becomes a dilemma when considering how universities might structure learning for principals. However, principals, as has been identified through this research, can identify and articulate their learning needs, and it seems to this principal that some aspects of learning are generic.

Pedagogical leadership learning based on developing and improving curriculum and learning outcomes is deemed of utmost importance by some (Robinson, 2010), whereas transactional leadership learning which is more managerial focussed is valued by others (Bass, Avolio, Jung, & Berson, 2003). The transactional leader needs to know how to effectively manage a school; to focus on day-to-day affairs, business needs, short-term goals and quantitative information (Pepper, 2010).

The Goddard study (1997) adds to the increasing list of required capabilities; the skills of developing community involvement, understanding changing technology and assessment needs. Lambert (2006) takes the thinking further, believing that principals at every stage need to build reflective time into their learning. Gronn (2003) describes a future global curriculum for principals' learning, evidenced through the work of the National College for School Leadership (NCSL). The need to understand how to equip schools with effective and capable leaders is a growing phenomenon.



Up until the 1990s, outside of the United States, there was very little evidence of the need to train educational leaders (Murphy & Louis, 1999). Currently, the notion is accepted that on-going leadership pre- and in-service professional learning is important to providing effective leadership (Gray & Bishop, 2009; Nunnery, Yen, & Ross, 2011). Leadership development requires a philosophic base that includes both formal and informal learning. Practicality and context specific aspects to their development are implicit. Leadership learning requiring peer involvement will be further examined through the literature in chapters two and three.

Reeves (2008), in his recent monograph for the Australian Council for Educational Leaders, makes a case for leadership practices being taught and learned. He advocates job-embedded professional learning evaluated against school improvement.

There is still much to unravel in understanding what constitutes meaningful principal learning. Mitgang argues that “successful principal training programmes are significantly different from the majority of programmes in existence” (2008, p. 5). There has to be a selective focus on instruction, context, and providing a link to hands-on experiences. An emerging notion is that learning does not finish on appointment, it evolves (Townsend, 1999). Townsend sees educational leadership very much as an on-going process. Principals would be sensible to consider their own learning. They are required by necessity of the job to identify their skill and knowledge needs and consequently undertake a process of deliberate and intentional learning.

The skills required to carry out the complexity of the role are, according to Caldwell, fundamental reasons for the rising principal shortages (Caldwell, Calnin, & Cahill, 2003). Principals need to be able to understand fully how to support teachers and to transform schools to be effective places where teaching and learning for all students is actively promoted (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011)

In summary, there is an understanding that principal learning can be built around developing the core components of governance, day-to-day management, strategic intent, curriculum leadership,

and ethics. Furthermore, that learning is self-motivated and needs to be situated within context. Reflection, mentors, and networks are all identified as individualised learning options to support principal learning throughout the career stages.

### **1.12 What does this mean for New Zealand?**

The Health and Wellbeing survey of 1500 New Zealand primary school principals conducted by Wylie and Hodgen (2005), found 42% of those sampled worked over 60 hours weekly. Principals in that study considered that increased responsibilities led to increased working hours. Principals' organisations reported that, "their members felt pressured by the increasing complexity and breadth of the role, as well as rising expectations" (OECD, 2007, p. 73). This raises issues of time, reason, and meaningfulness of learning.

The job is too diverse and complex for one person (Elmore, 2003; Thrupp, 2005). Elmore for instance, identifies the many tensions that exist in carrying out the many expected roles. A principal is the day-to-day manager and the school's professional leader. Elmore makes the point therefore, that the principal's learning, by the very nature of the job, must be diverse if it is to cater for the numerous role requirements. He further posits principals "are being asked to do something they do not know how to do" (Elmore, 2005, p. 140). The notion of occupational stress and overwork is further explored through the literature in chapter three.

There is no doubt that the New Zealand government has significant issues to overcome if quality principalship is a goal for the future. For example Robinson, Eddy and Irving (2006) argue that New Zealand's induction programmes needs to be differentiated by school type and sector "but even more importantly by capability" (p. 165). They advise that mentoring, context based learning and individualised programmes be combined in one programme to meet the diversity. In a similar vein, Brundrett (2006) claims that New Zealand is lagging behind other countries in inducting new

principals. The Education Review Office reports (ERO, 1996, 2001, 2002) have repeatedly identified a need for formal principal qualifications.

Principals themselves are among the first to agree that they need to be prepared more effectively for their jobs (Cardno, 2003). All but 4% of practising principals report that on-the-job experiences or guidance from colleagues has been more helpful in preparing them for their current position than their graduate school studies. In fact, 67% of principals reported that “typical leadership programmes in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school districts” (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, & Foleno, 2001, p. 39). A recent four-year study by Levine in the USA found the majority of principal development programmes deficient (Levine, 2005).

The 1989 ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ reforms introduced a leadership environment where any registered teacher can be appointed as principal. There are no mandated requirements for prior experience. New Zealand’s leadership learning dilemma has recently focussed on whether or not to mandate principal preparation programmes (Cardno, 2003; Thew, 2002).

The focus on school leaders is not only a New Zealand phenomenon; internationally, leadership learning has been prioritised (Golman, 2002; Harris & Chapman, 2002). Nonetheless, New Zealand is in a position to learn from other countries that have programmes already developed. It has the opportunity to implement a significant, contextually based Kiwi Leadership Framework for Principal Learning (MoE, 2008a).

If programmes are to be formulated to support school leadership in a local context, they ought to be based on New Zealand practitioners’ experiences (Cardno, 2003). A more in-depth understanding of what principals want and value would help to further the connectedness between leadership theory and practice. Closing a gap in the literature and in particular, the disjunction between leadership

theory and practice (especially within the New Zealand context) is the justification for this study into the professional learning participated in, and perceived as meaningful, by primary principals.

### **1.13 The thesis outline**

Structurally there are seven chapters. This initial chapter introduces the study. Chapters two and three take into account the significant literature within and outside of New Zealand. The fourth chapter provides a methodological framework and the last three chapters discuss the findings and their implication for New Zealand's policy makers.

In more detail, Chapter One has developed the argument that school leaders need learning beyond the professional learning to be a teacher. The research aims and central questions are identified (section 1.1.p.13). Moreover, the notion that principals are important people in their schools and their learning should be paramount is considered.

Chapter Two introduces the specific issues and requirements for principals in New Zealand. The chapter contextualises the research in more detail. The 1989 reforms and international policy copycatting are discussed. The decentralisation influence on principal workload and a changed knowledge need are developed. Programmes currently available for learning are reviewed and the Kiwi Framework for Leadership (MoE, 2008a) discussed.

The third chapter considers the broader literature, the overseas learning trends, and the influence of maturation in the role. Chapter Three introduces the terms used in the research, meaningful learning, adult learning, and phases of learning. In addition, previous leadership-learning research is identified which in turn underpins the research's over-arching theme, 'The professional learning of urban primary school principals'.

Chapter Four states the important components of the research agenda. The chapter outlines the embedded case study methodology, the data-gathering protocols and research trustworthiness, the

term this research uses instead of reliability. Trustworthiness as a notion fits with the researcher's own beliefs that valid qualitative research is built up through phases of trust.

The overall design is described to include this researcher's philosophical and theoretical perspective. This case study begins with a scoping email survey, then focus group surveys of New Zealand school principals. The triangulating of data includes four embedded individual cases.

Chapter Five is the story telling (findings) chapter; the voice of the principals, and provides the platform for the discussion in the follow-on chapter.

Chapter Six synthesises the principals' thinking under the framework of the guiding questions first introduced in this chapter.

Chapter Seven, the concluding chapter, examines the implications of the data, the identified limitations and offers recommendations for possible future research.

## **1.14 Conclusion**

Boards of Trustees are mandated to appoint any registered teacher to the position of principal. There is no formal body that stipulates what qualification the principal must have. There is no formal monitoring of principal appointments. Macpherson's research into principals' preparation identifies that the provisions for learning the role are uneven. He says also that the methods to prepare and support principals in their work lack coherence or depth, and that learning is less responsive to the diversity of career paths than it could be (Macpherson, 2010b).

New Zealand's political change in 2008 from a three-term Labour Government to a National Government continues to be of interest, as educationalists wait to see how the government deals with possible principal shortages, on-going work overload and professional learning needs. This

research cannot hope to keep pace with current changes, but it can, at this moment in time, describe the broader learning issues' facing today's primary principals and consider a range of learning options that maximise effectiveness. The thesis contribution to literature provides direction for New Zealand policy makers and educationalists.

# The Professional Learning of Urban N.Z. Primary Principals

## CHAPTER TWO

### New Zealand's Leadership Learning Development

*If ways can be devised to help, principals reflect thoughtfully about the work they do, analyse that work, clarify and reveal their thinking through spoken and written articulation, and engage in conversations with others about that work, both they and their colleagues will better understand their complex schools (Barth, 1990b, p. 85).*

#### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter Two contextualises principals' learning in New Zealand since the advent of self-managing 'Tomorrow's Schools', 1989 (Picot, 1988). The focus is on the increased complexity of the principal's role and programmes and opportunities for developing skills and capabilities to meet the demands.

That New Zealand school leaders require learning specific to their role is recognised. However, that learning is currently " haphazard and dependent on the interest of individual principals" (Thew, 2002, p. 253) is apparent. New Zealand researchers identify the need for formalised approaches (Cardno,

2003; Macpherson, 2010b; Patuawa, 2007) nonetheless, governments seem reluctant to mandate in the current self-managing school environment. Hence, variability and lack of consistency as reported in the previous chapter, are evidenced (OECD, 2007).

## **2.2 'Tomorrow's Schools' reform**

Picot Taskforce's findings of parents feeling powerless and the need for school accountability supported the government's move to individual school governance with parent-elected Boards of Trustees (Picot, 1988). The new de-centralised model focussed on organisational self-management controlled through centralised contracts with newly formed Ministries of Education. Parent-elected representatives employed principals.

The restructuring created issues not seen previously in New Zealand educational history. At the time, this researcher was a Deputy Principal. Memories of new curriculum documents, extensive training, removal of inspectors and the Departments of Education, parents in a governance role, were just some of what principals were required to manage.

It would be fair to describe this as a time of major upheaval in New Zealand. School Principals were in a role for which they had not and did not receive training. They were suddenly the property manager, finance, curriculum, and personnel leader reporting to stakeholders (the parents) who, like the principal, were not trained for their role.

The rate of reform over the 1990s was frenetic. A The government change from Labour to National in 1990, whilst schools were just coping with the 1989 new governance model, produced further change. Bulk funding of staffing, an excessive increase in curriculum objectives and market-driven enrolments were just some of the new expectations for principals to manage. It is no wonder schools were not happy places (Wylie, 1997). Codd (1997, 1999) describes the 'Tomorrow's Schools' policy as a neo-liberalist change based on the ill premise of efficiency and responsiveness.



The reforms focussed on parental choice, centralisation, management, governance, and accountability but seemed to forget children's learning and school effectiveness. Codd supports education for the common good, so is critical of a government course of action focussed on skills and knowledge expressly developed to enhance the economy. As well, Principals were given no choice but to accept the changes or resign from their role. This was not a policy developed in partnership with the education sector.

The New Zealand Council of Educational Research survey identified a steady decline in teacher morale and a 42% principal turnover from 1991 through to 1993 (MoE, 1994). This was in direct conflict with the rhetoric of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century reforms. Collaboration, professionalism, and choice were promoted as the core values of change. The reality was contradictory to the policy, and political conflict and dissatisfaction were inevitable outcomes.

The pace of the reforms and the lack of any evaluation of impact have had a lasting influence (Codd, 2005). Change has become the constant. Schools continue to be at the 'whim', of governments as they introduce 'their' latest educational policy. In 2007, the Labour government had schools develop their own school curriculum. In 2010, the National government introduced National Standards, which currently is creating educational rebellion. One must query, are children and learning central to these managerialist decisions?

### **2.3 Managerialism and beyond**

The swing to managerialism, Codd argues, created an illusion of freedom for school leaders (1999). He identified, central to the self-governing policy, an erosion of trust and a degradation of teaching. Codd (1997) at the time, argued that schools needed to understand their political world if they were to affect any change. Without doubt, schools had moved into an organisational culture that was

hierarchical and individualistic. This was the aeon of an educational culture of performativity driven by standards and competencies.

Not everyone agreed wholly with this conviction. Bottery acknowledges that some identified strategies supported school improvement. Nonetheless, he believed in terms of developing ‘genuine learning organisations’ (Bottery, 2004, p. 95) political control acted as a barrier to schools developing as creative, flexible and pedagogically sound environments (Bottery, 2006). To say the least, school leaders were feeling as Stewart termed it ‘done to’ and not ‘done with’ (Stewart, 2004).

What remains interesting within the New Zealand context is that although principals are bound by performance standards, unlike the United States of America, there is no formal reporting against them. This raises the query of whether schools would be as good as they could be if they were so focused on meeting government standards (Gunter & Ribbins, 2002). The perception is of course debatable and a continuing disparity occurs between what is espoused about the principal’s job, learning needs and the pragmatic reality of school leadership and whether any standard can truly define what a leader does.

Credential expectations, attestation, and pre-principalship training programmes are becoming the international norm. Gronn describes an evolving worldwide curriculum for leadership (Gronn, 2003). The debate continues, as to whether governments should have more power over what happens in schools or less. This balance of power is critical to the New Zealand context and to the role of principalship.

#### **2.4 Decentralised control**

New Zealand, like Finland, with their decentralised educational systems, blends a stakeholder and professional self-governing leadership-development model. Macpherson (2008c) describes decentralised systems as providing a greater balance between political power and professional need.

Teachers and principals have a say in what they do in their schools and, in particular, how they choose to learn. There are, however, negatives to the model.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) case study team of Hargreaves, Halasz and Pont (2007), upheld Finland as a successful case study model of decentralised control. Their review, nonetheless, aired concerns about sustainability due to demographic turnover, the falling attractiveness of the principal's role, insufficient incentives, training and development (pp. 23-25). The Finnish government, like the New Zealand government, had been advised to "strengthen consistency and quality assurance" (pp. 32-33) to ensure long-term viability.

It might be argued that New Zealand, as was found in Finland, can be too insular, which consequently has the potential to make professional learning provision less dependable (Macpherson, 2009a). The centralised systems such as those found in Germany exhibit defined and consistent governance of leadership development. Perhaps this bureaucratic approach could be perceived as less appealing to New Zealand principals. Checklists of expected actions and behaviours are synonymous with low trust models (Stewart, 2004). Relevant to this study is that, despite an ever-changing landscape and soaring principals' workload created through decentralisation, when school leaders are given a choice, they choose not to lose their new found autonomy (Wylie, 1997; Wylie & Hogden, 2005).

This raises doubt about how, what and when principals' learn for a continually changing and perpetually increasing role. Principals, it seems, must learn to be experts in change management, personnel management, finance and property management, student achievement and at the same time they are required to be the educational visionary (Thew, 2002).

## **2.5 The effect of change on what principals need to know**

Principalship is dynamic and as such, 'the how to do it' is hard to explicitly define. Context, demographics, and personal beliefs are just some of the external and internal factors that influence how the job is done. It is no wonder that developing a universal role description of what each principal does is an impossible task. It is infinitely more difficult to write a description of what they need to know and how they need to study for it (Lashway, 2003b). As has been outlined, the role of principal in New Zealand has undergone large restructuring over the last 20 years and yet professional learning for principalship remains un-mandated. This, despite professional learning being identified as a key success factor in developing effective principals is of concern (Cardno, 2003; Patuawa, 2007; Thew, 2002).

Nonetheless, there is a growing disquiet that the job of principal is too complex to learn from any explicitly defined set of competencies (Fullan, 2003; Garcia-Garduno, Slater, & Lopez-Gorosave, 2011; Gronn, 2009; Levine, 2005). So much of what a school leader does is implicit; they base what they do on what they think is right, or tacit; they learn through practice. As well, some principals require greater support than others. As identified through induction mentoring programmes, some new principals were "highly challenged" by the job (Robinson, et al., 2006, p. 165).

The concept of learning communities (Barth, 2006) and distributed leadership (Gronn, 2008), are contributing to an emerging empirical base of research arguing for lessening the principal load to create time to reflect and learn. The successful implementation of either of these models of leadership however, requires principals to understand delegation practices and the many facets of transformation management.

## **2.6 Leadership learning on a continuum**

The OECD background reports (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008) make the recommendation that to improve school leadership and develop skills for effective leadership requires treating leadership development as a continuum, thereby ensuring provision, consistency and appropriate variety.

Macpherson (2010b), supports the recommendations including the requirements for fiscal recognition of learning, distributed leadership development and the provision for on-going learning.

Macpherson believes these aspects could support New Zealand to untangle the current ambiguities of governance and recentralisation in education and possibly provide “alternatives to learning leadership on the job”, as a preferred learning method (Macpherson, 2010b, p. 1). He describes New Zealand’s principal development as being heavily reliant on serendipitous experiential learning with some systematic approaches being used in early career development, “ambivalence was evident concerning the proposition that appropriate leadership preparation at each level should be mandatory” (Macpherson, 2010a, p. 24).

The Kiwi Leadership Strategy goes some way to recognising the need for learning at pre, early, mid and experienced phases of leadership (MoE, 2008a), but needs to go further. New Zealand researchers (Macpherson, 2010b; Patuawa, 2007; Robinson, et al., 2006; Robinson, et al., 2009; Thew, 2002) and the Education Review Office (ERO, 2001) have all recommended formalising learning for principals.

The Aspiring Principal’s Pilot programme (NAPP), the First Time Principal’s Programme (FTPP), the disbanded professional development centre for experienced principals (Overend, 2008) and a raft of professional learning groups, are initiatives that have been developed since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In interview Robinson supports the new initiatives for experienced and aspiring leaders but

argues the need for “robust evaluation” of these learning opportunities if New Zealand schools are to be led by consistent highly capable principals (Boyd, 2009, p. 4)

## **2.7 Informing the principal learning context**

Wylie and Hogden’s (2005) survey analysis of the qualifications of 1500 New Zealand primary principals found 40% had a Diploma or Certificate in teaching (at present the only regulated basic requirement to teach and be a principal) 45% had a Bachelor’s Degree or equivalent, 15% had a Master’s Degree or postgraduate equivalent and 1% a Doctorate or recognised equivalent.

Brooking’s (2008) review of New Zealand-advertised principal vacancies and consequent appointments identifies the teaching diploma and/or teaching degree (68%) as the predominant qualification. However, there has been a 10% increase of principals moving into post-graduate status. Table 1, p 46, identifies Brooking’s data gathered from the 386 applicants for positions advertised in the New Zealand Gazette in 2008. The data includes those who applied and those appointed to principalship. Over a nine-month period beginning February 2008, data were gathered.

The four data sets identify appointments broadly representing all types of applicants. Twenty-six per cent of applicants appointed had postgraduate degrees despite the lower percentage (19%) of applicants with post-graduate qualifications applying.

**Table 1: Profile of primary school applicants and those appointed to the position of principal**

Profile	Applicants (n= 386) %	Applicants Appointed (n= 120) %
<b>Highest Qualifications</b>		
<b>Teaching Diploma</b>	20	21
<b>Teaching Degree</b>	53	47
<b>Post- graduate</b>	19	26
<b>Leadership/Management programmes completed</b>		
<b>First Time Principals</b>	27	35
<b>Principals' Development</b>	23	20
<b>Aspiring Principal</b>	24	26
<b>Other</b>	14	15

(Brooking, 2008, p. 2)

A higher proportion of applicants appointed to principal positions (35%) had completed the First-Time Principals' Programme. As well, Brooking's research identifies that males were appointed in slightly higher numbers and that successful applicants were more likely to have had experience in deputy principal positions or have had senior teacher experience prior to principalship .

Brooking ( 2008) identifies post-graduate learning and government leadership programmes valued more than informal-only learning in the appointment process; however, she raises questions as to whether in itself that is enough to ensure quality leadership? The earlier reports from the Education Review Office (ERO) of principals' learning needs identified insufficiency in availability of tertiary level courses, for:

... qualifications that focus specifically, on the leadership and management of New Zealand primary schools. Incentives should be available to encourage providers to enter this market. There should also be incentives for aspiring principals to gain high-level qualifications in school management before they are appointed and to continue to undertake appropriate training and education after appointment (ERO, 1996, p. 20).

ERO identifies that principals' education and development usually focuses on their teaching responsibilities with little attention paid to the professional understanding of the broader concepts of management and leadership. As such, early New Zealand professional learning for principals focused on the person's management and administration skills. By 1999, this was proven inadequate as was communicated to the Ministry of Education by ERO's (1996) and Wylie's (1997) research.

Post-Picot, school leaders continue to identify a need for support to handle their multi-faceted job (Eddy, Gwilliam, Robinson, & Waayer, 2004). Stewart (2004) advocates groups of principals needing to share their learning in high-trust learning environments and have a say in what learning is best for their individualised needs.



In an address to principals, he said:

Thinking and new understandings require grounding in the real work of the school and there should be a general recognition that school leadership is an intellectual activity, based around the centrality of learning. Schools should be viewed as communities where leaders regularly demonstrate their personal commitment to lifelong learning and critical reflective thought (p. 4).

Perhaps the notion of principals deciding what they need to know is too simplistic. New Zealand researchers (Brown & Chai, 2012; Robinson, 2010) identify pedagogical leadership to be more effective than transformational leadership. However, what has not been established is the level of tertiary study required to build a comprehensive knowledge of the teaching and learning processes in order to effect improvement.

The argument exists that leadership in New Zealand's self-managing school environment by its very nature has to be far broader than just pedagogical leadership. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report on improving New Zealand leadership (OECD, 2007, pp. 115-124) makes several pertinent suggestions to strengthen the preparation of principals ,which include identifying and developing aspirant principals and:

- That the state has an interest in system capability and so supplements, albeit voluntarily, at key strategic points; First Time Principal Programme, Leadspace, Management Advisor and the Principal Professional Development Centers
- That principal learning is better initiated by the individual than imposed by regulation and that the first three or four years are crucial for principal learning and support

- These provide a guide for the New Zealand policymakers to develop a unique to New Zealand implementation plan.

It is evident that learning cannot be left to chance, however, and what still has to be determined, are the options that best support the New Zealand multi-tasking, over-worked school leader (Macpherson, 2010b; Wylie, 1997).

## **2.8 Current New Zealand options**

Thew, a practising principal and researcher recommends “a national pre-service qualification be established” (2002, p. 255). He believes there is a place for a core curriculum for a pre-principal learning. This has not eventuated and the government, despite an explicit focus on leadership in the Education's Statement of Intent (SOI), 2006-2011, has never committed to a compulsory development programme. The SOI priority in 2006 identified the need for “further developing effective leadership across all levels of the system and its support for effective teaching” (MoE, 2006a). This provided potential scope for change. Unfortunately, the focus was maintained in the 2009-2012 SOI (MoE, 2009) where leadership is considered from the perspective that principals strengthen teacher practice. The development of leadership remains serendipitous, with individual choice the primary process.

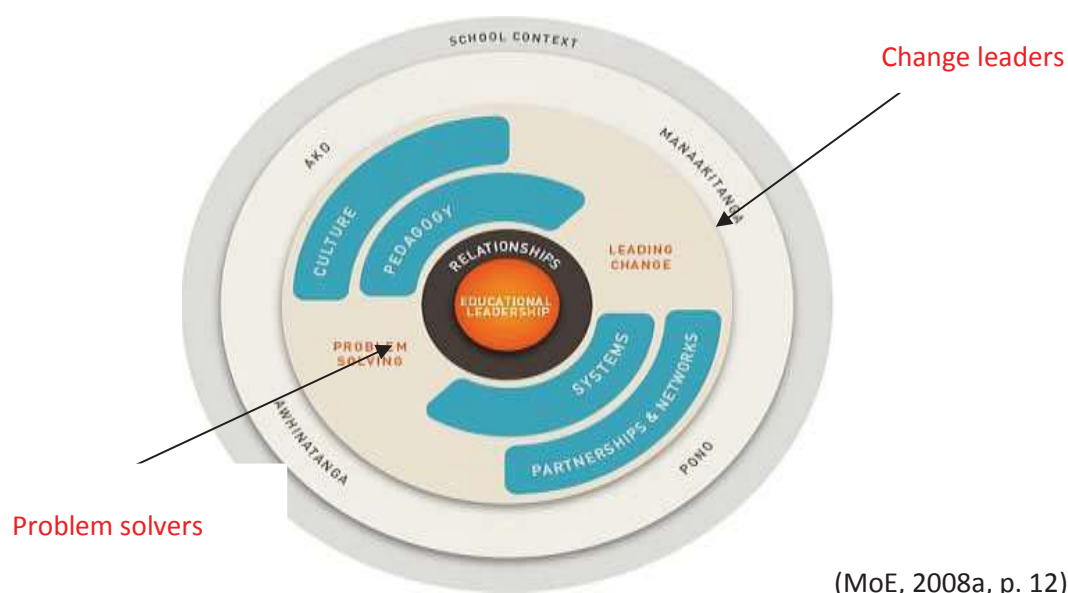
Innovations nonetheless have been introduced under government programmes between 2002 and 2007: The First Time Principals (FTP) programme, the Principals' Development and Planning Centre (PDPC), which was then closed in 2008, and Principals' Learning Groups (PLGs). The New Zealand government is building resources for school leaders. The Educational Leaders website maintained by Ministry of Education (<http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/>) provides a comprehensive repertoire of stories and research, but requires leaders to access the work. The Kiwi Leadership for

Principals Strategy (MoE, 2008a) provides further guidance, taking into account the unique conditions in which New Zealand's self-managing schools operate, in particular, the Maori context.

Self-management introduces obligations, opportunities, challenges and responsibilities for principals (Pont, et al., 2008). The Kiwi leadership document aligned to the recommendations for pedagogical leadership in the Best Evidence on Leadership (Robinson, et al., 2009) identifies the school leader requiring many capabilities, yet both guiding documents stops short of generalising formalised or pre-requisite learning for all principals.

The core elements of the Kiwi Leadership Strategy presented in Figure Two: Culture, pedagogy, systems management and relational dimensions are included under the umbrella of teaching and learning (Ako) and morality and community mindedness (Manaakitanga). The model makes explicit that successful educational leadership is contextualised and dependent on principals being relationship focussed, effective change managers and problem solvers.

**Figure 2. A Model for Educational Leadership**



(MoE, 2008a, p. 12)

The initiatives, such as the Kiwi leadership strategy, are developing and modifying to need over time. The resources are perceived to reflect a strong partnership between government, external providers, and school leaders (OECD, 2007). From this researcher's perspective, they do not go far enough to provide for principals' assorted needs and the courses that can be accessed do not encompass the broad range of providers. For example, individual Boards of Trustees determine the funding for anything outside the government-funded programmes, so arguably a person desiring an academic pathway could in essence attract no funding assistance. Principals need to access learning over time.

The notion of on-going learning is supported by Elmore. He sees learning as continuous. He feels strongly that we need to reference, "practitioners who have taken schools through a range of stages of development, and thus have developed a broad range of knowledge and skill." He is concerned that "most systems have no capacity to learn from these practitioners." Elmore believes "Learning, whether it occurs in students or adults, whether individual or collective, is a developmental process. We should not expect it to occur in a uniform, linear fashion" (Elmore, 2008, p. 49). Clearly, New Zealand requires a well-developed, funded strategy to manage all levels of principal learners.

What has been determined as generalisable is that principals require learning that supports understanding how to improve context-bound organisations and student learning. Nonetheless, context is the variable that changes the learning need. Healey and De Stefano (1997) posit that

Knowledge is imperfect, and because people's educational needs and aspirations vary both in time and in space, answers must be continually pursued. Moreover, success will require thoughtful and coherent combinations of strategies and interventions (p. 9).

People's educational aspirations, needs, and contexts differ from place to place. Accordingly, what works in one location may not necessarily work elsewhere.

Principals however do value what they are funded to access. The induction course originally offered by Waikato and Auckland Universities for new principals and the principals' development centre (PDPC) for the "refreshment of experienced principals" (OECD, 2007, p. 133), are both valued opportunities by the participants in this research, despite both learning opportunities identified as having deficiencies. For example, the PDPC was perceived as an appraisal centre as opposed to a learning facility and FTTP participants describe requiring greater management learning support early on in their career. It is apparent that learning opportunities have to provide for the different needs and styles of learners. For some leaders that may be a government programme such as the First Time Principals' programme and for others a credentialed university course.

## **2.9 The First Time Principals' Programme**

The Education Review reports (ERO, 1996, 2001) led to the government commissioning the Hay Group (2001) to define the core competencies required for principalship. These competencies in turn underpinned the initial curriculum developed by two universities for the First Time Principals' Programme (FTTP)<sup>4</sup> in 2002.

The initial FTTP programme, un-trialled, has continued to evolve with an increasing focus on instruction and school improvement. The work of New Zealand researchers Robinson and colleagues (Alton-Lee, 2003; Robinson, Phillips, & Timperley, 2002), and latterly, Robinson's (2009) BES<sup>5</sup> Leadership work, has been critical in influencing the course's development. By the end of 2004, 90%

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<sup>4</sup> FTTP is sometimes referred to as FTP programme or First Time Principals.

<sup>5</sup> BES stands for Best Evidence Synthesis. Researchers are funded by the Ministry of Education to determine what literature is saying about a content area.

of new principals had attended FPHP, 550 new school leaders. Eddy (2004), the first of the programme directors, confirmed by Macpherson (2008), that the FPHP has worked with 160 to 200 participants per annum since 2002.

“Almost all first-time principals enroll in and complete the programme. By mid-2006, approximately 700 new principals representing over one-quarter of New Zealand’s 2693 principals have completed the main components of the programme. (Robinson, et al., 2006, p. 152)

From the onset, early career principals argued that although the programme could not teach them all they needed to know it was a positive experience (Cameron, Lovett, Baker, & Waiti, 2004). It could be queried: is an experience enough? An 18-month programme not contributing to a qualification could be deemed by some as unproductive. Macpherson describes the FTP promoting knowledge around curriculum leadership but lacking in the development of self-governance and self-management needs (Macpherson, 2008).

One tension in delivering a single programme to all includes the “wide variance in prior experience and learning of participants” (Robinson, et al., 2006, p. 152). In 2006, there were 35% with Bachelor’s degrees, 17% with Undergraduate Diplomas, 12% with Master’s Degrees, and 36% without any of these qualifications.

Power is another tension in this type of early career development. Models of learning link closely to the question of power, so one must ask whose needs are being met when delivering such a programme. If the participants, as they did in this research, articulate a need for more management-type learning and if they believe there should be academic recognition, the question must be why that cannot happen. Since the programme is university-delivered, there appears to be no reason why a qualification type curriculum should not be accommodated.

There is also the tension between bureaucratic and formal processes, social and often informal development opportunities. This initiates debate about what learning actually provides the best support. This is an area for Chapter 3's international literature to consider. Formal versus informal learning validity creates further conflict between funding, accountability, principals' needs, and children's needs. As well, Thew (2002) believes involvement in only informal learning is too inward focussed. Principals, from Thew's perspective, require a formal learning platform as part of their repertoire.

The initial evaluation of the First Time Principals' programme in 2003 concluded that the programme was well conceptualised. It supported improving learning with the potential to remove disparity of achievement across schools and improve principal knowledge over time and principals had a more consistent awareness of the government's educational goals (Cameron, et al., 2004). Post-2003 research identifies "leadership development policy and provisions in New Zealand continue to lag behind initiatives across the Tasman" (Macpherson, 2010a, p. 117).

Hence, despite the FTP programme developing and referencing new trends, evaluation of leadership as a whole is required.

It is recommended that comparative policy research be commissioned to identify and eliminate the conditions that are antithetical to the systematic professionalization of leadership and investigate incentive regimes that will sustain leadership capacity building. (Macpherson, 2010a, p. 238)

### **2.10 The Principals' Development Planning Center and its replacement**

In May 2005, The Principals' Development Planning Centre (PDPC) was developed as a five-day professional development initiative for principals of New Zealand schools with five or more years'

experience (later reduced to three years' experience). As at June 2007, 331 principal participants in groups of four to six participants had attended the centre each week.

The MOE advised that they had enough participants to conduct each session (Maetzig, 2007). Yet on December 1<sup>st</sup> 2008, principals were advised the centre would close. Through a consultative process, principal groups felt there were better options for using the funds allocated to the PDPC (Overend, 2008). By October 2010, a preferable option had not been identified despite principals being invited in July, 2009 to join one of five new trial experienced principal development programmes across New Zealand. The trial resulted in no new programme development and New Zealand research continues to identify a need for crossing “ the threshold into international professional parity of an all master’s profession (Macpherson, 2010a, p. 240).

### **2.11 Professional learning groups**

Stoll, Fink and Earl’s (2003) work around professional communities was the catalyst behind developing the Professional Learning Groups (PLGs) and the Principals’ Professional Learning Circles (PPLCs) introduced in 2004. PLGs are groups of four to six principals who share ideas through reading and discussion and are used as part of the FTTP. The PPLCs began originally as a mentoring project; a partnership between Massey University and The New Zealand Principals’ Federation (NZPF) catering for 200 principals nationally for 18 months at a time. David Stewart (2005) articulated his support for this model:

At the heart of the project are regular face-to-face, small group discussions where regular school leadership activities are mutually critiqued, available options widened through systematic reading, and evidence of practice routinely shared with each other. Such meetings will usually be of two to three hours duration and occur at least twice a term. Each group will have a leader who will be responsible for both



maintaining the process and impetus of the interaction and, in addition, will act as the conduit for the communication to and from the project director (p. 1).

The concept was expanded and Ministry of Education (MoE) in 2008 asked for self-identified principal groups to submit areas of focus for their previously unfunded and more informal groups. The MoE funded up to \$3000 per annum (Aitken,2008) for learning groups that met a set of outcome criteria. This was a high trust model of funding, as limited reporting to the Ministry on results, was required. Data describing the number of groups developed and sustained was not collated. This researcher's PLG group was no longer externally funded and consequently disbanded. Nonetheless, each principal in this researcher's group continues their memberships of a range of informal networking clusters.

The professional learning groups, some funded and some built up through networks with no funding are presented as valuable principal learning options (Gussgott, 2004; Patuawa, 2007) . This research examines that broad notion of networking supporting principals' learning.

## **2.12 Other Ministry of Education opportunities for learning**

The Ministry of Education funds Leadspace, the e-learning portal. MoE also provides regional principal advisors and has funded, in an inconsistent manner over the last five years, courses for principal appraisers and principal appointment advisors. A national aspiring principal programme pilot (NAPP) introduced in February 2008, continues to evolve. Unfortunately, the Ministry's many stand-alone, often one-day courses and programmes are not recognised as higher forms of learning.

Mentors in programmes such as NAPP and FPHP are self-selected experienced principals. If, for example, their work was embedded in a university accreditation programme there may be more professional value and recognition for what they do (Macpherson, 2008). The same applies to the

FTEP participants. Formally, recognised qualifications could arguably provide greater credibility to Ministry of Education leadership programmes. One such example described in chapter three is the mentoring programme linked to qualifications developed in Hong Kong (Walker & Qian, 2006). This could help inform New Zealand's principal learning development.

### **2.13 Other providers, other options**

New Zealand tertiary providers offer a number of study programmes for all levels of leadership, with Unitec's professionalisation services in educational leadership being described by school leaders as providing the most dynamic and coherent set of provisions (Macpherson, 2010c, p. 220).

Macpherson's report, identifying what each institute offers, explicitly indicates that leadership demands are changing.

Principals access a range of learning activities including conferences, courses, appraisal processes and mentoring. Nonetheless, New Zealand principals continue to access predominantly individualised self-directed programmes. Macpherson identifies that the "current national annual investment in the professionalization of educational leaders apparently needs to be increased threefold" (Macpherson, 2010c, p. 237). Further incentivising policies are required to triple the existing participation.

New Zealand is beginning to build a body of evidence and knowledge around leadership that makes a difference for students and teachers (Alton Lee, 2007). The In-Service Teacher Evaluation Project (INSTEP) 2005-2008 stated it had as a core goal the support of professional leadership and on-going improvement within the in-service teacher education sector (English, Harwood, Lamont, Chiaroni, & Dreaver, 2008). The project provided considerable information about effective professional development practices, and in particular, reflective practice, collaborative learning, and mentoring.

Robinson et al., (2009) through their consultation with advisors and sector stakeholder representatives, explore the knowledge skills and dispositions required of leaders. From the BES leadership evidence (2009), the more the focus is on teacher competence, student outcomes and relationships, the greater the leader's influence (p. 40). Nonetheless, the Robinson team identified only 134 studies worldwide between 1985 and 2006 relevant to questions around student outcomes, leadership's role in student improvement and the practices required to implement improvement (Robinson, 2007). Sixty-one of those studies came from New Zealand with 27 only quantifying the relationship between leadership and student outcomes. This is not a huge data set when we consider its importance in underpinning the FTP programme.

School leaders are required to have an extensive and multi- faceted skill set. BES assumes leaders bring instructional capability to their role and yet Timperley identifies, "creating a professional learning context within the school that simultaneously addresses knowledge, skills, and expectations is a demanding task for the most competent and experienced leader" (2005, p. 13). What we do know is that school leaders who know how to build relationships with staff and recognise and use staff expertise to focus on teacher and student learning, "can make a powerful difference in their schools" (Robinson, 2007, p. 7).

Has the time come for universities to move beyond currently offered elitist programmes of study to consider the real-life learning needs of aspiring and practising leaders (Macpherson, 2010c); to challenge their ways and programmes to meet the working adult learners needs. Martin and Robinson (2003) believe tertiary institutions, not governments are the ideal providers for principal development but require programmes "focused around the real needs of school principals" (p. 10). Their notion is more in keeping with the American approach where many institutions offer courses, as opposed to the British centralised mode.

Whichever way New Zealand does choose to go, it needs to continue to build understanding of how New Zealand leaders' best learn. This identifies a gap in current research. There needs to be a collaborative understanding of what learning is meaningful in order to enhance the work of principals, as well as effective means of funding on-going principal learning.

### **2.14 Building capability**

The notion of meaningful learning is broad. Principals are adults; hence, the specific needs of adult learners are considered further in Chapter three. As well, understanding the importance of context and motivation to learn are significant aspects of this topic. Equally noteworthy is the knowledge that the job of principal is complex and non- explicit (Fullan,2003; 2006). Accordingly, Macpherson's framework (Table 2, p 60) provides a possible learning matrix for the career phases of New Zealand's school leaders.

Table two, has been modified by A. Malcolm to consider data relevant only to the primary school sector, which is the focus of this research. MacPherson identifies with his framework the need for role modelling, mentoring and course work (Macpherson, 2008). The framework supports Mohr and Evans' earlier thinking, that learning must be continuous with a focus on on-going school improvement (Evans & Mohr, 1999).

**Table 2 Macpherson’s preliminary career based learning framework**

<b>Career Stage</b>	<b>Roles</b>	<b>Learning interests</b>	<b>Preparation strategies and Pre service</b>	<b>Succession strategies, In Service</b>
Potential Leaders	Beginning teachers and basic scale teachers.	Mastery of class management and trialling innovation.	Initial graduate training includes classroom leadership.	Pedagogical and curriculum Professional development.
Aspirant Leaders	Fully registered teachers (3yr+) seeking management units.	Classroom and team leadership.	Work shadowing & skills training in classroom leadership.	Coaching and mentoring. Leadspace( Ministry e-learn portal) online resources.
Team Leaders	Middle management roles. Syndicate leaders & year level coordinators.	Team and project management.	Work shadowing, team leader identification, recruitment programmes. National Aspiring Team leader programme (not currently available).	Annual induction and development conference. Coaching and mentoring. Leadspace & Post graduate scholarships in Educational Leadership.
Executive leaders	Member of senior management team, assistant principals, deputy principals.	Educational management and leadership.	Work shadowing a principal & NAPP.	Annual induction conference. Coaching and mentoring. Leadspace & Post graduate scholarships in educational leadership.
Institutional leaders	Teaching and non-teaching principals.	Educational management and leadership.	Shadowing & Recruitment programmes. NAPP.	FPPP. Annual development conference. PDPC equivalent. PPLGs& Leadspace. Master’s and Ed.D scholarships.

Learning involves broad based understandings of what it means to be a learner (Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003). Evidence suggests leaders are seeking alternatives to what is currently offered; they need to be exposed to expanded opportunities that fit with their workload and life beyond their work (Blankstein, et al., 2009; Campbell, 2003; Gussgott, 2004; Levine, 2005). What is yet to be established is what learning in the future looks like.

There remains much to debate on the subject of providing optimal and meaningful principals' professional development. A principal must have the knowledge and skills to lead from the day they are appointed. Stephenson (2000) provides a simple comparison between capability and competency:

Competency is about delivering the present based on past performance; capability is about imagining the future and bringing it about. Competency is about control; capability is about learning and development. Competency is about fitness for (usually other people's) purpose; capability is about judging fitness of the purpose itself (p. 4).

Much of what a school leader does is learned on the job or through colleagues. The concern is raised again as to how a country can ensure a core consistency in educational leadership in all its institutions regardless of experience level. Thew, a practising principal, identified that many principals new to the role base what they do on what they think is right; they learn through talk with other principals and practices that develop over time (Thew, 2002). From Thew's perspective this is too conservative. "It is somewhat disconcerting that the professional learning of principals is centred so strongly on their colleagues" (p. 196).

Relevant to the principal learning discourse is not only financial recognition of the role as previously described, but also for learning. Teachers have a graduated salary, based on higher qualifications, whereas New Zealand principals have no such motivator to learn. This deemed yet another challenging aspect for future leadership development.

Subsequently, despite appearing to be successful, there is continued criticism of the New Zealand's MoE developed programmes not meeting individual needs and therefore not building capability consistently. Brundrett, Fitzgerald and Sommerfeldt (2006, p. 19) advise caution around "copy-cattling" policy development. They reference the work of the Hay Group in Victoria, Australia and Britain being not dissimilar. Concern is focussed on the underlying assumptions determined throughout the Hay Group's reporting and the NCSL's leadership programme development:

that principals act as one homogenous group, that their professional development needs can be homogenised and that a normative view of leadership is possible to simultaneously predict and develop (p. 25).

Thrupp (2005) also advises caution. It is his belief New Zealand needs its own context-based learning.

## **2 .15 Conclusion**

The advent of self-management has increased the workload and complexity of school principalship. Longer hours, personal resilience, and a much broader skill set are general requirements of the job. The tensions and challenges seem to be ever increasing, and the job ever more stressful. Currently the largest gaps occur between the provision of principals' learning and principals' identified learning needs. Further understanding about, how and when principals learn needs to be developed. Principals' perceptions and experiences of learning requires further exploration to ensure professional development meets both individualised and contextualised needs. The importance of this knowledge for developing future programmes is implicit. Determining learning that is meaningful is fundamental to this research. Chapter Three examines the broader literature to consider occupational stress, how adults' best learn and what makes learning meaningful, informal and formal learning and moves to understand what other countries are doing to build and sustain their quality school leadership.

# The Professional Learning of New Zealand Urban Principals

## CHAPTER THREE

### Effectiveness, learning, and needs: the “International Perspective.”

*Despite the yawning chasm between where principals are and where they need to be, the nation can prepare principals for tomorrow’s challenges. Communities have little choice. The schools of the 21st century will require a new kind of principal.*

(Usdan, McCloud, & Podmostko, 2000, p. 4)

#### **3.1 Introduction**

Educational leadership literature provides a “substantial body of information” at an international level (Townsend, 1999, p. 3). High quality leadership is acknowledged as one of the most important requirements of an effective school (Bush & Jackson, 2002b). Less understood is the preparation and development of the successful skilled and knowledgeable school leader. This chapter examines international educational leadership research in relation to principals’ learning.



Learning is a non-linear process. Learning needs differ according to context (Day, et al., 2010), and time in the job (Kedian, 2004). Accordingly, maturation in the role of principal is explored highlighting learning needs at the early career and experienced phases of leadership. As well, external and internal factors that influence learning, including school context to include school size and demographics are considered.

Successful principalship requires leaders to be both managers and leaders of people (Day, Harris, & Hadfield, 2000). Principals must also understand the impact of their actions (Hausman, Crow, & Speery, 2000). For example, to ensure successful implementation of any innovation, namely a new reporting system, the principal articulates to the staff, parents, and students why change is necessary and outlines the expected outcomes. If change is understood, it is more likely to be accepted. The leadership aspect of the role is providing vision and school direction. The management perspective involves managing the processes and logistics of change. Fullan (2001) argues the role demands principals being knowledgeable change leaders and managers.

Schools cannot flourish on the actions of the leader alone. The need to harness experts within a school is part of the learning process. Distributed leadership practices are suggested as a way forward (Harris, 2004).

Chapter Three further examines principals' learning to cope with the immensity of the job and an ever-changing role (NCSL, 2004).

New approaches also signal the prospect of different skills being required of school leaders. Enhanced stakeholder and relationship management skills, alongside political skills such as negotiating and networking skills, will increase along with change management, financial management, people management and project management. (NCSL, 2009, p. 14)

What contributes to effectiveness? Context does matter; core task identification needs to be explicit; learning-centered leadership is critical, so too is distributing leadership. The changing nature

of the work and succession planning aspects have never been more important, is the underlying message in the National College school leadership review (NCSL, 2009, pp. 20-21).

Learning leadership needs to be more “adaptive” according to the English OECD report (Higham, Hopkins, & Ahtaridou, 2007, p. 75), where individual leaders and school’s contextual needs are met through new and innovative collaborations and shared learning. The current debate *a propos* leadership learning appears to be divided between those who advocate for more prescriptive models and those who call for less directive systemic approaches (Lashway, 2003b).

Nonetheless case studies, small thus far, have found no direct correlation between formalised leadership programmes and principal effectiveness (McCarthy, 2002). Conversely, since the advent of the National College for Leadership of Schools and Student Services, principals’ learning is more closely scrutinised and programmes internationally are evolving (NCSL, 2009; A. Walker & Qian, 2006).

Furthermore, the role of principal is continually developing. Hess and Kelly (2005) believe principals today are asked to lead in a new world marked by unprecedented responsibilities, “principals are the front-line managers, the shop stewards, the brigade commanders—the ones who will lead a team to new levels of effectiveness. Or not” (p. 35). Attracting new principals warrants further examination within a study of principals’ learning.

Leadership reports prepared for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (Huber, 2004; OECD, 2007; Pont, et al., 2008) suggest to policy makers in the OECD countries that they have a responsibility to enhance leadership opportunities and outcomes. Suggestions include country-wide, contextualised learning programmes and greater sharing of leadership. The reports identify the need to make leadership more desirable, with suggestions of greater fiscal recognition and better learning opportunities directed at leaders and succession opportunities to be developed to ensure a future supply of school principals.

Conversely, international evidence suggests future leadership supply problems. For example Australia's need is predicted as "serious" (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 11). In 15 out of 22 countries reviewed through the OECD reports there were cited difficulties in "finding suitable candidates for principalship" (Pont, et al., 2008, p. 158).

Ensuring sustainable school leadership requires well defined pathways and support for developing leaders (Leithwood, Steinbach, & Jantzi, 2000; Pont, et al., 2008). In contrast, Levine (2005) after his scathing commentary on the American training provisions believes the United Kingdom's NCSL is "well placed to build capacity"(p. 54):

The previous chapter focused on principals and their learning needs specific to the New Zealand context. In particular, the increased demand on principal knowledge and skill, created through decentralisation and the introduction of school governing Boards of Trustees were reviewed.

Chapter Three examines the international literature to provide a broader view of the tensions and challenges for principals' professional learning.

In 2007, the New Zealand Ministry of Education granted thirty weeks study leave to this researcher, providing time to extensively explore educational leadership literature related to successful principalship. The review considered broad aspects of school leadership to include twentieth century leadership development, theory development, and andragogy and school effectiveness. The thesis proposal developed from that review, "The learning Pathways of New Zealand Urban Principals", later modified to "The Professional Learning of Urban New Zealand Principals", identified four recurrent literature themes around learning and school leadership effectiveness.

1. Educational leadership- to include management and leadership
2. Principals' professional learning- availability and need
3. Optimising learning- understanding differentiation linked to maturation for adult learners

#### 4. Tensions and challenges inherent in the job

Within each theme, sub-themes establish further, what is known about school leadership learning.

### **3.2 Theme One: Understanding educational leadership**

Ribbins and Gunter (2002) in mapping the school leadership field, describe the term educational leadership as, “a number of overlapping and related parts: administration, policy and management” (p. 360). The definition is rather narrow and limiting when considering the New Zealand principal who is also the leader of pupil and staff learning, is an employer, board member and leads governance and management decision making. Nonetheless Ribbins and Gunter do support along with others (Usdan, et al., 2000; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) that educational leadership is a broad term used to describe the school principal’s role; their skill base, required knowledge and how they use influence to improve teaching and learning outcomes. The nexus between principals as managers and principals as leaders is explored.

#### **3.2.1 Principals as leaders and managers**

Some of the literature describes the difference between management roles and leadership roles as nothing more than semantics; others believe the school principal has to be able to do both (Robinson, et al., 2009; Sergiovanni, 2000b; Southworth, 2008). Management provides order to the school and leadership is the producer of movement and change. Northouse describes leadership as “a complex process with multiple dimensions” (2009, p. 1). Although often quoted, “Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing” (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 21), it could be argued that a successful school requires a principal who can do both.

Leadership, management, and administration are terms that have been used interchangeably to describe school leadership. Neither term management nor administration fully depicts the actions of the twenty-first century school principal. Educational leadership, a conceptually broader term,

acknowledges and includes the range of activities carried out by the principal. Throughout the chapter, components are identified describing fully an educational leader.

Southworth & Doughty (2006) identify the principal's management role in educational leadership to include, time management, communication management, performance, finance and project management. They support Tolofari's (2005) notion that management involves day to day procedural activities and that leadership encompasses people, learning and the visionary aspect of the role.

Leadership of any academic organisation is a multi-faceted activity involving a blend of human and operational behaviours, attitudes and attributes (Drew, Ehrich, & Hansford, 2008). The skills and knowledge requirements are extensive. Collins (2006) describes the principal as the legal expert, health and social worker, public relations consultant, security officer, technological innovator, resource manager, fundraiser and, most importantly, the promoter of learning. There is no one-way of leading or learning to lead that works for every principal (Brundrett, 2001). Furthermore, Blackler & Kennedy (2004) believe leadership is highly contextualised. Therefore, research needs to build a differentiated view of what leaders do. Understanding the complexity of the role within a school setting influences what needs to be learned, to be successful as a principal (Leithwood & Duke, 1998; Southworth & Du Quesnay, 2005).

Without doubt, educational leadership involving leading or managing is an influencing process of people and resources (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004). Effective school leadership involves building capacity and commitment of, and with staff. The principal by association must recognise good teaching and learning, share other schools' good practices and ensure teachers or learners access support to achieve success (Elmore, 2008).

As well, Hargreaves (2010) identifies that in order to achieve excellence, leaders must demonstrate high fidelity; loyalty to the bigger purpose of education; fortitude and fraternity. They must

demonstrate flair, flow, flexibility, an absolute value, a belief in what they do is for the good of their school and their team. The leader has a core responsibility to the people and organisation within which they work. Hargreaves supports Elmore's systems leader who works with other less capable schools (Elmore, 2008). Leaders have a responsibility to champion education for all. Hargreaves and others describe today's educational leader as someone who is moral and empathetic; a person who wants the very best for learners and teachers (Duignan & MacPherson, 1992; Elmore, 2008; Hargreaves, 2010).

The most important quality for today's leader/manager is willingness and openness to continual learning. Ribbins and Gunter (2002) identify "One hundred serious definitions of leadership" (p361) and although they support leadership encompassing both leading and managing they believe research has to go further to consider :

*Detailed and contextualised accounts of what individual leaders do and why they do it, in a variety of specific circumstances, how and why others respond as they do with what outcomes (2002, p. 362).*

Studies of principals need to go beyond describing leaders' managing and leading skills, to understanding and thenceforth develop the successful behaviours.

### **3.2.2 Building principals' capacity**

Learning the role of principal cannot be left to chance (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007). Principals require a full repertoire of learning tools if they are to develop requisite leadership behaviours, capabilities, and knowledge. Fenwick and Pierce (2002a) identify three modes of development. The traditional model of learning through university courses; the craft model, where principals learn from other experts in the field, for example at principals' centres and through

networking and thirdly, the reflective inquiry approach where principals are encouraged to generate learning through systematic inquiry such as a school improvement project.

A range of learning opportunities best supports developing capacity for successful leadership (Colley, Hodgkinson, & Malcolm, 2004; Gunter & Ribbins, 2002). For the purpose of this research, leadership capacity is defined as, “broad-based skilful participation in the work of leadership”(Lambert, 2006, p. 239). Educational leadership capacity is premised on the understanding that principals have to demonstrate a range of behaviours, knowledge and skills appropriate to each circumstance. When a decision has to be made principals may choose authoritative action, yet when agreement is sought, collaborative behaviours are a better match (Sheive & Schoenheit, 1987). Principals require a general understanding of educational theory to inform and underpin the changes they make in their schools (Thew, 2002; Van Berkum, 1994). The core components of governance, day-to-day management, strategic intent, curriculum leadership, and ethics that are inherent in the role require principals to be capable. Identifying the knowledge and skill core requirements for successful educational leadership is the antecedent to understanding principals’ professional learning needs.

### **3.2.3 Twenty-first century skill and knowledge requirements for principals**

The balance and combination of skills; the complexity and demands of educational leadership are, according to Caldwell (2004), fundamental reasons for the rising principal shortages. Kennedy’s (2000) study of 91 teachers to determine what discouraged aspiring principalship found the changing demands of the job, increased accountability, lack of adequate support, legal and special education issues were the main responses. Principals need to be able to support teachers, but also to transform schools to be effective places where teaching and learning for all students is actively promoted (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010).

The Di Paola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) findings link well to the notion that knowledgeable school leaders lead effective schools impacting positively on students’ learning. Confirmed through the

McREL meta-analysis (Waters, et al., 2003) of 1.1 million students and 2,894 schools in which a significant correlation between effective school leadership and positive student achievement outcomes was determined. Effective leaders not only know what to do, but how, when and why to do it.

The notion that successful principals directly link to organisational success is espoused by Fullan (2003) and supported by a Tasmanian study (Edmunds, Mulford, Kendall, & Kendall, 2008).

Understanding successful educational leadership entails recognition of principals as power holders, theory adopters, and the executors of appropriate behavioural styles and models of leadership.

Despite the trend towards shared- leadership as identified by Edmunds et al., the principal is responsible for the school and as such is the ultimate power holder. Recognising, understanding, and being able when needed to diffuse, positional or personal power structures in a school are part of leadership and the organisational need.

Principals lead through a variety of styles and access a range of theory. Theories, for example transactional and transformational theories, explain what leaders do, how they act and the required skills, consideration of options; will this be a team or collaborative approach, and why? Researchers (Bush & Chew, 2006; Leithwood & Duke, 1998) believe an appreciation of theory can inform leadership practice. Furthermore Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, & Beresford (2000), identify that through theory principals share certain attributes that can be generalised to specific situations. As one example, an autocratic approach provides for immediate outcomes, such as staff being advised to complete attendance registers using a school- wide consistent approach. The issue does not need extended discussion.

Contemporary principals are required to be confident, self-aware, empathetic and wise if they are to lead others to a shared vision (Duignan, 2004). Duignan further describes the principal as having relational capabilities of “trustworthiness and emotional maturity.” They need to exhibit



professional capabilities; “strategic thinking and pedagogical knowledge” are two Duignan specifically identifies. School leaders as well, require personal capabilities of “passion, courage and optimism”(pp. 20-21). Moreover, principals are critical inquirers (Mulford, 2012; Mulford, Silins, & Leithwood, 2005) . They have to be able to ask and answer the questions, what is going on here and how can I improve that? Bush and Glover (2003) believe school leaders have to understand and be able to act as change managers. They create improvement through change. Unfortunately, despite ever-increasing school needs there can be no definitive capability list, as they too continue to evolve.

As studies continue, the capability requirements increase. The license to lead in the United States of America, a preparatory certificate (CCSSO, 2008) required by 41 States, has 6 dimensions, 49 performance standards, 44 knowledge domains and 43 dispositions. Scottish heads have to demonstrate four domains of managing learning and teaching, people, policy and planning and resources. The United Kingdom’s Headship Standards, “represent the role of the head teacher”(DfES, 2004, p. 4) . Principals have to be able to shape the future, lead teaching, and learning, develop self, work with others, manage the organisation, be accountable, and strengthen their communities. The New Zealand principal has to be able to develop culture, understand pedagogy, systems, and partnerships within their educational context. Australia’s requirements are different for each State but include interpersonal, organisational, strategic, and personal capabilities. Gronn (Gronn, 2003) could be correct in assuming that with interagency sharing a global curriculum for school leadership is developing.

### **3.2.4 Principals as influencers of people and change**

Moyle’s Australian study involved talking with 400 Australian leaders about their perceptions of how leadership influences school development. Moyle (2006) identified that to integrate any change successfully, there is a reliance on a shared school leadership endeavour. The effectiveness of embedding any new learning when principals work alongside staff is confirmed by Robinson (2010) ). If

there is systemic school-wide ineffectiveness the leader's role as a change agent becomes more critical (Hargreaves, 2003). A major challenge must therefore be to ensure principals are taught how to be effective change agents.

When children find learning unsatisfying and teachers are disengaged, leaders become the key to change. Focussing on what is important, leading with moral vision, according to Fullan (2003) creates legitimate change. Principals who understand change are more capable of working with their staff to think and look for solutions to the deeper issue problems (Heifetz & Linsky, 2004) or simply to improve existing situations.

Change management skills are implicit in the leadership role. Presenters at the 2010 (ACEL) Australian Council for Educational Leadership Conference (Hannon, 2010; Hargreaves, 2010; A. Walker, 2010a) describe the need to modify the curriculum; change classrooms' set up; adapt how we teach and alter our ontological view of how children learn. Children, teachers, and the school leaders are moving into a new era of unprecedented technological change. Daniel Pink describes it as the conceptual age. A time of "inventiveness and big picture capabilities" (Pink, 2005, p. 2).

Leaders create the conditions for learning. They establish the goals and academic focus (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Yet answering this simple question, "Given what you know about leadership for learning, where would you advise me to put my effort as a school leader in order to gain the greatest improvement in learning for students at my school?" (Hallinger & Heck, 2011, p. 2), is anything but simple.

Regrettably, at times, focus on what is important can be eroded by the more managerial, resource management type demands on schools. Usdan and fellow authors argue that principals get pulled in many directions which in turn can lead to failure in fulfilling their core mission of educating children to high levels (Usdan, et al., 2000). Perhaps learning how and when to manage the external and internal influences would support stronger prioritising and overall principal effectiveness. Nonetheless,

Barth (1990a) advises caution with any generic change influence on learning. He indicates that principals can be effective change agents only when they respond to their own vision.

Influence and behaviour seem inextricably entwined. The ways in which principals behave ensures successful or unsuccessful implementation of something new. Greenfield and Ribbins(1993) claim that early leadership studies focussed on 'the characteristics of leaders, whereas what is important is their character,' (p.259), the way they behave. An emerging perspective is that contemporary leaders require a range of accessible behaviours if they are to positively influence others to a shared vision (Duignan, 2004).

### **3.2.5 Principals' leadership behaviours**

Over the last thirty years terminology describing leader behaviours has increased exponentially (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Bush & Glover, 2004; Sergiovanni, 2000a). The servant leader became the collaborative leader. That leader in turn reflected on their new found status and became an authentic leader (Duignan, 2004). One leader might describe their leadership style as that of a delegating strategist; another, a vision-led leader (Sergiovanni, 1973). What is evident is that principals require a repertoire of leadership practices.

This view raises the question of whether principals' behaviours are inherent or learned. If learned, is it through experience, course work or a combination of methods? Boyett and Boyett (1998) assert that abilities are slowly developed from identified leadership potential. Dweck (2010) describes the fixed and growth mind-sets. A person with a fixed mind-set would view leadership as innate or nature- provided whereas a growth mind-set would have us believe "that leadership abilities could be learned and acquired through effort and experience" (Chase, 2010, p. 297).

Gardner (1995) determines through his study of leaders that there are known constants of leadership behaviours:

- Leaders can walk the talk; they do not act in the role
- Leaders all have a story, a central message that they convey
- Leaders have to have an audience and organisation
- Leaders exert both direct and indirect leadership, and they require expertise

Gardner believes the attributes of resilience, confidence, big picture thinking, moral commitment, a sense of timing and reflecting on experience are imperatives.

Principals refer to themselves as ethical leaders (Duignan, Kelleger, & Spry, 2003); they are required to behave in a moral and just way. It is not negotiable that they are expected, by society, to improve what happens for students (Hargreaves, et al., 2007). A principal who does not understand deficit thinking; a principal not aware of prejudices could arguably fail to notice injustice in their school. Walker (2010b) describes it as the difference between connecting to understand which, is not the same, as connecting to accept. For example, social deprivation and low performance have been linked. Walker expects principals to recognise and overcome inequality in their schools. A core requirement in multi-cultural environments is for leaders to ensure a culturally responsive pedagogy in their schools (Bishop & Berryman, 2010; Bishop, O'Sullivan, & Berryman, 2010).

Within the changing landscape, leaders have a responsibility to challenge the current expectations for learners. Shields agrees with Walker and advises principals to develop principled courage and activism into their work (Shields, 2005a). The status quo is not good enough as children continue to be failed by their schools. Shields advocates that principals include moral fortitude into their array of behaviours. Moral leaders discount loudly common beliefs that lack of opportunity for example, equates to inability to learn (Shields, 2005a; Thrupp, 2007; A. Walker, 2010b).

There is however a gap in the literature in determining if certain behaviours and responses can be learned. Hellner believes implied knowledge can be converted to specific action (Hellner, 2004). In the findings of Hellner's research, one participant described feeling very relieved he had experienced minor conflict in order to subsequently apply his knowledge and defuse a more complex problem Hellner believes the worth of assimilated or tacit knowledge, gained through experience, is underestimated.

Despite developing a large list of acceptable and evidenced behaviours, it seems there is no one way to behave as a school leader. What is identified is that leader behaviour mode is heavily influenced by his or her disposition; however, rigid adherence to a particular style of leadership may prove to encumber leaders from developing to their full potential. Hoy and Miskel (1987) posit that, "In sum, appropriately applying or balancing different types of behaviours for varying situations is fundamental to enhancing leadership performance" (p.402). What is made explicit is that principals and their actions need to be informed by more than just who they are.

### **3.2.6 The influence of leadership theory**

Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall (2003) argue that teaching and learning have to be grounded by theory. School leaders then, are responsible for understanding theory and responsible for translating and guiding teachers to use theory to underpin effective practice (Robinson, 2007). Beyond pedagogical theory are multiple theories to explain leader-led behaviours or events (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Theory has been developed to describe school improvement methods and a range of theories describe how to lead (Bass & Stogdill, 1990).

Translating theory into practice and developing notions of a school being informed are significant tasks for the principal (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Yukl, 1998). The current drive is for transformational leadership linked to pedagogical leadership (Hannon, 2010). The pedagogical leader leads school learning and teaching through analysis of school data, formative assessment practices and

up-skilling teachers in best practice. School leaders are expected to lead schools focussed on successful outcomes for all students (Hargreaves, 2010).

In summarising this theme, educational leadership is a shared social influencing process. Principals must explore their beliefs; understand their behaviours and their theories of practice if they are to transform themselves and the leadership of their schools. The review supports knowing that principals have to, from day one in the role, demonstrate competent educational leadership.

Educational leadership cannot be defined simply. The leader is a manager and leader. Leaders require a broad repertoire of skills and knowledge to be effective. The capabilities are increasing exponentially; nonetheless, commonality is emerging around the requirements of the role. Problems around developing leaders and the immensity of the job are identified. What is not answered, and is addressed by this research, is how to ensure sustainable principalship through principal's professional learning.

### **3.3 Theme Two: Professional learning focussed on Principals' learning**

Cameron and Mitchell (2002) reported that principals access a wide range of learning that they are:

Inveterate learners themselves, with many belonging to principal mentoring groups, undertaking tertiary study, taking part as educational leaders in working with others outside their own school, being involved in principals' associations. (p.5)

This notion of principals as confirmed learners is supported by Cameron and Dingle (2006) in their career path study.

The second theme considers professional learning in general, then examines prior research into principals' professional learning. The section explores how principals find time for learning.

Furthermore, their adult learner needs are identified, their motivation to learn and finally whether meaningfulness is found through formal or informal learning opportunities.

### **3.3.1 Professional learning**

Concepts describing professional learning have similar characteristics and all can be classified as informal or formal learning (Federighi, 1999) For this research formal learning is taken to mean accredited programme learning such as a university diploma or degree and informal all other learning, to include non-accredited government programmes. Separating the terms, nonetheless can distort the picture of learning as formal and informal are generally combined and balanced according to each learning situation (Colley, et al., 2004).

To that end, defining professional learning and how it happens is complex. Houle (1988) believes it is process-driven improvement that can happen in groups or for individuals. To add to the convoluted, ‘professional learning’, the term, is a non-specific idiom that has many associated terms:

- vocational training
- personalised learning
- professional development
- in-service education
- continuing education.

Through many States in America where professional learning is defined, reference is made to it being:

- systematic, on-going improvement
- knowledge and skill acquisition
- professional and organisational goal achievement

(Brundrett & Dering, 2006).

Professional Learning is a term that goes further than training, which used to 'be done' to teachers. It goes beyond development, which conjures images of being told how to do something correctly, incorporating the notion that someone else will do the developing for you. Professional learning is linked to mentoring, coaching, observation, and reflective practice. It embodies the notion of the learners directing and being responsible for their own learning. Professional learning has to be embedded in the work of the leader (Easton, 2008). Easton goes further to suggest educators have a responsibility to their students to become professional learners.

Professional learning includes working alongside staff in school-wide development programmes. It can be an all-encompassing term to describe a range of leadership learning opportunities. Bush and Glover's report, reviewing 130 articles and 16 books for the National College (Bush & Glover, 2003), outlines many of the above-mentioned approaches and methods for learning.

Tacit and explicit knowledge acquisitions are terms synonymous with informal and formal learning. Eraut (2000) uses the example of a teacher in a classroom. The teacher describing a pupil's ability accesses explicit knowledge, diagnostic data, but also a range of their own anecdotal observations or tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge we gather mostly in informal ways through watching and learning from one another. Whereas explicit knowledge, includes the entire range of printed and electronic media conveyed or distributed to others. Identifiable is that learning has to involve managing knowledge through formal and practical methods (Imel, 2003).

When defining professional learning the notions of ownership, collaboration and active learning have relevance. Action learning, mentoring and coaching are strongly associated with successful leadership, as are peer support, group networking and school based learning (Bush & Glover, 2003). Bush and Glover determine that leadership learning provides the platform from which principals lead others.



The debate around learning to support 21<sup>st</sup> Century school leaders and the best person to lead is only beginning to emerge as empirical research replaces anecdotal accounts. Research is establishing insight into actual practices and has identified that the key role for the leader is to improve instruction (Robinson, 2010; Robinson, et al., 2009). According to Elmore (2008), large scale school improvement requires an investment into the skills and knowledge of educational leaders.

### **3.3.2 Principals' professional learning**

Principals require professional learning that is explicit and connected to their needs (Kochran, et al., 2002). In particular, they need learning that is contextually based, emphasises real life problem solving to support leading and managing teachers and schools successfully (Bush & Glover, 2004; Lazaridou, 2009). According to Pierce (Fenwick & Pierce, 2002c; Pierce, 2000), the 21<sup>st</sup> century principal is being asked to do more and more. She believes if a governments' goal is to attract new principals or for current principals to remain in their jobs for longer, principals need to learn how to develop strong committed teams and distribute leadership. Southworth(Southworth, 2008) goes further to suggest working across schools, between schools, regionally and nationally; learning from each other's practices: a combination of external and collegial supported learning.

Principals are expected to be the leaders of organisational transformation (Bush & Glover, 2004). More so in decentralised environments. For example, in New Zealand and Finland the school leader is responsible for all that happens in the school from property to learning (Pont, et al., 2008). A trained teacher does not necessarily make a quality property manager. Principals therefore, require learning in some areas that is far more generalist.

Mohr and Evans's seven core beliefs provide a coherent and cohesive list of learning that works as a point of reference:

- Principals' learning is *personal* and yet takes place most effectively while working in groups

- Principals foster more powerful (teacher) and student learning by *focusing on their own learning*
- While we (value) principals' thinking and voices, we want to push them to *move beyond their assumptions*
- *Focused reflection* takes time away from "doing the work" and yet it is essential
- It takes strong leadership to have truly democratic learning
- Rigorous planning is necessary for *flexible and responsive* implementation
- New learning depends on "protected dissonance", a *safe environment* in which to take risks with ideas and ask tough questions (1999, p. 130).

For principals' learning to be successful there needs to be an interlinking of external support, intervention, and school to school interaction. Learning that is personalised, challenging, reflective, flexible, and safe.

Up until the year 2000 when the United Kingdom's National College for Leadership<sup>6</sup> was established, the United States of America, with predominately-graduate programmes was the indisputable leader in the field of principals' development. Importantly, in that era of change Dembowski (1998), posited two differing views of learning. Firstly that principals' skills are developed largely on an 'individual basis,' (p.6) and often not transferable. Secondly, that graduate school research is valuable in informing leaders and providing a strong knowledge base. The discourse around meaningful principals' professional learning being university based continues to be divided (M Brundrett & Dering, 2006; Gunter & Ribbins, 2002; Huber, 2004).

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<sup>6</sup> Briefly known as National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services 2009 - 2011

The assumption that mandated formalised professional learning supports principals to do their job more effectively, is yet to be proved (Davies & Ellison, 1997; Lashway, 2003b; Levine, 2005; J. Reeves, Forde, O'Brien, Smith, & Tomlinson, 2002). Nonetheless the concern remains that if principals only access informal learning within the school setting that this can be too inward looking and conservative (Thew, 2002). As well, centralised programmes open themselves to manipulation by government policy (Thrupp, 2005; Wright, 2001). Brundrett (2001) for instance, applauds the United States for building state requirements alongside university programmes. He believes decentralisation ensures levels of academic rigour are maintained. In saying that, an overhaul of graduate programmes is required to meet the practising principal's needs. Levine's belief is that universities are out of step with what is needed (Levine, 2005).

Despite the rhetoric for and against Master's level learning, the centralised model of the United Kingdom's National College for School Leadership is being attributed with improving systematically the work of school leaders and influencing international programmes (Bush & Glover, 2004; DfES, 2004; Southworth & Doughty, 2006; A. Walker & Dimmock, 2004). The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2003) identified between 70 and 75% of head teachers in England doing a fairly good job of meeting headship criteria. They attribute some of this to the incremental learning of principals centralised through NCSL.

Regardless of whether knowledge is delivered through a government programme or university accredited programme, the school principal requires professional learning to support strong pedagogical understanding in their organisation (Patuawa, 2007). Principals' learning links strongly to Day's premise that enhancing and improving teacher qualities is central to the principals' role (Day, et al., 2010).

Discerning what contributes to quality principals' learning is central to this review of the literature.

Lindeman was a true futurist when he wrote:

Small groups of aspiring adults who desire to keep their minds fresh and vigorous; who begin to learn by confronting pertinent situations; who dig down into the reservoirs of their experience before resorting to texts and secondary facts; who are led in the discussion by teachers who are also searchers after wisdom and not oracles: this constitutes the setting for adult education, the modern quest for life's meaning. (Lindeman, 1926, pp. 4-7)

His notion of experiential learning using discussion to disseminate practice resonates well with what principals say they need (Hill, Harvey, Harrison, & Clarke, 1999).

Professional learning is required to continuously focus on improvement (Evans & Mohr, 1999). As with double loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974), there has to be revisiting and checking, to see who, why and what impact? Praxis is another form of reviewing learning practices deemed successful when considering leadership learning (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). Both are forms of meta-learning; people learning about and reviewing their own learning. Meta-learning improves understanding through inquiry:

Needing to know, even when what you find out is something you think you didn't want to know. It means reserving judgement and being open to new ideas, gathering the necessary information, and questioning and challenging your own beliefs and perceptions (Stoll, et al., 2003, p. 165).

Stroud (Stroud, 2006) determined through his small-scale study in the United Kingdom that there is still a 'dearth of literature related to head teachers in general,' (p101). This is not just a United Kingdom phenomenon. According to Campbell (2003), who considered the American literature there is little reporting in her country on principals' identified learning needs.

Undoubtedly, the job of principal is too complex to learn from one explicitly defined set of competencies. Essentially a balance of explicit and tacit opportunities delivered in a manner that considers principals as time-poor adult learners is best.

### **3.3.3 Time to learn**

What encourages adult students to persist with learning, when sometimes the most basic things such as the demands of carrying out a job can overshadow the need to learn? Murphy (2007) like Gronn (2003), supports the notion that workload is an identifiable barrier to learning. A consequence of the 'busy-ness' of leaders is that many will come to learning opportunities at the end of the work-day feeling exhausted. Gronn makes explicit, that school leaders especially in countries such as New Zealand could easily feel time-deprived:

In their greedy work environments, educational leaders in self-managing schools, for example, especially principals, work at the kind of relentless, full-on, treadmill pace. Greedy work is such that it demands one be constantly and 'fully there' (Kahn, 1992): always attentive, alert, absorbed in and utterly committed to the particular task as a totally functioning, fully available, non-stop cognitive and emotional presence in the workplace.

(Gronn, 2003, pp. 148-149).

Issues raised around work overload stem from balancing teaching and managing aspects of the principals' role. Most principals feel they spend too much time on management rather than leadership, and that the job has become more stressful (Wylie & Hogden, 2005), which does not bode well for finding more time to learn. Nonetheless, in a role where high performance is an expectation a principal has to understand and be able to manage associated stress.

The issue therefore is how school principals are taught to cope with the ever present issues of time-management and stress (Andreyko, 2010), which could include delegating tasks from their job.

Distributed, shared, or possibly dual leadership are perceived as possible ways to decrease workload and make the job of principal seem more do-able (Court, 2003b; Harris & Spillane, 2008). Macpherson sees spreading the task load as a way forward for New Zealand principals (Macpherson, 2010a). The

status quo is not an option. Change in the way schools are led is inevitable to support leaders cope with their comparable higher task load (OECD, 2007).

Specialist people have much to learn from each other, to include school principals, who should be encouraged to purview better ways to do their job. Business people are especially receptive to using consultants to support them achieve their outcomes. It seems imminently sensible that any person expecting to reach peak performance, needs to be well grounded in techniques to harness positive stress and develop their attention and focus capabilities (Carnahan, 1981).

Surgeons working to save lives describe the importance of camaraderie, endurance and flexibility required of them when operating. High performers whether they be lawyers, surgeons, managers, sports-people or principals, typically must be “reasonably bright, physically fit and have a sense of calling” (Hays & Brown, 2004, p. 47). Physical fitness can be taught, as can cognitive forms of mental imagery that are currently “associated with motivational aspects of behaviour or self-efficacy beliefs” (Giacobbi, Tuccitto, Buman, & Munroe-Chandler, 2010, p. 491).

Brown and Hay have a range of recommendations to assist high performers; many have relevance to the school leader:

- Education to address specific concerns
- Mental skill training - such as attention focussing
- Technical information inter- group and interpersonal skill development
- Assessment and feedback on performance
- Support and career guidance.

Adults experiencing stress through lack of time is not uncommon. Still, time to learn is created through understanding and creating personal space that recognise the importance of being a learner (Barth, 1990a). Creative and strategic leaders who understand the importance of learning will make their learning a reality.

Making time and sourcing learning are closely linked in the adult learning literature. Moreover, recognising principals as adult learners provides insight into what motivates them to learn. Knowing the adult learner involves identifying their “situational” influences, that is what is happening in their life, their time frames; the institutional influences or impact of the system they work in and of utmost importance the person’s experience (Comings, 2007, p. 31). All are contributing factors to accomplishment, or failure for the learner.

### **3.3.4 Principals as adult learners**

Adults learn through processes supporting meaning and knowledge construction, participation and active reflection (Lambert, 1995). The methods by which adults learn have been defined by a myriad of authors (Houle, 1992; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). In as much as this definition by Houle (Houle, 1996, p. 41) is clearly bound by his own philosophical beliefs, it is central to understanding how learning happens for adults:

Adult education is the process by which men and women (alone, in groups, or in institutional settings) seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill, knowledge or sensitiveness; or it is any process by which individuals, groups or institutions try to help men and women improve in these ways. The fundamental system of practice of the field, if it has one, must be discerned by probing beneath many different surface realities to identify a basic unity of process.

Learning, according to Houle, is process-driven improvement that can happen in groups or for individuals.

Adults do not learn in isolation. Learning is a complex interaction between the adult and their world. Learners are both independent and interdependent (Bee & Bjorklund, 2000). Adults as learners,

require empowerment, a say in determining their learning. Motivated adult learners need to feel safe to share their ideas. As well, Ashubel's acquisition of knowledge theory (2000) proposes that learning is more meaningful when it is scaffolded by past experience.

The State of Victoria in Australia has helped to advance thinking around role definition and scaffolding of principals' learning (OGSE, 2007). Their learning framework is aligned closely to Hallinger's 'Critical to Future Leadership Preparation and Development' list (Hallinger, 2003, p. 290):

- Evolve from passive to active learning
- Create system solutions that connect training to practice
- Create effective transitions into the leadership role
- Evaluate leadership preparation and development
- Develop and validate an indigenous knowledge base across cultures
- Create a research and development role for universities

Leach (2011) along with Lambert (1995) encourages us to view all learning as a way of making meaning, which is a constructivist view. Knowledge is not imposed it is jointly constructed. Learning comes from practise and socialisation and does not link to any formal curriculum (Colley, et al., 2004; Eraut, 2000; Knight, 2006). No one method has been determined as being better than others. There are nonetheless, identifiable traits and behaviours that adult learners exhibit.

The Bush and Glover (2004) evidence created for NCSL, the Sandler (2002) study of 426 global organisations and the study by Thompson, Storey, Grey & Iles (2001) of organisations' business leadership data, all show similar trends. In each study, the five top-ranked methods for development, based on perceived effectiveness, identified that formal training alone is the least effective. Tough (1979) and Houle (1988) describe learning for pleasure, goal centred or



qualification learning and working alongside colleagues as adult intrinsic motivators. Balanced formal and informal learning opportunities fit with the dimensions.

Findsen (2002) believes learning calls for more than thinking and understanding, it should transform what we do. Transformative learning is when a person challenges their own beliefs and considers how to make positive changes to their world and how they live in it. His guidelines for a transformative framework provide a plausible set of guidelines to those providing learning for adults:

- Knowledge is not imposed; it is jointly constructed.
- Increased responsibility needs to be taken by the learner with less dependence on the teacher to interpret their world for them.
- Teachers and learners are co-learners operating with mutual respect
- Learning is not done to learners but is a process and a result of what learners do for themselves
- The teacher encourages choice and decision making by the learner
- Responsibility and freedom are primarily in the hands of the learner with the teacher at times intervening (P.181).

These are challenging ideas from Findsen, in particular his notion that learning is what learners do for themselves. Personal motivation and a desire to persevere are implicit, as is the notion that each adult learner has a set of values, beliefs and established prejudices that they bring to their learning (Rogers, 1996). The way a school leader responds to prior knowledge, can also strongly affect their learning experience positively or negatively (Cuban, 2003).

The evidence to date suggests if an adult student is motivated, persistent, supported, and is in a situation where self-study is an option, they are more likely to succeed (Beder, 1990; Cuban & Comings, 2002; Meder, 2000; Quigley, 2000). It is also recommended that learners learn best, when

they learn for a purpose and practise with authentic tasks (Pressley & McCormick, 1995). Motivation and persistence are two aspects of principals' professional learning that require further enquiry.

To motivate adult learners requires providing a range of choices about what, how, and when to learn. Adults need to be encouraged and provided with methods to take responsibility for their own learning. Motivation of adult learners requires learners taking responsibility for their own learning (Entwistle, 1998; Wlodkowski, 1999). Learning does not happen in isolation. People and circumstances are key determinants (Zepke, et al., 2003). The post-modern view is that learners have many other roles and multiple responsibilities beyond just being a learner.

### **3.3.5 Traits of motivation and persistence relevant to principals**

Murphy (2007) outlines what might better motivate school leaders to go further in their learning:

Design materials that are highly relevant to the programme objectives and that promote the engagement of busy professional educators. Draw upon their experiences, motivations, and interests and treat what they bring to the learning experience as a central resource. Make sure that opportunities are included early on for starting to build robust supportive relationships between everyone involved in the programme. Think about how the participants will be feeling, as well as what you want them to learn (p. 5).

The Australian Hill, Harvey, Harrison & Clarke (1999), study carried out by Edith Cowan University determined seven factors that influenced primary school leader motivation to learn:

1. Assisting teachers to be more effective
2. The desire to understand student learning
3. The opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues
4. School level issues

5. Sharing ways of meeting present issues
6. Personal reflection on my work
7. Evaluating one's own performance.

The first three reasons relating to learning that supports people and relationships are recurring themes. Thus far, understanding context, people and influencing change cannot necessarily be taught solely through a formal model of learning (Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992; Elmore, 2003; Rogers, 2002; Waters, et al., 2003). The need for balanced informal and formal learning is supported repeatedly.

To remain motivated learners, school leaders need learning that supports building resilience, flexibility, and self-efficacy. To build resilience over time requires:

- Appropriate levels of stretch and challenge in the role and the targets set
- Increasingly ambitious goals over time
- Development of the size, complexity, and scope of the school
- Funded and appropriately chosen professional development opportunities
- Participation in networks and collaboration with peers
- Positive feedback on achievement against goals (from Boards or external agencies)
- Opportunities for coaching and mentoring from respected peers.
- Contact with and learning from leaders and professionals in other sectors

(Hartle, Stein, Hobby, & O'Sullivan, 2007, p. 23).

Townsend (1999) identifies that learning is cumulative, unique and idiosyncratic. She describes how the principals' personal characteristics and lifelong learning intersects with the needs of the school and community environment. Connecting community and leader's needs creates a dynamic zone.

Identification of need, Townsend identifies "as the single most important element" (p. 9), in

educational leadership learning. Ideally, to ensure learning is perceived as meaningful, programmes should be constructed around identified core needs.

### **3.3.6 Determining meaningfulness**

Learning is about developing connectedness. Meaningful learning practices therefore need tailoring to individuals within their own context. Meaningful learning also clearly requires a balance of instructional-type learning, a focus on students and a range of cooperative learning opportunities (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2007; Wong, 2004), and components of personal choice as to what is to be learned and how?

The professional learning for current and future school leaders is an international phenomenon (Huber, 2004). Work-based action learning, mentoring, coaching, diagnostics, and portfolios are all advocated as successful development methods. More importantly, emphasising real life problem solving with support from peers would help school leaders at all career levels to consider multiple consequences and solutions (Lazaridou, 2009; Zepke, et al., 2003). Initially, however, principals primarily want to build their knowledge around the practicalities of principalship. They want learning that is focussed on relational issues, instructional supervision methods, and basic administrative functions.

The Walker, Mitchell and Turner study (1999) linked eight universities with eight cohorts of aspiring and in-the-role principals. They found the needs and expectations of each cohort group kept changing. They further determined that although the groups enjoyed the support and collaboration of a cohort at times there was a discrepancy between what they learned and what they needed to learn.

Arguably, the challenge for organisations delivering development programmes is meeting the needs of individualised, contextualised leader's learning and ensuring academic rigour.

The findings suggest convergent views among researchers. Pedagogical leadership-learning based on developing and some deem improving curriculum and learning outcomes, most

meaningful. Others value transactional leadership-learning which has a more managerialist focus.

Meaningful principals' learning is inclusive, interactive, involves a broad curriculum, contextual, problem based and incremental. As well, Lambert and others (Blankstein, et al., 2009; Lambert, 2006) believe that principals at every stage need to build reflective time into their learning. Learning is meaningful when it is self-directed and self-initiated.

Learning has to provide stimulation; be motivating. Mentoring and learning facilitated by principals for principals are identified as success factors. Learning, reiterated, has to balance both tacit and explicit methods. Hughes and Beatty (2005) believe learning for leaders has to include, "understanding the wider environment, and complex interactions" (p. 11), and strongly suggest that learning cannot be left to chance, that schools needs organisational structures to ensure learning takes place. For example Board of Trustees in New Zealand, ensuring budgets allocate funds appropriate for principals' learning.

### **3.3.7 Informal Learning**

For this research, it is important to understand the concept of informal learning as many principals describe much of their learning happens on the job (Garcia-Garduno, et al., 2011; Gussgott, 2004; Thew, 2002). Learning outside formal, institutionally based education nonetheless is a "fledgling area of the adult education research literature" (Selwyn, Gorard, & Furlong, 2006, p. 3).

Previously generic notions of informal learning have traditionally been content to refer to informal learning as any type of non-formal education encompassing a wide range of non-credentialed but often structured forms of learning (Cullen, 2000). Emerging is an understanding that informal learning is all tacit learning or practical knowledge (Hager, 2000), which is more than simply being anything outside of formal adult education.

Hallinger and Heck (2003) believe priority attention to how leaders can be developed could make a positive difference to them, their schools and their students. Learning based on a broad curriculum encourages expansive-thinking leaders. A comment from this research was that the study of 'thinking' would enhance any principal learning programme (Ewen). Furthermore, learning that encourages leaders to share ideas and plans supports mutual learning (Bush & Jackson, 2002b). In Di Paola and Tschannen-Moran's (2003) study participating principals believed that being a teacher and having time as an assistant principal, the notion of sharing skills incrementally, is most important in principalship preparation.

The study of Perth principals (Hill, et al., 1999) emphasised learning through work, personal reflection and the need for principals to take responsibility for their learning. Deputy Principals included in the study, identified that acting in the role was highly beneficial learning. The participants' additional written comments stressed learning was best when it was "tailored to their particular needs" (p.42).

Neufield (1997), Aitken (1992) and Marnik (1997) believe learning has to be on-going, based on trusted relationships. As Neufield says, "learning from one-off courses fades surprisingly quickly with little or no real benefit" (p. 39). Neufield supports principals' trialling and discussing with colleagues what they are doing. Gusky (1997) and Sparks and Hirsch (1997) also advocate job-embedded professional learning.

Duignan (2004) suggests a selective focus on instruction, context, and provision to link to hands-on experiences is most effective. An emerging notion is that learning does not finish on appointment: it evolves. Emerging also, that "successful principal training programmes are significantly different from the majority of programmes in existence" (Mitgang, 2008, p. 5). In part, this is confirmed by the evolving nature of NCSL's programmes, which are credited with influencing emerging programmes

such as the Blue Line series delivered through the Hong Kong Centre for the Development of Educational Leaders.

One of the programmes, 'Blue Skies for Beginning Principals,' has drawn on "the best from overseas to create a holistic coherent" and incremental "approach to leadership" to include university accreditation and contextualised supported learning (Walker & Dimmock, 2006, p.125) . The range of Blue Line programmes are continuously being modified and since 2005 have extended to include aspiring, beginning, middle and experienced leader programmes. They use a blended learning approach. Learning linked to a leader's own context underpins the programmes.

As well, in Walker's Hong Kong model there is substantial involvement of experienced and trained principals in mentoring, sharing, observing and questioning of leaders. Mentors complete a professional diploma in mentoring before being accepted to coach beginning principals. Using mentors, the learning programmes provide opportunities for reflection, sharing and questioning.

A third strength of the Blue Line programmes is that prior knowledge and experience are recognised. Cohort bonding developed across school and across experience provides broad networking opportunities (Walker & Qian,2006) .The model of best practice leadership development that, includes generic features and principles of design was drawn from the NCSL research (Bush & Jackson, 2002a). This supports further the notion that internationally programmes have like components and countries are building on other's best practices.

Researchers, from the United Kingdom's National College visited leadership-learning centres in Australia (New South Wales and Victoria), Ontario in Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, Sweden, and USA (Chicago, North Carolina, Ohio, and Pittsburgh). The College's findings around learning opportunities included:

- Almost all the centres operated programmes for aspiring principals

- Most courses focus on leadership and incorporated consideration of the main task areas, such as human resources and professional development, finance, curriculum and external relations
- Mentoring is well established as an important feature of leadership development in several countries, including the United States (Daresh, 2004) and Singapore (Bush & Chew, 1999)

(Bush & Jackson, 2002b, pp. 420-425).

Brundrett (2001) supports programme based learning, such as Blue Skies, which combine formal with informal opportunities as opposed to practice based learning only. Programme based learning provides problem based methods, which Brundrett believes could allow for identified school leaders growing expertise outside of a succession or apprenticeship models.

Nonetheless, the apprenticeship model is still prevalent in many countries including the United States. The notion of an apprenticeship model fits with practice-based learning and the understanding that learning is best within context. The idea of learning in the job is supported by New Zealand academics (Patuawa, 2007; Robinson, 2007) , but needs to go further to include a qualification pathway (Thew, 2002).

### **3.3.8 Formal learning**

Regulatory qualifications, such as master's degrees in Canada and Finland and mandated pre-principalship qualifications in USA, Canada, Britain and Hong Kong have become the norm (West-Burnham, 2004), but not so in New Zealand and Australia. Formally required qualifications still have not been presented as a New Zealand option despite suggestions to do so (ERO, 1996, 2001).

Moreover, there is no agreement on what constitutes the most meaningful credentialed learning; university based or government programme qualifications, for example, the National Professional Qualification for Headship or a Master's Degree in Educational Administration. Brundrett (2001)



believes that any leadership development programme should be developed in partnership between state regulatory authorities, universities and schools. In Cardno's (2003) research, mandatory pre qualifications were determined necessary but the level of qualification could not be agreed on. Likewise Thew's research (2002) recommends mandatory national pre-service qualifications but does not go so far as to say it how it should be delivered.

Ribbins (2002) suggests principal development programmes lack the critical examination of empirical research and as such provide only a subjective reality of what they are achieving. Subsequently, despite principals agreeing that they need to be more effectively prepared for their jobs, they cannot define what that means beyond their own needs. Bush and Jackson (2002b) contend more coherence and greater integration is required. Reeves, makes a case for leadership practices being taught and learned but comments that it is, "conceit to equate educational training with influencing professional practices" (2008, p. 11). He believes that meaningful learning occurs when it is embedded within the context of the learner's school.

Murphy (2007) identifies another disconnect, the technical knowledge incongruity between what universities offer and what principals need to be able to do. In short, the primary concern is that there is an identifiable narrow-mindedness in universities current instructional focus.

Furthermore, Elmore (2002) believes there is insufficient consensus in the literature concerning effective professional development to support any large scale reform, university based or government delivered.

This second theme identifies that principals require a range of learning opportunities. The conundrum is that there is not conclusive data, nor universal theory describing whether informal or formal principals' learning is more meaningful; nor which is more effective in influencing the principal in the role. Nonetheless, despite new directions developing within educational research;

the inductive, naturalistic studies of principals' practice to provide insight into the real work of school leaders continues to be a gap (Patuawa, 2007).

### **Theme 3.4 : Optimising Learning: A focus on early and experienced principalship**

Thew, from his study of Auckland practitioners, makes several recommendations regarding professional development:

That the leadership component of development programmes should recognise and develop each principal's philosophical understanding of leadership rather than promote forms of best practice. Professional development programmes should be funded and provide salary incentives. They need to develop to individuals' needs and understanding (Thew, 2002, p. 255).

Brundrett (2001) found evidenced in the literature the tensions surrounding principal training and development are multi-layered. Leadership is highly contextualised ( Leithwood,2006;Southworth, 2008) . Optimising learning must therefore involve understanding of the importance of context, learning timeliness, and the influence of maturation in the role.

#### **3.4.1 The importance of context**

Researchers are consistent in their belief that leadership learning is influenced by context (Southworth, 1995a; West-Burnham, 2004). Similarly, Bush and Glover (2004) believe that any leadership development should be based within the leaders' own schools and recognise their individual needs. Hellner (2004) agrees that it is logical for principals to practise and apply successful actions or responses to given situations.

Principalship is "dynamic and situational" (Duignan, 2004, p. 6). What works in one situation may not work in another (Walker & Dimmock,2008).

Campbell's thesis (2003), an in-depth study of five principals' learning in the USA, hypothesised that for learning to be meaningful it had to be contextually based. Neufield's (1997) study of 42 middle school urban principals consistently identified understanding the context and conditions of practice as a core requirement. In Allison's research (1996) principals prioritised their needs as:

- specifics – that is, dealing with the nuts and bolts of their own school
- relationships, in their environment
- philosophical issues such as “creating a climate for change” (p. 25).

Hausman, Crow and Sperry (2000) assert there is no single style of principal to suit any school, believing that context influences demands on time, possibilities for reform and other constraints. The notion that “differences in socio economic status can affect the expectations of how a principal are supposed to behave” is expressed (p. 6). They describe how the teachers influence principals' work, for example, new staff might require greater directiveness. As well, in schools with social deprivation the principal may well spend greater time with “social service organisations” (p. 7).

Hallinger and Heck (1998) describe a leader's needs changing with context, large and small schools, high school and primary have different organisational and coordination needs. Gordon and Patterson (2006) in their research determine that leadership is about negotiations between all the various stakeholders which creates a sense of community with identified goals. It could be assumed then that leaders will better identify with some community goals over others.

Additionally it is acknowledged that a principal with thirty years of experience in possibly more than one setting will be quite different in their leadership in any context, to a beginning principal (Hausman, et al., 2000).

### **3.4.2 Learning maturation**

Whilst there is no consensus that learning needs require differentiation based on maturation (Southworth, 1995a) there are nonetheless, emerging issues supporting learning that specifically address experience levels. Weindling's (2003) study established that a distinction must be made between taking on a new leadership role and being experienced in the role. The view that there are career phases linked to years of service was confirmed by the Perth study (Hill, et al., 1999) and the work of others (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Kedian, 2004; Woods, 2002).

The challenge to understanding principalship, as argued by Braukmann and Pashiardis (2009), is in identifying and effectively evaluating the different career stages. Pashiardis believes, supported by Wiendling and Dimmock (2006), that greater coherence between defining and evaluating the needs of the role at various stages, might in turn support the induction, role socialisation and transition through typical stages of principalship learning. Southworth believes aligning learning to maturation in the role as too simplistic, He (1995a) argues:

The idea of head teacher maturation warrants close examination. At present, the idea of phases of headship is notional. It is unclear whether head teacher development occurs because of time in post, experience of different schools and/or life circumstances. Nor is it understood how professional development opportunities influence head teacher development. There is much to investigate here (p. 219).

Maturation and the requisite learning linked to time in the job warrants further exploration.

### **3.4.3 Phases of learning**

Day (2007), however, supports the notion that principals go through development phases and that different phases of headship generate different needs. He characterizes the 'initiation phase' or early learning phase as one of idealism and uncertainty. Various other authors (Day & Bakioglu, 1996;

Kedian, 2002; Woods, 2002) researched the career lives of principals and have divided experience into similar phases of learning. Day and Bakioglu (1996) define them as:

- Initiation
- Development
- Autonomy
- Dis-enchantment

Woods (2002) distinguishes three phases only, which include an initiation stage which lasts three to four years followed by the developmental phase, then, at around ten years, the principal's move into a decline and withdrawal phase unless re-energised. The National College for Leadership support Wood's premise with its development of courses for those who could become disenchanting. The Local Leader and National Leader programmes develop highly skilled and experienced mentors from long serving leaders to support head teachers or schools in difficulty. The idea of supporting or innovating provides stimulus to this group of experienced heads.

Ribbins (2003) proposes a four-stage model. His first stage is formation, the initial shaping phase determined through one's own social and educational history. The second is accession where headship is achieved. The third is incumbency or enacting and the final stage, moving on and leaving headship.

Kedian (2004) sees initiation as the first three years and the development phase between four to seven years. It is the development phase, where he believes principals recall making the most progress. Full mastery of the job is evidenced between eight to ten years. Nonetheless, there is yet no "universally agreed, unequivocal consensus on a stage theory of leadership" (Dimmock, 2003, p. 8).

The stages of leadership predominantly cover three very broad phases. They are referred to in various definitions by Brooking, (2007) and adopted by the New Zealand's Ministry of Education in 2006 as aspiring, beginning, and experienced principalship phases. This was modified in 2010 using a leadership continuum of: learning, developing and leading and improving (MOE, 2010).

Ribbins believes identifying stages of principalship is central to designing preparatory and succession strategies. Then again, it is problematical grouping principals by service alone as each principal brings different levels of experience to the role. Ribbins (2003) further reminds us that not all principals progress to the final stage. Day (2003) shares that there are three lessons that can be learnt from the stage development theory.

They are:

1. Development is uneven, discontinuous, and unpredictable
2. The capacity to engage in critical reflection is vital to growth
3. Reflection itself as a learning process is subject to 'incremental fluctuation' (p.35).

Despite unanimity, time in the job is seemingly a key determinant on learning needs. Most early career leaders are unable to focus on being transformative or innovative, as they are generally learning the job. Even so, it is important to highlight that there is no agreement around early career leaders being at the same place in time and need. Southworth (1995a) believes the notion is too simplistic. Prior study and prior mentoring impact directly on capability. The problem this thesis seeks to understand is how to best meet individualised learning needs.

#### **3.4.4 Pre- principalship**

Preceding principalship there are concerns that learning is often out of touch with the reality of the role, (Farkas, et al., 2001). Preparation programmes are not adequately preparing teachers to be principals who can face the challenges that will be required of them (Day, 2003). For instance, a

programme on its own struggles to address the real-life situations in which principals find themselves. Chapman (2005) in her findings of related research suggests there is a need for a range of admission procedures to principalship:

- Presentation of an education platform and a career goal statement to judge an applicant's visioning skill, ethical stance, and writing ability;
- previous experience as an instructional or collaborative leader presented through resumes; and
- group problem-solving and assessment activities to provide evidence of candidates' skills in communication, analysis, and collaboration. (p.13)

This could perhaps support New Zealand's Boards of Trustees who have no such procedures to determine capability when employing a beginning principal.

Browne-Ferrigno (2003) strongly supports experiential learning as a core element of principal preparation and early learning. Early career learning requires a balance of instructional type learning, a focus on students and a range of cooperative learning opportunities (Wong, 2004). Hess (2005) believes there is a serious lack of consideration to developing aspiring principals into the management role. There is a failure to teach the array of skills required. As well, Daresh and Male (2001) comment that the programmes being developed, although well intentioned, need flexibility if they are to face and meet the needs and the challenges of an "unforeseeable future"(P.10).

#### **3.4.5 Early career principalship**

Michael and Young (2006) believe that effective principals' learning for appointed principals in the first years of their career should involve simulations, case study work, and critique to augment theoretical learning. Mentoring and networking help mitigate stress and isolation and, the use of seasoned

administrators to design and deliver meaningful professional development to new leaders enhances early experiences.

Hill (1999) found, “primary school leaders who had been recently appointed (with 0-2yrs’ experience) placed highest value on peer-assisted forms of learning such as mentoring, peer coaching and work shadowing. As well, Day (2003) determines professional learning programmes for novice principals need to be trans-disciplinary and to include aspects of leadership and management. Not articulated is the importance or lack of influence of the principal worked with prior to a leadership appointment. In a succession or apprentice model as identified through this research findings this would seem important.

Duignan (2004) calls for school leaders with broad awareness of metaphysical issues. He states that any early leadership development programme should include:

An understanding and appreciation of values, ethics, spirituality, art and great literature, including poetry, as well as habits of critical reflection on key issues of the day, can be important resources for leader formation programs (p. 23).

Reflecting on this researcher’s experience early career leaders might suggest they do not have time for spiritual pursuits.

The notion of feeling like an impostor or fraud in the job is raised. Beatty (2000, 2006) supports explicit teaching to learn emotional resilience and build self-well-being. Kochran and Riehl (2002), support principals’ learning that is explicit and connected to the needs at the time to promote a locus of control and ensure the leader feels informed.

The number of courses being developed internationally for early career leaders is well reflected in the curriculum for the New Zealand’s First Time Principals’ programme. Weindling’s’ report (2003) which examined global induction programmes selected four as quality case studies:



- New Zealand's, First Time Principal Programme;
- The Australian Principal Centre (APC), Victoria, SAGE Principal Mentor Programme;
- Georgia State University, Academy for New Principals;
- Prince George County, Beginning Principals Mentoring Program

In general, the programmes worked with early career leaders from six months to two years. The content was based on future potential challenges, building of leadership competencies to deal with challenges, and skills for self-development. A common belief underpinning the programmes was that principals have an articulated sense of purpose. All programmes supported developing school-based action plans. Mentoring and strong induction were identified as key to any new principalship role, in particular using experienced principals to facilitate the learning.

### **3.4.6 Experienced Phase**

Woods (2002) identifies that the driving forces for long-serving principals learning are relationships with the children and school pride. Woods believes that motivated, experienced principals, as well, expend energy growing and developing teachers into leadership roles.

Experienced leaders cope with strategic planning, culture change and a focus on improving learning outcomes (Kedian, 2002). The experienced leaders value the people around them and often model those values. Young leaders learn the importance of people in an organisation through experienced leaders. Woods describes the enchanted heads, a descriptor for long serving leaders, as people who have an, "appreciation of the privileged position they have earned as the head teacher," (p.13).

Experienced leaders often seek opportunities for school improvement; hence, they tend to be knowledgeable change agents and seek learning to support change. Stroud's research (2005, 2006) interviewing experienced principals identified concerns about mundane tasking and competency

based learning. Experienced principals want to be able to shape learning to their school's needs. They do not want short courses; they seek challenge.

Principals attending the learning programme for experienced New Zealand school leaders established that group dialogue and group analysis of issues regenerated their thinking. The ethos of learning, 'for principals, by principals' – learning from peers and facilitated by principal colleagues was perceived as meaningful (Leadspace, 2007). The notion that experienced leaders working with others stimulates their learning, provides direction to the policy and course creators.

### **3.5 Theme 4: Principals' learning challenges and tensions**

Starratt (2004) believes principals have to be able to demonstrate both professional and moral competencies. Managing people is a core requirement. Knowing where and how to access information and to manage improvement too are core-learning needs. As identified previously, there are worldwide similarities to programme development for principals' learning. Nonetheless, evaluation of the impact on a principal's effectiveness is limited. Understanding the barriers to a principal's learning informs future possibilities.

#### **3.5.1 Tensions**

A major challenge for principals is managing systemic change, implementing new tools and new ways of doing and thinking (Lashway, 2003b). Fullan (2001) describes this learning as the "fit between the innovation and needs of the school" (p. 75).

Worldwide, researchers seek to understand how first time principals can be effective leaders from their first day in a school. Patuawa (2007, p. 22) identifies a raft of potential barriers specific to the success of early career principals. Her tension analysis includes "professional isolation" and the, "legacy of the school's previous principal." She sees as challenging, budgetary issues, dealing with

ineffective staff and site management. She itemises educational law, consultation and school image development as all being potential elements of learning.

A major shift since the 1980s has been in improving leaders’ pedagogical understanding and improving overall school effectiveness (Robinson, 2010). Teach the right people to be the principals is Mitgang’s advice (2008); “Pick the right school leader and teachers will come and stay.” The “wrong leader attracts mediocrity which in turn leads to school decline” (p. 30). Southworth (2008) believes learning has to go beyond one method; that professional learning in its broadest sense ensures knowledgeable and capable future leaders.

Following on Table 3, (pp. 106 -107) identifies the tensions that have been raised through this chapter as well as identified possible solutions. Table 3 clarifies that the role and the solutions are complex, needing to respond to contextual elements, individual skill sets and professional journey of principals.

**Table 3 Contradictions in the literature and potential solutions**

Contradiction/Divergence identified through research	Sample of Researchers identifying the tension	Possible solutions
Over work /high stress. Principal’s role not attractive to younger teachers.	(Gronn, 2003; Roberson, Schweinle, & Styron, 2003; Wylie & Hogden, 2005; Zellner, Jinkins, & Gideon, 2002)	Fitness, mental imaging, coaching, re-conceptualising the role; concepts of distributive leadership; teamwork.
An aging population of principals- issues of succession planning	(Blankstein, et al., 2009; Brooking, 2008; Bush & Glover, 2004; Bush & Jackson, 2002b; Fenwick & Pierce, 2002b; Harris, 2004; C. Mitchell, 2010; Mitgang, 2008)	Distributed leadership and incremental- steps leadership programmes

<p><b><u>Table 3 continued</u></b></p> <p>Principals need to understand transformational, transactional, and pedagogical theory.</p>	<p>(Lambert, 2003; Leithwood, et al., 2006; Ribbins &amp; Gunter, 2002; Robinson, et al., 2009; Southworth, 1995a; Thew, 2002; West-Burnham, 2004)</p>	<p>Programme based learning. Principals developed in reflective practices, networking, on-going learning, in-depth curriculum knowledge, pedagogical leadership and interpersonal skills, fully conversant with change management strategies</p>
<p>Stages of principal learning recognised and programmes developed appropriately</p>	<p>(Coles &amp; Southworth, 2004; Day, 2003; Gussgott, 2004; Huber, 2004; Stroud, 2006; A. Walker &amp; Dimmock, 2006; Woods, 2002)</p>	<p>Government and university programmes directed at phases of learning early, mid and experienced</p>
<p>NZ copycatting overseas policy Need contextualised leadership learning</p>	<p>(Bottery, 2006; Cardno, 2003; Court, 2003b; OECD, 2007; Patuawa, 2007; Thrupp, 2004)</p>	<p>Empirical New Zealand research.</p>
<p>Adult learner issues of persistence, motivation work life balance</p>	<p>(Cuban &amp; Comings, 2002; Hays &amp; Brown, 2004; Zepke, et al., 2003)</p>	<p>Programmes to include school based, peer supported and academic learning that is timely and accessible.</p>

People, supplier diversity, a level of rigour in learning and shared leadership are further challenges identified in this chapter. This researcher asserts that understanding the barriers to principals learning decreases their influence on effectiveness, hence the examination of the challenges.

### **3.5.2 The challenge to focus on people**

No matter how good a leader’s pedagogical application, or implementation of transformational theory, if the school does not have strong relational skills such as trust, collective commitment, and aspects of risk taking the learning impact is limited (Robinson, et al., 2009).

Bhindi (2008) and Sergiovanni (2005) note that prospective schools leaders need to know how to hold onto the school’s social covenant of loyalty, fidelity, obligation, duty, responsibility and reciprocity.

Both researchers suggest school leadership needs to move back to prioritising people-work over rules and paper obsessions.

The concern this raises is that academic study alone does not teach people skills. Fullan (2001) describes leadership as moving beyond solving problems to the empowerment of people. He espouses a need to create a succession of many leaders if long-term leadership sustainability is to be achieved.

### **3.5.3 Distributed Leadership**

There are proliferations of models to describe leadership. The traditional model involves a senior team of principal and deputy principal as key decision makers. The distributed model of leadership sees a flattened management system (Gronn, 2003) although it has been argued this is just another name for delegated leadership (Harris, 2004). Shared leadership on a continuum described by Kagan (1994) and reviewed by Court (2003a) helps when considering the different forms of leadership.

**Figure 3 A Continuum of Leadership**



(Kagan, 1994)

At one end of the spectrum is sole leadership, where the person leads alone. Supported leaders seek out people to support their role but remain decision-maker and power holder. Co-leadership is two people sharing the role, termed dual leadership or partnership leadership. Shared leadership is the move to distributing leadership. Harris and Chapman (2002) distinguish devolved, dispersed and democratic leadership as being different to delegated or task allocated leadership. Of interest when

considering Figure 3 is: which mode is natural for school leaders? Kagan does not differentiate between the possibilities of one method being better than another.

Court (2003a) identifies that, “distributed leadership is rapidly becoming a buzz phrase in education” despite quoting Gronn’s literature search (2002) as not finding “ many examples of what it looks like in schools”(p.6). Nonetheless, Gronn, Harris and Spillane (2008), depict the concept of distributed leadership as a way to think about and analyse school leadership and management. By removing the principal from a sole leadership position, greater staff synergy and collaboration can result (Gronn, 2002). Lashway (2003a) conceptualises distributed leadership as a way of weaving together people, materials and organisational structures for a common cause. Elmore describes it as ‘organisational glue’ (Elmore, 2002). What then becomes important in this model of leadership, are the relationships and the influences individuals and groups have on one another.

Alma Harris (2004) summarises that, for distributed leadership to succeed, the school principal has to have a very good understanding of relationships and understand reciprocal learning processes that allow for sharing. The implication from the current school improvement literature is that “distributed leadership helps schools build institutional capacity” (p. 256). As well, distributing roles across an organisation develops learning pathways for future principals.

Spillane’s (2004) initial foray into distributed leadership found it was best to think of distributed leadership as a “ diagnostic tool that principals and others can use to think about the work of leadership (p.10). Spillane describes the need to distribute leadership across the school’s total context social and structural. An emerging theory of distributed leadership provides an understanding that leadership is grounded in the actions of the leader not the role of leader. Alma Harris makes clear that distributive leadership is very much dependent on the principal’s skill levels, and the strengths of the team (Harris, 2004).

Distributed leadership is another conceptual lens through which to consider schools. Harris believes effective models of distributed leadership are emerging; nevertheless, it is apparent there is still much to learn. There are questions still to be answered about the learning to distribute and action required by the persons distributed too. Is it taught by the universities, government providers or learned through in-school opportunities?

#### **3.5.4. Supplier diversity an increasing challenge**

According to Murphy and Vriesenga's (2004) review of research, 296 articles (1975-2002) of administrator preparation were published. They acknowledge the educational community still "know almost nothing about... preparation programs... where issues around teaching and learning and community are reshaping the profession" (p. 24). They support increased supplier diversity, beyond the domination of universities. When considering Levine's study (2005), where 47% of principals perceived their university preparation programmes "outdated" (p. 30), perhaps they are correct to applaud diversity. Brundrett (2006), despite his support of NCSL also supports the United States model of many providers. He says:

The intricate interrelationship between state and national governments, university academics and industrial organisations was preserved. .... The delicate balance has been preserved' (pp. 233-234)

Brundrett (2001; 2006) has documented extensively the development of leadership learning in the USA and Britain and concludes that school leadership courses should reflect individual context and explore the links between research, knowledge, and practice. Nonetheless, unsubstantiated is that the myriad of programmes being developed are leading to greater school and leader effectiveness (Brundrett, et al., 2006)..

Hansman (2001; Hansman & Wilson, 2002) posits that professional learning does not happen in the mind alone. Professionals learn within their own context, through the relationships they develop, by engagement in activities using the tools and resources available. Hansman is just one of many researchers who believes that contextual and unplanned learning is sometimes more powerful and authentic than planned-for learning. She discusses, like Southworth (1995b) that mentoring, networking and reflective practice as part of that informal or formal development supports principals to do their job.

Implicit in the discourse is the belief that, for school leaders to remain effective, they need to ensure on-going personal professional learning opportunities. The concern is not with who offers the learning but that the learning is a blend of activities. Gunter (2005) espouses a need to have the courage to develop innovative learning processes; that we need to be inventive and not be constrained by bureaucracy.

A further tension is that learning has to be outward seeking. Literature reviewed by Higgle brings into discussion how countries monitor the levels of rigour in principals' learning and work (Higgle, 2007). A difficulty arises when school-based development focuses schools inwardly and the lack of external impartiality can result in self-perpetuation of problems or failure to recognise they are problems at all. Thew (2002) agrees that some learning is too inward looking. His concern is with principals who do not access external development, settling only for in-school and personal network options, so that they can't be as good as they could be with a balanced learning curriculum, but perhaps this is too simplistic.

Despite limited data to date identifying the number of principals accessing international on-line learning and social networking opportunities, data would have us believe 62% of principals are social networking (ed.web.net, 2009). What is not identified is the success of this medium as a learning



tool. There is no doubt the on-line globalised learning options and the technologies to support these are increasing.

### **3.5.5 Considering the future**

Schools in the future are required to be strong professional learning communities where leaders' learning is embedded within the school culture. Professional development is imperative in educational reform and instructional improvement (Leithwood, et al., 2006). For professional development to have a prolonged effect, "it must be sustained, on-going, intensive and supported by modelling, coaching and the collective solving of specific problems of practice" (Elmore & Burney, 1999, p. 263).

The findings in this research focus on New Zealand principals, and aim to reaffirm Thew's findings that the tensions are multi-faceted; that professional learning needs to be broad-based and funded adequately, (Thew, 2002). Meeting individual needs and Boards of Trustees recognising principals' need for time to learn are some of the themes to be explored. Weindling and Dimmock (2006) remind us that this is not just a New Zealand problem: internationally, principals deserve better training and support to develop networks and learning opportunities that consider principals' individualised contexts.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

It is recognised there is no one style of leadership and no one way of leading. Nonetheless, 'principals have to have a say in what is done to them,' was the tenet put to principals when Stewart described how he felt school leaders best learn (Stewart, 2004). This is confirmed in the National College's report on current school leadership (NCSL, 2009, p. 106):

We believe that school leaders themselves should lead the way in developing school leaders and school leadership. They should develop local approaches that address the specific challenges of their local context.

This chapter has identified there are a recognised repertoire of identifiable basic leadership skills principals need. Successful leadership practices are recognisable across all types of schools. Principals who collaborate, adapt, explain, synthesise, model, personalise and localise are deemed more effective (NCSL, 2009). The learning that principals participate in, that supports successful practice, is not so clear.

Converging themes from the literature form the basis of this doctoral research. Meaningful pre-principalship learning requires both formal learning based on sound educational theory and informal learning to provide in-context leadership experience. Working with peers and mentors results in positive learning outcomes.

Learning at an early career stage, if it is to be meaningful, has to have an emphasis on real life/school problem solving using mentoring and group learning. Deputy Principals and senior leadership staff are ideally placed to move into principalship if their leadership is nurtured and developed. Learning at all career stages is deemed meaningful when it is contextually based and focussed on school improvement. The gaps in the literature addressed in the findings of this research are about optimising learning with consideration of context, adequate time for learning, and the influence of experience in the role. As well, to ensure future sustainability of new leaders there is a need to develop school based succession plans.

Elements of challenge, developing and motivation of experienced career-stage principals are recurrent themes. After ten years, principals have been described throughout the literature, as moving into an era of disillusionment. In this phase, principals are more likely to be motivated with a focus on strategic school-wide improvement.

What has been generalised is that principals are self-motivated and persistent learners who require a multi-faceted approach that considers prior learning. Up until the 1990s, outside of the United States, there was very little evidence of the need to train educational leaders. It is now accepted that on-going leadership pre- and in-service professional learning is important.

The contradictions in the literature relates to principalship skills, dispositions and knowledge assessment, and to the learning needs of principals at various stages of their career. There is some endorsement for standards. Equally, there is growing recognition of the need for the school leader to be focussed on pedagogical improvement. There is variable opinion as to whether principal learning should be from a common source or from diverse sources.

A review of the relevant literature has identified a number of important gaps:

- Stroud (2006) reports there is a 'dearth of literature' relating to the professional learning of experienced principals
- Preparation programmes are not adequately preparing teachers to be principals who are capable of facing the challenges that will be required of them (Day, 2003)
- Learning needs to be part of a coherent framework that is also focussed on making the job do-able (Caldwell, et al., 2003; Huber, 2004)
- There is a paucity of studies relating to mentoring for mid-career and experienced leaders and yet mentoring and reflective practices are both valued as meaningful for early-career principals (Smith, 2007)
- The influence of learning on principals' actions requires more in-depth research (Blandford & Squire, 2000)
- There are still many principals learning the role on the job. Some are saying this is not enough in today's leadership climate where accountability stakes are so high (Thew, 2002)

- Greater emphasis must be on understanding how to develop pedagogic leaders  
(Robinson, et al., 2009)

These aspects of divergence are too many for this thesis. However, the underlying theme is the research focus: namely meaningful professional learning, how to learn, learning needs over time, opportunities to learn and the why of learning.

Educational research is about looking for patterns and constructing a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon to be studied (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 2002). It is evident from the literature that much of what school leaders do is implicit. They base what they do on what they think is right or they learn through practice. This doctoral research into urban principals' professional learning in New Zealand, considers leadership beliefs and perceptions about what is implicit and what needs to be learned explicitly. The gaps and tensions in the literature are investigated through focus groups and individual interviews. The research desires to further understand how principals believe they best learn. Furthering knowledge through principals' voice makes a potential contribution to international literature.

# The Professional Learning of Urban N.Z. Primary Principals

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Methodology

*Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There can no longer be doubt that those seeking quality in education must ensure its presence and that the development of potential leaders must be given high priority.*

(Beare, Caldwell, & Millikan, 1992, p. 99)

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methods and justifies the researcher's choice of methodology. The need to understand what and how a group of urban principals thinks and acts about principals' learning directs the research to a qualitative case study design. Data analysed inductively are aimed at making sense of principals' personal learning theories, to provide insight into school leaders' professional learning experiences. The experiences are examined in light of the literature on professional and principals' learning. It was not the intention of this qualitative case study to evaluate any particular method or programme chosen to learn; Macpherson's work (Macpherson, 2008) has synthesised that well. The thesis, however, examines and interprets principals' perceptions of learning that supports their self-efficacy and actual practices of learning.

This chapter begins by identifying the philosophical perspective for the research, its interpretivist approach, and naturalistic theory paradigm. Naturalism provides an interpretive method for

determining the multiple interpretations of reality held, by in this case, individuals and groups of principals.

A broad discussion on qualitative research issues follows. Then the relevance of case study design and the use of embedded case studies are argued. The methods section follows, outlining both the data gathering and analysis processes. In conclusion, dependability, trustworthiness and the ethical aspects of the research are described.

#### **4.2 The philosophical perspective**

A paradigm, according to Kuhn (1970) provides an overarching concept under which the design of the research fits. It attempts to explain and interpret knowledge; the aspect where philosophical beliefs are considered and assumptions articulated (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Qualitative social inquiry fits within a naturalistic paradigm. Naturalism, used in this research design, seeks to understand principals' reality within their social context. For example, principals learning alongside teachers in their school, and with other principals in networks, learning by themselves and in groups, informally and formally.

To understand how and what principals learn requires building up an understanding of individuals' behaviour. The researcher, "entering into an empathic relationship with the participants to grasp what an experience means to them" (Clark, 1997, p. 34), gains this. My philosophical perspective is grounded in my current experience as a school principal, as a colleague of the participants, and a strong believer in personal development.

Naturalistic inquiry is based on the notion that people and their behaviours are directly linked to their environment. Furthermore, how each individual behaves is in part determined by his or her circumstances. Naturalism is about examining the unique experiences and knowledge people as individuals and as groups bring to a situation. Lincoln and Guba (1986), identify that sharing

perceptions and personal beliefs, in this case principals' learning, supports developing insights and hypotheses of phenomena. These insights can in turn inform theory or identify the need for further research.

My own learning, identified in Chapter One, began with a teaching diploma and no aspiration to principalship. I moved up through middle management, which created my need for knowledge. I embarked on my leadership pathway with a Diploma in Educational Administration, followed by a Diploma of School Management, then a Masters of Educational Administration. Technology was increasingly important to education so I completed a two-year Diploma in Educational Technology followed by seven years completing a Doctorate in Education. This evidences my belief in personal learning and my worldview, that knowledge is power.

Interest in educationalists' professional development provided impetus for the topic. The methodology is guided by the following fundamental questions: What is the most meaningful learning for principals? What informs their beliefs? What implications might such findings have for the development of current and future school leaders? My concern aligns with that of Stewart's (2005). He believes learning cannot be done to principals, that they have to be self-determining and have a say in their learning.

If we are to construct an understanding of when, how and why principals learn, Patton (2002) suggests we question the meaning, structure and the essence of experiences of the (phenomenon) professional learning for principals. From an ontological perspective, therefore this study accepts that all realities are "inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals" (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). Morrison (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000) states, "for interpretivists, reality is not out there as an amalgam of external phenomena waiting to be uncovered as facts, but a construct in which people understand reality in different ways" (p.18). The implications for this study are the

substantial amount of interview transcript data the research generates and the iterative reviewing and grouping of data required to enable generalising and hypothesising principals' learning.

Key to this qualitative study design is that data have to be descriptively rich that readers connect with the participants' experiences through the researcher's analyses. The researcher in essence enters the world as the participant sees it. Through constructing knowledge the researcher then tests and reviews "new theoretical constructs" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). As previously, identified principals' beliefs are examined within a naturalistic paradigm, through an interpretivist lens.

From a philosophical stance, this research considers the practices of learning with no intent to change what is happening. The research augments the growing body of knowledge as to why people choose their learning in the ways they do. A qualitative rather than quantitative approach fits naturally with the research method. There are no data absolutes or aspects easily counted when considering the reasons why principals make their learning choices. Qualitative research is arguably better suited, in this instance, to allow participants to provide their perceptions and views. The data is explored to give meaning to human actions.

#### **4.3 The qualitative vs. quantitative approach.**

Watling (2002) provides a definition that captures the ideals of qualitative research in the context of this research. He states, "The qualitative researcher is likely to be searching for understanding rather than knowledge, for interpretations rather than measurements, for values rather than facts" (p.267). The view is supported by Dey (1993) in his assertion that "qualitative data deals with meanings whereas quantitative data deals with numbers" (p. 3). This study of leadership aligns more closely with qualitative research since it seeks to explicate principal understanding, interpretations and values.



Quantitative research does not have the capacity to consider the principals' emotions, their language, nor how they construct their social practices. A qualitative approach supports answering the why and how questions that typify this research and assist in explaining human actions.

Quantitative purists desire objective data. They hold the belief that research bias and emotional attachment by the researcher should be eliminated. In contrast, the qualitative traditionalist rejects this so-called positivism and argues for value bound research where explanations generate inductively from the data. Qualitative studies often involve a substantial element of narrative.

Accordingly, this makes summarising and theorising sometimes difficult hence some critics perceive this as a weakness of the research methodology (Mitchell & Charmaz, 1996) .

Perhaps to be considered is Burke-Johnson and Onwuegbuzie's (2004) argument for a pragmatic balance of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Morgan (2007) argues however that there will be a dominant paradigm. For this research, a qualitative method is predominant despite a quantitative questionnaire to scope the research. The qualitative nature of this study has a focus on learning about a group of principals and is not so concerned with generalising about large populations.

Qualitative research is concerned with the complexities of human lived experience, with the design dependent on the aims of the study. In other words, what is to be studied determines the strategy. Creswell describes the issue as the key determinant "A problem might be defined as the issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice that leads to a need for the study" (Cresswell, 1994, p. 50).

Saldana (2009) believes the key dilemma researchers confront is determining the most appropriate coding method to address predominantly qualitative data. Coding methodology, according to Saldana, is highly dependent on what and how something is studied. Selection of coding methods depends on the researcher.

Patton (2002) and Saldana (2009) note that because each qualitative study is unique the analytical approach will, by the very nature of the research “be unique”(Saldana, 2009, p. 47) . Qualitative research data are based on the researcher’s inductively developed categories or coding. Transcripts are read and re-read to identify themes and generalise categories. The researcher is able to describe people’s experiences more informally. This involves the researcher generating theory or building new knowledge based on what they discover through participant-provided information. The researcher becomes the primary instrument of data collection. In comparison, quantitative data favours using statistical data, mathematical analysis and precisely compared variables.

Accordingly, this qualitative research is conducted through Interpretivism, inter-twining the researcher with the reality of the principals’ world. The emphasis is on examining and making meaning of lived experiences, which, through an interpretivist view, allows the researcher to embrace multiple realities.

#### **4.4 Interpretivism connected to qualitative design**

Interpretivists identify a need to engage, and become actively involved, with participants in order to describe and interpret their social reality (Locke, 2001). Although researchers taking an interpretivist stance make an effort to eliminate the influence of their values and beliefs on their interpretation, objectivity cannot be guaranteed. Interpretivists rely therefore on being able to verify and confirm their data using a range of sources or methods an “objectified account of the experiences” (Locke, 2001, p. 9). Triangulation of data provides reliability or terms used currently that fit more closely with value – based discussions, dependability and trustworthiness.

The two essential elements that dictate using an interpretivist approach in this research are (1) understanding learning through principals’ lived experiences and (2) examining the perceptions, they hold relative to their own learning. Accordingly, the research is concerned with human actions that affect perceived reality. Initially objective data collection occurs through an email survey. The data is

then confirmed or de-confirmed interpretively through the voice of the participants. This inquiry is about examining and making meaning of participants' views and beliefs against research literature, to confirm or de-confirm what has previously been written and to develop new findings.

#### **4.5 The overarching research question.**

The overarching question guiding this research, first stated in Chapter One, is derived from a gap in the New Zealand literature.

***What professional learning is participated in, and perceived as meaningful, by***

***Urban New Zealand Primary Principals?***

Determining when and how principals learn establishes the processes principals undergo to ascertain their learning needs. This in turn supports identifying the specific programmes principals choose, and how these choices might change from inexperienced to experienced principals. In particular, the focus is on the informal and formal learning options available; the identification of learning barriers, and how learning can increase, at all phases of principalship early through to experienced, principals' confidence in their actions and decision making.

From the long-serving principals disenchanted with the job (Woods, 2002) to the aspiring principal worrying about their choice of career (Macpherson, 2008), this research is about making sense of the motivators and challenges school leaders face in learning for their job. The extent to which principals value learning about their principalship is explored. Finally, the range and reasons for informal and formal learning options are considered.

Meaningfulness as a notion is important to the findings. Participants will reflect on the programmes, processes and conditions of learning that they perceive as supportive. This in turn allows the researcher to explore the motivational factors and personal beliefs about their perceptions of meaningful learning. Finally identifying and exploring the influencing factors, external and internal,

assists in contextualizing the research and potentially contributing to improved learning pathways for principals. In particular, there is much to discuss around the impact of decile, type, size, and change of school. The effect of Boards of Trustees as an external influence on what the principal needs to know, is yet another aspect to be considered.

This research is focussed on learning that supports school principalship quality, which can be taken to mean student and school outcomes. Robinson (2009) identifies little evidence around leadership's direct outcomes for students but makes clear that what a principal does with teacher's learning, school resources and vision contributes to overall school effectiveness; to include students and their learning. This research is focused on enhancing principal learning and career satisfaction. The qualitative case study design enables participants' voice to be researched.

#### **4.6 Justification for case study design.**

Grounded theory was initially considered as the appropriate design for this thesis. Thew's (2002), "The role of the principal as the school leader," was a grounded theory Doctoral Thesis that set out to theorise the principals' job. In Thew's words, his study explains, "how principals can manage their complex environments" (p. 258). Exploring connections, similarities and dissimilarities, explaining behaviours seemed fundamental to this research's potential findings, which fits with grounded theory. Nevertheless, unlike Thew, the focus for this thesis was not on creating new theories. The underlying objective was to hypothesise meaningful learning through an examination of the literature then linked to the participants' view.

The current research sought to contribute new knowledge to close the present literature gaps. This study is about principals and learning, as opposed to the interactions of the principal with their staff. Furthermore, because the focus of the study was on the learning of particular persons rather than interactions amongst a group, ethnography was deemed not a suitable research design. As well,

historical research was rejected because it focuses predominantly on text analysis, whereas the current study was interested in individual principals' past and current experiences.

Action research is applied when practitioners want to understand and improve their practice (Lewin, 1946). The method uses a spiral of steps that include planning, action, and data gathering and reflection about the results of the action. Action research might have been applicable to this study if there was a focus on improvement. As the literature review developed and research questions formed, it became clear that underpinning this study were boundaries of time and geography, therefore, a case to answer. Furthermore, the focus was on particular learning of a sample of principals; requiring detailed information about their case.

#### **4.7 The Case**

Research design or methodology, says Merriam, is like an "architectural blueprint" which directs how the researcher collects data (the method), which in turn results in findings (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The rationale for this research investigation being a case study was that this is a contemporary study focused on a single phenomenon: principals' learning, based on their experiences.

The case considers primary principals leading schools in an urban city in New Zealand. Embedded within the case are in-depth stories of four self-selected members from the three purposive sample focus groups. Yin (2009) describes embedded case studies providing a more holistic, whole examination of a case. Embedding sub-cases such as individual interviews provides for further investigation of the case. Scholz and Tietje (2002) describe case study operating on three levels. Understanding, in this case the quantitative survey then conceptualising, that is what is to be learnt and finally to explain. The focus group conceptualised what is known about professional learning, following on, the individual interviews provided supportive data that enabled further refining in the analysis.

Two focus groups, one comprised of experienced principals and one of beginning principals, involving fifteen participants in total. Participants had identified themselves as willing to participate when they submitted their responses to the email survey.

Qualitative case studies provide in-depth descriptions. They can be interpretive as in this case and involve gathering as much data as is needed to analyse, interpret and theorise the issue. Klenke (2008) identifies that it is “the explicit nature of case study that supports building theory” (p. 60). In this case, theory that confirms and in part refutes what is already in the literature. The notion is supported by Becker (1968) who describes a case study as supporting both “a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study” and building or supporting “general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure” (p. 233).

Case studies by their very nature are value bound, subjective, and often quite specific, using purposive sampling. The sample in this case considers a range of factors, such as school size, which are fully articulated further on in the chapter.

Eisner (1991) discusses coherence and consensus in qualitative research. He believes research of this nature provides voice in the text, acting as a pathway or map for the future and as such directs “our attention to aspects of the situation or place we might otherwise miss (p.59).” He posits the researcher and those being researched are brought closer as opposed to using neutral instruments such as questionnaires, which tend to be impersonal. This raises the issue of researcher neutrality. The researcher in case study has an ethical responsibility to act as an objective outsider.

Qualitative case studies have identifiable characteristics, although terminology can differ according to the source. Yin (1994) describes case study as a design that can be applied when: “How” and “why” questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real life context. (p. 1).

This case study is set in one place at one time, a “bounded system.” It uses surveys and interviews as its method; both applicable to case study. Yin defines a case study as:

An empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1988, p. 23).

Merriam (1998) suggests qualitative case studies have four essential properties. They are:

- Particularistic, in that they focus on a particular phenomenon; in this case principals and learning.
- Descriptive, in that the end product will provide rich and complete descriptions of the phenomenon under study; the principals will each contribute their own thinking to the data.
- Heuristic, in that the case study illuminates the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon being studied.
- Inductive, in that hypotheses, generalisations and theory emerge from the examination of the data.

The motivation for doing qualitative research is to better understand the people and the multitude of social and cultural contexts within which they live. Interpretive researchers begin with the assumption that reality is constructed through shared meaning, from in this case, dialogue. Each human in the study is inimitable; they are unique.

Social settings also, “are unique, dynamic and complex”(Hatch, 2002, p. 9). Qualitative case study is an appropriate research method to illuminate specified groups, lived experiences. This is a study of real people in real setting. The case study method enables the researcher to enter a world from the perspectives of those living in it. This study is constructed from the case of urban principals whose data is gathered through focus group interviews and then within that case are the embedded

individual cases. The city demographic, accessibility and diversity provide a rather broad snapshot of urban New Zealand schools.

#### **4.8 Situating the research in a metropolitan city**

The research was located in a metropolitan city for three reasons. The first was logistical, which kept the costs of conducting the research, without any funding grants, achievable. Secondly, researching in a major urban city supports greater participant anonymity. The large numbers of schools make it more difficult to identify individuals or their schools. In addition, a broader demographic sample of school type, size, and decile was possible. Thirdly, my contextual knowledge of the schools and principals was deemed an advantage. During my three years on the Executive of the Principals' Association (2003-2006), I built up personal credibility with principals, who knew they would be respected and understood. The limitations of knowing participants are acknowledged. Tape recording interviews, using professional transcribers, and having participants verify transcripts, all support data dependability, and reliability in this study.

#### **4.9 Role of the researcher**

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding people, who they are, and what they believe in. I set out to understand and make explicit, the perceptions about learning held by a metropolitan city group of principals. The literature makes evident there is no one way to learn and that principals value a range of learning opportunities. This research would provide a group's preferences. I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to listen to the beliefs of others in my profession.

Cresswell (2003.) believes that qualitative researchers need to understand the process of the research; why and how they use the tools such as interviews to collect their data. The researcher has a responsibility to provide enough flexibility within the interview structure to expose ideas that could arguably fit outside the researcher's beliefs and knowledge base. The use of semi-structured



interviews, for example, allows the direction of the focus groups to move with the group's thinking. The strength of qualitative research is that it can be reflective and consequently produce data not anticipated. An example from this research is the initial survey introduced the influential role of rural advisors on principal learning. This factor had not been referenced so positively in previous literature.

For this researcher, preparation for collecting and analysing data was initiated with the development of data gathering and data analysis protocols (see Tables 4 & 5, pp. 130 & 131). A case study protocol according to Yin (1994) is essential because it is a "major tactic in increasing reliability ... as it is intended to guide the investigator" (p. 63).

Analysis of interview data begins with coding or grouping of similar words, phrases, and events. Marshall and Rossman (1995) describe it as the headings researchers decide to apply to make meaning of the topic. Patton (1990) believes the process requires high levels of creative input. He reminds researchers that the challenge is to examine the data holistically, then put it into meaningful categories. He emphasises the importance of not being too prescriptive, as many of the themes emerge from the data. Hatch (2002) and Saldana (2009) who recognise that coding is not a precise science, that it is interpretive, involves patterning beyond finding suitable regularities support this. Similarity, frequency, and causation are just some of the patterns that can be identified.

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) encourage researchers to build rapport and respect for participants' knowledge. They suggest defining interview protocols to address issues of motive, anonymity, and ownership of data. Further, they recommend telling participants that they have been selected because they have something to offer to the research. Transparency and researcher neutrality both support participants feeling valued and therefore more likely to share their experiences.

Some participants' thinking challenged my beliefs at times but it was not my role to put my own case or judge others. The researcher's role is to describe and interpret through common themes what a group of principals believed about principal learning. As such, mutual building of new knowledge about principals' learning was developed.

Saldana (2009, p. 185) describes a cyclical process where codes are first grouped then transitioned to broader categories then fitted into "themes or concepts or at least one theory (key assertion)". First cycle coding methods Saldana describes as an "elemental method (p.66)," where both a procedural protocol (see Table 4 p. 130) and an initial code structure based on prior knowledge are used. Second cycle coding uses pattern matching to develop defined categories under which initial codes are grouped. Clearly defined processes provide a map for the researcher. Defining the direction also guides the reader. In this study articulated protocols were developed for data collection, data analysis and interviewing.

#### **4.10 The research protocol**

Qualitative research generates large amounts of text. Analysis requires the researcher to interpret participant's commentary, their feelings, values, and perceptions. The protocol guides the processes and field procedures. The Research Protocol (Table 4, Page 130) was developed to guide this research.

Saldana (2009) advises coding approaches, as with design, have to match the researcher's expected outcomes. Provisional codes for example allow the researcher to directly answer research questions. Axial or theoretical coding is best if developing new theory. "Initial codes are provisional and tentative" (p.81). They will often be reworked as analysis progresses. A key element in the beginning analysis phase is to take time to reflect on and digest the data (Clarke, 2005; Saldana, 2009).

A limitation with qualitative research is how the researcher chooses to illuminate the data. Accuracy is enhanced with a coding protocol (For example Tables 4 and 5), and the researcher testing codes by developing links and clustering codes to unambiguous themes. In this case, with the use of NVivo 7, a qualitative software analysis tool, the data were reviewed.

**Table 4: The research protocol**

<b>Phase of Research</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Documents Reference</b>	<b>Field Procedures</b>	<b>Schedules/ Place</b>	<b>Tools</b>
Email Survey	All principal members of identified principal group	Advise participants of confidentiality, research intention  How data will be used. Appendix 1	Pilot survey with inner metropolitan principals  Modify and then send via principal organisation database	5 to 10 minutes to complete.  Email sent to their school principal address (all principals have government funded laptops)	Questionnaire with tick boxes and space for comment  Appendix 2`
Focus Groups  Experienced principals & Early Career Principals	Purposive sample of principal group members with variables for sub grouping  Male female  Size, decile, intermediate, contributing, Maori immersion, Kura, independent.	Invite participants  Information for participants (Appendix 3)  Agreement participate (Appendix 4)	Interview expectations guide  (Appendix 5)  Semi structured questions (Appendix 6)	Time expectation 1 ½ hours	Digital tape recorder (back up tape)  Participant transcript release (Appendix 9)  Transcription confidentiality agreement (Appendix 10)  Nvivo 7 for coding.
Individual Interviews	Purposive sample 4 principals identified through focus group involvement. 2 from each group and this time the focus on formal learning and informal learning pathways.  Formal –has a postgraduate educational leadership qualification	Invite information and participation agreement (Appendix 7)	Interview expectations (Appendix 8)	1/1/2 hours maximum time on interview  At the principal’s school.  Interview transcript checking 30 minute time required	Digital tape recorder  Transcription by Academic Services  Participant transcript release  Nvivo 7 for coding

The coding method identified in the Modified Coding Protocol, Table 5, expands on Weber’s (1990) coding protocol, defining his terms in light of this research method. Weber’s thinking combined with a consideration of Saldana’s (2009) coding through to conceptualising processes is included. Through grouping and regrouping or pawing, a term used by Dey (1993), the data are grouped according to themes.

Creswell’s modified model of inductive analysis, “Building Analysis Reliability and Accuracy” is also relevant to this process. Creswell has the researcher defining and refining of codes. Pawing text for themes, highlighting segments, reducing overlap and establishing the most important categories are the basis of the model (Cresswell, 2002, p. 266).

**Table 5 Modified Coding Protocol (Saldana, 2009; Weber, 1990)**

<p><b>Initial coding</b></p>	<p>Pre-established research protocol (procedural guideline)          Pre-established codes taken from literature- anticipated codes          To begin analytic consideration code as data is collected and formatted          Paw the data for codes not pre-determined - search for key words, phrases, and concepts that come out of the data. For example: Motherhood fitted into an initial free node of other leadership opportunities which then subsumed into the tree node which in turn was developed as the theme motivation to learn.</p>
<p><b>Reflect, review and code all text</b></p>	<p>Focus in on a priori (determined beforehand) articulated questions and begin to write analytic memos e.g. What are principals saying?          Read and re-read data checking the dialogue for ‘best - code fit’.          Review transcripts to check that all reference to learning is coded.</p>
<p><b>Revise the coding rules</b></p>	<p>Group or discount initial coding that references a single participant’s thinking. Rogue and one-off comments are tested against the six transcripts of the research for further reference.          Re group codes into broader categories to narrow down what is being said to represent the greater voice.          Explore codes for emergent categories.          Reduce number of codes linking greater data to create stronger, generalisable data.</p>

<p><b>Table 5,continued</b></p> <p><b>Second Cycle coding</b></p> <p><b>(Broad categories using pattern matching)</b></p>	<p>Assess reliability and accuracy - continue analytic memo writing.</p> <p>Consider codes against literature pre-determined codes and codes that come from the transcripts - pattern matching. Codes are matched to the research questions. Repeated ideas grouped to one idea.</p> <p>Systematic review of multiple-data supports the validity of the research results.</p> <p>Theme the data – determine a phrase or sentence that identifies the grouped units of data.</p> <p>“Captures the ideas into a meaningful whole”(Saldana, 2009, p. 139)</p>
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The coding protocol directs the researcher to constantly compare and reflect on what participants say. The analysis process is “iterative and integral to the research, pervading every aspect of qualitative inquiry” (Watling, 2002, p. 263) . The data that are collected through a triangulated method can be cross woven, checked and rechecked to ensure all possible categories or themes are identified.

Triangulation, the gathering of data from a range of sources or methods, is important for the validity of research results. The researcher has an obligation to strengthen the validity of the research results. Categorical aggregation is one such method. This is where expected issues emerge and are discussed (Stake, 1995). An example from this thesis is where ideas were grouped initially into four categories then generalised to the formal learning category. Master Degree pathways, post graduate diploma learning and certificate in leadership programmes contributed to the category. The categories are discussed through the findings (refer to Chapter 5.4, p.165, paragraph 1 as an example).

Pattern matching as described (see Table 5, p.132 second cycle coding) is used to theme the data. As coded data are examined and re-examined within a possible range of categories and across groups

predicted patterns emerge. One example was the formal learning of early career principals and experienced principals. Both groups described the importance of university learning to their role. An example:

*“We need some formal qualification”* (Harry, experienced principal).

*“I know that formal learning is what will take me to that next step”* (Bronnie, early career principal).

This form of pattern matching is also described as explanation building (Stake, 1995) and is highly relevant to this research. Because of commencement with a theoretical statement based on the literature, e.g., “Principals require on-going learning specific to their skill and knowledge base,” the researcher follows on by considering the data against the statement. It could be added to with a statement such as, “and learning needs change over identified time periods.” A sample of the coded text is included as Appendix 14 (p.324).

Morse describes data analysis as a relentless search for answers. It is “piecing together data.” It is a process of “conjecture and verification” and “of organising data so the analytic scheme will appear obvious,” (Morse, 1994, p. 25). The final analysis involves “reorganising and reconfiguring” codes to develop themes (Saldana, 2009, p. 149). This approach is an adaptation of axial coding which is used to identify a core code for developing grounded theories. Focused coding most applicable to this data categorises ideas with conceptual similarity that, when linked to literature memos and descriptive diary records, enable the researcher to generalise the phenomenon.

The process involved a detailed literature review completed over thirty weeks study leave in 2005 from which core themes emerged. The codes derived from the literature are referred to in Nvivo 7, the qualitative software, as tree nodes. These major themes increased through transcript analysis. The initial aspect of the analysis was therefore deductive, the codes pre-determined, thus creating a first phase transcript analysis reference point. As the data was read and re-read the inductiveness of

the analysis became evident. Principals made comments around their journeys that did not fit into the deductive coding and so new codes, for example: *Early identification by the school leader*, were developed. Appendix 14 (Page 324) samples the links of code to literature then to the more detailed codes developed through the interviews.

**Table 6 Sample of coding links to the literature**

<p><b>Codes derived from the literature.</b></p> <p><b>Memos/ Key findings</b></p>	<p><b>Core themes derived from coding classified in Nvivo 7 as Tree Nodes</b></p>	<p><b>Coding headings as data pawed into Nvivo 7 as Free Nodes</b></p>
<p>Levine (2005) Improve formal programmes. Fullan (2003) principalship too diverse to learn from a single course. Martin &amp; Robinson (2003) the challenge for universities to meet needs. <i>Lashway(2003b)the lack of connect between effectiveness and formal learning.</i> Colley et al (2004)informal learning is about links with people and networking. Thew (2002) the need for university qualifications stops learning being inward looking.</p>	<p><b>Formal Learning</b></p>	<p>University</p> <p>Post graduate</p> <p>Other institutions</p> <p>Qualifications</p> <p>Impact</p>
<p>Eddy et al,(2004)identified support around own context. Cameron et al (2004) early career needs. MacPherson (2008) matrix of learning needs shows progressive development. Thew (2002) -Much learning happens informally. Robinson et al. (2011) principals make it happen best when with staff. <i>Blackler &amp; Kennedy(2004) mentoring provides for tailor made learning</i></p>	<p><b>Informal Learning</b></p>	<p>F TPP &amp;</p> <p>Other government courses</p> <p>Mentoring</p> <p>Clusters</p> <p>National organisations</p>

The Links presented in italics in Table 6 identify literature sought when comments were made through the interviews that had not been identified through the initial review of the literature.

In summary, the thesis methodology has been developed to understand a group of school principals and their learning. It is an interpretive, naturalistic, qualitative case study set in urban New Zealand schools. An insider research lens is applied through one principal studying other principals and their learning. The research protocol applied to the data analyses entails pattern- matching of data to broad themes. That in turn enables generalising principals' learning. The chapter now considers application of the theoretical research design to this case study of primary principals in a New Zealand metropolitan city.

#### **4.11 Sampling**

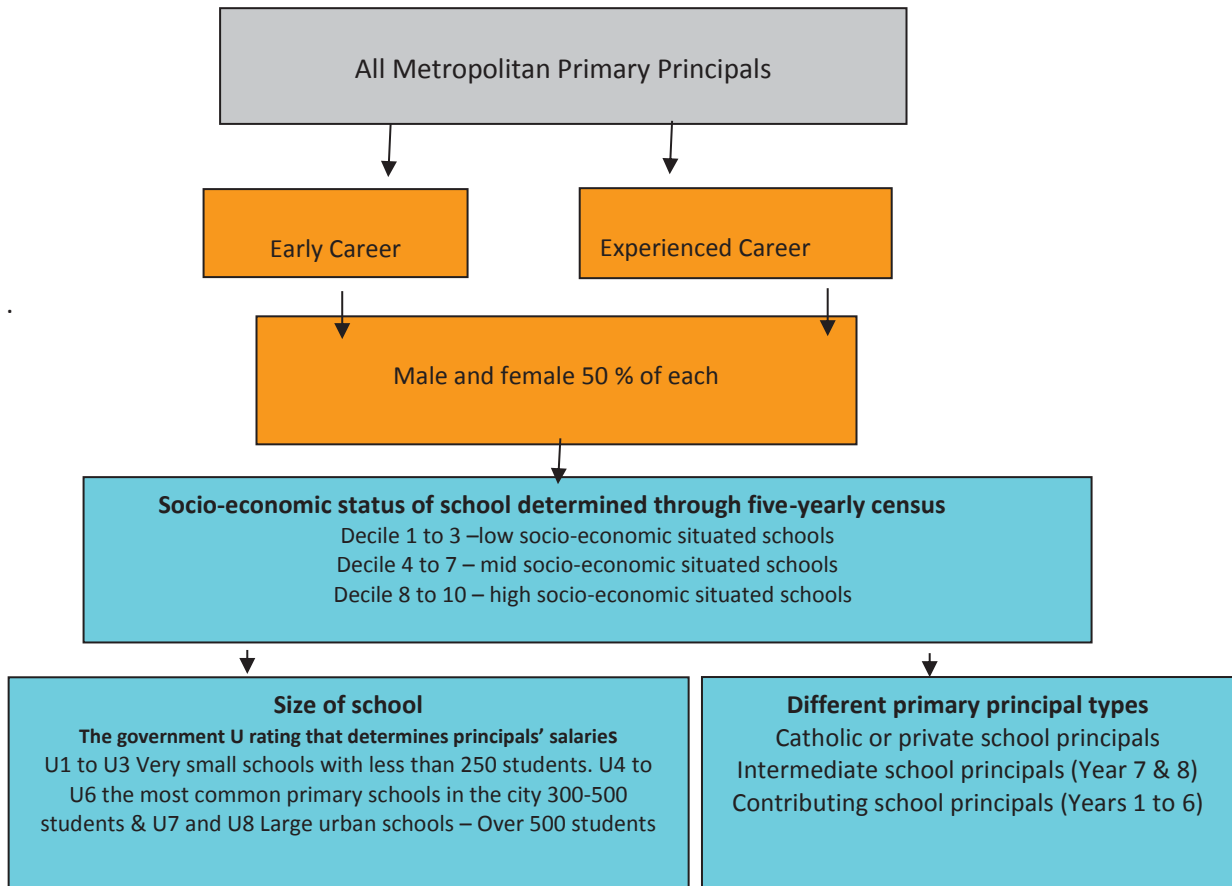
Goetz and Le Compte (1984) identify, using their term, 'criterion-based sampling' (p. 77), that the researcher firstly establishes the necessary attributes and then finds the people to match them. The fifteen research participants for this study are on the metropolitan Primary Principals' Association database.<sup>7</sup> This research also uses quota selection (Goetz & Le Compte, 1984) where one of each major subgroup was identified, and invited to participate. Figure 4 outlines the many variables that were included.

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<sup>7</sup> Permission to use the database granted by the President of \*PPA by email on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2007.



**Figure 4: Identified sampling variables**

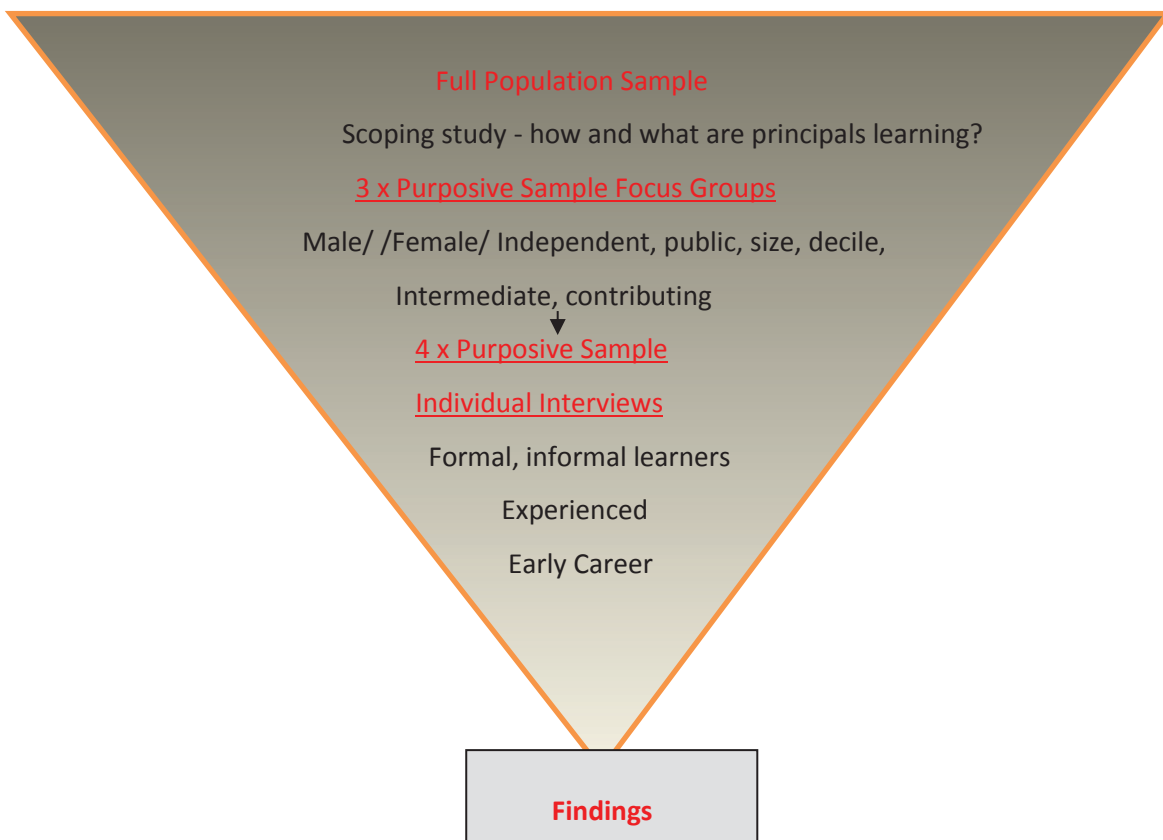


The purposive sample sought to gather equal numbers of male and female participants. A range of school types, Catholic integrated, intermediate, contributing and full primary were identified through the Ministry of Education data-base (2006b). Schools of differing sizes were grouped to consider a number of small (less than 300 students), medium (300-600 students) and large schools (601+) were included in the sample. Decile variables were also grouped as low (1-3), mid (4-7) and high (8-10) socio economically situated schools and, as stated, the participants were in close geographical proximity to the researcher. The sample was split equally across gender as the database from the Principals' Association showed an even 50% split. Figure 4 identifies the complete population from which the diverse sample was taken.

## 4.12 Data gathering

The initial scoping for the study involved a full population sample using an email questionnaire. The second iteration involved a purposive sampling with two types of focus group: experienced principals, those who had been in the job more than five years and early career principals (who had been practising principals from zero to three years). Figure 5 identifies the funnelling down approach that was applied to gathering the data. It is an iterative and inductive data gathering method, which allows the researcher to build knowledge upon previous knowledge as the data set narrows.

**Figure 5 Data collection model**



#### **4.12.1 Email surveys**

The initial scoping email (Appendix 3, p.306) was chosen because of its potential for collecting data quickly. The email questionnaire was set up through an independent web development company with responses sent to my home email. In this case, 404 emails were sent out on 26 April 2008 and 80% (151) of the 48.5% (189) of replies were received by 28 April 2008. The final responses were received by 11 June 2008. An email survey was easily administered, flexible and less expensive than conventional mail (Best & Krueger, 2002).

Other studies identify that “electronic” questionnaires have a very favourable response rate when compared to the typical 20-50% response rates usually achieved by conventional mail surveys (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996). Nguyen (2007) in his review, confirmed that speed of response, ease of access and participant tracking are all advantages. Electronic surveys provide a faster reaction time than mail surveys. Personal experience identifies that principals tend to respond to emails within a very short period or they do not respond at all.

One possible compromise with email surveys is that it is impossible to guarantee the respondent’s anonymity. Thach (1995) points out those questionnaires must therefore state that the researcher guarantees the respondent’s confidentiality. There are other issues to consider with email questionnaires such as, the network culture of online learners, online language, technical faulting, and entry to a population sample. For this research, these issues were relevant on two counts. The Principals’ Association database was not routinely updated and so remained static from October 2007 to April 2008. Secondly, one principal advised that the survey link did not work for them. This could have been an isolated case or a larger problem but one that could not be determined because there was no data explaining why 51.5% (215) of principals chose not to respond.

Best and Kreuger’s greatest concern is the threat posed by coverage. Email surveys can limit a population being sampled because of access and contact ability (Best & Krueger, 2002). This

limitation had little relevance to this study, as all principals in the metropolitan area are provided with a Ministry of Education laptop and have an email address. Email is how they communicate with both their Association and the Ministry of Education. Best and Krueger also air a concern that a person can respond more than once to a survey but in this instance there would be no gain in so doing.

The email survey had one purpose only and that was to consider the ways in which principals learn and as such is an exploratory, mostly quantitative, aspect of the case study. It could be questioned that this therefore is mixed method research. This notion is dismissed from the perspective that the survey was a scoping tool to gather data not available through other educational sources. The interview phases two and three, in contrast, provide in-depth analysis of a sample of principals' beliefs, their perceptions, and their understanding of their own learning, which situates the research strongly within a qualitative methodology.

Merriam says interviewing is necessary "when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings or how people interpret the world around them" (Merriam, 1998, p. 72). Focus groups are about developing conversations. They are called focus groups because they focus on a particular topic (Morgan, 1988). Furthermore, Morgan identifies that focus groups enable explicit focus to provide precise data on a topic. An added advantage is that the researcher acquires a more candid response. This interview data for this research was collected over two months, in mid-2008.

#### **4.12.2 Focus groups**

Working in a group, participants might be more willing to express their opinions particularly if they believe it might not fit with the researcher's beliefs (Hatch, 2002). Participants also have a say in the direction of the interview in that although there are directing questions, a sensitive researcher will go in the direction the group chooses, as long as it remains on the topic. When conducting focus group interviews, the researcher tries to create an atmosphere in which participants feel

comfortable to share ideas and their experiences around a topic (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Focus groups rely on the synergy of the group. Focus groups are established as part of the 'social researcher's toolkit' (Katz & William, 2001). They provide the researcher the opportunity to assemble a group with defined characteristics to consider a particular issue. Both collective and individual responses are generated.

For this study, three focus group interviews were conducted. Each focus group comprised a minimum of two people, necessitated by people's schedules. Two experienced groups of seven and two participants were held, as opposed to the single group originally planned. Time to meet created an obstacle for two members. One early career group of seven participants was also included.

Morse identifies that six participants would support discerning the essence of their experiences (Morse, 1994). Poskitt (2007)<sup>8</sup> however, suggested that data from an odd number is preferable. Patton (1990) believes that a sample should be large enough to get reasonable coverage of the phenomenon and Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend sampling until saturation of data is reached. The sample for this research, although small, used a range of methods to give the research greater credibility.

The three focus groups participants were invited to attend an interview (Appendix 4.p.310) set in a central part of the city. Issues of access, parking, and neutral venue were all considered. The interviews were all set for 11am. This gave principals time to set up their school day and return before the end of the day. Too often principals miss their lunchtime so the discussion flowed on over a provided lunch, which enabled the researcher to listen to the aspects of the interview that

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<sup>8</sup> Permission to quote J. Poskitt provided via email.

stimulated further discussion. Formal learning requirements dominated all three over-lunch discussions.

Participants were required to select pseudonyms for themselves and their schools. They were advised of the accepted practices of focus group interviews that each person's viewpoint is valid for that person and that confidentiality of what they hear and say is implicit in their role as participants and in my case the researcher role. The focus group interviews were semi-structured (Appendix 7, p.316) which supports coding the rich data more easily.

The responses tended to be grouped around key ideas that were developed from the literature links (examples of idea linking to literature Table 6, p.134). Questions such as, "Tell me about your pre-principalship learning," provoked multiple comments about how participants embarked on their principalship journey. Although the questions provided a guide there was still scope for the participants to develop ideas outside the researcher's brief. Motherhood, rural pathways, family issues, and principals' influence on developing new leaders were ideas not previously encountered. This necessitated further literature trawling to ascertain whether they had previously been raised in educational research.

Flexibility was inherent in the focus group interviewing. The researcher's role at times was one of bringing the conversation back to the topic. Flexibility distinguishes a focus group from a standardised qualitative interview. The standard version uses a specific set of questions, and does not deviate from them. This semi-led discussion therefore enables complex issues to be probed in a relaxed atmosphere. The limitations are that one interview data set cannot be compared to another and the depth of information can be sometimes difficult to analyse and is dependent on researcher skill (Klenke, 2008).

Focus group interviewing is a formal approach. The researcher is "in charge" of the interview, sets the time and place and records the dialogue (Hatch, 2002). Two assumptions underpin the use of

focus groups. Firstly, that they are a rich source of information and secondly that they produce material that is different from other sources (Glitz, 1998). Disadvantages arise when researchers control the discussion too tightly. Another disadvantage could arise from the group interaction contributing to another person's discomfort. Potentially, however, both these disadvantages are ameliorated through clearly defined processes and expectations (Appendix 8, p.302 outlines interview expectations). Finally, if there is too much flexibility afforded, the data around the actual topic can be hard to determine.

The three focus groups interviews were each completed in just over one hour, providing a large dialogue set in transcript form. Analysis began as soon as the transcripts were loaded into Nvivo 7, the qualitative analysis software. This allowed the researcher in the early phase of data pawing to identify ideas that had not previously been encountered through the literature. This in turn provided an area for further exploration through the individual embedded case studies. Although the individual story interviews were unstructured, there was opportunity at the end of the interviews to probe issues raised at focus group level.

Selection for the individual phase came from the focus group participants self-electing to take part. The third phase of data gathering was developed to gather in-depth descriptions; the personal stories of principals' learning. Two experienced and two early career principals from the focus groups comprised the sample.

#### **4.12.3 Individual interviews**

Whereas the focus group interviews were semi structured and held in a central location, the individual interviews were unstructured and held at each participant's school. Being in their place gave the researcher a real understanding of who these principals were and what they stood for. A sample from the research diary supports answering what impact principals' learning has on their

school. Karena described in detail her previous learning about assessment. She used those skills to develop and focus her school to where formative assessment was currently:

Diary entry, Karena's school - "Her office walls were covered in formative assessment quotes. The entry to the school had exemplars of children's work anywhere there was display capability. There had obviously been some sort of writing moderation and the school samples were there for all to see. Great reading whilst I waited..... Walking around the school there was a sense of orderliness and purpose."

The research diary was a reference tool accessed when coding sometimes became confused. The reflections brought the data back to the present and provided clarity to some of the conversations. Jenny, for instance, talked animatedly about the first time her principal told her she would be a leader, which confirmed what was said in the focus groups that principals need to recognise future leaders:

Diary entry, Jenny's school. "Openly expressive when she said she was never going to be a leader and then the wow moment, when she said now I am one and I know I can do this."

The most common interviews in qualitative studies are open-ended where participants provide their opinions and their insights. In this style of interview, the respondents, according to Yin (1994), become "informants" (p. 84). This in-depth manner of interviewing is designed to go "deeply into the understandings of the informants" (Hatch, 2002, p. 94). Patton (2002) suggests truly open-ended interviews are guided by what the participant wants to say.

Unstructured interviews aim for depth of information. The opening question was:

Tell me your principalship-learning story. Begin before you became a principal and talk about yourself as a learner now. What have you done? Why and when has learning been most meaningful?



This broad question set a platform for the principals to talk without any interference from the interviewer other than presenting as an active and empathetic listener. The aim is to have individuals reveal their true feelings and views. The researcher at times probed for further data. In this case, the following prompts were used: “Tell me more, and so what happened?”

Open-ended interviewing incorporates a “case story” approach, which facilitates the participants describing in context their learning journey (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Marshall and Rossman (1995) see this narrative process as a way to collect data to describe their lives and it is most suited to “in depth interviews” (p. 86). The narrative process allows participants to describe their experiences based on their recollections and perceptions.

The individual interview allows for a more relaxed meeting. The direction is determined by the participant, which in this case, covered in detail, how individuals felt they learnt and applied their learning to the role. The individual interviews are comprehensive narratives of individual journeys. Although coded alongside the focus group dialogue they are separated from that data in these findings as embedded cases. The four individuals interviewed provided such powerful, singular stories: they deserve to be heard.

#### **4.12.4 Taping and transcribing**

The interviews were taped and transcribed, ensuring that data were “preserved for analysis” (Merriam, 1998, p. 87). Visual observations supported the portrayal of excitement in a person’s voice, the feelings and strongly held views of the participants, which cannot always be gained by reading transcribed text. Hence, post interview notes were kept. Interview notes contain the descriptions of behaviour, verbal and non-verbal interactions and the researcher’s own thoughts which Saldana refers to as “analytic memos” (Saldana, 2009, p. 32).

No single principal's story provided a complete picture of how early career or experienced principals learn but each story supported some aspects of the data. Marshal and Rossman (1995) describe the stories, when grouped together, as providing "pieces for a 'mosaic' or total picture of a concept" (p. 88). Richmond (2002) supports this multi-layering of understanding through learners' stories recorded as text. Case storytelling is an approach that supports the critical reflection on the journeys taken by school principals.

#### **4.13 Data analysis**

The email survey data was collated using Excel spread sheets. The data identified the city demographic. School types, principal age and gender, preferred learning and accessed learning were counted to provide a snapshot of city leaders' schools and learning. The data referencing what learning principals deemed meaningful was grouped and ranked according to preference, for example networking was seen as valuable by 100% of principal respondents.

A combination of deductive and inductive methods of analysis was applied to the focus group and individual interview data. The deductive analysis was applied using a predetermined set of typologies (codes). Chapters Two and three reference these key themes (sample pages noted):

- formal learning excluding Ministry courses which have no university accreditation (p.95)
- informal learning (p.92)
- MOE learning programmes (page 56)
- barriers to learning (p. 105)
- challenges that require learning (p.107)
- motivation to learn (p.89)
- meaningfulness (p.91)

In typology analysis, the researcher starts with a predetermined list of codes that are expanded or at times decreased if the data being analysed does not fit with the specified category. In that sense, the analysis of data remains inductive. Even when computer software is used to sort data mechanically, the researcher determines how the data are organised, coded, and categorised:

Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning. It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Analysis means organising and interrogating data in ways that allows researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques or generate theories (Hatch, 2002, p. 148).

For researchers without access to qualitative software the process does not change. The highlighting and cutting up text and grouping of phrases are done manually as opposed to electronically, but are more time-consuming. For this research, the cost of software was considered against efficiency and time; hence Nvivo 7 was purchased to aid the analysis.

#### **4.14 Use of computer assisted analysis tools**

The use of computer programmes (in this case Nvivo 7) to assist qualitative researchers has continued to grow and support analysing large amounts of data into categories. Walsh (2003) writes:

Switching from paper-based to electronic software-based research allows more freedom to play with ideas, because researchers can link and compare patterns within and across documents. The results one is able to save, print, or undo at will. When beginning a project, researchers create new documents or import text, numerical data, and graphics files from compatible software programs. NVivo 7 organizes raw data (interviews, observations, etc.) and links them with memos and “data bites” where researchers might make codes and analytical notes, and then edit and rework ideas as the project progresses (p. 253).

Issues around qualitative computer-assisted analysis software (CAQDAS) have been identified. These include portability of data, rigid approach to analysis and distancing the user from data. Another concern is that the researcher could become locked into analysing a certain way, limited by the capability of the software (Tesch, 1990). However, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. “Computer-aided analysis is more thorough, less likely to miss things, more flexible and much faster” (Weitzman & Miles, 1995, p. 18).

Nvivo 7 can create matrices, link ideas across transcripts and group ideas through researcher memos. It keeps the data in a centralised place, which is a preference. The transcripts are directly loaded into the programme so there is no double handling of data. It is in retrievable, moveable, and managed form. In this case, subsets are maintained and typologies built up within the coding sets.

Analysis in whichever form, according to Yin (1994), has to show that all relevant evidence has been considered exhaustively. Nvivo 7 allows for the interrogation of the data, word and phrase searches and sub categorisation (Sample in appendix 14, p. 310). The programme uses the terms ‘free node’ and ‘tree node’ to describe the coding and category building aspect. Sub-categories in this study were grouped under the research questions, which came from core themes in the literature (seen previously in Table 5. p.131)..

An example:

**Question**

*How do principals determine what learning best supports them as aspiring and novice leaders?*

**Relevant Tree Nodes**

**Related Free Nodes**

*Pre principalship*

*Succession, Mentoring, Identification*

*Informal learning*

*FTEP, Other government courses, Mentoring*

*Formal learning*

*University, Post graduate, Other institutions*

*Early career needs*

*Finance, Property, MOE, Boards of Trustees, HRM*

*Meaningful learning*

*Impact on staff, Change management, Pedagogic*

An articulated research method and methodology contributes towards the validity, reliability, and ethical quality of the research results. Stemler (2001), asserts that cross-validation in qualitative research also provides credibility (e.g. refer to section 4.8, p.127), coding protocols for the discussion about triangulation). To ensure credibility, identifying and defining the limitations is important (Wilkinson, 1998).

#### **4.15 The trustworthiness of the research**

A series of iterations, the data triangulated, the protocol outlined and my own beliefs articulated, all contribute to this study's trustworthiness and dependability. The term 'trustworthiness' as opposed to 'reliability' has been purposely selected. Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest validity is affected by the researcher's perspective of what constitutes valid. From an educational perspective, research that is trusted is "defensible" (Johnson, 1997, p. 282). Trustworthiness establishes confidence in the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986).

.Building up knowledge through three phases (email questionnaire, focus groups, and individual stories) supports researcher validity. The iterative nature of building research through phasing allows the data to be tested and re-tested for truth. At all phases of the research, participants were advised of the research processes (Appendix 4a, p.311). Participants were given opportunity to make comment on the transcripts and verify them prior to their being used as data (Appendix 10, p.318).

Internal validity is about matching the findings with reality (Merriam, 1988a). Do the findings tell it like it is? The findings are influenced by the way researchers choose to illuminate them. Therefore, as described by Taylor and Bogdan (1984), the researcher's obligation is to "present a more or less honest rendering of how informants actually view themselves and their experiences" (p. 98). Triangulation was the strategy, using multiple sources of data that supported the internal validity of this research. Patton (2002) advocates triangulation as a method to strengthen research validity.

Comparing a range of sources “controls bias and establishes valid propositions” (Mathison, 1988, p. 13).

External validity is the extent to which a study can be generalised. Analysis, using a typological strategy and inductive thinking steps, aims at that result. Cronbach (1975) suggests developing a working hypothesis is a more realistic approach. Hypotheses allow for local context and can act as a guide to educators in making choices. Highly relevant in this research is how current principals’ choices of learning could possibly influence future principals’ learning.

#### **4.16 Ethics**

A qualitative researcher could be likened to a visitor into another person’s world. As a visitor, there are a set of expected behaviours the researcher needs to follow. Truthfulness is implicit to the role. Diligence in ensuring Massey University’s Code of Ethics when researching human subjects was regularly considered throughout the various phases. The Massey University, Palmerston North Ethics Committee, granted ethical approval to this research in April 2008.

Ethics is as much of a concern to research as is validity. Accuracy and confidentiality are implicit in ethical considerations. From a worldview perspective, the data are developed to consider principals’ social reality. In this study, the perceptions are not those of an individual but of groups of people, thus the data is diverse and plentiful, supporting greater anonymity.

The questionnaire data was collated in an aggregated form, which is not problematic with regard to issues of confidentiality. Participants from the interview phases checked transcripts for accuracy prior to use in the thesis. All participants provided their informed consent (Appendix 5, p.314) to the relevant research phases. The researcher articulated to participants that guaranteed anonymity was not possible. Although pseudonyms, chosen by the participants, are used, focus group members could possibly identify comments from other participants. As there is unlikely to be anything in the

report that is offensive to the participants, this should not create any ethical tension. Moreover, the large number of schools in the city helps also to protect the individuals' privacy.

Lincoln and Guba describe the vulnerability of both researcher and the participants as they share information suggesting that the relationship is one of mutual influence.

The interactive nature of the relationship is prized, since it is only because of this feature that inquirers and respondents may fruitfully learn together. The relationship between researcher and respondent, when properly established, is one of respectful negotiation, joint control, and reciprocal learning.

(Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 17)

Nonetheless, the power relationship can favour the researcher, particularly, as in this case, the researcher knows the participants and as such becomes the gatekeeper of what information is disseminated (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The notion of trustworthiness and rigour were therefore maintained through the overt disclosure of researcher intent and opportunity for individuals to check the transcripts.

The researcher spent considerable time delving into the literature around moral leaders and, although it does not have an extensive role in the study's literature, Duignan and fellow-researcher Bhindi, believe moral leadership underpins all a principal does (Duignan, 2004). This research is about colleagues, a world of education and as such, the researcher has a responsibility to all who work for and believe principals are important to children's learning.

The very personal, conversational nature of interviews highlights many of the basic ethical issues of any research (Patton, 2002). All participants released the transcripts to the researcher with the understanding that their names and their school's name would be protected. This process enables the participants to have greater control over the data. They were asked to make comment and verify

the accuracy of what was written. Confidentiality was implicit in writing up the findings (Appendix 9, p.318).

Analysis of data is by its very nature, filtered through the researcher's theoretical position and as such is open to bias. All a researcher can do is be open about any bias, accurate and as "honest as is humanly possible in all phases of research" (Diener & Crandall, 1978, p. 162). Merriam makes a strong point that regulations, such as Massey's ethical guidelines, do not stop interviewer coerciveness, or advise when to intervene if a situation is unacceptable. In Merriam's words:

The best a researcher can do is be conscious of the ethical issues that pervade the research process and examine his or her own philosophical orientation vis-à-vis these issues (Merriam, 1998, p. 219).

A qualitative researcher cannot be totally unbiased and objective. Gorard (2004) does not believe we can totally eradicate our own pre-conceived ideas but through reflexive and reflective action, we can moderate their effect. Concisely put, it is my belief that every effort was made by this researcher to behave ethically.

#### **4.17 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this interpretive qualitative case study is set in urban New Zealand schools. It fits within the naturalist paradigm, examining the unique experiences and knowledge people as individuals and as groups bring to a situation. Case study qualitative research was established as the appropriate design for this research.

Case study provides a large and rich data set. The data are bounded by time and place and therefore influence replication factors, and enhance the research explicability. Case study research is recognised for using focus groups and interviews to answer a problem or issue. The issue is



principals' learning, and providing voice to principals. Qualitative research is the most appropriate method for researching through narrative.

This research is based on gaining an insider view of participant's beliefs and values. The analysis of their ideas required both deductive and inductive processes. By using the literature to firstly inform the research questions and then create the initial coding categories creates cohesion between the literature and methodology. The transcripts in this thesis were grouped initially into codes from the literature. The inductive process was evidenced when pre-determined codes did not fit with what was said. Broad questions acted as a guide only for participants: they chose their own tangents. This led to insightful data and codes not initially established.

The methodology was developed to provide sampling that provided saturation of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In essence, this means that data would be representative of a researcher's findings in the event more interviews were included. The data were gathered, transcribed, and analysed into generalisable codes. The codes were then examined in reference to six key research questions first outlined in Chapter One. Data were triangulated through an email questionnaire, three focus groups, and four embedded case studies.

Triangulation is a dependability requirement in qualitative research. In brief, this acted as a guide in the phasing planning. The first iteration was to gain a snap shot of who did what learning in the unidentified metropolitan city. Data then informed the next phase, focus group interviews, which in turn informed the final individual interview phase.

The findings are the next piece in this study of 'learning to lead'. The findings highlight a common set of beliefs about principalship and learning, the need for collegiality and a range of learning pathways to support principals. Most importantly, they illuminate how principals think and feel about current learning.

# The Professional Learning of Urban N.Z. Primary Principals

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Findings - Principals talk about their learning

*In every New Zealand school the principal is ultimately responsible for the quality and effectiveness of the multiple and interconnected dimensions of educational leadership and management (MoE, 2008a, p. 10).*

#### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to report the findings of the research. The data identify how principals of urban schools perceived themselves as learners over time. Three data phases were used: email survey, focus group interviews and four embedded case study interviews. The findings are analysed to consider the barriers principals face as learners, their learning challenges and the learning they deem meaningful to their school leadership.

The chapter begins by reporting the findings from the email survey. The survey data, linked with the Ministry of Education statistical data (November 2007) situates this as a case study of metropolitan principals. Anonymous data broadly determines the demographic and preferred methods of leaders'

learning. This was the initial iteration of a three-phase process. Methodologically the survey provided a large set of previously unavailable data.

The second iteration exploring the case used a focus group interview. Semi-structured interviews enabled sufficient flexibility for each group to explore a range of planned and spontaneous topics. The views of fifteen principals have been analysed according to their career stage either early or experienced (terms identified through the literature as pre- and post-five years in the role).

The final component of this chapter is the findings of four individual principals' learning journeys. The four participants, through unstructured interviews, described how they learned their crafts of principalship. Individuals expressed their beliefs around principals' needs early on in their careers and the motivators to learn as they became more experienced. As the third iteration or final set of data in the triangulation, the individual cases confirmed and expanded on themes from the focus groups.

It is accepted methodologically that there needs to be sufficient data to provide insight into the participant's learning experiences. Principals had much to say about their own context, their own learning, and their perceptions of future learning needs. This chapter provides insight into their lived realities.

Current data signals to New Zealand's policy makers and academics the need to consider carefully the principals' voice in New Zealand's educational leadership future. Outside researchers and consideration of international trends provides direction to New Zealand; although practitioner experience is of equal importance. Stewart (2004) strongly supports principals having a say in what is done to them.

## **5.2 The email survey**

An email survey (Appendix 3, p.306) was successfully sent to 404 Metropolitan Primary Principals' Association database members in April 2008. The database included full primary schools,

contributing schools, intermediate schools, and Kura. It did not include the intermediate departments of high schools or middle schools. The MoE database provides names, addresses, school size (U rating) and deciles (socio-economic ranking) of primary schools in all regions. This survey provided information that could not be ascertained through other means, such as:

- principals' years of service
- the number of principal positions held, and
- Principal's preferred professional learning at their different stages of principalship.

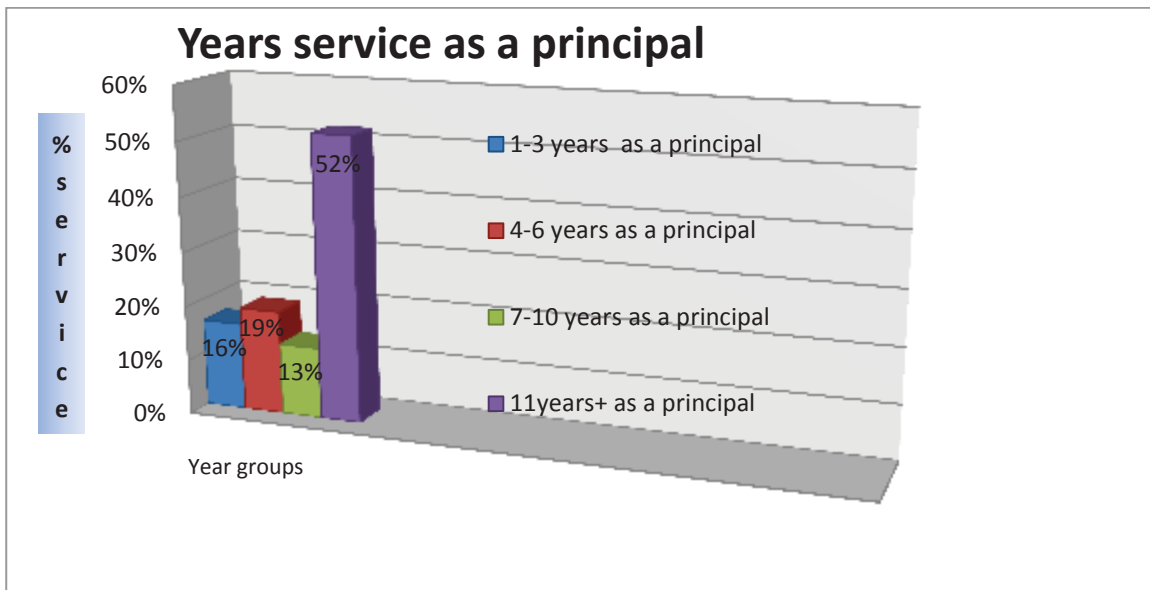
The responses provided a base of information for analysis. Examined responses revealed aspects in need of further investigation through interview. For example, respondents commented on appraisal and rural advisors being meaningful in their learning. As this was an area only once encountered in the literature, it was a subject to probe further.

Questionnaires were returned over a two-week period, one hundred and eighty-nine out of four hundred and four questionnaires received. This equated to a 48.5% return rate of primary schools surveyed in the urban region. Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents were in their first or second principal positions with the majority of returns from experienced principals. Figures 6 to 11(pp156-160) represent the range of schools and experience levels of the respondents.

### **5.2.1 Time served as a principal**

The first graph, Figure six, identifies that 68% of responding principals had been in their job for more than 7 years. The New Zealand government career web page (New Zealand careers, 2009) described the average age of a principal as 55 years, with most retiring at 58 years. Brooking (2008) identifies 40 to 49 years old Europeans with a teaching degree as the largest group currently being appointed to principalship.

**Figure 6: Years' service as a principal**



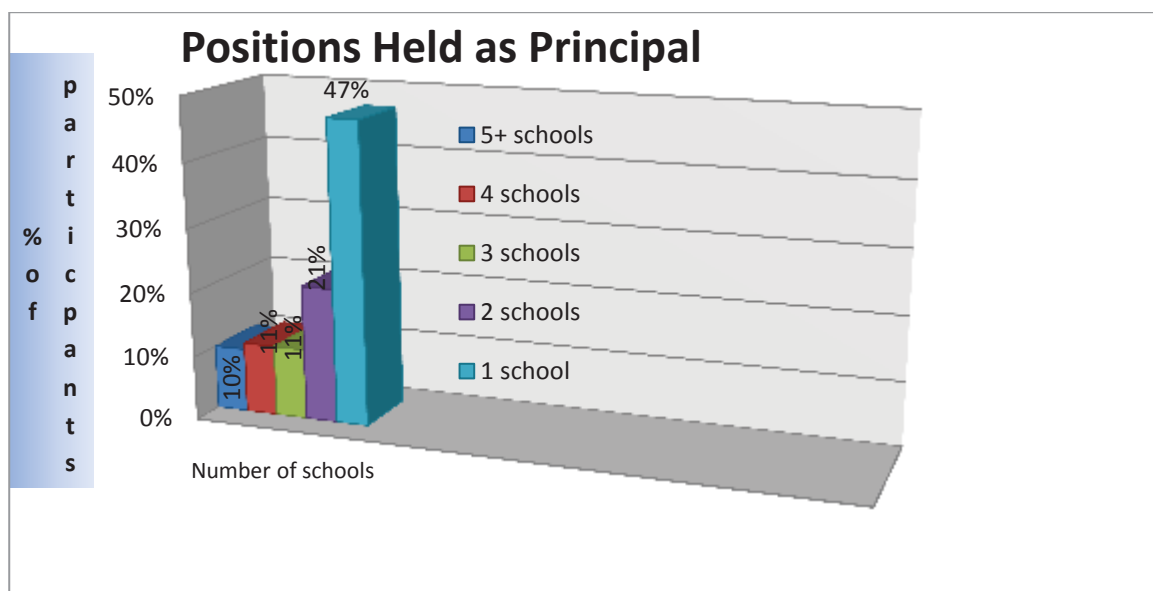
The graph confirms that the respondent percentages of principals have 11 years or more in the role and as such would be deemed experienced transformative leaders.

### **5.2.2 Number of positions held over time**

The data identified 47% of principals were in their first principalship. What cannot be ascertained is the length of time some principals spent in their first school. The question was posed to consider if changing schools was a reasonably common occurrence. In this case, 53% of the surveyed principals had made at least one change.

The data sources in Figures 6 and 7 suggest that the longer the service, potentially the more schools in which principalship was held. A question this generated for focus groups was “What motivates changing schools and what does a change in context do for leadership?”

**Figure 7: Number of positions held.**

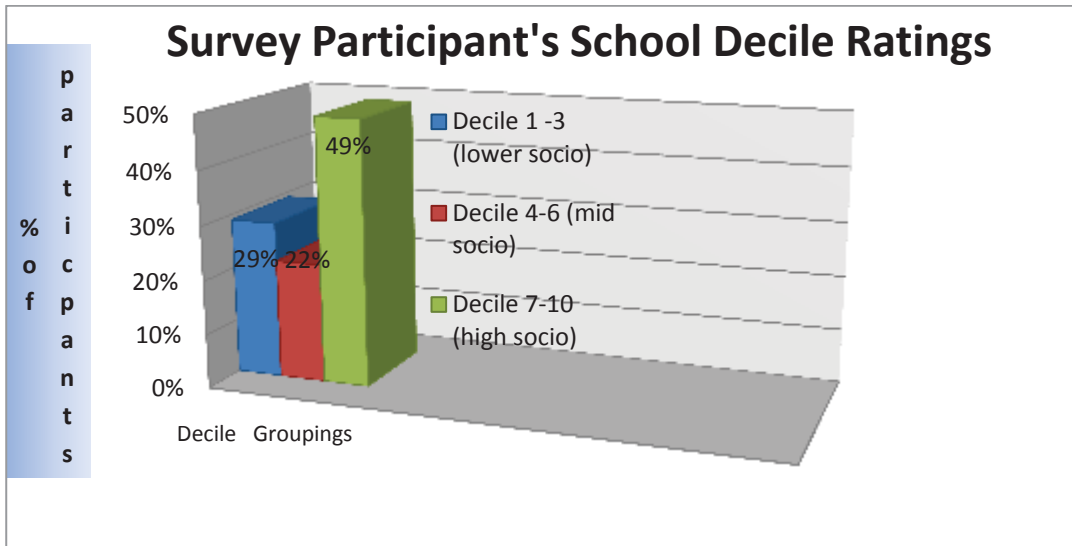


Literature suggests that good leaders in one school might not be so good in another (Dimmock & Walker, 1998). Hence, the experienced principal focus group sample included principals who had multiple school experience. The research did not include data from any leader with 5+ schools experience, but five of the experienced leader group had been principal in more than one school.

### **5.2.3 School deciles**

A school's decile indicates the geographic populations' wealth. The five-yearly censuses assess schools' population against a range of criteria. Funding for equity is applied based on the school's decile. Principals in schools below decile 4 receive an extra salary payment, a socio economic recognition payment.

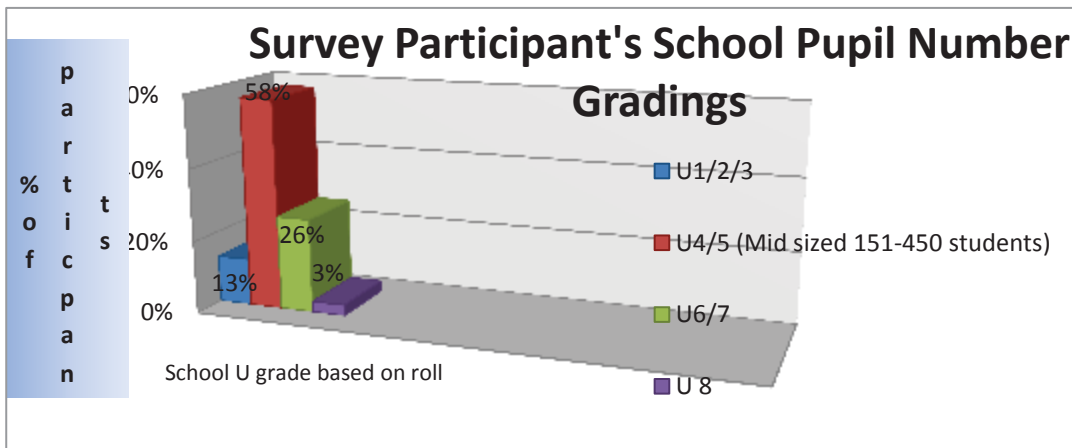
**Figure 8: Survey participant's school deciles**



Low decile schools fit within the decile 1 to 3 band. Mid-range decile schools are 4 to 6 and high decile schools are generally classified as decile 7 to 10. In this survey, 49% of respondents came from decile 7 to 10 schools. In comparison, the MOE database has 35% of all schools in the area as decile 7 to 10; these schools are over-represented in this survey. Deciles 1 to 3 schools comprise 45% of the population so in this survey are under-represented. Deciles 4 to 6 are therefore represented fairly.

**5.2.4 U-Ratings representing roll size**

**Figure 9: Size of schools led by respondents**

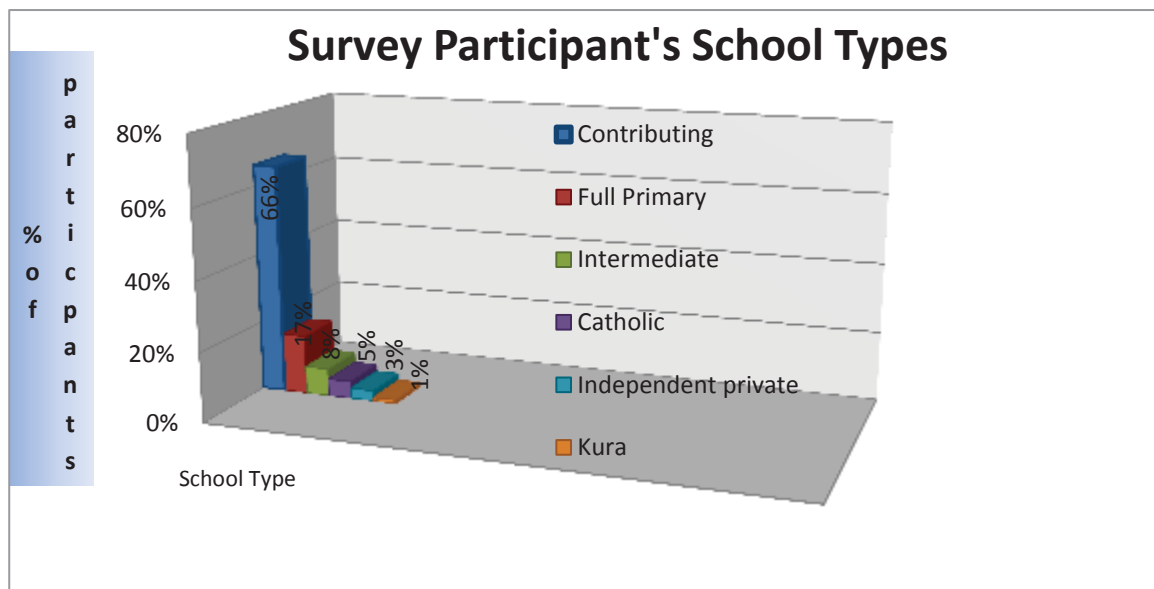


In the metropolitan region, the MOE data from the 2007 Directory of Schools identified 59%, or just over half the primary schools in the urban area, as U 4 and U5 in school roll size. These schools cater for 151-450 students with principals earning \$92,376 to \$99,089. There is no financial recognition of qualifications, although as previously stated there is financial recognition for principalship in lower decile schools.

Survey responses were consistent with the MOE data on school size. Most responses were received from the U4 and U5 sectors: 58% from U4 or U5 schools, 29% from U6 to and including U8 (501-1025 student roll), the larger schools, and 13% from U1 to U3 (1-150 student roll) or smaller schools. The purposive sampling for the focus groups reflected the greater proportion of schools in the U4 and U5 range.

### **5.2.5 School types**

***Figure 10 Types of schools***



Most responses, 66%, came from contributing schools. Contributing schools cater for year 1 to year 6 students that approximate the 5 year to 10-year age group. Full primary schools include years 7



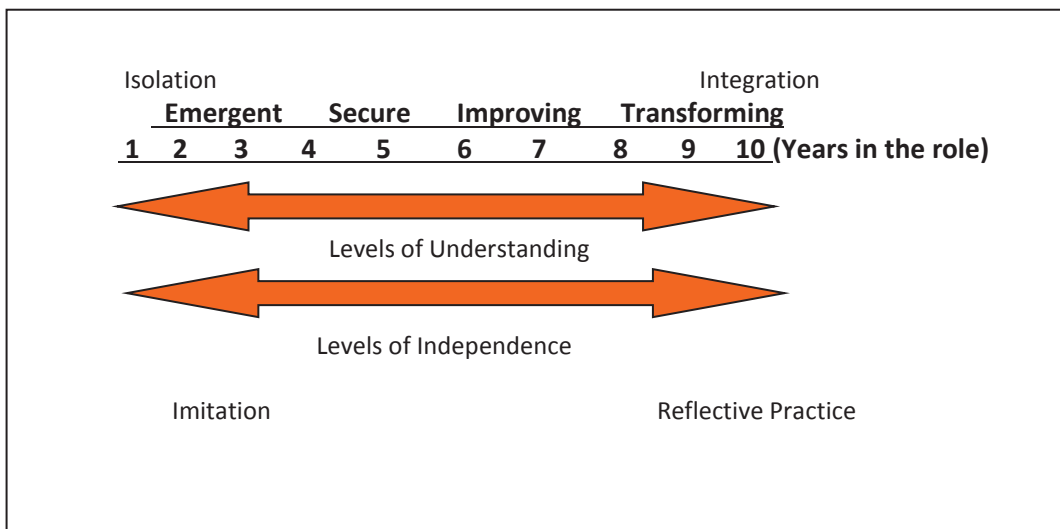
and 8 on their roll which equates to 11 and 12 year old students. Intermediate schools teach years 7 and 8 only and are classified as primary sector schools.

MoE data in 2007 had 53% of all primary schools in the urban area as contributing schools so the sample is over-represented in the research by 13%. Since full primary schools make up 36% of the total primary schools this survey, then a 17% response from full primary principals, was under-representing them. Eight percent of the replies came from intermediate schools, which is 2% less than the July 2007 MoE statistics. Less than 10% came from each of the following types of schools: private independent, Catholic integrated Special and Kura schools (Maori immersion schools). The MoE data base is consistent with those numbers with each of these school types providing for less than 10% of primary school-aged children.

### 5.2.6 Experience levels of principals

Highly effective principals are perceived to possess accumulated knowledge, which creates the basis of their professional practice as leaders and educationalists (Southworth,1995a) . Kedian(2004) refers to developing competencies as crafting wisdoms. Modified Figure 11, Principal’s Assimilation, identifies years one to three as an emergent time of learning the role and that by a principal’s seventh year they have skills to transform their schools.

**Figure 11: Principals’ assimilation** A modification of ‘Crafting Wisdoms’ from Jeremy Kedian, 2004)



(The survey (Appendix 3.p.306) grouped principals as 1 to 3 years' service, 4 to 6, and 7+ years. For the purposes of this research principals with 4 years, those becoming secure in the role chose by their selection of response whether to define themselves as experienced. Early career principals were also identified by their survey response. They answered questions related to pre-principalship and the first 3 years in the role. Experienced principals completed the questions related to meaningful learning as an experienced leader. A small number of the sample (not statistically significant) in the 4 to 6 years' experience bracket did not see themselves as experienced. Seven year plus, potentially transformative career principals generated 78% of the response. MoE does not have the data to compare principal experience statistics.

### **5.2.7 Types of learning**

***Table 7: Meaningful learning preferences for 'Early Career Principals' (Email survey data).***

<b>Types of Learning</b>	<b>Actual number of responses</b>
Colleagues, support from other experienced principals.	55
Learning on the job-doing the job. Getting on with it, problem solving and learning from mistakes.	35
First Time Principals' Programme (FTPP).	33
Cluster networks (Local, NZAIMS, Catholic, Special School, Primary Principals' Associations).	29
Mentoring.	27
Master's degree/ Postgraduate Diploma in leadership/administration	27
Rural advisors	15
Experience as a DP	10
MOE and their range of support services/mini courses	8
Advisors for Principals	4

In the second section of the questionnaire, principals were required to indicate the types of learning in which they had participated. They were asked to select from a detailed list of what was available in New Zealand at that time. There were high levels of convergence across the respondents.

Responding principals strongly supported the meaningfulness of learning provided through their local principal associations. They valued collegial support and networking as their main method of learning. Mentoring featured as important to all levels of principalship, as did the learning provided by the government-led programmes. Formal qualifications supported principals in their role, but the trend to gain qualifications was more significant for principals entering the secure phase of assimilation (See Figure 11.p.160).

Tables seven and eight (p.161 & 163) identify the 12 most meaningful forms of learning determined by the two groups: early career principals (Table 7) and experienced principals (Table 8). Types of learning that fell below 1% of the respondent groups have been collated in the appendices (Appendix 14.p.324). Participants were not restricted in the number of items they chose to select relevant to their development.

Consistent with the literature (Chapters 2 and 3), these data revealed that principals' learning needs are individualised and diverse. Secondly, collegiality and networking were perceived as providing the most support at all career levels of principalship. Contrary to the literature was the experienced leaders' drive for qualifications. Formalised study was cited as most meaningful by principals who had more than four years' experience.

**Table 8: Meaningful learning preferences for “Experienced Career Principals” (Email Survey).**

Types of Learning	Actual number of responses
Collegiality- includes Principal clusters (16) NZPF (3) Local groups(7) other groups through type of school, past schools etc. ( 6)	62
Formal Study –Master’s degree in Leadership Admin. (20 of the37); Post graduate Diplomas/study (6 of 37) and other	37
Conferences (5 comments about careful selection as more experienced)	15
PLGs/PLCs/PPLC - professional learning groups	15
PDPC	12
Professional Mentoring/ personal coach	11
Travel to overseas conferences/schools/APPA travel fellowship	9
On the job/experience	9
Personal initiatives	6
School wide initiatives	4

**5.2.8 Principals’ learning shifts**

The survey provided an opportunity for principals to acknowledge their most meaningful learning. The principals were required to indicate their types of study in three phases: pre principalship, in the first three years, and post five years. The defined selection options were informal, formal, and no direct leadership learning (Appendix 2, p.304).

Early career principals, (one to three years) placed formal learning at sixth place<sup>9</sup>. This is consistent with prior studies (Hill, et al., 1999). Experienced leaders placed formal learning as the second most meaningful manner of learning. The data identified a significant shift to formal learning as principals gained in experience. Fifty four out of 123 principals had, after their initial period in the role, gained Master's Degrees as their highest qualification and two had Educational Doctorates. Five more indicated they were studying at Educational Doctorate level. Nineteen participants had Postgraduate Diplomas as their highest award and eight had Certificates in Leadership. The shift by experienced leaders to formalised study was not recognised in any current New Zealand literature. Nonetheless, 83 principals, 55% of principals in the survey, had gone on to higher learning as they became more experienced in the role.

### **5.3 Interview data**

The interviews were focussed on two groupings of principals: early career, and those with experience. This research chose to consider two clearly defined groups.

The survey asked principals to record their contact details if they were interested in further involvement in the research. The principals' names were sorted into school size, type, principal gender, and decile. The types were matched to the purposive sample requirements (see Figure 4, p.136). As no Kura principals responded, two were contacted by telephone and personally invited to submit to the survey. None chose to participate further. Accordingly, the sample was modified to include Maori principal voice from mainstream schools.

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<sup>9</sup> Formal learning is learning that results in a qualification

All principals invited to participate were practising principals. Pseudonyms have been applied to provide confidentiality for principals and their schools. The principals' schools are situated across five districts of the city. This section firstly reports the comments of the early career participants followed by the experienced focus group participants' voice. The themes discussed link to the guiding questions (Appendix 7, p.316). Both groups included:

- a. Preparing for principalship, which includes discussion around appointment processes and practices
- b. Early career learning needs with a section on the First Time Principals' Programme
- c. Issues and challenges which includes barriers to learning and leading
- d. Informal and formal learning modes to include networking
- e. Meaningful learning
- f. Triangulating the email data

*Experienced principals' coding included:*

- g. Transferability of skills
- h. Continued/on-going learning

Four individual stories (embedded case studies) were included to strengthen some of the ideas raised through the focus groups. The data have been analysed through Chapter Five, producing analytical statements to reflect both group's common beliefs. Further analysis has led to recommendations for future principals' learning development as outlined in Chapter Seven.

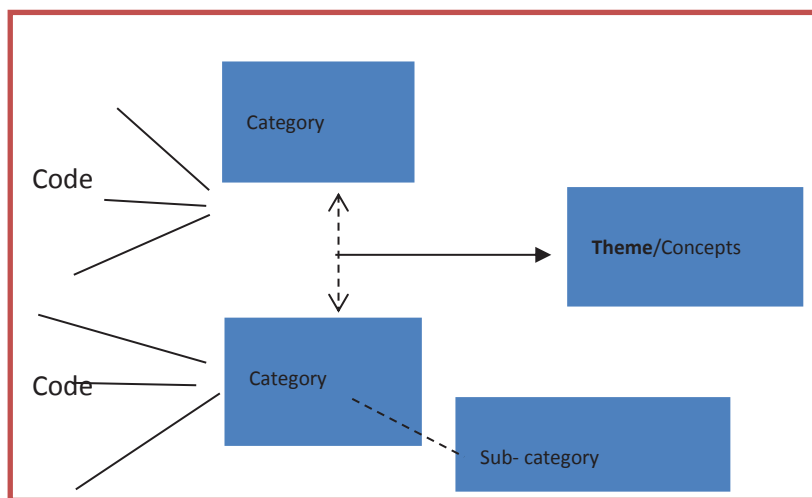
#### **5.4 Coding**

To make sense of the transcript, the dialogue was coded and grouped using QSR's qualitative software analysis tool, Nvivo 7. Appendix 14, p.324, provides a sample of the research coding. The

codes were built up over several analytical iterations. The initial list of coding themes (chapter 4, p.116) broadly group common ideas.

The second phase of the coding, involved grouping common themes together to build up categories of discussion (Saldana, 2009). Identified in Figure Twelve “Codes to Concepts,” the streamlining process is identified. This is fully articulated in Chapter Four (Outlining the Protocol Chapter 4 p.129).

**Figure: 12 Codes to concepts (Modified from Saldana, 2009.p 12)**



The process ensures codes are grouped to specific categories. For example, two of the group talked about motherhood and time as influences on their principalship development and so the codes included both time and parenthood concepts. These categories were then re-grouped under the barriers to learning theme.

Where there was no fit with one of the literature-developed categories, a new category was developed. One example, there were numerous comments around the topic in-school development, hence a sub category of the tacit learning was created which in turn linked into the major theme of informal learning. The process involved the researcher building generalisability through grouped themes. These themes in-turn informed the findings.

### **5.5 Early career focus group.**

The focus group participants were leaders in decile 1 to decile 10 schools. Their schools ranged in roll size from U 3 to U 6 and principals represented a range of primary school types. The participants had an array of qualifications and pathways to principalship. Chris and Denise (pseudonyms) had the opportunity to carry out acting principal's roles whilst their principals were on study leave. For these two participants the experience occurred prior to their being appointed to principal. Chris also experienced one term on the aspiring principals' pilot prior to appointment.

Table 9 identifies, using pseudonyms, the early career group. In this group, Larry and Karena self-selected to carry out phase three of the research, the individual interview.

***Table 9: The early career group demographic.***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Leader Service</b>	<b>School size</b>	<b>School decile</b>	<b>School type</b>	<b>Qualification</b>
Karena	2 ½ years	U5	7	Contributing	Dip Ed. Admin.
Bronny	2 years	U5	2	Intermediate	"life experience"
Chris	6 months.	U4	9	Contributing	1 <sup>st</sup> year Master's Ed. Admin. but stopped on gaining principalship
Denise	2 years	U3	4	Contributing	Partial completion M. Ed. Admin
Prue	2 years	U5	3	Full Primary	Dip Ed Admin
Jason	3 years	U4	4	Full Primary Integrated Catholic	Partial completion of M. Ed Admin
Larry	2 years	U6	10	Full Primary	M. Ed Management

All seven principals, at the time of the research, attended or were attending the First Time Principals' Programme (FTPP). Each participant noted the importance their colleagues, teachers, and administrative staff made to them being able to do what they described as an enormous and very challenging job.



### **5.5.1 Preparing for the job**

The question that emerged in the early career focus group discussion was, “Can you ever prepare someone fully for principalship?” The responses listed: “They can’t,” “You can’t,” “No,” “Definitely not,” “You can’t give it to them,” “No,” were seven people saying emphatically, no! There was also a sense that you cannot learn principalship from a textbook.

*You can have all of the leadership knowledge in the world, in theory and so on, but it is putting it into context that’s the biggest challenge. (Prue)*

The group had very clear concepts of what worked. Mentorship, strong role models, personal fit with the school, and the desire to build relationships were their articulated beliefs.

There was group consensus that some elements, such as the knowledge of teaching and learning, were naturally brought to the role. The group acknowledged that Robinson and other FTP facilitators nonetheless believed there needed to be more rigour in pedagogical leadership for all new principals. There was debate about academics not having as much knowledge as the principals doing the job. The general belief of the group was that as deputy principals (all moved to principalship from a DP position) they had developed sufficient depth of knowledge to provide school wide curriculum leadership.

Bronny talked specifically around the notion of creating “a success key.” She believed being a leader was all about knowing people and knowing how to unlock expertise. She identified her knowledge coming from her senior management time and her Master’s Degree.

*I focus a lot of my leadership around relationships, and have found that that’s very successful when moving into Principalship. (Bronny)*

The idea of, 'bringing your knowledge with you,' came with the caveat, only if you had moved through senior teacher to deputy principal<sup>10</sup> to principal. The group felt strongly that experience was more important than study. There was strong consensus around succession planning.

*It should be an ethical responsibility of principals to plan for succession. Not necessarily in your own school, but within the profession. (Prue)*

That idea sparked conversation and agreement that principal sabbaticals could be a possible method of providing opportunity for practical learning. Both Denise and Chris drew on their experiences leading the school whilst their principals were studying. Chris commented:

*I was very fortunate to have an extremely strong principal and mentor who got me involved in things like property and finance meetings, but as you say it doesn't really make sense until it is in your own school and you are confronted with the ultimate decisions. In an acting role, you got of sense of what it would be like. (Chris)*

The group considered how each person had prepared for principalship. Two participants moved into advisory roles then principalship but both felt they had spent enough time in senior school roles to understand what was required of them. The group agreed that through succession preparation they gained core skills of conflict resolution, curriculum leadership, and organisation. Three of the group felt they had been encouraged by their principals to seek further leadership development through

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<sup>10</sup> *The terms deputy principal, associate principal, assistant and vice principal are used quite loosely in New Zealand schools to denote the person or in some cases people who work as part of the school's executive leadership team. Some schools still differentiate deputy is above assistant but self-managing schools use the terms they choose so there is no one rule for each school.*

attending courses in middle management. Two had completed postgraduate study. Two participants had started Masters of Educational Administration study but put their study on hold once appointed to principalship. Despite all moving through senior roles, each person developed leadership skills differently dependent on their school's context. That context seemed to be highly influenced by their principals at the time.

### **5.5.2 Appointing early career principals**

All early career participants believed that they needed more than succession knowledge learned on the job. Three participants felt strongly that academic qualifications prior to appointment were necessary although four were undecided as to the timing of qualifications. There was also an aspect of 'fit with school', that needed consideration. In particular, they discussed that Boards of Trustees 'take a gamble' employing untested principals. What emerged from this dialogue was the imprecise matching process referenced by Brooking (2008) where appointments directly link to a people-fit.

*I could feel the fit was there, because I'd come from a similar school, similar decile, I was able to talk to them about having been a teacher, on a Board as a parent, in the same sort of decile community, so that they could see that I had the fit in terms of the, type of person. (Larry)*

*I had nine people sitting around me and it felt like I was in a fish bowl, it was a huge. However, I felt like I was comfortable and they obviously felt like they were comfortable having me because of that whole matching thing. (Karena)*

Brooking (2008), aired her concern with the Board appointment process not giving more credence to demonstrated leadership skill, but it seems that this is a two-way process. Principals in this study felt strongly that they did need to fit with their community.

### 5.5.3 Early career learning needs and the FTPP

Principals described how early on in the role they often felt out of their depth. It was apparent the principals were all at different stages of need, but unanimously they agreed that small groups with specific learning were one way of 'plugging the gaps.' They also felt that a range of learning was required.

*There is research overseas saying that we need a combination of university and government type courses, and your own learning. (Larry)*

All participants attended the First Time Principals' Programme. There were concerns expressed that the FTPP did not meet specific needs.

*In the First Time Principals' Programme, there is a conflict in that the University runs one part and then there is a Ministry aspect; a Ministry run department of it. Because, when it was brought up in our group about addressing some of the finance and property issues, all we got back was, "that is not what we are here to do". Therefore, for me, there is a conflict between who is doing what, when our role isn't about nuts and bolts. Our role combines leadership and management stuff. So that, that concerns me, that they didn't feel that it was their responsibility. I spoke to the course directors of the FTPP about it, in quite a lot of detail, and heated discussion because I felt that our group was crying out for finance and property. (Bronny)*

Participants clarified that the FTPP presented positive and negative aspects for their learning. The group felt that it was correct to have school leadership primarily focussed on students and learning. However, two of the seven articulated there was too much emphasis on big picture thinking and curriculum. They felt there needed to be learning based on the management aspects of leadership.

What they required was knowledge considering property, human resourcing, and financial management.

Three (out of seven) early career principals had withdrawn from formal courses (two master's programmes and one post-graduate programme) when they became principals. They felt the combination of workload and the FTTP was a barrier to them being able to continue with additional formal study. Unanimously, the early career principals felt they had no choice but to be involved in the FTTP.

*You felt like the FTTP was compulsory. You were certainly given the impression that if you did not do it, you'd get rapped over the knuckles. (Karena)*

On the other hand, the early career principal participants made contacts and built networks through the First Time Principals' Programme. Karena, despite feeling a compulsion, valued the learning.

*The networking was probably the biggest thing. Thinking, "Yes, I could put that into the school, yes I could do that." You know it was the practical ideas I took away with me. (Karena)*

#### **5.5.4 Issues and challenges to learning and doing the job**

The main challenge identified by the group centred on the 'nuts and bolts' needs, and knowing what to do in an amazingly diverse range of situations. Two cited examples were pupil suspension and power outages, people and technical issues, not curriculum. In particular, the group felt they all had to learn how to cope with property and finance. Larry, in the early career focus group discussion, encapsulated the groups' thoughts with:

*My mentor (from a personal network) kept telling me; when referencing finance and property, it won't make sense until you have to work with it, and that was exactly spot on.*

The Ministry of Education was applauded for more recently making an effort to support new principals gain knowledge. They had initiated providing small courses to specifically deal with aspects of management such as budget preparation.

Boards of Trustees created a range of challenges for this group. The challenges involved board members not understanding the governance role and stepping into management. Board members expected too much from an early career principal and wanted too much information too often. Depending on their understanding of their role, board chairs may help or hinder principals.

Another challenge raised by the group was working with an existing senior staff member who had applied and not been appointed to the principalship. A disgruntled deputy principal can make a newly appointed principal's life untenable.

The greatest identifiable challenge and barrier to learning however, was balancing time and tasks. For this group of principals they felt their greatest stressor was feeling like they could never complete anything well.

*"How do you keep all the balls juggling, be successful, and not drop them?" My mentor's answer was you just have to prioritise. Decide what the most important thing is. (Denise)*

Despite the concerns, the participants felt they managed to stay focused on people, teaching, and learning in their schools. There was a sense of pride that what they did was important.

### **5.5.5 Formal & informal learning**

Every participant believed formalised learning should be expected, although views varied as to the ideal timing of qualification study. All participants thought that formal learning was impossible during the first year in the job because the FTTP was an extensive time commitment. The group felt if there was to be a formal component, it needed to be either

pre-principalship, or, for most of the group, after they had settled into and felt comfortable with the job. After those initial years, the participants felt they were, or were going to be, ready for greater challenges.

Interestingly they articulated that principalship might not be their final career destination and that qualifications would be needed if a range of future career pathways options were to be a consideration.

*I might want to do something after I've been a Principal. In what's left of my working life, which will probably go on until I'm seventy, but I'm not sure at this stage, that I want to be a principal for a decade even. (Denise)*

The dialogue established that learning needs are as diverse as the schools where these principals serve. Each principal had their own individual requirements and preferred styles of leading. Through the discussion, they identified the variety of ways they chose and preferred to learn: formal, informal, with colleagues, doing their own reading, task specific, broad visionary learning, conferences, and short courses and with mentors.

There was a sense they weighed up what was available, with funds available in their budget, with what would best support them to do the job. The literature made little mention of the cost of studying or who bore the financial burden. For this group there was a combination of school and self-funding of learning. Cost and time, were cited as further barriers to study. They all believed they required learning that supported them to make a difference in their schools.

### **5.5.6 Meaningful learning**

A domain this group touched on was the learning they believed made a difference to the children, teachers, and their school community. Prue felt that attending Board of Trustees training was a good way of “*getting everybody on the same page, all together.*” Denise discerned through an educational

leadership course how to analyse what was and was not working. Then, through a full staff interview process, she determined the staff's vision for the school and made staffing decisions based on that knowledge. She had to reduce staffing and the discussions consolidated her thinking around who to make redundant.

All agreed that at times they were making employment decisions that required a detailed understanding of human resource management and the law. They felt strongly that they needed to know what was required of them. Some gained that knowledge through study and others felt they had access to mentors who would advise them.

Despite probing for examples where participants could validate their learning in terms of pupil outcomes, there was very little commentary on the idea, other than that principals "have to get it right." Karena had attended courses, advised principals, and read about inquiry. She believed principalship required a clear and strong mental picture of where a school was heading.

*You have to be quite clear about a vision for what education is. The property and finance runs, I mean, there are sometimes issues but what I'm more interested in is getting the teaching and learning happening in the school. And, (in my school) it was happening really well. So when it's happening really well, (you have to ask yourself) how do you do that? Making use of where the interest is (and) in the motivation for teachers. That seems to have worked really well. (Karena)*

### **5.5.7 Triangulating the email survey data**

As a group, the early career principal discounted the idea that came through the email survey, that appraisal training was meaningful learning. The seven leaders had not trained as appraisers other than what they learned through the FTTP. They did not see appraisal learning as vital to how they led their schools although they appreciated school-wide knowledge about evidence-based teaching.



Three of the group felt that prior theoretical knowledge enhanced their early leadership. Four felt learning in the job and knowing people to call on for support was most valuable. None could talk with any knowledge about the effectiveness of the pilot aspiring programme but all of them had a strong belief that principals needed development beyond just teaching.

In summary, the early principal group believed it took time to learn the job. Principals need prior learning which, for this group, came from moving progressively through leadership roles in the school. Once in the role, considerable learning was required in the context of their school.

Mentors and networking were vital supports for staying in the job. They all believed the job at times felt “too big for one person” but when they felt secure in the role, they had a common belief that they would continue their learning with formal study.

#### **5.6 Experienced principals’ focus group**

The experienced group had seven years in principalship as their minimum time in the role. They were the largest group in the email survey. As with the early career principals, the schools they currently worked in were situated across the city. Again, pseudonyms have been used to provide confidentiality to the principals and their schools. Ewen and Jenny agreed to participate in the phase three individual interviews. Table 10 (p.177) provides an overview of the total group of experienced participants and their schools.

The Group had a wide range of formal qualifications. All, but one, gained their postgraduate, formal qualifications after being appointed to principalship. Conversation with these principals flowed fast. As an observer and listener, you got a sense of the passion and collective wisdom of these principals.

**Table 10: An overview of the experienced career group's diversity**

Name	Leadership Service	School size	School decile	School type	Highest Qualification
Harry 1 <sup>st</sup> position	10 years	U 5	7	Contributing Full primary	Partial completion M. Ed. Admin
Jenny 2 <sup>nd</sup> position	8 years	U 7	10	Contributing	M.Ed. Admin
Carla 6 <sup>th</sup> position	22 years	U 5	10	Full primary	Dip Tchg.
Ewen 2 <sup>nd</sup> position	25years+	U6	3	Contributing	Doctorate of Education
Sharon 2 <sup>nd</sup> position	13 years	U6	1A	Contributing	Dip. Tchg.
Alex 3 <sup>rd</sup> position	15 years	U 6	9	Intermediate	Partial Master's Ed. Admin Dip. Ed. Admin
Mary 2 <sup>nd</sup> position	10 years	U7	9	Full Primary	Master of Education
Byron 1 <sup>st</sup> primary sector position	15yr+	U6	5	Intermediate	Master of Education

### **5.7 Experienced career dialogue coding**

The early career and experienced career codes were very similar except the experienced career group were able to focus on the support of rural advisors. They were, as a group, much more aware of the impact of formal learning on the role and quite explicit as to why Master's level learning provided support to a person in the role. Nobody believed a single course with a prescribed curriculum 'made' a person a more effective principal.

*Principalship is not something you learn from a book. (Jenny)*

The participants considered the core component of the role as leading teachers. They discussed responding to different people's personalities; to issues of competency; to suspension; to being the property developer. Early in their careers, they were often faced with issues in which they lacked knowledge and awareness. In the main, other principals, their colleagues, not books, gave them guidance.

*I don't think you could ever prepare anyone for the role. I mean that. There are certain things you could know. The Principal I worked for (before Mary became a principal) involved me in the budget setting, so that, I was ready for that when we started to do that in Term 3. I had been involved in employment, so I'd done that. My Board report, I hadn't ever done Board reports, but I'd seen a good model previously, when I was the DP. I suppose those sorts of things that if you're involved in them, are good on the job training. (Mary)*

### **5.7.1 Nurture or nature in your early career.**

The experienced principal group began by exploring whether leadership could be learned. Although there was a belief that there was considerable learning to do, there was much discussion around being identified and nurtured and having the natural propensity to lead early in their teaching careers.

*I think you are born with it to be honest but I also think you can improve on your skills.  
(Sharon)*

*You have huge biases towards natural leadership, but leadership can be nurtured, and it can be developed, and moulded. (Harry)*

*Initiative for me is the key word. Because I had the ability to see some things that needed to be done and did them and that was seen, that was encouraged, and that was nurtured. I see that as leadership ability. I just did those things naturally, but they were recognised by somebody else, and encouraged. (Jenny)*

These comments make apparent that participants felt principals' recognising and developing talent in their teaching staff could improve the process of leadership.

Initial discussion with this group considered how each individual came into principalship. The principals talked about succession planning, building expertise through experience at different schools; being in the right place at the right time and other broader leadership learning experiences. The era of becoming a principal was also a factor. Two of the principals, pre-Tomorrow's Schools, described the support by the rural advisors as invaluable.

*They had a roster and a number of schools that they rotated to, and in our case, it was about 18 or 20 schools. And they just rang up and made appointments and just went around the schools and supported you. When we were appointed, they knew that we were first time Principals. And they had no expectations of us beyond that. You know, they were realistic. (Carla)*

*They held the group together in terms of a cluster. Like the Chairperson of a group. (Ewen)*

The Boards of Education, pre- 1989, were major contributors to the running of a school.

*Training for being a principal was really the same as training to be a teacher. It became the expected thing to do. One day I had this grading level, you just applied for this job, and you applied for that. For me the pre-service, the pre- principalship training was non- existent really. (Ewen)*

Post Tomorrow's schools (1989) the principals' job expanded considerably beyond curriculum leadership and the skills required became far more comprehensive.

*A huge part of my preparation, even though I didn't know it at the time, was leading community groups. Being the first person to set up a new parent centre, I had a lot of leadership in the community. I think community work was a great preparation for that leadership role. (Jenny)*

*I just climbed up through bigger and bigger schools. (Carla)*

Early on in their first roles, as described by Harry, principals identified understanding the "Impostor Syndrome." Many participants described not knowing what they were meant to do.

*I remember my first morning at ten o'clock; I went out to the secretary and said, "What do I do now?" And I think that's the last time I ever asked that as a Principal, but I remember after one, or even two hours in the job, I didn't know what I was doing. (Byron)*

*I actually became Acting Principal of a school, as Tomorrow's School's was coming in. So I was literally thrown in to the deep end; blind leading the blind a little bit. And the training I got was, I was given the keys to the school and, that was it really. (Sharon)*

For Sharon this was pivotal in her career. She had arrived in the city to take on a Deputy Principal role, so she was already aspiring to leadership. Then the principal was promoted. She became an acting principal then principal. There was no induction or learning period for her. She admits to having no real idea of what was expected of her other than keep the school going.

*It was literally just sinking or swimming, and I decided to swim. (Sharon)*

Sharon has been a principal now for thirteen years. Some days the job gets her down but it also excites her. The school has grown with her.

*They've actually encouraged me, paid for me to do what I want, and supported me in giving me time. (Sharon)*

### **5.7.2 Networking**

Networking was recognised by all participants as important to their learning and well-being.

Colleagues were described as important in providing them with emotional support and advice. Alex talked about colleagues providing a range of ways to handle different situations. Conferences were described as opportune for networking. Two described finding out how and where to access resources, government projects, funding. Networking enabled these participants to share with different colleagues the different approaches they had, for example, handling difficult conversations with staff.

Mary valued her principal learning group, an informal group who met regularly and talked around a range of subjects. That sharing she believed was vital to her well-being. Jenny described her previous principals' cluster group. She said there were five principals who motivated each other and ignited new thinking:

*Little lighthouse stuff in our schools, so what happens when we came together, all the lighthouses sort of came together across a whole lot of schools. (Jenny)*

Byron described learning "so much" from his colleagues. All felt learning with others, and watching what others do supported them to be more effective. Networking removed some of the feelings of isolation.

There was a proviso however, that only learning from each other could be too narrow and create an inward looking profession. There was consensus that formal learning, linked to strong networks, was a “two pronged method” that supported principals’ effectiveness.

*I would not be coping as well with the challenges that I’ve currently got if I didn’t have this wealth of theory and learning, and conscious learning, behind me. (Jenny)*

### **5.7.3 Formal learning**

Formal learning (learning that resulted in qualifications), was valued as meaningful by **all** participants. Formal study provided experienced principals with knowledge and challenge. They described it providing them with the ability to draw on and seek literature to support their vision. Participants talked about understanding people and a school’s culture from a theoretical perspective. They felt they were better principals because of their formal learning. They could call on studies to inform their decisions.

Jenny described taking time to talk with her staff to find out what they thought was important before instigating new programmes. This came out of her work on change management. Mary explained her focus on formative assessment derived from an understanding of models of learning. Six of the participants outlined how study informed their school’s development.

*I did my Master’s, sort of mid-career and it sort of prepared and recharged me again; because at that stage I’d done probably about 15, 16 years of small school principalship, and it rejuvenated me, to take it on again after a break. (Carla)*

*I’ve changed my mind over the years actually. I thought you could, you know, do it without having to do any academic study. And I didn’t start studying till I was in my mid-thirties, forties, and it was drip fed a bit every year. I’ve come to the point now*

*to believe that if we really want a profession, if we want to be seen as a profession, we then have to do this now. We need some formal qualification. (Harry)*

There were strong suggestions that a formal qualification should be a minimum pre-entry requirement and that formal study was necessary to do the job.

*I am a real fan of academic study. If I had my way, I would have every principal with a Master's Degree. I would pay them to have it. I would not bother with a lot of these courses. I'd just say, right, here's eight thousand dollars for principals with Master's Degrees. Then they would go and do the study themselves for the money. The study I would expect would be around the philosophy of education, what teaching's all about, why we have schools; the whole sort of philosophical, psychological perspective on education. So that's, what I am a fan of. (Ewen)*

*I'd almost go so far to make, that some form of qualification training probably compulsory. Because it's such an important job, and it's just so vital. In my, role I have helped a lot of principals, a lot of the ones that I think are in need, they just don't know what they don't know. And I think that help, (could come) through some sort of study. We should not be appointing principals who have not got an academic degree. I just cannot believe that they haven't in this day and age. (Mary)*

Qualifications support a principal in the job but study constraints were an issue.

#### **5.7.4 Barriers to formal learning**

Mary felt her family life had been eroded by every weekend being given over to her Master's Degree. Jenny developed health issues because of the excessive workloads of a job and study. She still has those health issues. Harry described the cost of the job, as "*phenomenal.*" He felt the drain



on a principal's, "emotional, physical, and mental wellbeing," as unacceptable. Sharon said she would love to do a Master's Degree but she physically did not have the time.

Byron felt government policy needed to change, that the overworking factor in the job is untenable. He outlined twelve-hour working days and no lunch, and then meetings night after night. To add studying to a person's already full schedule seemed to signal disaster. Cost of studying was raised several times as a de-motivator.

Carla reminded the group that if they thought it was bad for urban principals in large schools imagine how much worse it would be for a rural principal to contemplate study. "They don't have time. They'd go out of their tree." Despite recognising the barriers, the principals did have suggestions and outlined possibilities for the future. They felt sabbaticals provided respite. Restructuring of schools and the notion of distributing more of the role was also seen as having merit. Alex talked about online opportunities not being fully utilised. Despite the many barriers, participants maintained a belief that formal learning should be a required aspect of a principal's learning repertoire.

*Having choice, and getting supported to do it. I don't know if there's a sort of one plan for all, but I think it is necessary; the complexity of the job now requires robustness in every aspect of it. Whether it's the relationship side, or it's the academic side, you know, we are the front people for a huge industry. (Alex)*

Mary considered one day a week allocated to principal study, as an option. Study leave opportunities were also highly valued. Jenny argued that the added bonus for principals on study leave was that deputy principals had practice in the job. Pre- principalship formal learning was also suggested as a means to ensuring principals had what the group deemed, learning with academic rigour. However, no one believed reading a staff usage report (SUE report) or developing property plans were possible to learn until a principal was in the job. Ewen described this as, "in time learning."

### 5.7.5 Learning to support greater effectiveness

When the participants were asked to consider the types of learning that helped them be more effective they developed a comprehensive list. Mentoring, networking, input from business friends, literature and colleagues supporting and encouraging you, were all expressed as supportive. Alex described his jogging partner's (a friend principal) input into problem solving as invaluable. *"It's having that help on hand, when you want it. 'Look I'm into it up to my neck, what do I do now?'"*

There was no doubt these principals felt an isolated person could not do the job as effectively.

Alex talked about web resources, in particular Leadspace, the government's leadership portal, having the potential to provide immediate response to management type questions. *"You know there's, actually there's a powerful lot of stuff there that we could use. But it's cumbersome. It's a hassle to get into. And they've got to overcome that."* There was strong awareness that the job was huge and that the management aspects were easier than leading, so they sometimes dominated the 'actual doing', of the job. On-line support could provide effortless solutions and quick information when needed.

The principals described trying to give away the management type jobs but felt often that they held onto control. They liked to have their say, *"even down to things like the colour of the carpet for the new building"* (Ewen). In fact, as a person became more experienced, the job seemed to get even bigger. Harry described the first five years of principalship as getting by, in his words just *"steering the ship in the right direction,"* but as he became more experienced the focus changed to *"sustaining and reinventing."* He described his career and his contexts changing and leadership therefore changing within those contexts despite staying in the same school. For Alex it was about developing knowledge that *"comes with time."* Through discussion, it became apparent that the focus over time changed from management tasking to a focus on leadership. The big picture of where the school was

heading, student achievement, and outcomes were some of the areas identified. The notion of being transformational as identified throughout the literature.

### **5.7.6 The importance of challenge**

Challenge was mentioned as being important to all participants. Changing schools was cited as one approach for increasing challenge. In particular, having new staff, new Boards, new parents, and knowing better how to manage all of the various stakeholders supported experienced principals' rise to the challenge.

The concept of challenge from school change raised several considerations. Remaining in a small school could be de-motivational when a principal wanted to tackle something larger. As well, the support of a larger management team was mentioned as desirable, along with increased financial reward leading a larger school. Nonetheless staying in the existing school where a principal was known and trusted enabled them to experiment with new thinking. It seemed changing schools could provide a positive or negative experience depending on the people. In a second or third appointment, principals agreed, they had greater knowledge to deal with issues of conflict.

*I can remember sitting in the meeting thinking I'm so pleased I've got a bit of experience under my belt. Had I just been fresh to principalship I would have thought, my gosh, what have I walked into? (Harry)*

Appointment to new schools generated the application of new ideas for principals. Jenny interviewed every staff member in her second school, to discern their needs and to build an understanding of the school and its strengths. She did not do that in her first school, in her first years of principalship. A new school allowed her to apply the theories and knowledge developed from study and experience. She had greater confidence to apply those skills to a new setting.

Challenge is not solely developed through principalship in another school. Sharon and Ewen felt, since 1989, their current schools had changed and grown and that provided their challenge. The most important thing for them was that their Boards recognised their needs and made sure they met them.

*My school's grown while I've been there, but the really important reason,(I stay) is that school's been really good to me. (Sharon)*

The participants were aware of the principal disenchantment literature coming out of Britain. Ewen made this comment.

*I think that around about ten years, probably, you probably do need to reinvent yourself in some way. If you stay in the same school, you need to reinvent yourself. I think you can do it; you don't have to move on to another school. It is about having the opportunity in your current system, where you can take that stock take and be innovative.*

#### **5.7.7 Defining a person's principalship**

School context fitting with the principal was considered important. It was apparent through the conversations that the participants believed context defined a person's principalship. Principals choose to work in certain environments. They believed they could work in any school but chose not to. Mary described an important step for her, when changing schools, was to talk to the administration staff.

*We under-rate them when you go into a school. They know the nuts and bolts; and they've had the ear of the principal, the previous principal.*

Principals in the experienced focus groups demonstrated wisdom in succession planning. They discussed the importance of identifying and developing future leaders.

*I've got a second year teacher at school that you can see has got phenomenal leadership skills, phenomenal relationship skills, she's going to be a leader who makes a difference.*  
*(Alex)*

They identified how the process of developing principals could be shortened. The long road, teacher to senior teacher to deputy principal to principal could be reduced if targeted training was provided. These principals genuinely believed they had a role as trainers of future leaders.

*There are three in our leadership team, one of them has just been teaching two years, but she is an exceptional leader. And if she aspired to be a principal, she could be a brilliant principal. But she probably just needs the experience of dealing with people. They top leaders, but it's just that confidence thing. I don't think they do need to go through that progression necessarily. (Jenny)*

It was in this discussion that the notion of delegation and distributed leadership was raised as being the only way principals could do their job. No one perceived principalship as one person doing it all. It takes a well-led team to run an effective school.

### **5.7.8 How, why and what stops leaders learning?**

The experienced group focussed predominantly on three aspects: their learning, motivation to learn and the fundamental barriers to principal learning.

Experienced principals, when asked what policy makers could do to ensure principals are exposed to meaningful learning, described opportunity, stronger networking, improved middle management leadership development, provision of time and financial support to complete their study. Although money was not seen as crucial to taking on the role of principalship, the participants deliberated over teachers being rewarded for academic qualification and aired concern that the same did not apply to principals.

Ewen said the policy makers need to provide opportunities for "*academic training, overseas international experience of travelling and seeing schools and talking to people and supporting networks of people.*" Hargreaves (2011) described similar catalysts for creating greater school coherence as: school-to-school networks and leadership development, people working together with purpose, having ownership and common direction.

In summary, the significant ideas raised by experienced principals have been grouped into three categories:

### **Learning**

- Formal learning is necessary; it provides a pedagogical and philosophical backbone to a principal's work.
- Informal networking and collegial support is paramount to a principal's well-being and problem solving.
- Understanding people is the largest component of the job. This involves a combination of learning. Informal learning, watching and talking about how to deal with situations, life experience also influences how we treat others and formal learning can support decision making for styles of managing people.
- It is easy to be diverted into administrative obligations, but learning has to involve understanding systems.
- Sabbaticals and study leave strongly support principals' learning by providing them with time for reflection and deep learning.
- Some learning cannot be done in advance. Significant learning occurs contextually and spontaneously within the role.

### **Motivation to learn**

- Understanding context and building sustainability; within that context are the key drivers to feeling more successful and generating greater motivation.
- Principals recognise, and are excited with their role in developing new leaders.

- Boards of Trustees understanding of what drives principals, and supporting them financially to realise their vision, is paramount to success and retention.
- Principals want and need data to support decision making, problem solving and change management.
- Deeply caring about what happens to children and their learning is what motivates principalship.
- Pedagogical knowledge ensures principals understand how to improve student outcomes.
- Time in the job leads to greater understanding of how to do the job.

### **Barriers**

- Time, which is affected by workload, learning, family needs and striving for balance is the single largest barrier.
- People in the organisation who create negativity (the word used by two participants was 'septic'), need to be advised that education is forward thinking. Schools require a balance of critique and positivity.

These identified themes are developed further in Chapter Six, in the analysis and discussion of optimal learning and favourable conditions for learning.

### **5.7.9 Pathways for learning**

No agreement was reached for a single mandated qualification path, pre-principalship, or post-appointment. Both groups however, did agree that there needed to be a combination of formal and informal learning before, and in the early stages of, principalship. They established that academic learning and networks needed to be on-going.

*I think that on the job stuff, the people stuff, the mentoring is where you really learn.*

*People, like me, need the theory in the background, and that's almost an academic exercise, to have that theory in the background to reflect on. However, the actual practical learning all comes from your day to day practice. (Jenny)*

The participants considered degree qualifications more worthwhile than multiple course certificates. They identified that formal learning gave a person, “confidence; a theoretical base to call on.” Ewen raised his concern about the FTTP; that an 18-month course provided no cross credits to a formalised qualification. This he thought could be “*an easy fix.*”

Mentoring by more experienced colleagues was raised as a possibility. As well, the idea of an apprenticeship model with recognised and trained principals sitting alongside training principals was considered. Funded travel for principals, as is offered in both Sweden and Britain, was mooted as positive learning. The group were incredibly grateful to their Boards of Trustees when they were funded to experience educational opportunities overseas. Strengthening the principals’ academic base and building capacity through networks underpinned the dialogue from the interviews.

The focus group interviews provided rich descriptive data. They dispelled and supported data collected through the email survey. It became clear the job was at times untenable; learning was often context-bound and principals needed to work out issues with colleagues. Principalship was an exciting role. Many of the themes raised by both groups were then confirmed or de-confirmed through the individual interviews.

### **5.8 Individual case studies**

An aspect difficult to develop when presenting findings through text is the passion and conviction demonstrated by the participant’s body language; their voice; their gestures. The focus group transcripts revealed that all fifteen principals believed they were in their schools to make a difference to their learning community, in particular, their students. The four case study interviews then further contributed to the findings analysis in Chapter Six. Much of what was said confirmed previous data. Their stories of progression are each different but inform and personalise this research, hence each journey is detailed.



### **5.8.1 Karena**

Karena is an early career principal, with two and a half years' experience. Her leadership capability was identified early in her teaching by the principal. *"He saw the big picture rather than just what was going on in the school."* Karena was provided with opportunities, firstly as a senior teacher, and then through a deputy principal role.

She moved rapidly to a walking deputy position. She described the principal of the school where she was D.P. as knowledgeable, but a person who lacked personal confidence. Once Karena realised she was doing the principal's job she became frustrated and sought change. Motherhood intervened; a role Karena saw as too big to combine with principalship.

She returned to an urban large school, again as Deputy Principal and during the following years completed a Diploma in Educational Management. She described the graduated learning programme the institution offered as outstanding. After one year, a person could finish with a certificate, two years a diploma and five years, a Master's Degree. The course she found both practical and it covered, in her words, *"the things I wanted to know about."*

Karena then chose a sideways move. She took on an advisory role, facilitating *'workshops at the Teachers' Centres'*. She described the learning she got from working and talking with many principals as insightful, *"You know, discussing what was going on in their schools. I was learning from them, even though they were learning from me."*

Karena then moved into her first principalship. She described this job as 'fate and fit'.

*I was comfortable and they obviously felt like they were comfortable having me because.... (They appointed me). I think that whole matching thing is important.*

She talked about the importance for first time principals to take over a school that is successful. *“It was (the school) really in good heart. There were already good teachers and a lot of the problem stuff had been dealt with.”*

Induction into the role by the previous principal was valued. Karena had a clear understanding of what had and had not been accomplished. *“I wasn’t able to do this with the staff... I have not been able to....”* She gave Karena a strong understanding of the school culture and made clear the first challenge was to build her own staff relationships.

Karena had a good understanding of change management from her formal study. She articulated her belief that there needed to be some written contract about principals handing over schools to new principals. She was in her words, “lucky,” but it was not the same for other colleagues she had met through the FTTP.

The First Time Principals’ Programme (FTPP) provided networking and learning opportunities for Karena, *“The practical examples from principals. Coming away with ideas and thinking, yes, I can do that.”* She was thankful they grouped her with like principals from large urban schools, which provided shared understanding.

Karena’s most important learning came from her FTTP mentor. The mentor advised the Board of Trustees that Karena would only be able to achieve certain things in that first year. Her mentor made sure the Board knew what was important. Karena felt that, compared to many colleagues, she had an excellent start to principalship, although she still had lots of “in time, on the job learning.” She had three suspensions to deal with early on and she said that, without colleague’s advice and the New Zealand Trustees Association, she would have really struggled with the crisis management issues. Sleepless nights and worry she described as being inextricably tied to principalship. Each new experience however provided her with unforgettable informal learning.

Three years into her job, Karena said she was ready for more formal learning. She had recently joined a principals' learning group where they considered a range of different educational leadership perspectives. She was again contemplating completing her Master's Degree, but the cost of the degree was a concern. She believed that if the FTTP had contributed papers towards a Master's Degree that would have helped her on that journey.

She described conferences she wanted to attend, overseas and in New Zealand. She believed conferences provided her with wonderful thinking opportunities, time out of her busy schedule to reflect. Her barrier was the school's limited government funding. She was already fundraising large amounts of community money annually and she said it would have felt wrong to spend it on her learning.

Karena strongly supported a range of pathways being open to developing principals. She felt the succession plan however, was the most common pathway to the first job. Karena verbalised that formal learning would take her to her next career step. She believed she would be in her present school for a few more years and then she would like to develop another school, "*knowing what I know now.*"

Karena did not expressly identify how her learning made a difference to student learning but her drive for the staff to use assessment data to inform their teaching was evidence of practice.

### **5.8.2. Larry**

Larry was an early career principal with two years' experience. He began his leadership learning also with a very strong mentor. His mentor guided him through leadership and provided a range of opportunities. He realised that as the Associate Principal, he experienced, "*a number of opportunities that several colleagues (of mine), in the same level of associate principalship, may not have been lucky enough to get under their Principal*". Larry described initially having no aspiration to

leadership but over time he realised he wanted to give something back to education. He describes it as *“almost a duty.”*

His pre-career learning involved attending conferences, going to seminars, being encouraged to attend principal networking functions. Of the highest importance was completing his Master’s Degree.

*It helped firm up many of the concepts in my mind that you could see developing from theory into practice.*

Larry was given a study leave grant for six months to complete his Masters of Educational Management. He identified that the business paper component of his degree provided him with a strong strategic view of his current school.

After completing his degree, he felt he could make that *“next leap,”* into principalship. Like Karena, he felt one of the most important aspects of his appointment was his fit with the school and job. He began principalship in a type of school he was familiar with and where he felt comfortable. It was similar to the school where he had developed his leadership skills.

Larry talked about his own experience in those first months in the job. He sensed so much of the job was experiential. He talked about the value of keeping the school running smoothly in that first year and the importance of people who help make that happen. He also believed first time principals were advantaged by taking on successful schools with knowing and supportive Boards of Trustees.

Continued support by the FTTP mentor was an important factor in his success. Involving the school in a networked action research project provided external stimuli to keep him and the school *“moving forward.”* Larry described the value he gained from self- reflection. He said principals have to be able to identify and rectify personal and institutional weaknesses.

He thought that building relationships and strong communication skills were paramount to the job. Larry verbalised his thoughts about the need for emotional intelligence and an understanding of the different styles of leadership. He felt personality had a huge influence on leadership. Sometimes he felt he was consultative but he knew and could apply authoritarianism when the hard decisions had to be made.

Larry talked about decision making, prioritising, and knowing your community as key skills for early leaders.

*You have to decide what the most important thing is. If it comes down to a student or welfare of a student, or a family concern, then, those are the important things to deal with. We're dealing with students, and that's our first priority, the other stuff can just get in line. But then, sometimes being sensitive to issues too, so that if a parent issue crops up, I think you develop the, the ear, or the nose if you like, to sort of detect need.*

Larry referenced the importance of networking several times. *"I really can't overestimate that, because you do hear about principals who nobody hears about, and they're sort of like a silo in their own school, and they don't seem to talk to other people, but (from networking) you learn so much."* Through his colleagues he heard about new programmes and events his students should be participating in.

Larry talked at length about the role of the senior management team and distributed leadership, the importance of having the same vision and understanding of where the school is heading. He believed principals have to be seen by their staff as learners. Larry strongly believed that apprenticeship leadership preparation is part of an effective model for learning.

Larry had just finished the First Time Principals' Programme and found it valuable. He felt there needed to be an element of compulsion to attend so that, *"at least they've had that learning."* Larry

described however, a huge range of new principals, in age, learning, and experience. The thing is, that they are all “*suddenly a principal.*”

### **5.8.3 Ewen**

Ewen is a long serving principal who took up his first position, in a five teacher rural school, pre ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’. On his first day as a principal, he went out at lunchtime and it was one of those ‘wow’ moments when he truly realised the enormity of his job:

*It suddenly hit me, here are all these kids coming to their school, this is their school, they’ve been coming here since they were five. They turn up here every day, and this is their school. All of a sudden, I’m their Principal; I had better know what I’m doing. The essence of that message is, ever since that day, there’s been a constant search to know what I’m doing, and what is it I should be doing, and how do I know that, and how would I know if I’m doing it? My search continues because I am the kids’ Principal. I’d better make sure their school is working for them.*

The big questions raised by Ewen concerned how much of what a principal does well is experience and how much can be attributed to explicit learning. Ewen has a strong belief in academic study. He says the rewards of study always “*outweigh the worry, work and giving up weekends.*”

The second learning he identified as meaningful was his involvement with fellowships; specifically funded learning. Throughout his career he applied for numerous travel and learning opportunities. Travel provided him with time to “*think about big picture stuff, to see what other people do and say about these things.*”

Ewen believed formal courses of study are a preferable way for principals to learn.

*We can run development programmes, and we can run courses, and we can go off on conferences, but there's nothing quite like, I believe, well it was for me, the rigour of actually enrolling in a course of study and having to write papers.*

Learning that contributes to a qualification was described by Ewen as sensible.

*I think at the end of the day; you may as well have a qualification, it may as well amount to something, rather than just have a giant collection of papers that never actually gets pulled together. You may as well call it something.*

Ewen talked about much learning coming from involvement. He has been on committees, working reference groups and he commented that although he was contributing he was also learning.

*"Principals, most principals say they learn most from other principals."* Ewen was sceptical that only participating in informal learning was *"possibly frightening, even incestuous."*

Ewen was provided with, and funded for, a range of opportunities. His school looked after him and he looked after the school. Ewen expressed general concerns around principal remuneration and qualifications. He was strongly in support of a pay scale that reflected tertiary qualifications.

*It is amazing to me that principals are probably the only people in, in our line of work, that don't have a qualification allowance or step built into our pay scale.*

He would reward principals with,

*Significant, meaningful salary incentives, that would do two things: one, it would actually reward people to do it. And secondly, it would just build it into the expectation in the job.*

He made it clear that a teacher with a degree did not necessarily make a very successful principal. He however believed all principals and teachers needed to demonstrate the capability to learn. The

selection of principals needed to come under scrutiny. He described the importance of selecting the right person for the job, *“If you’ve got the wrong person in the first place, all the training in the world, no academic qualifications in the world, are going to fix the person.”*

Ewen described management as relatively simple. It is logical and generally systematic. “You develop systems then look for ways to improve them.” Leadership he said was far more complex. He expressed real concerns around professional judgement being eroded away through government policy.

Ewen’s leadership beliefs were highly aligned to personal beliefs. Near the end of the interview, Ewen made two strong comments about principals and their learning. He said:

- A person’s childhood determines them as a leader.
- Principals need academic rigour of some sort that makes us really get down and think about things.

Observing and talking with Ewen made me consider that perhaps model schools with high performing leaders could provide another learning pathway.

#### **5.8.4. Jenny**

Jenny was an experienced principal who took up her principalship post-Tomorrow’s Schools. She was currently in her second school as principal. Jenny described herself, pre-principalship, as a person with no ambition.

*The trip to being a principal was completely, on the surface, accidental, because it was never a long term goal, it was simply people saying to me, through the years, “You could do this,” and, “you’ll be a principal one day.”*



Her progression was senior teacher to deputy principal to principal but with gaps in between dedicated to motherhood.

She described the pivotal moment in her development being when she was prompted to apply for an associate principal position in a newly built school. She realised early on in that role that the principal of the school was an inspirational man who would be important in her own career. His passion was in developing a strong school learning culture. When Jenny later took up a study fellowship, her focus was also on building school cultures.

Jenny described herself as a naturally encouraging person but did not feel that was a valid style of leading. Hence her move back to study whilst in an associate principal role. Jenny chose the same tertiary institution as Karena. She saw it as a, *“teaching-based programme with very clear learning intentions, clear success criteria, even before we were using that terminology in school.”* She felt the course would challenge and stimulate her thinking. She described some past university study not doing that but knew that this course facilitator would demand she provide validity to her thinking and consequently encourage her to grow her leadership.

She won her first principal’s position before she had completed her study.

*As I was just formulating a thesis, which was a ninety point thesis, so it was quite major just formulating that, and then applied for my first principal job and shock, horror, got it.*

Jenny, like Ewen, strongly voiced her opinion that Master’s level study is important. *“It teaches you the way to research quickly and effectively.”* Jenny said that level of study taught her how to, *“access the right material, and understand about different levels and validity of publications.”* She described being able to digest literature and apply it to an *“evaluative process.”* She articulated that principalship would have been harder without that level of study.

Jenny, as others have described, chose a school that had a good fit with her. She chose to work in the high decile environment. What made a difference to her being able to do the job early on was some of the principals in the area. They truly supported her and she felt she could comfortably phone them with what she termed the “*silly*” questions. In that first year she completely “*by-passed the study*” although she participated in the first of the First Time Principals’ Programme.

She found the usefulness in the FTP programme was further networking opportunities. The learning she believed lacked the rigor of her university learning. Two hours on change management when she had spent six months studying: the topic was superficial. She felt being allocated a mentor was also not helpful. Mentors come from people you want to work with, “*I was getting everything from the local principals and from my past mentors.*” Jenny supported building strong personal networks. She aired her concern, her worries about principals who did not build people around them.

*What I’m saying there, is that for me, the formal mentoring didn’t work. The informal did work.*

She described learning on the job. The first time she heard of a five-year plan was when another principal was talking about it at a breakfast meeting. She returned to her school and looked for the document. Jenny felt she reached a level of competency where she felt confident as a principal after five years in the role.

The advantages and disadvantages of working locally is a common point of discussion with principals in light of how many meetings they attend at night. Jenny was one who had often talked about working in her local area. When a position in a much larger school close to her home was advertised, she applied and won the principalship. In the new job, she realised the value of a principal having emotional intelligence. It is not just a degree, not just being a teacher, it is about communicating and understanding people and understanding dynamics.

When Jenny considered how her learning made a difference to students, she described improved meaningful dialogue with teachers; improved professional learning for staff, changing how teachers' talk and teach. She agreed it was qualitative data but she felt her work on change management and her culture development were providing positive outcomes. Changing schools provided her with the fresh platform to apply her thinking.

### **5.9 Individual interview summary**

Regardless of the pathways to principalship, the first years of principalship involve significant learning, predominantly informally and in the role. It is supportive for first time principals to be appointed to schools that function well and where they feel, they have a fit with the school culture. A positive approach is to be inducted into the role by the previous principal. An accommodating Board of Trustees and encouraging local principal group improves the do-ability of the role.

Each person, other than Ewan who took up principalship pre 1989, felt recognition and nurturing of his or her leadership by his or her past principal provided a positive catalyst. All identified that another person recognising potential leadership in them supported their development. As aspiring principals, the three post-1989 principals, benefited from attending conferences, leadership seminars and being encouraged to take on leadership learning. The two early career principals valued their appointed FPPP mentors. Mentoring provided principals with time to talk through issues, guidance and in the case of advice to a Board of Trustees, intervention.

Academic study provided a strong platform for leadership. All four principals considered they needed the language, the knowledge, the philosophical background to manage change and build strong school cultures. All principals found it difficult to quantify the difference their learning had on their schools but as an observer in their schools, I observed evidence of well-developed vision, change management skills, and a focus on learning. It was on their walls, through their dialogue,

through the interactions with their students and staff. The two barriers identified to formal study and qualifications were the same as the focus groups, time and funding.

For the females, time away for maternity leave was a gap in their development that allowed time to study and develop “community networking” skills. Networking is invaluable at all stages of principalship. In particular, local cluster groups and broader networking discussion groups provided information that may have been missed through dealing with an enormous paper workload. As evidenced by one principal, a sideways move into an advisory role does not prevent future principalship appointment. One sample, however, does not provide enough evidence to formulate a generalisation.

Common to the four principals was that belief that formal and informal studies were both important. These principals believed the need to have the language of leadership, to be able to locate information and have a philosophical view based on some theory were critically important in a principal’s knowledge repertoire. Building relationships with other principals was also paramount.

Gender provided some divergence, as did time of appointment. If appointed prior to 1989, there was no FTTP but local networking provided support. There was also less expectation on the role. The Board of Education and rural advisors carried out much of the bureaucratic function. It could be argued that pre-1989 principals were what is aspired to today, the pedagogical leader.

Mentorship was seen as beneficial and a hindrance. Appointed mentors in one case did not provide the level of support provided through local networking. Mentoring effectiveness was dependent on the need and fit with the principal. Respected previous principals were cited as most effective as mentors.

Despite all believing that qualifications support a principal in the job there were some strong concerns expressed around time to study, financial constraints and ‘principal burnout’. Highly valued

by the focus group participants and Ewen was principals' learning fully funded by their Boards of Trustees.

## **5.10 Conclusion**

Easton (2008) describes professional learning as active learning. She advocates the least educators can do is become learners themselves by engaging in a process of professional learning.

Furthermore, Hannon (2010) believes professional learning is about learner engagement, experiences sensitive to individual need, strongly formative, collaborative and connected. The voices of fifteen principals in urban New Zealand confirm learning is a core requirement of the job.

Chapter Five synthesises participants' ideas, and gives voice to their beliefs. Evident was the huge drive for learning, knowledge, and challenge, underscored by integrity and passion for the role. Participating principals progressed through various phases of learning with their own tensions related to that learning. These phases are examined throughout various themes in the next chapter.

Participating principals were compelled to do an excellent job with a focus on students' learning. They worked long hours and although they deemed the job too large for one person, they found it difficult at times to delegate. The notion of senior teams, not one person leading, was a strong premise. There was a strong view that academic learning needed to be part of the job. Following on, the next chapter discusses the findings in relation to the literature review and within a framework of the research questions.

# The Professional Learning of Urban N.Z. Primary Principals

## CHAPTER SIX

### Discussion

*The critical question for policy makers, universities and professional associations is not “What are the research gaps?” but “How can we put conditions in place that will ensure the gaps are filled?”*

(Robinson, et al., 2009, p. 211)

#### 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter contained detailed findings from an email survey, focus group, and individual interviews with four case study principals. In this chapter, the data are analysed according to the literature, research questions, and key emerging themes. The six themes listed underpin the data analysis:

- 1) Motivation to learn
- 2) Optimal timing
- 3) Most favourable learning conditions
- 4) Phased meaningfulness
- 5) External influences
- 6) Future direction

The findings in Chapter Five parallel previously raised concerns regarding New Zealand principals (Thew, 2002). Thew established that principals did not feel prepared for the role. His research made five recommendations for the New Zealand Government that relate closely to this research:

- A national pre-service qualification pre-principalship needs to be established.
- The FTTP should be expanded and mandatory for all first time principals.
- On-going professional learning should be established for current principals with national guidelines for delivery. Learning needs to be flexible but to include recorded annually reported goals.
- Professional learning should distinguish between management and leadership development. Whilst both are important, leadership requires a strong philosophical approach.
- Principals' professional learning should be supported with funding, time allocations and salary incentives (Thew, 2002, pp. 255-256).

There was agreement from the principals interviewed for this research that learning beyond a teaching degree is crucial to principalship; that formalised leadership learning improves effectiveness.

The findings in Chapter Five furthermore confirm the findings in Patuawa's (2007) research that principals in their first years of appointment require a range of formal and informal learning to reference. Emergent principals require explicit learning around leadership. Experiences prior to principalship affect how principals transition into the role. A recurring theme in Chapter Five is the importance of early leadership recognition and promotion by the principal. Middle management leaders, who are encouraged to take on formal study, attend conferences, build networks and who are mentored by their previous principal, believed they had a robust knowledge and skill base to build on. Experienced principals should be encouraged to give further consideration and focus to the development of leadership for potential candidates in their schools.

Unequivocal was the support for a mandated FTTP, but with the requirement for qualification equivalence. An emerging theme for New Zealand research was the requirement for mandated Master's level learning with a follow on recognition of degree status through financial remuneration. This chapter discusses the principals' view of 'meaningful learning', beginning with motivation to learn.

## **6.2 Motivation to learn**

Whilst everyone, including children, has their own preferences for what and how they learn, there are some traits and behaviours that can be categorised as being more suited to adults. Traits of persistence and motivation are specific behaviours required of the adult learner (Comings, 2007).

Houle's (1988) adult learners involve themselves in further learning for three key reasons:

- (1) Pursuing a goal,
- (2) For the love of learning, or
- (3) To improve content knowledge.

The goal pursuer understands achievement requires specific learning. An example, the early career principals who believed principalship would not be their pinnacle of achievement, stated that Master's Degrees would be essential if they were to move beyond principalship. Experienced principals discussed learning for the love of learning. They were of the opinion, everyone needed to take on learning such as an instrument or a sport for pure pleasure. Principals agreed content was invaluable when needing new knowledge. Understanding how to write a budget, prepare an annual report, and report to a Board were examples cited as content oriented learning.

Principals were motivated by their need for knowledge. It is apparent from the findings presented in Chapter Five that principals intrinsically know when they need to build skills and understanding. This is not dissimilar to the formative practices being developed with the teachers and their pupils.



Principals are most often motivated to formulate pathways for their next steps in learning based on school or contextually based need.

Elmore (2003) discusses successful leaders who cannot replicate their success in another setting and this is evidenced in the literature by the theorists who identify leadership being about change which is dependent on the context and people (Fullan, 2003; Rogers, 1996; Waters, et al., 2003) . The principals in this research transitioned well to new positions, however in making that generalisation, size was the key component of change.

As confirmed by Merriam (1998, 2001), professionals learn best when they consider their own schools, their own set of relationships, their tools and available resources. School culture; the population of the school; student and the staff's prior learning experiences and socio-economics contribute to a principal's learning needs. Nonetheless, the experienced principals believed a principal who understood change management theory was able to cross context.

Needing to know was a key influence relating to both timing of learning and motivation. Principals described needing a formalised knowledge of broad subjects. Early career principals who began principalship with explicit knowledge of pedagogy, human resource management, and culture development were at a distinct advantage. They could consider their school through a variety of lenses (Bolman & Deal, 1997). An experienced leader might have serendipitously acquired that knowledge along the way but the belief was that principals require that knowledge. Leaving certain levels of learning to chance or to informal means was not effective.

There was a conviction that although principals cannot know it all, they need to know how to access knowledge. Principals described formal study supporting them to do this. Being able to carry out a literature search on a topic was an advantage. The ability to provide staff and parents with reputable information was attributable to formal study techniques. Being able to stand behind a philosophical belief was also linked to degree status learning.

Being knowledgeable for staff was a motivator for formal learning. Principals are leaders, so require advanced or at least equal curriculum knowledge to their teachers. They described young teachers having a degree, hence the importance for school leaders to be at least or better qualified. There was considerable discussion related to curriculum leadership and people leadership. In particular, principal participants discussed learning that enabled them to harness staff capacity. Managing change effectively underpinned much of the learning they sought.

A balance between formal and informal learning was identified. Through formal courses, a principal learns the theory behind modifying behaviours but it is through practising negotiation that the skills are embedded. Brundrett (2001) nonetheless, identifies tensions surrounding principal training and development as being multi-layered. No one type of learning will provide all the answers and that was made apparent throughout Chapter Five.

Principals in the early career group talked about principalship possibly not being their final job and that they needed learning that might take them further. A Master's in Business Management was described as an option if principals were to seek leadership roles outside of education. Although some of the experienced principals had resisted formal learning, they expressed a belief that this would eventually be expected as a requirement for the position. This group were in strong agreement that principals needed knowledge and understanding beyond what they had learned as teachers. Knowing and doing, however sit at odds with one another and principals additionally recognised the many barriers they needed to overcome.

The challenging factor was finding ways to remove the barriers. Commitment to families in terms of time and money concerned principals. The job was described as extremely time-consuming, so finding free periods to learn had to be forward planned. They had broad visions for their schools. All required information about finance before they could take on transformational aspects of school leadership.

Despite the difficulties, these principals seemed to be, or had, managed their formal and informal learning practices. Delegation, prioritising, realising own limitations meant some things did not get done, but were strategies applied to remove barriers. However, the most common approach was over work, increasing hours and weekend study. Motivation came from a desire to role model learning behaviours for their organisation. The principals felt they participated actively and influenced positively the learning in their schools.

Two of the principals described how the 'Extending High Standards across Schools' projects<sup>11</sup> were so successful because principals were involved. There was agreement that professional learning programmes involving principals and adequate provision of funding are more likely to thrive.

Timperley et al., 2007, identify that principals have, "the ability to make it (professional development) happen" (p. 192). Their evidence supports the important role of the leader. Effective leaders "do not leave the learning to the teachers - they become involved themselves," (p.196).

Networks and prior leadership roles guided principals to acquire the pertinent knowledge required to be effective. Networking provided time for principals to ask questions and share their actions.

Prior leadership built knowledge and skills through practical learning. Principals' professional learning required multiple approaches of sharing, practical application, and leadership knowledge.

Elmore & Burney (1999) believe principals cannot do it alone. That idea was raised through this research but also that principals find it hard to give roles away. What is accepted is that meaningful learning requires both formal learning based on sound educational theory, and informal learning.

Together they provide informed in-context leadership experience.

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<sup>11</sup> EHSAS funding and future projects stopped by the National Government from December 2009

Moreover, as seen throughout the literature, what works well for one principal may not work well for another. Woods (2002) identified through the literature that the inspiration for long-serving principals is their relationship with the children and school pride. The greater focus by experienced leaders is on building pedagogic knowledge. Finsden (2002) believes learning needs to be more than understanding, it should transform what principals do. That was apparent in the findings of the experienced leaders yet not so prevalent with early career leaders. Experienced principals described implementing projects, such as ICT developments, that affected both teaching and learning, whereas early career principals spent more time talking management strategies.

There has been much discussion of principals being transactional and transformational leaders. Transactional leadership seeks to maintain stability rather than promoting change. It is focussed on setting specific goals for both, “ the leaders and their followers” (Lussier & Achua, 2004, p. 358). The central concept of transformational leadership is change. The role of leadership is to visualise and implement the transformation of organisational success. The principals in this research determined that, to be effective, you have to be both a transactional leader directly influencing learning through working with teachers and examining data, and a transformational leader using knowledge to improve the organisation.

What has been made explicit is that there is no one way to train leaders. Everyone interviewed felt theoretical knowledge linked to practical expertise enhanced their ability to lead. Learning had to be thorough, a combination of both theory and learning on the job experiences. Participants were of the opinion that no one course delivered all to everyone. Contributors to this research had attended a range of university programmes. A graduated learning programme targeting the school setting and building up from Certificate to Masters of Educational Leadership was cited most often as being practical and most relevant to the job. Tailored learning, timed around school semester breaks and using online environments, was perceived as meeting needs.

Time and relevance were both cited as encouragers of learning. Gronn (2003) describes the greediness of the job, that too many principals are forced into workaholism. The NZPF survey (Wylie & Hogden, 2005) confirms that New Zealand principals worked over sixty hours a week. What the survey did not define was whether principal study time was included. The principals in this study identified that, when universities or course developers built learning around times such as school holidays, they were more likely to participate.

To remain motivated, leaders needed to feel they were building self-efficacy. The process has to be re-energising and as such promote personal resilience (Hartle, et al., 2007). The findings reported in this thesis, maintain motivation to learn requires:

- appropriate levels of challenge in the role
- increasingly focussed goals over time for students and principal as a learner
- if possible funded, but certainly self-chosen professional development opportunities
- positive feedback
- opportunities for professional sharing
- inter-school sharing

Motivation is supported through personal networks built up over time, mentoring relationships, school government contracts and professional associations and formal learning groups. The principals described periods when they were de-motivated, when paper work, students' behavioural needs, and parent demands overpowered other aspects of the job. There were times principals relied heavily on the support of others to re-energise themselves.

Real life problem solving supports principals to consider a raft of potential consequences and solutions (Lazaridou, 2009). Principals supporting principals was a favoured option for professional learning. Principals, it seemed, chose their own preferred mentors. The early career principals described being provided with supportive mentors through the FTTP but in early principalship, they

more often consulted with a principal from their past. Experienced principals consulted with people they respected and trusted. They encountered these principals through their various networks. Perhaps, if New Zealand had a trained mentor programme such as Blue Skies in Hong Kong, mentorship would be strengthened and could provide another pathway for the highly experienced leader.

The findings identify an evident tension between the demands of the job and principals' learning. They evidence the need for balanced practical and theoretical learning. They also illustrate an evolving focus where principals choose specific learning appropriately aligned to their context. For example, the school a principal chose to work in was seen as a key motivator, choosing learning with bi-lingualism, Maori medium learning, and enviro-schooling were cited as variations of context.

The disposition of a principal also had influence on personal motivation and leading. The debate, "nature as opposed to nurture" was raised. Principals believed many personal traits were core requirements with ability to demonstrate an inquiring mind paramount. Principals were morally and ethically bound to keep up to date and to learn. They had to be positive by nature. However, many aspects of leadership were identified as learnable, which raises the notion of the optimal timing for principals' learning.

### **6.3 Optimal timing for formal learning**

Principals' learning needs are as diverse as their personalities and understanding of the role. These principals described the influence of prior knowledge. There was a persuasive belief that leadership and some management knowledge built progressively. Principals reflected on their journey from being a teacher, taking on ever-increasing leadership through to deputy principalship. Their journey enhanced their personal capacity to lead.

The early career principals in the study felt their leadership was endorsed by exposure to strong role models. A teacher identified as a leader early on in their career and encouraged to take on roles of leadership, was advantaged. Formal study prior to principalship added additional benefit to their understanding of the role. Early identification and encouragement into formalised learning ensured first-time principals drew on a tangible knowledge base.

In agreement with other New Zealand research, this study determined that principals in New Zealand require a leadership qualification. In previous studies, there was no consensus as to when in their leadership career that formal learning should occur (Gussgott, 2004; Patuawa, 2007; Thew, 2002). In this study, there was a predilection towards studying for a master's qualification after three years into the role. That would consolidate past leadership learning and build new knowledge when principals had reached a state of readiness. The view from the early career principals was they would need more knowledge, once not encumbered with completing the required 18 months of the First Time Principals' Programme. The FTTP being academically credentialed would provide a link to the next level in learning.

The experienced principals described formal study as imperative for highly effective leadership. Yet, principals described in detail the negative health effect of studying in weekends. They described the harmful effect on their families through working nights. Conversely, they could see no way around this without government or the Board's intervention in the form of leave. As a group they seemed to pragmatically balance health and learning to their own capability or propensity to study. Time to study appeared to be therefore, individualised. A potential solution recommended by some of the early career principals was to require a leadership qualification prior to application.

Formal learning was seen to underpin decision making with informal means identified as the most powerful day-to-day learning. Murphy et al., (2004) suggest that researchers and professional developers need more knowledge about school leaders training and prior professional knowledge to

determine what it is leaders really need to know. Kochran and Riehl(2002) advocate that 21<sup>st</sup> century principals require learning that is explicit and connected to their needs. In particular, on-going collegial support was seen as imperative. Principals most often built initial networks through their previous principal and previous study groups. Membership of local cluster groups supported a safe entry to the broader principal groups. Principals described the smaller cluster groups proactively supporting new principals into a demographic area. Knowing others at larger gatherings was an important confidence aspect, in particular for females.

Networks both formal and informal provided much assistance. Principals said they managed a deluge of paper and emails and sometimes heard of important but missed items through their principal networks. The participant principals were of the opinion that school leaders who do not get out of their schools and work with other principals do their schools a disservice. A principal who does not communicate with other principals isolates their school. Across-school projects came out of principals' networking. Principals selected to work with other schools based on engagement of the principal.

The macro world of leadership is as important as the micro or own- school world. This participant group were resolute in their belief that leading requires building people around you. Study helped principals to build connections with tertiary providers and through those connections link their staff with research and academics. Mixing with other principals initiated a range of knowledge bases.

Belonging to professional programmes built another people knowledge base. These principals provided credibility to the notion of practice based or on the job learning. It came with the proviso that academic rigor, learning beyond just talking with colleagues, learning that provided knowledge to support transformative and transactional leadership was integral to a repertoire of learning.

The school leader had to be able to lead both change and pedagogical practice. The experienced principal focus group mentioned the number of failing schools because they were concerned that



moving from teacher to principal without any required preparation could in fact open a school up to failure. Although it was outside the brief of the research two participants felt that the principals of failing schools should be involved in some form of directed mandatory learning.

The findings established that it is often serendipitous events that create learning. Suspensions, property and finance were all identified as the 'need it now' learning. An ERO report with non-compliance could be the learning catalyst. Early career and experienced principals discussed how they valued contacting colleagues to talk through the day to day issues that confronted them for the first time. There was strong agreement that not having networks to call on would be problematic for any principal.

School context affects the timing and requirements of learning. A new principal in a high functioning school with a knowledgeable Board of Trustees is more likely to consider systemic change sooner than a principal in less functional circumstances. A school where there is a high incidence of student behavioural and pedagogical needs requires the principal to speed up their learning process. They need to be conversant with support agency requirements and legal knowledge. A teacher with competency problems requires principals to understand legal and union requirements.

There was an emphasis on the importance of individual and school-wide reflection. This informal method of learning provided a platform for self and school improvement. Argyris and Schon's (1974) notions of reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action validate explicit deliberation as a means of organisational improvement. Trust, professional humility, and accepting others' points of view all requirements of an ethical learning community, contribute to effective reflective practices. For the school leader that means 'taking stock of the school', and taking time with the whole staff to reflect on what is important and why.

Reflective practice supports the school leader to consider what went well and seek potential change.

The focus groups expressed an opinion that each person had to make time to consider how and when they best learned and what they needed to further learn.

All participants identified learning pathways influenced by other aspects in their lives, such as motherhood, age, and the personal urge to lead. Even so, there were common elements of learning in each person's story. Principals described the importance of broad personal reading. They described literature accessed through study, articles from current journals through to school-based articles found in newspapers and magazines. When they felt they needed solutions to problems, they referenced literature to provide an external guidance. They outlined how they accessed collegial advice when decisions had to be made, that were outside their previous knowledge base. Prior experience provided tacit knowledge. Personal motivation and the need to know more and that all learning was cumulative provided commonality.

The adult learning literature encapsulates much of what works for principals. They like to have power over what, when and where they learn. Learning is predominantly a phenomenon of the individual. School leaders value experiences of others. Principals prefer to be self-directed, at the same time valuing interaction with colleagues. They are motivated intrinsically more than extrinsically, but wish to see recognition of their qualifications. Online learning would suit them if they were not so hindered by the multitude of passwords required to access the government learning spaces.

They talked about learning for the good of the group even if sometimes they do not fully agree with what is being asked of them. This was relevant to a principal's involvement in school cluster initiatives. Each participant felt you could never know it all, so intelligence, the ability to inquire, to reflect and to analyse were imperative. Principals need to make time for pre-meditated action.

I am no different from many school principals as I work beyond 55 hours most school weeks. This is average as determined by the NZPF survey in 2005 (Wylie & Hogden, 2005). I study in addition to those hours, using weekends and school breaks. What I have come to understand through this research is a core leadership function that requires further focus is building capacity. With an aging principal work force, people like me have a responsibility to role model for the rising leaders that the job is 'do-able'. Not only must it be seen as achievable it must also be learnable. Participants described growing future leaders, encouraging them to carry out management learning, mentoring them early in their leadership.

In summary, this research determined that the optimal time for learning is best through incremental development at various phases of the principalship development:

- **Pre - principalship**

Principals have a responsibility to identify and nurture leadership capacity in their staff. Increasing opportunities for leadership across a school supports the development of leadership skills and knowledge. Explicit mentoring by the school leaders provides for all levels of leadership. The provisionally registered teacher planning a syndicate unit of work through to school wide curriculum leadership are learning leadership opportunities. Active participation in leadership roles enhance school wide leadership and support the principal in their role.

Encouragement to participate in formal directed leadership programmes was identified in this study as important. There is also a body of research that recognises much professional learning happens informally, it comes from practice, socialisation and in the main does not link to any formal curriculum (Colley, et al., 2004; Eraut, 2000; Knight, 2006). Principals however described that understanding what educational leadership is provides philosophical and theoretical knowledge. The early career principals who had been encouraged to study leadership described having greater confidence in their decision making in the first year compared to what was expressed at the FTTP by some of their counterparts.

- **Early Career Principalship ( 1-3 years)**

Principals determined the importance of compulsory attendance in the First Time Principals' Programme. They felt with no required formal learning or qualification that a consistent approach course was a minimum requirement for all beginning principals. The FPHP supported building personal networks and enabled practising principals to share their issues. Although not provided with the attention the principals desired, they felt the Ministry of Education short courses related to management learning such as property management and finance added to the learning of the FPHP.

Involvement in local principal and regional networks was seen as critical for early career principals. They were inundated by so much paperwork that often through networking they learnt about requirements they had missed. Conferences through local associations were cited as important in the networking process, as, for some, it was time out from the busy-ness of the school to reflect and build personal vision.

If a principal had no formal leadership learning pre-principalship it was determined that around year three a principal would likely know what they needed to know to move a school forward. This was seen as an opportune time to take up some form of formalised learning. A Master's Degree in leadership was described as most suitable.

- **Experienced Career Principals (7 years +)**

Experienced principals believed they should be involved in government funded professional learning and development groups. They valued opportunities to consider trends and new literature with other principals. Involvement in local principals and regional networks were seen as valuable for them but also a mode for supporting new principals. Government funded sabbaticals and a range of fellowships provided further challenge. Moreover, they considered sabbaticals should be as of right after seven years in the job. Weindling (2003) identifies rejuvenation for long serving heads through

secondments and sabbaticals as an option. For some of the principals in this research, formal study was still on their agenda. As well, some were near qualification completion, and still some others were considering what next. They all believed formalised learning provided required theoretical perspectives.

The experienced group remained self-motivated. They sought out a range of learning opportunities. This despite required learning not compulsory, beyond reporting to their Boards that they were involved in learning, a professional standard requirement. They felt the PDPC (now closed) was a strong assessment model but preferred a professional programme that focussed on their school's development. A newly devised experienced principals' programme was to be trialled through five different leadership centres from October 2009 with a focus on school improvement. Each model was different and, through principal hearsay only, the best model was then to be further developed. Unfortunately, to date nothing further has been ventured.

Time for learning has to be balanced with creating favourable learning conditions. This involves determining 'best fit,' the appropriate mode of learning. For some that is working collaboratively; others work better alone and then share; online is most appropriate for people who like to consider their responses carefully before sharing. The range of learning models is extensive but what was most advantageous to this urban group of principals was a balance of shared and individual learning opportunities.

#### **6.4 Most favourable learning conditions for principals**

There was a strong commitment to formal learning being meaningful and required. As one principal communicated, education comes from learning. Although a degree does not make a better teacher or principal, it demonstrates the capacity to learn. Qualifications were described as providing a philosophical and pedagogical structure to leadership. Study leave to complete formal qualifications was seen as imperative.

Thew's study (2002) desired national guidelines that set out pre requisites of learning required for principals. This group supported that thinking. They added to Thew's work with most of the participants believing that after the initial learning phase, a core requirement should be completion of a Master's Degree. Some experienced career participants felt very strongly that Master's level learning should be the pre-requisite to principalship. Others felt principals knew when it was the right time to study, that the first years in the job enabled a person to understand what it was they needed to understand. The idea that it is better to complete a degree than a raft of papers was a supported premise.

Travel to visit schools in other countries, conferences overseas and sabbaticals were perceived as environments for favourable learning. All learning nonetheless included barriers to learning and for some that led to inequity for principals accessing learning. Financial, personal health and school's funding of learning were the three key limitations raised. Male and female principals in this study identified having a young family as a barrier. They described feelings of guilt as they failed to balance family time with principalship and study.

Learning for different phases of experience created discord. It was argued that government programmes, such as the now closed PDPC, were not sufficient for experienced principals. Certainly, for early career principals the FTTP was supported despite some contributors describing a need for improved subject matter. Disquiet was raised about content and length of time spent in the FTTP resulting in no formal learning recognition. Concerns were raised that within the FTTP such widespread cohorts have disparate levels of understanding. Grouping with like sized, similar context schools created some commonality.

For both early career and experienced principals there was genuine concern around meeting personal needs whilst at the same time building expertise. The identifiable tension was principals' access to learning. Bureaucratic, formal processes, social and often informal development

opportunities were not equally dispersed. Principals described access to Ministry special project funding as an example. Conflict was evident over funding, accountability, principals', and children's needs. For these principals their priority was improving what happened in their schools for children's learning and that meant sometimes they chose learning that did not support their own growth. They selected learning that did not overly affect their school budgets. They missed a conference or put funds to school wide teacher development.

There was evidence that the models described in the literature (Bush, 2004; Gronn, 2008; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003; West-Burnham, 2004) generally fit learning into one of six types:

- mentoring;
- networking, such as principal learning groups;
- qualification programmes;
- on-line environments;
- government informal programmes; and
- other informal opportunities, such as conferences and courses.

The various categories are easily grouped as either informal or formal learning settings. Networking, mentoring, and Ministry programmes featured in the top five categories of the email survey as identified in Table 11

***Table 11 Summary of five most favoured forms of informal learning***

Ranking	Type	Number of email responses
1	Colleagues, networking with other experienced principals	100+
2	MOE funded learning- PLCs/PLGs and specific learning based on need eg finance.	52
3	Learning on the job- doing the job. Getting on with it, problem solving and learning from mistakes	45
4	FTPP and PDPC equal responses	45
5	Mentors- past principals, paid coaches ,FTPP principals	39

Conferences and advisors were also cited but by only 25 respondents. The email data were confirmed through the focus group discussions and are further explained in sections 6.4.1 through to 6.4.3.

The two groups perceived formal learning very differently. The discrepancy between both groups' valuing of formal learning is further explained in the following sections 6.4.4.

The most preferred formal learning for leadership was a Master's Degree with a leadership focus. The email survey of preferred informal learning identified networking as the most preferred method, supported by 100 % of respondents, MoE funded programmes 52% of the sample and learning on the job was supported by 45% of the sample.

#### **6.4.1 Networking/Learning groups/Principal associations**

The email survey and focus group findings identify unequivocally that networking is invaluable. That is a supported view through all phases of the research. Principals spoke in detail of the importance of the cluster groups of their association; their association meetings; and the wider network of the New Zealand Principals' Federation. The "knowing you are not alone" (*Jenny, experienced career principal*), especially when starting out.

Principals talked explicitly about networking supporting knowledge of things such as funding pools; new MoE requirements; methods to approach property matters, even to the best plumbing contractors in an area. Networking provided a means for unguarded conversation. In particular, principal learning groups (PLGs) were highly valued for in-depth discussion.

The principals who participated in PLGs advocated being members of groups focussed on learning and not the day-to-day gripes. For day-to-day gripes, they preferred to discuss with the D.P. or email to a local principal to find out what they were doing. When the groups focussed on current literature there seemed to be valued added to their learning. Where there was funding that allowed groups to



access facilitators or attend courses together, there was further worth. Groups could arrange speakers, venues, and courses relevant to their areas of learning.

The Principals' Association was positively recognised for the support it provided: an annual conference, regular breakfast meetings, study fellowships, a strong web site, and transparent, informative communication with members. Principals described networks removing the feeling of being secluded, and believed principals at all levels of experience, especially when first appointed, needed to make time for principal networking.

Early career principals talked about the networking from the FTTP being one of the programme's strongest aspects. They also described their deputy principal networks morphing into principal networks as they were appointed to principal's jobs. After two years in the job, participants were actively seeking academic network groups to further challenge their thinking.

Stewart (2004) strongly supports networking as an important form of learning. Kedian (2004) describes leadership being about people influencing direction and change. He values principals using their group intelligence, attributes, and attitudes to enable them to learn collectively how to deal successfully with changing situations. A principal who does not actively join and participate in networks, according to the voice of these principals, does not do their school justice.

Online learning environments are becoming a way of networking. It was interesting listening to a student recently who said, *"I like wikis and blogs because I have time to think about what I want to say"* (Josh, 2009). In the context of principalship, this seems to make sense. In large forums often, a few principals dominate the discussions leaving others to ponder what they might have liked to have said. The online discussion forums through Leadspace and principals' associations provide that forum. The New Zealand Herald commentary (2000), on long work hours and low morale was well commented on through letters to the editor but also through principal's Leadspace environment.

Conceivably, there is a need for on-line spaces where principals do feel safe to comment. The chat capabilities are still not over-subscribed to by urban principals, but, according to one experienced career principal, Alex, have “tremendous potential for leaders, particularly those in remote locations.” Twitter, Facebook, and other online environments currently provide a raft of opportunities to be explored from a learning perspective.

At the time of this research, online networking environments were in general not perceived positively. Issues were raised around the number of passwords principals required for ICT environments. This is currently being addressed and although not eliminated, principals are given direction how to create secure passwords in order that they use them in several environments. An example is the list of 16 different user names and passwords for government site access that I regularly use to log on. Understandably, because of their sheer number they have to be recorded where I can easily find them which certainly decreases security. It should be noted that the number of passwords has halved over the last three years.

Online learning networking was identified as crucial for principals studying for formal qualifications. Principals prefer to choose when and where they learn. The ability for learners to share their thinking outside physically meeting has observable advantages for time-poor people.

Most favourable learning conditions in New Zealand include partnerships with universities and the Ministry of Education. The FPHP and the newly devised experienced principal programme is testimony to that. A well-defined curriculum focus that reflects and is aligned to school need, contributes to an organisation’s and principal’s effective learning. Mentoring, funding learning groups and developing programmes through universities to develop aspiring and beginning principals are integral to that partnership.

The single most valued form of learning described through all phases was clustering of principals, which is aligned to mentoring and networking. Whether accomplished online or face to face, time

has to be made for principals to talk and share. There was discussion about methods for principals to grow their professional networks. Organisations such as the New Zealand Educational Administration and Leadership Society (NZEALS), promoted as a network provider across sectors provided for that broadening.

Principals were generally proactive in building networks. From a researcher perspective I believe people who are not comfortable with networking probably would not have offered to participate in this study. This raised the question that, if networking is seen as important, who monitors involvement. It seems that the smaller cluster groups keep an eye on each other and encourage involvement. Examples were cited where local principals took it on themselves to visit and talk with principals who were not seen at meetings.

#### **6.4.2 Mentoring**

Mentoring covers an assortment of methods. The allocated mentor from the FTTP is selected from principals who volunteer their services. These self-identified principals are provided with some training. The Advisory allocated mentors are appointed to a role, some in conjunction with local principals' associations, although the government has currently curtailed this support.

Self-selected mentors are usually a previous principal. Some experienced principals paid for access to professional mentor coaches. It is apparent that mentoring is valued by all career levels. What requires further exploration is the training and selection of mentors. It was an area of concern that some mentors provide more effective support than others do.

Mentoring was seen as a powerful form of learning. Considering learning from those with more experience in their field was described as fitting double loop learning (Argyris & Schon, 1974). Mary felt that seeking support from a mentor involved consciously choosing to **look** at an aspect of one's learning or learning environment. Discussion made clear that this type of reflective **looking**

encourages open communication and supports the public testing of a person's assumptions and beliefs. Mentoring was perceived to offer favourable learning however, that was dependent on the skill, people skills, and knowledge of the mentor. If you had the wrong person mentoring, the outcome could be seen as negative.

What has been made apparent in this thesis is that solid mentor relationships are grown out of trust and high regard. Complexity about who should be the mentors is open to scrutiny. This research determined an inconsistency of practice in both the FTTP mentors and previous Advisory mentors. Guidance from the Blue Skies Beginning Principal Programme in Hong Kong led and described by Alan Walker (2008), could support the New Zealand Leadership Framework. Mentors in Hong Kong receive a Professional Diploma or Master's Degree paper for their study. The focus is on skill and knowledge uniformity. They are explicitly taught relationship building, a required skill when supporting others.

The Hong Kong model trains mentors with a minimum of five years successful principalship experience. Candidates are nominated by their peers and their work is assessed through their reports and involvement in the training. They are required to be serving principals although recently retired principals can apply. The mentors participate in 133 hours of formal learning. The New Zealand model in comparison has little rigour. The selection process is not transparent. The FTTP web site describes that selected mentors are highly experienced school principals trained in mentoring at The University of Auckland. The processes and training for the role are not articulated.

The Victoria State (Australia) model expects all principals to give back learning as mentors but mentoring is un-funded. If, as Gronn (2003) describes, we are heading towards a global principals learning curriculum, adequate training in the highly valued mentor role seems sensible. Morgan and Hawkins' (2004) study with New Zealand and South Australian principals determined the value placed on mentoring, "Systems need to be developed to ensure that experienced school leaders

have an opportunity to pass on their knowledge to future generation” (p.40). Poor mentorship can also be an impediment, so in the study they outlined the core requirements for effective mentoring.

- Mentors adequately trained
- Mentors match the school context of new principals
- There is immediate access to expertise
- There is a matching process with an element of self-election of mentors (Morgan & Hawkins, 2004, p. 41)

Immediate access and the need for mentors to understand the school context were themes raised through this study.

Early career principals believed principal sabbaticals provided practical mentored learning opportunities. Participants described that being in the role with the principal on leave as an active mentor was optimal learning. It was suggested that sabbaticals of right be granted to school leaders with between five and ten years of service. The actual period of time was not agreed on, however, as a process that would provide further opportunities for aspiring leaders to practise the role.

A mentorship model has to be based on the premise that principals require learning that is explicit and connected to their needs (Kochran, et al., 2002). The New Zealand Teachers’ Council sees the role of mentor as twofold: Firstly, to emotionally support those less experienced and secondly to challenge their thinking in a supportive way. Mentoring provides on the job, experiential learning. A mentor environment allows for the learning to be tailor-made. In Australia appointed school leaders with zero to two years’ experience, placed greater value on peer-assisted forms of learning such as mentoring, peer coaching and work shadowing than their more experienced colleagues (Hill, et al., 1999). The experienced and early career principals in this study confirmed that point of view.

Mentoring that provides clear direction and feedback is invaluable early career learning, as supported by Walker's work in Hong Kong presently, and previously in Singapore (Walker & Dimmock, 2008; Walker, Stott, & Cheng Yin, 1993). Undoubtedly mentoring as a method of learning for early-career principals is imperative. Robertson believes a coaching type model improves the learning opportunities (Robertson, 2005). She aligns her thinking with New Zealand's beginning teacher mentor learning model.

The findings in Chapter Five see mentoring as critical in providing psychological support, advice, focussing on the 'knowing why and how to do' something. Despite concerns around appointed mentors, mentoring was perceived as stimulating principals' reflective practices. It was felt that a strong mentor for early career principals should act as a professional counsellor who can open networks and assist in dealing with bureaucratic agencies. On the other hand, experienced principals used mentors more as the sage who listens, supports identification of potential pitfalls, and helps with self-challenge. Mentoring, professional sharing, individual inquiry, and coaching are recognised as opportunities to develop effective leaders.

#### **6.4.3 New Zealand's Ministry of Education programmes**

The emphasis has shifted from evaluating leadership to improving both capacity and capability of leaders. Internationally governments have a stake in developing leaders for the future. Brookings data (2007) and others (F. Murphy, 2001; Ryan & Gallo, 2011; Vanheuckelom, 2009) inform us that an aging principal population will affect supply in the near future. In Britain, the government controls much of the learning through the National College of School Leadership. Competency and compliance were initially integral to the reforms in the United Kingdom.

Researchers, opposed to monopolies, caution against organisational practices that become highly influential government-driven initiatives. The belief is that centralised, controlled environments require careful scrutiny. Cardno (2003) identified that New Zealand was, up until 2003, following

closely on the heels of government interventions in Britain. There is no doubt that the NCSL is a major player in what is happening globally.

Australia is developing its framework for leadership. New Zealand in 2008 released its Kiwi Leadership strategy. It is, however, notable that both countries have aligned more closely to the USA with university-based providers, hence decentralised learning. The participants, as opposed to a nationalised college of leadership, supported this method. There was however, experienced principals' support for a coordinated approach to principal development and learning.

Not listed, are the accessibility issues and the capping of the various resources. Presently there are 75 study leave awards for all teachers and primary principals annually. Each year there are 100 paid principal sabbaticals of 10 weeks allocated nationally to principals with more than five years' experience. There are currently 2034 primary schools in New Zealand. Schools' financial recognition units to recognise up-and-coming managers are allocated based on school size, not the number of potential leaders. Advisors are not readily available and specialisation is dependent on a school's organisation, therefore highly unlikely in smaller schools.

Curriculum development again is dependent on the school. Predominantly school based development is then problematic for someone in a small, under-funded and perhaps not overly well-led school. It becomes apparent when considering the lists that greater availability begins on appointment to principalship. To be fair this is the area that has been developed for the longest period of time. The first FTTP was held in 2000.

The research concludes there are a large range of programmes and initiatives in action and being developed by the New Zealand Ministry of Education. As yet, they are not mandated requirements. The Educational Leaders ([www.educationallleaders.govt.nz](http://www.educationallleaders.govt.nz)) website lists the range of learning opportunities. OECD (2007) described this as developing planned, cohesive progression. Middle and senior leadership development is school capacity-based including courses funded through the school

Operational Grant and with a possible opportunity, through applications, for study leave and sabbaticals. Aspiring principals can apply for the aspiring principals' programme, started in 2008. First time principals can access the FTTP and regional induction programmes. All phases of leadership have access to online resources and advisors. Experienced principals have trialed a range of programmes that focus on school improvement and development.

The FTTP was seen as positive by participants in this research. There was general consensus it should be compulsory and fulfil some academic recognition. The PDPC, despite closure, was seen by most experienced principals as an opportunity to confirm their effectiveness. Short courses and the Advisory were all valued as part of a principal's learning repertoire. Principalship cannot be learnt by just being on the job or in the classroom. Effective principalship learning involves both formal and informal learning processes.

#### **6.4.4 Formal and informal learning aligned to qualifications**

The focus groups all believed Master's Degree learning supported principals through all phases of their career. Optimal timing to complete a Master's was not as apparent. The focus group principals had differing views as to what should be included within the Master's programme.

Curriculum leadership and philosophy were just two of the aspects of content identified. Some felt that, in particular, the work on understanding change management was an invaluable component while one felt it should be pedagogically based. Others felt formal learning should provide a more theoretical platform. It was plain that those who had completed their Masters Degrees believed they had the leadership knowledge to be more effective. They knew how to call on research to inform their day-to-day work. The responses centred around two key ideas:

- Principals felt they must hold qualifications at or above most of their staff.

Most teachers today come into schools with the minimum of a Bachelor Degree.



- Experienced and early career principals both felt they needed to ensure they had qualifications that could allow for other pathways being accessed in the future. Some thought they would want to move out of principalship and a qualification would help them do that.

Many participants believed formal learning would be more achievable as a compulsory pre-principalship expectation. Others felt principals would be better able to cope with formal learning after about three years in the job. The first few years were described as “fire fighting,” “learning as you go,” and “juggling,” so after a two-year induction period, the principal would have a greater understanding of the gaps in their knowledge. Two principals raised concerns that some principals were being appointed with no prior leadership learning. This could be likened to a teacher arriving in a classroom without training beyond being a school student.

It is apparent however, that learning encompassing both formal and informal aspects is most favourable. An untested aspect discussed was the growing of leaders from within schools.

Throughout the interviews, the notion of recognising and developing leaders was seen as the principal’s role. There was even discussion around ‘fast tracking’ identifiable leaders. Under the NZQA Framework, it would seem workable to provide credits for proven leadership development, curriculum leadership, and mentoring. This could by-pass the predictable succession model of senior teacher to deputy principal to principal. Potentially this would introduce the need for some pre-principalship qualification so that Boards could compare skill development between those trained with a combination of practical and qualification and those with progression only.

Learning is aligned to individual need and there are clearly three aspects of learning to consider. They are, what a person learns, how, and when they learn it, and the effect on optimal learning conditions. What can be generalised is that learning cannot be done in isolation. Academic rigour should be woven into any programme of learning. All principals need to be able to identify their learning, know how what they do improves their school, reflect, and plan for their future learning. A

fundamental trait exhibited by these principals was personal motivation to learn, driven through a desire to do the best for their students and teachers.

### **6.5 Phased meaningfulness of principal learning**

There are rafts of descriptors developed by academics to describe the learning phases of principalship. Day and Bakioglu (1996) realised initially four phases of role maturity, (1) initiation phase, (2) development phase, (3) autonomy phase, and (4) disenchantment phase (pp. 205–227). Gronn (1999) describes them as formation, accession, incumbency and divestiture. Woods (2002) describes that experienced phase as moving from decline back to enchantment. This research confirms there is an experience-based readiness for learning. Thinking you can do the job through to being a transformational leader fit at each end of the learning phase spectrum. At times however, there is large abyss beneath pre and beginning principalship that does not fit any typology. Many principals described feeling like an “impostor,” that of, “not me,” and “I don’t want principalship,” particularly from females in the group.

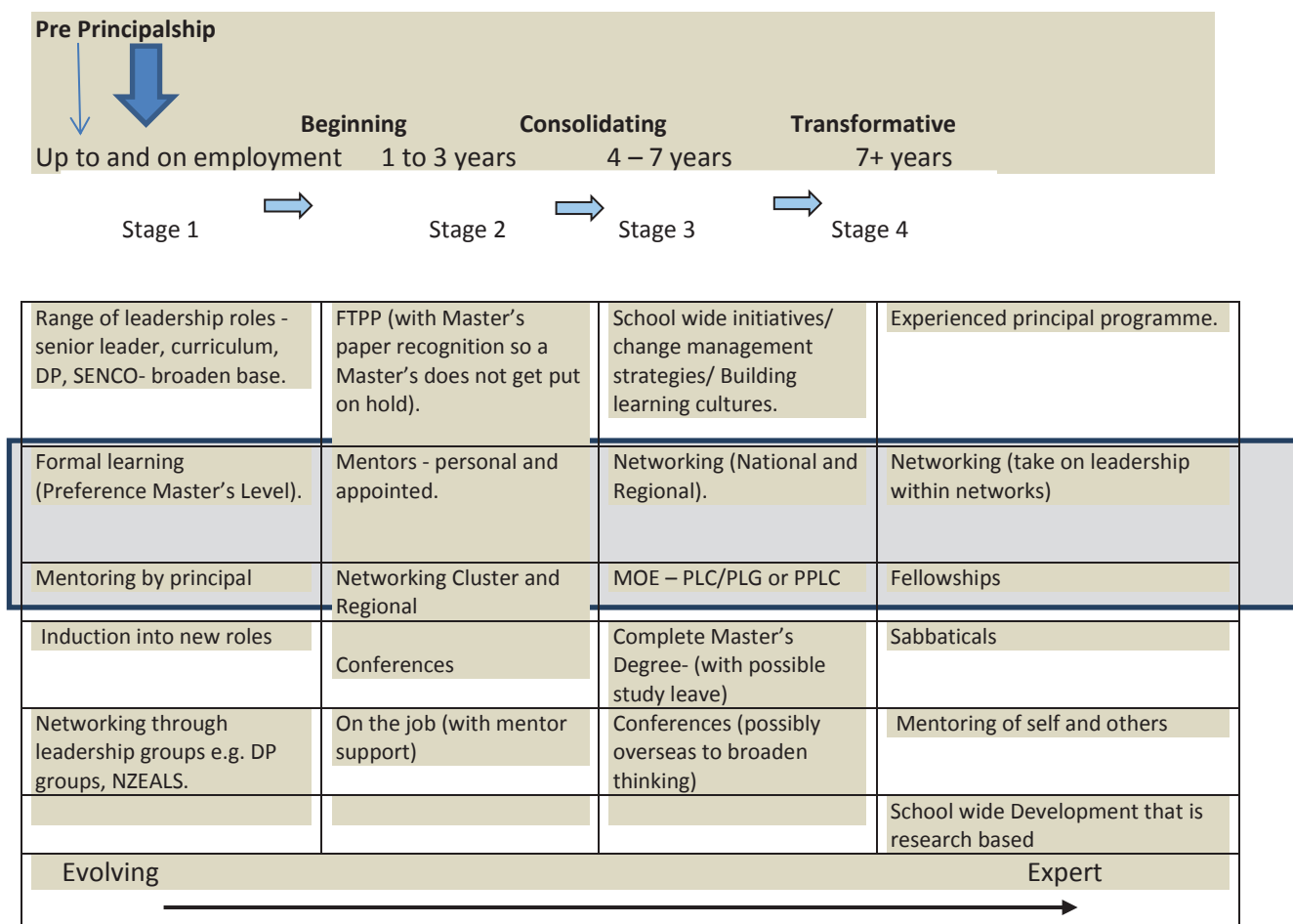
Pre principalship development was most effective when teachers were identified by their principals and encouraged to take on leadership. The early career principals described the first year in the job as almost surreal. Early career principals are very vulnerable in the first years of principalship. Some described not feeling confident to take a stand. Supportive learning practices for early career principals are core to effectiveness. Early career principals described how they would like to have known how to critically examine the school. They needed to know a great deal more about the staff, finances, and property needs. For this group putting their knowledge into practice was the greatest challenge. They were doing a job that they could not conceivably train to know. A huge part of the role was learning as they went.

Experienced principals reflected on how demoralising the job could sometimes be and how big it was. There was almost a sense of relief aired by the early career group when they found some

actions could be replicated. As they moved into stage three they believed they consolidated their knowledge and were starting to consider further challenge. Experienced principals in this study felt they could transfer skills to any context but that they became selective about the schools they chose to work in. Schools had to fit with the principal’s value base and have philosophical alignment.

Figure 13 summarises the experience stages and appropriate learning developed from this research. Changing schools or personal incidents could mean a principal needs to step back in learning. Moreover, learning was perceived as incremental with networking and mentoring valued by all.

***Figure 13: Best learning at four identified experience levels of principalship***



The findings in Chapter Five identify a raft of learning that should be of right fit.

Sabbaticals for 7+year principals, the FTPP contributing to a Master's degree and greater funding for establishing learning groups were just some of the differentiated learning opportunities described. The value of travelling, visiting other countries and schools was clearly something the research participants hoped to be able to do.

What leaders have to manage is a paradox, whether they are starting out or experienced. On one hand autonomy and on the other centralised control. Explicit learning opportunities at the various stages of principalship have been suggested as a way to support future leadership. Caldwell (2003) however believes training is not going to help alleviate the predicted future shortages. Caldwell sees the overriding issue in several nations is that the role of principal as it is emerging is unfeasible. Present literature is arguing that leaders need to return to being instructional leaders (Robinson, 2007). This would mean giving up some of the present role. It was clear this was not an option for either group of participants. They saw distributive leadership as the way forward.

Meaningfulness was reported in terms of how learning is applied. Many participants felt knowing what to do in a range of situations made learning meaningful. Mary describes learning as "communicating your ideas and then getting others to express it". Considering the programmes, processes and conditions of learning produced a wide response. There was no one best way. Identifying individuals' needs to learn remain as varied as the participants do. The impact of learning was equally wide ranging.

## **6.6 Factors beyond principals' influence**

This research, the "Professional Learning of Urban New Zealand Primary Principals," has identified a range of beliefs and understanding. There are gaps in the findings particularly in the area of what happens if a principal is not motivated to learn. What does happen if they do not get involved in

learning and isolate themselves from their networks? Professional learning has to be implicit in the work of principals. In participant Ewen's words, "the need to get it right". Principals bring with them a wide variety of learning characteristics such as: existing content knowledge, their own abilities and skills, and background, and that has not strictly changed.

What has harnessed change in the New Zealand context has been meeting the increasing needs of self-governance. There are concerns that the Board of Trustees' self-managing New Zealand model is flawed. Smyth (1993) believes it has contributed to the government "shirking its social responsibility.... turning principals into mini chief executive officers (p.8). Smyth and fellow contributors believe principals have been taken away from their core job of student learning.

The 2009 October NZ Education Review (ERO, 1999) considered structural problems inherent in the Tomorrow School's model. Weaknesses in governance and inconsistent improvement of student achievement are just some of the identifiable issues. Wylie (2007) compares the New Zealand system to Edmonton and recommends government considering "the benefits of having a single authority to whom principals are accountable, and with whom they work to ensure continual knowledge sharing and building (p.24). She believes there is too much them and us mentality, a lack of leader and school interconnectedness. Schools need to have greater coherence and trust with the Ministry of Education. This would ensure a continuum of learning, consistent appraisal and the Ministry as the employer of principals. Some would say principals would not choose this direction but Wylie's comparison makes for a compelling argument.

Mohr and Evans (1999) describe new learning being dependent on "protected dissonance" a safe environment in which to take risks with ideas and ask the tough questions. There was lengthy discussion by participants about why schools fail and much of it came down to principals not sharing their concerns and learning from each other and issues with Boards.

Considering the changes in schools required in the 2008/2009, a one-year timeframe provides small insight into the immensity of learning required. They included:

- A school curriculum to be developed and consulted on ready for 2010;
- National standards to be introduced by January 2010;
- Revised property management guidelines enacted.
- Class sizes balanced with property needs. The city in this research had disproportionate roll growth issues.
- Schools will grapple with newly elected Boards of Trustees early in 2010 and again in 2013.

These are major changes. Principals have to firstly learn what the documents might look like in their schools and then contextualise them. They have to ensure staff understand them and the Board agrees with the strategic intent being proposed.

Change was accepted practice but the pace of change and form-filling bureaucracy linked to change is what upset these principals. They described time spent on security, staffing funding; applying for extra staffing and property issues all creating anxiety. A major concern was student special needs. A completed application for on-going student resourcing was described as taking over 40 hours.

Principals' learning is threefold. They have to firstly understand any change, analyse the impact and then establish a method for implementation. A specific example raised was each school developing their school curriculum. No one, with the changed emphasis on competencies, had done that previously. This was a learning curve for all principals.

Demographics, context, and changing to a new school were raised as external influencing factors for learning. Decile, type, and size of school influenced principal choice, which in turn influenced the school-based learning in which they participated. It was evident from the findings that principals chose to work where they felt most comfortable. Their schools had to fit with their own values and beliefs. The learning in a school was then focussed to reflect leadership vision. There was consensus

that in a context-specific environment some learning was more appropriate for the staff and children.

The experienced focus group participants were more pragmatic. They saw context as behavioural change, not philosophical change. There was a general belief that skills were transferable but a feeling that comfort, in particular with decile, was important. There was a concern however that people not be labelled by the schools they work in, *"Oh you're a decile 1 or decile 2 principal"* (Sharon).

One member of the group described that she would feel inadequate, for example, in a decile 10 environment where parents' demands seem so high. As a theory, it seemed most people look for fit in terms of their experiences, including their own upbringing. There was a strongly articulated belief that principals in any context are seeking what is best for students. The notion of every principal providing optimal learning to students was hotly disputed. One principal described schools where there was little equity in the education being provided. Poor ICT solutions, children still in straight rows and a teacher-directed pedagogy still promulgated. Another principal who works closely with many principals described why some schools were failing against Ministry criteria. Some of those principals had been in other schools and been successful. All agreed context and external influences were important aspects to consider when describing best practice learning.

More than decile, ethnicity or size, the idea of *"septic people"* was raised. One principal described the incredible difference working in a school environment where people accepted change and were open to new ideas. Another described going from being perceived as a highly successful principal in one school and moving into a school where everyone had been for 20 years, including the principal who had just left, and feeling totally inadequate. Another principal described the subversiveness of a deputy who had not been appointed as principal. It was a country school and the staff backed the

deputy. The context did not change and the new principal left. No learning would change the culture that had been allowed to develop.

Context was described as *“knowing how to change your tactics”* (Ewen). It was agreed that learning within a context was about application of knowledge. Some of the experienced principals described how when they changed schools they had a wealth of knowledge they brought with them. One word of guidance from this group was to get alongside the office staff. *“They really do know what is going on and they generally had the ear of the last principal.”* Context, personal comfort and knowledge all contributed to how well the principal influenced the learning culture of the school, which in turn had either a positive or a negative influence on their own learning. It was discussed that if a person’s energy is going into shaping a school culture and coping with major change there is little left for the person.

The early career principals described things within their context for which they were not prepared. An unrealistic Board, financial issues, a disgruntled staff member and staff apathy, were four cited, negative external factors outside their influence that impacted on learning. The idea of asking numerous questions before considering a school was similarly raised by experienced principals.

The negative factors outside the sphere of influence were lessened where the principal could apply theory and structures to schools improvement. For example, formal learning around change management theory provided principals with guidance to deal with school transformation, which in turn enabled them to cope with staff, boards or situations of concern.

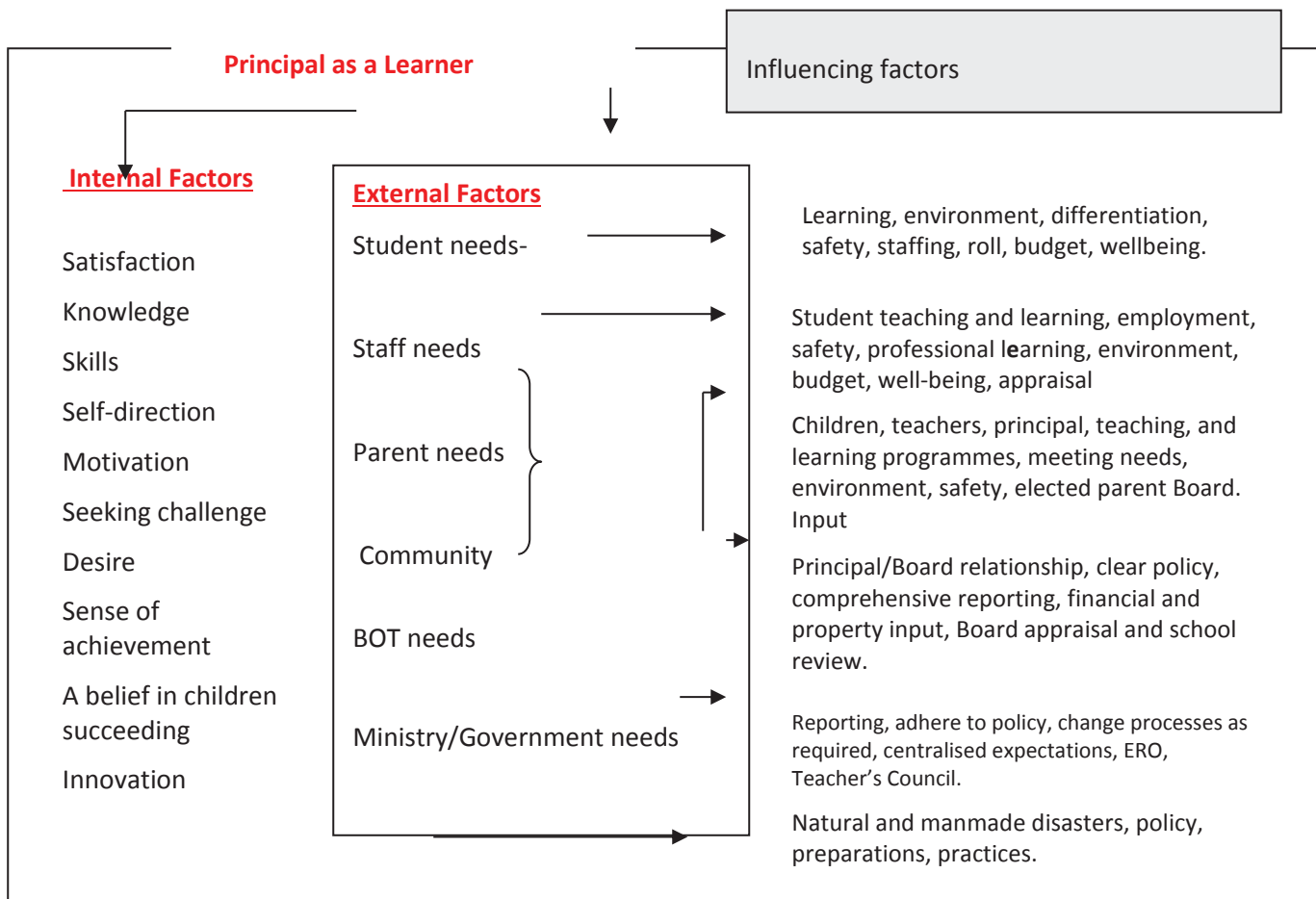
There was concern that the FTTP covered the major topic of change management superficially. It was apparent through the findings that knowing how to process change helped with every aspect of leadership. Figure 14 (p.240) identifies personal and external drivers that influenced principals in this study.



The need to know what to do in given situations is identifiably immense. Principals understand they cannot know all of this on the day they are first appointed to the role. They questioned whether all Boards appreciate the complexity of the role and whether the government needs to modify Boards' expectations through provision of hands on support...

For some early career principals the external influences make for a steep learning curve and the internal driver of personal satisfaction is noticeably decreased. It is therefore imperative that principals do not see themselves as isolated leaders.

**Figure 14: The external and internal learning factors**



Principals said that very often it was the people around them and with whom they associated that informed and motivated much of their leadership. After the initial years, coming to terms with the job, the principals sought further challenges. They joined principals' learning groups and many chose

to further their qualifications. They described that although money was not a motivation that financial recognition of qualifications would be advantageous.

The experienced principals increased their challenge level through school changes or through developing new initiatives. Their motivation came from applying knowledge. Their learning appeared more focused on making a difference to children's learning. They were perhaps more transformative. It was important to experienced principals that their Boards recognised and endeavoured to meet their needs.

The findings identified that formal learning involvement increased with experience. This could be taken to mean experienced principals were more likely to determine their learning needs. Evidenced was that external influences have a direct influence on what and how principals learn as opposed to the personal disposition they bring to the role. For many of the participants, moral leadership, which included empathy, trustworthiness and integrity, were brought with a person to the job and the rest could be learned.

### **6.7 Future direction**

In terms of students and principal's learning, principals saw their learning mostly affecting staff. The staff learning, in turn, influenced the student learning outcomes. Principals described evidence based on the conversations heard in staffrooms and corridors or through appraisal discussions. One principal described teachers feeling empowered because they had been taught by the principal to understand models of feedback. Performance management systems changed to professional dialogue sessions were another way of measuring the leader's learning. Principals felt that what happened in their schools was largely dependent on the principal's knowledge. What they read, reflected on and did supported teachers and students' learning.

Principals believed they sought meaningful learning dialogue from their staff. The findings supported principals' understanding and using evidence based practice. There was a strong tenet that formalised learning had to be around leadership and not management, as conscious learning is what transforms a school. No one felt their learning was fully quantifiable in terms of student outcomes but they believed their learning improved what they did in their schools. They believed that they made a difference and that was their world truth.

Middle management leading directly to principalship was considered viable for the future. Principals supported early detection of leadership potential, followed by a programme of development and mentoring. The discussion considered that with purposeful guidance a person could bypass deputy principalship. Schools have a range of curriculum and school-wide leadership roles that could be used to develop and fast track potential leaders.

Access to mentoring and involvement in a variety of professional networks was seen as valuable support by beginning principals and a potential area for growth. Mentors provided quick response to questions that required rapid action. They were seen as an interface at times between the Board and principal, ensuring Board members knew what an early career principal could achieve. Mentor training, however, required further scrutiny.

Some form of accreditation should be gained on completion of the FTPP, was raised both by early and experienced focus groups. The FTPP, it was agreed, provided a consistent approach and supported a pedagogic focus. The mentor and network aspects were seen as invaluable. Eighteen months culminating in no formal recognition was acknowledged as a weakness. Principals had arranged to have formal study suspended in order to complete the FTPP. Time commitments did not allow for both methods of learning.

Timing, funding, and financial recognition are aspects of learning that have been raised as obstacles at both career stages in this study. Programming learning into time schedules was perceived as a key

inhibitor. Funding for learning also differed relative to a Board of Trustees desire to provide. In an audit of principals' remuneration, reasonable professional development funding is at the approval of Boards and does not require MOE approval (OAG, 2009). The school's financial capability to make learning available evidenced further inequity in that 'reasonable' is not an explicit term. Explicit terms and conditions would ensure minimum levels of support. Generally, principals in this study felt they made a conscious effort to ensure they accessed learning. Participants believed it was important that principals kept up to date with pedagogical knowledge. Both groups were dissatisfied with the lack of government financial recognition for leadership qualifications.

To an outsider it may seem that in the ten years since Thew's research (2002) the government has done little to address what has already been raised. However, there have been gains. New Zealand's Kiwi Leadership discussion document released in 2008 was the beginning of a contextualised, articulated expectation for leadership learning. The document recognised the complexity of the role. New Zealand principals have both managerial and leadership requirements in leading their schools. Even so, professional learning in 2012 remains individualised and un-mandated.

There are no reporting requirements to ensure that principals' professional learning continues, despite Boards of Trustees requirement to annually appraise the principal. Change has occurred with the 'Professional Standards'. The 1998 standards (which never moved beyond draft) stated that a principal's performance should include:

- Reflecting on one's own performance appraisal
- Demonstration of a commitment to one's on-going learning in order to improve performance

This was modified in 2008 with new standards that require principals to:

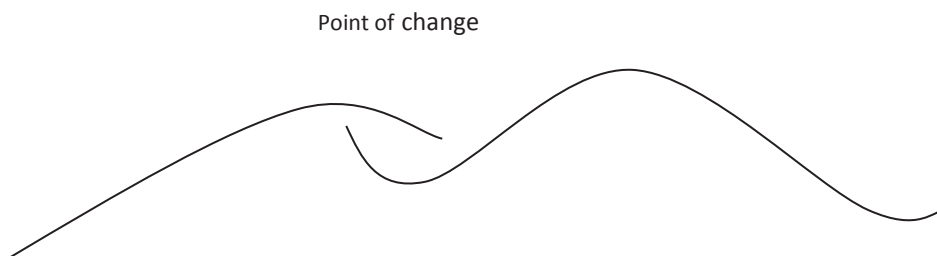
- Demonstrate leadership through participating in professional learning

- Promote, participate in and support on-going professional learning linked to student progress (NZSTA, 2009)

The teachers' union, which is also the principals' union, believes the new standards are Board appraisable, through agreed principal's performance agreements (NZEI, 2007). What continues to be argued is that there is no requirement for quality leadership professional learning. A principal could accomplish the standard through attendance at the school's own staff meetings. This thesis argues that a future requirement for principals to actively pursue professional leadership learning be explicitly stated.

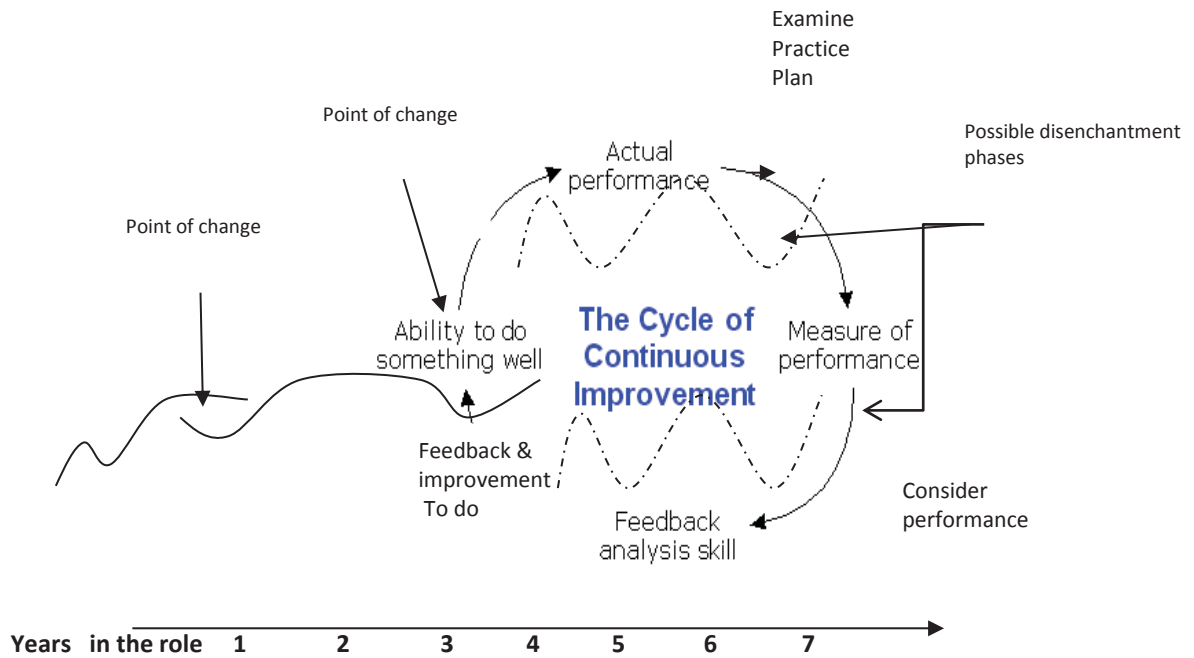
The process of learning principalship is not linear. Everyone has a prior knowledge base and value set. Personality, natural style, and comfort also have to be considered under the umbrella of learning-fit. A cycle of continuous improvement is an inaccurate description, there is no allowance for the dips, and faltering learners describe.

**Figure 15: Sigmoid Curve**



Handy's (1995) Sigmoid Curve (Fig.15) replicates closely what learning looks like for a consolidating learner but lacks the fluctuation points that occur when there is cause for immediate learning. Figure 16 more closely approximates learning through principals' eyes. Uncertainty and insecurity followed by periods of high satisfaction are inherent in the learning cycle.

**Figure 16: Diagrammatic representation of principals' learning**



(Informed by Deming's [Cycle of Improvement](#) (also known as Shewhart Cycle) combined with Handy's Sigmoid Curve (1995))

Learning for principals has highs and lows and, as indicated in Figure 16, is anything but linear.

The major implication for practice focuses on the development of a policy-defined learning pathway. Pre-principalship development cannot be left to the prerogative of individuals. Principals and senior teams have an important role to play in planning, identifying, and coaching future leaders. Government and universities working together ensuring a balanced programme of learning to include formal and informal approaches fits with the need for flexibility.

Mandating a theory linked to practice pathway with multiple choices was favoured. Evidenced was that individualistic learning could be accommodated within a framework of learning.

The recommendations translated into Table 12 over page identify progressive development to include core elements of networking, mentoring, formal study, and self-reflection. The model also provides for senior management without deputyship, thus by-passing the step by step succession development model.

A National College for School Leadership review of leadership literature suggested further investigation is required into leadership differentiation needs (Bush & Glover, 2004).

Table 12, page 247 summarises the various learning experiences articulated through the findings, providing a starting point to consider a progressive developmental process for New Zealand.

Based on the findings it is patently clear that the principal is important to what happens in a school. Principals agreed they actively sought learning that could support them in their role.

**Table 12: Progressive learning - a possible future**

Levels of Leadership	Defining leadership levels	Informal learning: Opportunities that are added to over time.	Formal Learning: Opportunities	Mandatory Learning
Middle Management	School wide curriculum Team Project/ school initiative	School team networks Principal identification Leadership opportunities Mentoring by senior management/ principal Encouraged self-reflection Online opportunities Learning groups.	Encouraged to attend courses on leadership. Encouraged to begin study towards a leadership qualification Board leadership growth plan identifies budget component	School based professional development as defined in the standards registration requirement.
Senior Management	Deputy Principal Assistant Principal Associate principal Dean School identified aspiring leader/ Director of school project	Principal mentoring Local networks Conferences/ local courses Support for middle management leaders Encouraged to present learning to a wider audience—parents/ staff/ community Online opportunities Expected self-reflective practices.	Encouraged to begin Master's level learning about leadership.	Aspiring Principal's certification course pre application for principal positions  Minimum Diploma of Educational leadership
Early Career Principals	1 <sup>st</sup> to 3 <sup>rd</sup> year principals	Cluster and Association networking. Conferences Principal breakfasts Online leadership sites Personal reading	FTPP – papers towards Master's or Professional Learning Diploma	FTPP
Consolidating Principals	4 <sup>th</sup> to 7 <sup>th</sup> year principals	Fellowships Study leave Study sabbatical PLC/G groups		Completion of Master's Degree by 7 <sup>th</sup> year of principalship
Experienced Principals	7+ years	Sabbatical as of right Leadership of local associations/ groups Overseas educational experiences Mentoring	Mentorship professional certification	



## **6.8 Conclusion**

Early career principals are required to learn quickly and there are some aspects that can only be learned once in the job. However, those who had completed leadership courses, who had the benefit of strong mentors, embraced change more readily.

The experienced principals were a powerful voice. They did not let themselves move to what in the literature described as disenchantment (Woods, 2003). They changed schools, studied and travelled. Many involved themselves in local association politics. They believed the principal as the academic leader had to demonstrate academic prowess.

For both groups, in addition to desiring a defined early career pathway, there was support for a Master's Degree being mandatory. Recognition of learning they felt should be through financial remuneration. Principals felt they had an important role in growing leaders in their schools.

An investigation aimed at making sense of principals' personal learning theories and to provide insight into their learning experiences was the purpose of the study. Leaders' understanding and beliefs have been examined in light of the literature on professional learning. Specific programmes, although discussed, have not been a central focus. However, principals' perceptions of learning that support their self-efficacy and actual practices of leadership have been of primary importance.

Exploring and explaining behaviours has been fundamental to the research analysis. The analysis and data support principals as leaders being transformational. There was reinforcement for the

notion that one person alone cannot do the job. The belief that distributive leadership is a way forward was an agreed premise.

The thesis supports learning from an adult learning theory perspective. Principals require relevance and the ability to make decisions about what and how they learn. The study concurs with literature espousing the need for coherent pathways in order to learn the role. Acceptance that qualifications provide consolidated learning as opposed to a raft of course completion certificates was implicit. Moreover, it validated that principals are self-directed learners who work best when they feel safe to share their learning and problem-solve together.

We have much to learn from the voice of practitioner. The next chapter answers the questions initially posed by the research. Questions focussed on meaningfulness and value. The final chapter identifies the implications of the findings, for policy makers and trainers, and considers recommendations for future research.

# The Professional Learning of Urban N.Z. Primary Principals

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Concluding Chapter

*School leaders are usually highly experienced educators with a rich background in teaching, subject leadership, and whole-school management. It makes sense to draw on this experience in devising, implementing and assessing leadership programmes (Bush & Glover, 2005, p. 237).*

#### 7.1 Introduction

The writing of this thesis was motivated by a desire to understand how principals grow knowledge and understanding of the role, and to determine the most meaningful learning pathways. That the leader is important to what happens in a school interweaves with the belief that the person has to be skilled to carry out the role. Understanding that aspects of leadership can be learned was an underlying belief. The study posits that learning is on-going, requiring both formal and informal learning opportunities; and that learning needs change over time.

Synthesising the voice of urban New Zealand primary principals provided some strong suggestions for future practice. The analysed data provided insight into practising principals' beliefs and actions. Twelve recommendations have been drawn from the findings. The data have relevance for policy

makers, school leaders and those educators who work with and facilitate professional learning. The work contributes to academic literature, confirming the need for formalised qualifications, mentoring and networking as part of a principal's learning repertoire. Knowledge that principals are highly motivated to learn because they wanted to improve outcomes for children and learning for teachers has been made explicit. Principals identifying and nurturing future leaders was an emergent theme.

This study contributes to the research literature by providing a practitioner perspective on principal beliefs and understandings. Particular insights were gained from the researcher, also a school principal, through familiarity with the educational language and jargon, similar professional experiences and implicit trust and credibility between the participants and researcher. A non-principal researcher may have provided different perspectives, but may not have accessed the deep experiences of the principal participants.

The concluding chapter answers the questions the research set out to consider and the implications therein for New Zealand's future principal development. It considers the limitations, makes recommendations for practice, and suggests possible future research.

## **7.2 The research questions**

- **Determining when and what to learn.**

Principal's learning is not static and it is possible, as raised by participants, that there is a disjunction in principals' minds between what they would *like to learn* and what they *need to learn*. The research goes some way in bridging accountability and individual choice. Experienced principals commented that some early career principals require a broader leadership knowledge base; that there needs to be an element of compulsory learning. The small percentages of early career

principals choosing not to participate in leadership learning, for example the FTTP, are doing their schools a disservice.

Principals' learning is on-going. Chapters Five and Six distinguish between career stage requirements. Pre-principalship is enhanced if principals recognise and nurture talented 'early leaders'. Mentoring and exposing young leaders to formalised course work; encouraging curriculum leadership roles and building expertise in human resource and change management strategies provide a strong platform for principalship.

The early career leader learns on the job, through course work, mentors, and networks. The first three years were described as stressful, unknowing, a lurching from one learning experience to the next. The findings support the premise that the FTTP should be compulsory but suggest the curriculum requires review to include formal qualification recognition.

There needs to be a formal handover requirement for principals moving into their first position. As well, an initial induction period could be considered where the previous principal, or an advising principal, is funded to lead the early career principal through the existing documentation, past ERO review data and planning. Ministry courses for early career leaders on finance and property were seen as invaluable when tailored and using the principal's own school data. This provided guidance in how to use data for next step planning such as budget development. Novice principals benefit from a range of professional networks and should be encouraged to attend local association meetings where they are exposed to a wide range of informal mentoring /coaching experiences.

The experienced leader appears most motivated by improvement to student and teachers' learning opportunities. Learning involving, and developing, innovation in their environment was preferred. An inspirational conference, travel, and professional learning groups were perceived as meaningful. By their seventh year the principals in this study felt Master's level learning was paramount. Formal learning opened new networks, developed the leader's philosophical base, and provided broad

pedagogic understanding. Experienced leaders believed the element of challenge in their learning was indispensable.

- **Support for early career leaders**

Investigating learning barriers provided insight into how to best support novice school leaders. Early career leaders believed no person can know how to be a principal until they are in the role. Chapter Six identified that strong past principal mentors, FPHP mentors and the advisory service make the transition less complicated. Moreover, access to knowledge, the provision of wise advice, needs to be immediate.

Formalised learning strongly supported early career leaders with understanding around educational policy and theory. The participants described the importance of being able to search for information. Principals in this study felt it important to complete a formal leadership qualification prior to beginning the FPHP or just after. The debate centred on learning new skills. It was often the 'finding out' what you did not know and the development of new understandings through study that supported a person's leadership becoming more informed. The FPHP providing papers towards a degree was seen as advantageous.

Where principals had been provided with opportunity to act in the role (see page 218) they initially felt stronger. Sabbaticals provided those opportunities. A tentative theory emerged through focus group discussion that early learning, supported by the principal acting as mentor, encourager, and promoter, developed more confident and competent early career principals. It was evident that school leadership cannot be left to chance; leaders need to be recognised and developed.

Succession planning was seen for this group as the preferred way to progress into the principal's role. Moving from middle to senior manager provided varied learning experiences in curriculum and

personnel. They did concede that some of their young leaders today could move through curriculum leadership pathways linked with study and aspiring leadership programmes and not aspire to deputy principalship as a succession requirement.

The first three years of principalship were perceived as both terrifying and exciting. The fear of making mistakes that could affect a school's outcomes is described throughout the findings. Sleepless nights worrying about their actions and the school lessened in the second year and by the third year principals felt they could be more systematic with change. They concluded that the first years provided many tensions, regardless of the amount of formal learning for principalship. Despite networks, their prior knowledge, FTTP and other groups the first years involved a vast amount of new knowledge and skills. Some learning happened over time, some was expedited by need or the experience of resolving complex situations. Both groups felt there needed to be expected credentialed levels of learning.

A recognised Diploma or possibly Master's Degree was proposed as necessary theoretical learning pre-principalship. Participants felt strongly that Boards of Trustees and schools require a process that evidences a person's capability to do the job in its most basic sense. It was suggested that similar to Ontario's PQP, in-school attested to leadership modules could provide the practical aspects of learning. Schools or a school in a cluster could apply for accreditation through NZQA in order to assess leadership capability internally. The Aspiring Principals' Programme would fit with the theoretical and practical aspects as a shortened management course attended when ready to seek principalship. Formal, informal and practice documents would initiate the principal's professional portfolio development. The idea of a professional portfolio was first raised by Stewart pre-2000. A professional portfolio commenced at middle management level and carried through as a record of learning would provide an appraisable document to meet the professional development standard of principalship. Boards of Trustees would be able to verify the learning.

- **The changed needs of experienced principals**

Experienced principals actively seek learning. They strongly support formal study to enhance their knowledge base. The value they place on their chosen networks cannot be underestimated. They use conferences to stimulate ideas and to build contacts. They love to travel. The notion of seeing how others do things was a strong learning motivator. Many of these principals had, or would apply for, fellowships. A high proportion chose to be actively involved in their principals' association politics.

They enthusiastically described projects where they were involved with other principals with a focus on transforming their schools. As a group, they believed ten week sabbaticals should be granted as of right after seven years. Principals need time to reflect.

- **Defining meaningful professional learning experiences.**

Learning that helps a principal feel more effective and in control is meaningful. Formal learning provides the philosophical backbone to leadership. It also supports principals developing their theories of practice. Time and impact on health and family were over-ridden by their need to know. Some chose extra-mural study and others preferred weekly lectures. All agreed programmes that provided incremental learning and some aspects of online work were most fitting. The learning of leadership, all agreed, had to be explicit.

Informal learning was equally valued but with the understanding that if a principal chose only informal means they could be perpetuating poor practice. There was acceptance that mentoring, networks and in school development programmes could all support the leader's learning. Equally, if the mentor was unskilled, networks ill-informed and in-school programmes poorly conceived, the learning could be limited. What was required was balanced formal and informal learning over time involving increased complexity and challenge.



- **The other factors influencing principals' learning**

Variability of demographics, school context, and personal motivation are all professional learning considerations. The impact of decile, type, and size of school influence what a principal learns but not as greatly as anticipated. Principals discussed changing context not being as important as why they chose to work in schools that matched with their value base. There was considerable agreement that a person's life experiences including family beliefs determine where a principal will feel most comfortable. Prior school leadership also had a bearing on choice of schools.

Experienced principals described changing schools to increase personal challenge. They continued in the main to stay with the context in which they felt comfortable. They chose larger schools or moved from intermediate to a like contributing school. Early career principals said they would want to know a great deal more about a school if they considered change. The early career principals in this research had been successful in gaining their schools of choice.

- **Determining the impact of principal learning.**

Principals did not explicitly identify, "I learned this, and this was the result," the impact was integral to their leadership. When they described a school development programme, their developing curriculum, their vision, it was evident their thinking did not come from their head alone. Principals described learning derived from principal association meetings, conferences, informal networks, as well as professional reading. Many of the principals described school innovations they had or were implementing. They attributed their school changes to involvement in a group, a school led learning focus, a new programme, or on something, they had read. What was happening in their schools was connected to and influenced by the leaders' learning.

Where they had innovated something very new they shared what they had done with others and so the learning was a perpetuating cycle. The importance of getting out of one's own school was

expressed multiple times. Looking, talking, and listening were deemed the key learning skills for every principal.

### **7.3 Limitations of the research**

Case study from a positivist perspective is subjective, value laden and unscientific. Some in the research world see the researcher being the sole instrument of data gathering as limiting. Issues of overstating, exaggerating or simplifying a case, are additional potential researcher limitations. Guba and Lincoln (1985) remind us that a researcher can select virtually any aspect to illuminate, so bias that could influence the final report must be identified. The way a researcher collects and analyses data can “ produce brilliant insights” (Merriam, 1998, p. 35), or incorrect and fraudulent analysis. For this study, tape recording interviews, using professional transcribers, and having participants verify transcripts, support data dependability, and credibility.

Human instruments for data gathering can also be deemed a limitation but according to Merriam are as fallible as any other instrument. All data gathering is influenced by personality and skill. It is important therefore, that, the researcher’s role is understood. Merriam suggests being a good listener is of primary importance and being aware of nuances and cues from the participants equally so. A researcher who understands and can interpret jargon is also at an advantage (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Consideration must also be given to the notion of reflexivity; where the researcher remains aware of their own biases and assumptions and the potential of these to influence and distort the research process. Reflexivity requires acknowledgement that there is no value free knowledge. Cohen et al., (2000) support researcher awareness:

Reflexivity recognises that researchers are inescapably part of the social world  
that they are researching and indeed that this social world is an already

interpreted world by the actors, undermining the notion of objective reality  
(p.141).

Knowing the participants could also be perceived as a limitation, in particular, if research is to be used to support the researcher's beliefs or if there were issues of power to be considered. In this case, there is no power or personal purpose for the researcher; the thesis is driven by an interest in how other principals learn. Nevertheless, a person unknown to the participants might gain access to a different set of information. In an ideal world, a known and unknown researcher working together may add depth to this study where the data from both researchers could be compared. This was not a feasible option in this doctoral study.

The size of the sample could also be perceived as a limitation but the purposive sample aimed to gather data from a wide cross-section without unnecessary duplication. As well, the sample did not attract principals who had experienced multiple school rejections, principals who sometimes settled for schools not matching with who they are.

Despite the sample size and inability to consider data from principals who did not easily find employment, dependability is about having enough data to respond to the phenomena. The notion of reliability carries with it a perception that the study should be able to be replicated. Mutch (2005) defines this as "someone else could replicate your study with similar results" (p114). This could be deemed problematic for this thesis. In future research the people will not be the same and the learning programmes are subject to change.

Unlike positivist research where reliability is expected of the research (that is: that the same results would be found) Merriam (1998) makes clear that qualitative research does not seek to isolate the "laws of human nature"(p. 170). Replication may not provide the same results in social research as seen in a science experiment. Lincoln and Guba (1985) therefore find the term "dependable" more applicable when describing the validity of qualitative research (p. 288).

Dependability as opposed to replicability is about ensuring data can stand up to similar interpretation until contradictory evidence is available.

Dependability also relates to how and why the participant sample was selected and in this case, that has been articulated throughout this chapter (see section 4.10 on page 102 for the detailed example). Dependability is focussed on making sure the techniques, processes of the investigation have been reliable, and that validity is inherent in the work.

#### **7.4 Forward thinking for New Zealand**

There is not full agreement through the literature, that phases of experience influence what and when principals learn. Nonetheless, this research confirms and supports the theory that principals' learning requires linking to development stages. Early career principals require teaching and learning knowledge, change management skills, and the ability to access relevant research. Experienced leaders, more confident in their practice, focus on pupil learning. They use their broader understanding of transformational practices and strategic intent to consider school improvement. The experienced principals in this study described developing new projects such as more focussed approaches to improving learning. For example, commitment to an Extending High Standards Across Schools (EHSAS) cluster with an emphasis on assessment was one such project described.

Learning required a range of approaches from the use of networking and learning communities through to mentoring, all of which were recognised as invaluable. Central to the findings were strengthening theory and practice knowledge and the need for principals to build emotional intelligence into their leadership. Emotional leadership is described as understanding people, being empathetic, knowing how positively influence change

Conclusively, principals did not wish to return to centralised control. Nonetheless, they recognised the government requires quality school leadership. Boards of Trustees, the government's agents,

appoint principals and provide funding for their development, presently with no mandates.

Identifiable friction was acknowledged where Boards of Trustees moved beyond the governance role and exerted their power over principals. A cohesive professional learning framework would predictably support external agency confidence and principal's autonomy.

The research supports that leadership is a balance of task and vision. The duality of the role therefore necessitates a variety of learning opportunities. Consequently, some of the questions concerning quality development of principals remain unanswered. Masters level learning was recommended but timing was not definitive. Learning totally at the discretion of the individual was not seen as tenable, if New Zealand is to have an explicitly defined and possibly funded principal learning pathway.

Principals' career experiences illustrated the importance of mentor principals at middle management levels but again raised issues of consistent practice. There was no solution posited, but concerns were raised about inequitable provision. Some schools known to the participants were described as not providing appropriate levels of new leader support. Whether that was through lack of existing principal knowledge, which was alluded to, or not considering the need to do so as important, was unknown. As well, the participants struggled with the notion of appointed mentors such as those provided through government programmes. It was agreed that mentoring was a relationship, one that develops through respect. As such, often a new principal will defer to their past principal for advice.

A desired outcome of this study was to determine principals' learning assumptions, their perceptions of meaningful learning pathways. The study theorises that school principals are required to

demonstrate intelligence<sup>12</sup>, and display multi-capability. Flexibility, knowledge, and competent communication were core competencies outlined. Change management theory was perceived as underpinning much of the leader's work. Harnessing people's talents and skills, development of positive cultures and an explicit focus on student's learning were embedded in the job. Principals who work closely with their staff to develop and implement a shared vision are perceived as effective. What was unequivocal in this research was that principals identified themselves as on-going learners.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century New Zealand principal also has a key management role. They are required to schedule day-to-day organisational tasks within their working week. Without doubt, to fulfil the role requires the school principal to be open to new learning.

The Kiwi Leadership strategy (2008) recognises the multifaceted role of the principal. The introduction states, "The heart of the Kiwi Leadership for Principals document is the principal as an educational leader, leading both the learning and the organisation to enhance educational outcomes for all young people" (p.4). The Model of Leadership,(MoE, 2008a, p. 12) identifies the job's diversity. The document states, "This is a reference point which outlines the expectations we have of school principals. It is a starting point for a Professional Leadership Strategy (PLS) which will be developed in partnership with the sector" (p.24). The Maori terms used in the document: ako, pono, awhinatanga, manaakitanga, encompass togetherness, learning, morality, and support, fitting within a school context. The model articulates what it is to be a school leader in New Zealand. This sets out the Ministry of Education's vision for school leader's learning.

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<sup>12</sup> Encarta describes intelligence as the ability to apply skills and knowledge; to be mentally able and rational; to self-regulate.

Nonetheless, the barriers to achieving on-going excellent school leadership in New Zealand call for action. Despite 89% of principals satisfied with their role, 62% of teachers “have no aspiration to become a principal” (Latham, 2010, p. 10). Time, overwork and financial recognition have also been cited as inhibitors to future supply.

### **7.5 Implications for future practice**

Suggestions made and discussed throughout Chapter Six are reliant on leadership centres, government, and universities having a consistent set of requirements and policy to enable multiple opportunities for learning. It was seen as critical that principals have access to a range of learning pathways. Given the findings, the implication for practice revolves around developing cohesive programmes that initiate in middle management, such as suggested in Table 12 in Chapter Six ( p. 247 ). The notion is supported by Bush and Glover who determined, “ There is a need to establish both the specific and generic needs of different categories of leader, including Head Teachers, middle level leaders and teacher leaders” (Bush & Glover, 2004, p. 21).

The thesis has 12 conclusions that contribute to school leadership’s academic literature. In particular, the conclusions support a New Zealand Leadership Development Strategy:

1. Principals would be required to identify, mentor and promote leadership within their schools. The principal would annually report their leadership development plan, leadership development budget, and outcomes to the Boards of Trustees. Ministry would identify in the Operational Grant a minimum leadership learning amount for principals and other school leaders. The leadership plans would be open to Review Office scrutiny.
2. Aspiring principals need to be conversant with teaching and learning pedagogies but should also expand their understanding through Master’s level learning with a focus on leadership and philosophy. This would support developing informed personal beliefs, big picture strategic thinking and change management capability, skills core to principalship.

3. All first-time principals compulsorily attend a First Time Principals' Programme. FTTPs course work to be developed in a module format to cover prescribed philosophy, management, pedagogic and leadership aspects. Exemption from modules (which decreases time) if prior learning can be evidenced.
4. Selected FTTP modules to be improved to meet university standards of rigour to contribute to Master's Degree papers.
5. FTTP to include (Ministry led) management training modules. Groups of principals with like context using actual budgets, property plans, staffing components to support understanding mandatory expectations.
6. Each beginning principal to be mentored by a trained mentor. Mentoring sessions funded and Boards advised of the requirements. The opportunity for FTPs to self-select mentors, if the person identified has been trained and is available.
7. Mentorship training for experienced principals (5 year +) culminates in a professional learning qualification which can be cross-credited to a single Master's level paper.
8. Mandated Master's degree. It was suggested that the third year of principalship would be optimal timing to expect the qualification to be started if not already obtained during the aspiring phase (see recommendation 2).
9. Principals with Master's Degrees would move to a next step recognised pay scale. The rise would be significant to encourage principals to complete.
10. Experienced principal programmes to support experienced principals developing further transformational practices for themselves and their schools.(Travel fellowships and possibly early or pre-career development options factored into the learning)
11. Networking articulated by the government as expected informal principals' learning. This would provide a strong expectation to Boards of Trustees
12. Principals would be provided with a ten week paid sabbatical, as of right, after each seven year period in the job (Some principals felt five and some ten, so a mid-point has been taken).



What the recommendations clarify is that principals believe they need a balance of formal and informal learning over their time in the role.

There was a strong premise that any first time principal's programmes should be compulsory in order to provide consistent messages. Academic recognition must be inherent in the programme. Prior knowledge required acknowledgement with the FPHP programme time reduced if evidence of learning was confirmed. An example from the findings was that a principal who had completed a Master's Degree paper on educational change would seek exemption from the change module. Principals working with similar school principals was critical to supporting stronger networking. Management was described as integral to the job and as such was required to be theorised and taught within the programme.

In the first instance, developing a diverse strategy would involve universities, New Zealand Qualification Framework, and other government agencies seeking agreement on what constitutes a Master's Degree in Educational leadership, in particular, the curriculum content of learning modules if they were to be cross credited. A leadership certificate that can subsume into diploma then into a master's degree provides for manageable learning. Components of face to face school holiday block courses, online environments and cohort learning networks seemed to fit with how principals chose to learn. For some, however, the weekly lecture provided greater motivation. Funding and time to study remain key issues of concern.

Nonetheless, improved remuneration and Board leadership learning plans outlining minimum funding would ameliorate some costs. Principals are able to access a New Zealand student loan and incur no interest whilst residing in New Zealand. This would be an alternative option for funding learning, preceding a qualification salary increase. Ad Eundem Statum provides for the recognition of prior learning. A principal without a Bachelor's Degree would need to demonstrate they are capable

of work at Master's level. Study leave and cross credits through the FTTP provide a realistic means to achieving a Master's Degree.

### **7.6 Possible future research**

The sample of principals could be deemed not fully representative of the urban region. Principals identified through the email survey their agreement to further participate in focus groups and then individual interviews. The purposive sample was derived from those prepared to be interviewed. Consequently, the study did not attract reluctant or failing principals as participants. It would be of future interest to determine how those groups of principals perceive their learning. However, a benefit of the group in this study is that they are all highly motivated and successful principals, therefore can be considered good role models and providers of direction in developing recommendations to enhance future principal leadership.

The limitations suggest a need to consider learning of principals in failing schools to determine if context, Boards, or learning contributes to failure. Discussed, but not delved into, was the issue of some early career principals who apply for multiple schools before being appointed. To be considered further are the criteria Boards use to appoint principals, in particular to consider if learning does make a difference to appointment or whether personality fit is the overriding factor.

A possible research topic derived directly from this study would be the impact of the principals on middle management leaders. The notion that when leadership is nurtured pre-principalship, stronger early career practices result, is worthy of further examination. Inextricably linked to that thesis would be the principal as a mentor. What makes a strong principal mentor; how do they harness leadership capacity and why do some principals better motivate young leaders?

In summary, despite an ever increasing literature supporting understanding how, why and when principals best learn, there is need for additional research to address the following five gaps in the current knowledge base:

**1. Consistency and innovation**

The interrelationship of management and leadership in a self-managing environment. How to best address government and school based needs to ensure consistency of practice, as well as building school based and shared innovation.

**2. Beyond succession and apprenticing**

The opportunities for developing leaders within schools with the possibility of by-passing the succession model most prevalent in New Zealand.

**3. Commonality of curriculum**

A comparison of what universities and leadership centres currently offer would be illuminating. This could support providing a common curriculum for learning, which in turn supports a New Zealand wide framework for linking government learning such as the FTTP to academic papers.

**4. Further research**

Further research is required to understand effective leadership learning outcomes on student learning. Unfortunately, in 2009 the New Zealand government removed funding for collaborative projects such as EHSAS. The projects (some, it seems, were more successful than others), provided an ideal opportunity to consider the impact of leadership learning on students' learning.

## **5. Investigate distributed leadership models**

The evidence base that considers the efficacy of distributed leadership remains limited. There is a need for haste to fully understand how to make the job of principal more do-able. The barriers of overwork, lack of time and increasing external pressure need to be addressed in order to make the job one of preference. Latham's(2010) research identifies only 38% of New Zealand teachers currently aspire to principalship .

### **7.7 Conclusion**

Given the findings of this study, the major implication for practice revolves around the development of a policy-defined learning pathway. Pre-principalship development cannot be left to the prerogative of individuals. Principals and senior teams have an important role to play in planning, identifying, and coaching future leaders. The role needs to be funded and made explicit to Boards of Trustees. Practical learning modules attested to by accredited principals linked to formal post-graduate qualifications, certificates, or diplomas in leadership should be mandated. The introduction of such a requirement would support Boards of Trustees in their appointment processes.

Early career principals have to learn quickly and there are some aspects that can only be learned once in the job. However, those who had completed leadership courses, who had the benefit of strong mentors, and were recognised and promoted by previous principals, embraced change more readily. The principal as the academic leader must be able to demonstrate academic prowess.

Accountability to Boards through a leadership plan and budget was current and effective practice for many of the principals. They had no concerns with this requirement being regulated. This would allow for external examination through the already prepared annual report and ERO review.

Flexible choices of where and how to study are already available. New Zealand is ready to implement a defined strategy. This thesis, despite an obvious tension between adult learning principles of choice, autonomy, and flexible learning, supports the development of a cohesive incremental framework of learning.

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## Appendices

1. Overview of concerns and positives for the 2007 OECD `background report	302
2. Information for email questionnaire participants	304
3. Email questionnaire to all (urban area) Principals	306
4. Invite for focus group participants	309
4A Information for focus group participants	310
5. Participation agreement.	313
6. Letter inviting further participation in individual interviews	314
7. Focus group questions	315
8. Interview protocols	316
9. Survey of learning, experience and demographics for individual participants	317
10. Transcript release	317
11. Optional Board Approval	318
12. Transcriber confidentiality	320
13. Cited learning less than 1% of email population	321
14 Nvivo coding sample	323
15 OECD development indicators	324

## **Appendix 1 Background Report**

### **Concerns:**

- Licensing to lead becomes problematic if applicant numbers for positions decrease.
- Consistency of practice, when there is a large range of course providers and no regulatory body checking the quality of programmes.
- Sole providers of learning, such as NCSL, directed by the government, could stifle innovation seen where there is a range of providers. This has yet to be proven or disproved (Gunter & Fitzgerald, 2008).
- Highly centralised prescriptive learning does not allow for prior knowledge levels.
- Lack of coherent national leadership strategy policies leads to a plethora of providers with no regulatory body determining the value of the learning.
- A need for governments to articulate their theory of action so that learning can be underpinned philosophically.
- Most countries expect principals to learn on the job.
- There is an identified need for a variety of pathways to headship.
- When broader social issues drive programmes, incoherence between needs of school leaders and government agencies.
- Fully funded learning with no option to choose to be a leader beyond passing an exam or meeting certain criteria could be seen as limiting accessibility.

### **Positives:**

- Systems leadership provides a clear career pathway (such as being seen in England) aspiring through to consultant learning.
- Customised induction allows for context-based learning.
- Fully funded learning encourages involvement in decentralised systems.

- Recognition of school-based projects towards leadership qualifications supports school improvement models of learning.
- Employment of, and involvement from, administrative specialists e.g. finance, evaluators etc. in Sweden is supported by leaders.
- Long-term educators used for strategic work after intensive time at school provide another learning pathway if day to day leading energy ebbs (Swedish report pg. 47).
- The Austrian online LEA initiatives offer learning where there are geographical access issues.

(Macpherson, 2008)



## Appendix 2

Information to participants Email questionnaire are online at

<http://www.schoolgate.co.nz/main.cfm?sid=94>

Information

### **The Learning pathways of xxxxxxx Primary Principals**



*Approval to use data base from xxxxxx Executive August 16th, 2007*

**Dear Association Principal,**

I am presently studying through Massey University how urban principals learn the crafts of principalship. If you could take 2 minutes to complete this [online survey](#) you would be actively supporting contextually based New Zealand research about principals and their work. All responses are confidential and no names or schools will be used in the research.

My very sincere thanks for your time.

**Kind regards**

**Anne Malcolm**

**Principal xxxxxx School**

**ED.D student Massey University**

#### **Research Information**

This research project is to satisfy the requirements of an Educational Doctorate from Massey

University. This is a scoping survey and as such is being sent to all (urban N.Z. city) primary schools.

The data will be aggregated to snap-shot how principals in xxxxxx choose to learn their craft. All data

collected from participants will be held in the strictest confidence and you will not be identified in any way in the research results.

By clicking on the online survey link and then completing the questionnaire, you recognise that you give your consent to participating in this research. As such, you may exit at any time and only completed surveys will be included in the final results.

Thank you for your participation. If you would like to email me with any questions or comments then you may do so at [amalcolm@xxxxx.co.nz](mailto:amalcolm@xxxxx.co.nz).

### **Appendix 3**

## Email Questionnaire

### Online Survey

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#### Survey

##### Terminology:

**Formal learning**- I have taken to mean qualification based learning that is accessed through a tertiary organisation.

**Informal learning**- I have taken to mean all learning related to school principalship that does not lead to a qualification e.g. succession learning, mentoring, on the job learning, courses etc.

**Government Programme learning**-I have taken to mean fully funded government programmes i.e. FTPP or PDPC

***If you continue to complete this survey it is accepted that you have read the participant information on the previous page and you consent to participate in this research.***

**Please tick all the boxes that identify your learning pathway.**

---

**1. Before you became a principal you took part in: :**

- Formal professional learning
- Informal professional learning
- No direct principal learning

---

**2. In your first three years as a principal you took part in: :**

- Formal professional learning
- Informal professional learning
- Government programme learning  
FTPP
- No direct principal learning

---

**3. As an experienced principal (5 years + in the job) you now take part in: :**

- Not applicable
- Formal professional learning
- Informal professional learning

- Government programme learning-PDPC
- No direct principal learning

---

**4. Please tick as many of the following types of learning that you have found support you in your principalship: :**

- On the job learning
- Personal networks
- Mentoring
- APPA Cluster groups
- Professional learning groups e.g. PPLC
- Regional and National Professional groups e.g. APPA,NZPF
- Conferences and short courses
- Principal advisors
- Personal coaches
- Leadspace
- FTPP
- PDPC
- Appraisal training
- School professional development programmes (e.g. NUMPA)
- Certificate in leadership
- Postgraduate leadership Diploma
- Master's Degree in leadership
- Doctorate in Education

**Other (please state): :**

---

**My most meaningful early career learning was: :**

**My most meaningful learning as an experienced principal has been: :**

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey.

## Letter of Invitation to Principal Focus Group Participants

Educational doctoral research:

### **The Professional Learning Pathways of Urban New Zealand Primary Principals.**

Researcher: Anne Malcolm

Date, 2008

Dear

#### **The professional learning pathways of urban New Zealand primary principals**

I am the school principal at xxxxxxxx School and I am presently engaged in an educational doctoral study through Massey University.

In my research I hope to explore principals' professional learning; what principals either do to prepare themselves before taking their first principal role through to, in your case, early career principalship or experienced principalship. The research wishes to consider the professional learning, *both formal and informal* that principals participate in and value. The research seeks to understand what principals want to gain from professional learning and how principals apply professional learning to improve what they do within the context of their own schools. I intend to undertake the fieldwork over May/June and July 2008.

This phase, which I am asking you to participate in, is a focus group discussion with six other selected principals who belong to the principals' association who have similar experience levels to you in their principalship. Your commitment if you do agree to participate is a 1 hour interview 11am – noon on (Date) to be held at (city address cited) followed by lunch. I have chosen the venue as it is central and there will be no parking issues or interruptions.

The data I will gather will come from the narratives (stories about learning), of urban primary principals. The selection is purposive to consider large schools, small schools, independent schools, contributing and intermediate schools and, Maori immersion schools. Gender is evenly split as the urban data identifies presently a 50% gender mix.

Attached is an information sheet outlining details of the project, the procedures and levels of involvement required from participants. I would like to emphasise that participating principals and their schools will be identified by pseudonyms. Nevertheless, the sample is small and uses group discussion. Hence, anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. There is a potential risk of identification. However, every effort will be made to protect anonymity.

I should be happy to arrange to discuss the project further with you or your Board of Trustees, if you feel you would like their approval. I can be contacted as indicated in the letterhead above or email me at [amalcolm@iconz.co.nz](mailto:amalcolm@iconz.co.nz) or amalcolm@xxxxxxx.school.nz.

My supervisors Dr. Jenny Poskitt and Dr. Wayne Edwards are also available to discuss this research. They can be contacted by email- [J.R.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.R.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz) or W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 08/08. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x6929, email: [humanethicssouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicssouthb@massey.ac.nz)

Thank you for taking time to read this letter and I look forward to your early reply. I have enclosed a paid response envelope or you can email your acceptance to participate to amalcolm@xxxxxxx.school.nz.

Yours sincerely

Anne Malcolm

Principal xxxxxxxxx Primary School

#### **Appendix 4 A**



[Date], 2008

Educational doctoral research:

**The Professional Learning Pathways of Urban New Zealand Primary Principals.**

Researcher: Anne Malcolm

**INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS**

**ACCOMPANYING INFORMATION**

**Purpose of the study**

To determine what urban primary principals believe provides them with professional learning. The learning, they actually use to be more effective in their schools. The study wants to consider principals' learning needs at different phases of their experience. The aim is to see if the New Zealand context is different, the same, or has some comparable features to other countries as described through the literature. This is a qualitative case study using predominantly interviews to gather data. The data will be analysed using qualitative data software NVIVO 7.

### **Project Phase 3**

Initially an email questionnaire was sent to the full principal association population. Phase two involved purposive sampling focus groups. This third phase involves interviewing a purposive sample of two experienced principals and two early career principals. Participants for interviews have been selected from the phase two focus groups.

This phase involves the principal telling their learning journey from before they became a principal through to the present. There are only four questions to be answered. Thinking of your learning as a principal what did you do to prepare yourself before you were appointed? When and how did you learn the role once appointed? What have you kept doing to keep up with the changing landscape of principalship and why? What is the most meaningful learning you have done as a principal and why?

This phase interview will be held at your school or we can negotiate another venue more suitable to you, that is agreed to by my supervisors. The interview involves one hour of your time and 30 minutes at a later time to read the transcript for accuracy approval

**In each phase, I am only interested in gathering data related to your understanding, beliefs and experiences. There are no right or wrong ways to learn nor any expected answers. I strongly believe all principals are learners and we all have our own ways of learning. My hope is that this research will inform the policy makers on the huge range of principals' learning options and what options are most valued.**

### **Your time commitment**

If you agree to take part in the study, I anticipate 1½ hours maximum in focus group phase. One and a half hours individual interview stage and one hour for staff in the staff focus group phase.

### **What can you expect from me?**

The interviews meetings are scheduled as outlined in your invite to participate.

In addition to an opportunity to reflect and share your thinking in this research, I make the following undertakings:



1. The research will not identify any schools or principals by name. This research involves a small sample so; there could be a possibility of identification. However, every effort will be made to ensure anonymity of the school and principal's name.
2. I shall endeavor to faithfully represent your experiences and perceptions in the report that will come from this research study. If I choose to use the research to speak or write about beyond the dissertation and if an individual is referenced albeit by pseudonym I will ask permission to use that vignette.
3. I shall explain the procedure and secure your agreement at every phase in which you participate.
4. I shall return the transcripts to you for your verification of accuracy.
5. I shall supply you with a copy of conclusions and recommendations from the completed study prior to the final report for any final input from you.
6. At all times, I shall deal with participants in an open courteous and honest manner.
7. On completion of my study, I shall destroy all personal data gathered during the course of the study and tapes will be kept in a locked cabinet for five years and then destroyed.

### **Removing any Conflict of Interest**

As a colleague, it is important I reassure you that I have no other interest in your data other than to inform this research. I have no pre conception of what suits you as a learning principal. Dependability has been developed through interview protocols, taped transcriptions checked by participants and building knowledge through iterative phasing. Matching the findings with reality involves me interpreting the data and in this phase, I will remain as true to the data as I can.

The research has no external funding.

### **Your Participation**

If you take part in this study, you have the right to:

- refuse to answer any particular questions, and withdraw from the interviews at any time.
- ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation
- provide information on the understanding that it is confidential to the researcher
- be given access to a summary of findings when the study is concluded.

You will be asked to complete a participant participation agreement prior to any individual interview you agree to participate in. From a legal perspective, principals are not self-employed. Participants may, therefore wish to secure permission from their BoTs for participation in the study. Attached is a Board participation agreement if you choose to have approval.

The supervisors for the project are Dr. Jenny Poskitt and Professor Wayne Edwards

They are also available to confirm or discuss any aspects of the research. They can be contacted by email at [J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz) or [W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz](mailto:W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 08/08. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799 x6929, email: [humanethicssouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicssouthb@massey.ac.nz)

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. You can email me at xxxxxxxx if you wish to further discuss any aspect of this study.

## Appendix 5



### Agreement to Participate

(Name)..... agrees to participate in the research into principals' learning being conducted by Anne Malcolm through Massey University supervised by Dr. Jenny Poskitt and Professor Wayne Edwards.

I have chosen to participate of my own free will and understand the procedures and processes of the research as outlined in the research information sheet.

I understand confidentiality and anonymity are implicit in the research but that they cannot be guaranteed.

I agree to the interviews being taped. I also understand I have the right to have the tape turned off for a personal comment, at any time during the conversations.

I will have the opportunity to read any transcript for accuracy prior to it being used for data analysis.

I understand the raw data will be kept for a period of five years in a safe secure environment accessible to Anne Malcolm and her supervisors and then disposed of.

Signed

Date

## Appendix 6



### Letter inviting participation in the individual interview phase

Educational doctoral research:

#### **The Professional Learning Pathways of Urban New Zealand Primary Principals.**

Researcher: Anne Malcolm

Dear [name/ pseudonym]

Thank you for having participated in phase two of the study. This third phase that I would like to invite you to participate in involves an individual interview for approximately one hour at your school or a place that suits you. If you agree I have scheduled your interview for [Date] at 11.30 am but this date can be changed to suit your calendar.

The aim of the individual interview is for you to tell your own story of development and learning, so that a deeper understanding of issues like theory knowledge, motivation, persistence and learning needs can be established.

Attached is an information sheet describing this phase. I must again reiterate that you and your school will be anonymous in the report. The pseudonyms you choose will be the only identifiers. This however cannot guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. The sample is small and you have previously been involved in a group discussion hence there is a potential risk of identification.

I am more than happy to further discuss this project with you, as are my supervisors. I can be contacted xxxxxxxx during work time or [amalcolmxxxxxxxxxx](mailto:amalcolmxxxxxxxxxx). My supervisors can be contacted as follows:

I appreciate you taking time to read this. I will email you to confirm your participation. Prior to the interview, I will ask you complete an agreement to participate document. With the information sheet, I have also included a Board agreement for you to participate. As principals are not legally self-employed, you may choose to use this.

## Appendix 7

### Guiding Questions for Focus Groups

Before the tape is turned on each principal will introduce them self

#### Tape goes on

#### **Warm-up**

To begin, the principals will be asked to each describe the demographics of their school, identify the number of their years and experiences e.g. number of schools they have held positions as a principal and any formal leadership qualifications.

**Semi structured questions-** Note I expect the conversations to cover many of these topics without being asked. Although I will mark them off as they are discussed to ensure I cover all aspects of the research.

1. What did you do to prepare yourself before you became a principal?
2. The first two years of principalship, what learning if any helped you tackle the job?
3. What were the learning issues in those initial years of learning?
4. In those early years, was there anything from a learning perspective you would have done differently do you think?
5. What were your barriers?
6. What do you need to learn to be successful principal? Why do you believe that?
7. What learning is most meaningful to you?
8. What is your motivation to learn?
9. How important do you think context is to professional learning?
10. What are your thoughts about principal skills being transferable to another school?
11. What have your experiences been with transferring your learning to a new position?
12. If you have been a principal for more than five years, what learning has continued to be important? Why?
10. Is there any link between your learning and what happens in your schools and how do you know that?

## Appendix 8

## Interview Protocols

### **Copy on table for each person**

Each person in this group has been selected because you bring a valuable knowledge base to the research. Every person here will have his or her own beliefs about what constitutes meaningful learning. Every person here will have their own perceptions about what principals should have to learn. Every person will have a viewpoint on how learning impacts on their school. My role in this is to gather data and not input my beliefs and perceptions.

Keeping these things in mind:

- this research is not about making judgment about any other person or their learning. It is about finding out what groups of principals believe they need throughout their professional learning phases.
- everyone's viewpoint is their own and is therefore valid. Respect is implicit
- one person speaks at a time (it makes tape transcribing much easier)
- anyone can choose to leave at any time.
- The researcher's role is to facilitate the discussion only.
- If any person feel uncomfortable, they can request the tape be turned off until an issue/ the issue that has caused the discomfit is resolved.

Please enjoy sharing your learning and knowledge with each other.

At times, I will direct the conversation with questions aimed to keep us on the topic but a focus group is about harnessing the synergy of the group, letting you follow your own direction. I remind you the focus is on principals' learning before you became principal, in those early years and as you gained experience. What has been meaningful and why. How does your learning support you doing your job.

Thank you

**Survey to be completed with participant and researcher at start of interview for Phase 3**

**Principal Learning Project**

Name:

School:

Years as a principal:

Number of principal positions held:

Highest qualification:

Most meaningful professional learning for you.

What impact do you believe your learning has on your school?

**Appendix 10**



**Date**

***Project Title:*** *Professional Learning Pathways of Urban New Zealand Primary Principals*

**AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TAPE TRANSCRIPTS**

**This form will be held for a period of five (5) years**

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview conducted with me by Anne Malcolm.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used by the researcher, Anne Malcolm in reports and publications arising from the research.

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**Full Name - printed**

.....  
.....

**Appendix 11 Optional Board Permission**

[ Date] 2008

**Educational Doctoral Research:**

**The Professional Learning Pathways' of Urban New Zealand Primary Principals.**

Researcher: Anne Malcolm

**Board Permission to Participate (optional use)**

Dear Board Chair,

Your principal has agreed to participate in an educational doctoral research project into the learning pathways of urban New Zealand primary principals. As principals are not self-employed, your principal has chosen to seek their Board's support to participate participation.

**Purpose of the study**

To determine what New Zealand urban primary principals believe provides them with professional learning. The learning that they actually use to be more effective in their schools. The study wants to consider principals' learning needs at different phases of their career. The aim is to consider whether the New Zealand context is different, the same, or has some comparable features to other countries as described through the literature. This is a qualitative case study using predominantly interviews to gather data.

**Methodology**

Initially all (name not included) urban city association principals were invited to respond to an email survey. This phase involves interviewing principals using focus groups to identify beliefs and values about leadership learning.

The research will not identify any schools or principals by name. However, this research involves a small sample so there could be a possibility of identification. However, every effort will be made to ensure anonymity of the school and principal's name.

**Approval**

The supervisors for the project are Dr. Jenny Poskitt and Professor Wayne Edwards  
They are available to confirm or discuss any aspects of the research. They can be contacted by email  
at [J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz](mailto:J.M.Poskitt@massey.ac.nz) or [W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz](mailto:W.L.Edwards@massey.ac.nz)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee:  
Southern B, Application 08/08.If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please  
contact Dr Karl Pajo, Chair, Massey Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 04 801 5799  
x6929, email: [humanethicssouthb@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethicssouthb@massey.ac.nz)

**Permission to participate**

The [School Name] Board of Trustees, give permission for our Principal  
[Name] to participate in a focus group in Anne Malcolm’s research into  
‘The learning Pathways’ of xxxxxxx Primary Principals.’

Signed (BoT Chair)

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date

---

**Appendix 12 Transcriber Confidentiality**



Date

***Project Title:*** *Professional Learning Pathways of Urban New Zealand Primary Principals*

**Transcribers Confidentiality Agreement**

Axxxx Consulting, Lynn xxxxx or a delegated member of her staff of xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx agree to transcribe the tapes provided by Anne Malcolm.

I or any delegated member of my staff agrees to keep confidential all the information provided to Academic Consulting.

I agree on behalf of the company and therefore any staff member delegated the task of transcription to not make any copies of the transcripts or keep any record of them other than those required for the project as outlined by Anne Malcolm.

.....  
**Full Name - printed**      Lynn xxxxx on Behalf of XXXXX Consulting, xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx  
.....

The following types of learning were cited by less than 1% of the respondents of early career principals.

Curriculum leadership PD.

Conferences

ASTU ADQUAL papers

Whanau and foundation members of the Kura. (The dreams and aspirations of students when everyone was starting at a disadvantage).

Dept. of Education- School inspectors & courses they ran ,

Other roles as leader in sport and organisations

Own reading

Sole charge

Being involved in a Quality Learning Circle

Support from NZSTA & ERO

Sole charge helped learn systems.

Diploma of appraisal

Working with local communities

Having to get school back to compliance (assuring parents I was going to be there the next morning).

Leadership courses -1 to 3 days

Small country principalship after DP role in large school

Country service and lots of delegation practice. A good basis for leading

Pre principalship, working with dynamic leaders

On the job and on the spot. A local colleague provided great support

New principal programme MOE. Mentoring group

Upgrading Teaching Diploma to Degree in Education

BOT chair influential

**Less than 1% of experienced career respondents identified the following:**

Mentoring for FPHP

Appraisal

Own school wide initiatives learning programmes

Backward step then back to principalship

Professional reading

Developing policy and procedure/ curriculum for your school

Short courses/ leadership training

ICT contract leadership

Other personal learning

NZSTA/ NZEI involvement

BOT support

ERO secondment

MOE initiatives e.g. plot and other workshops principals can participate in

International principalship

sabbatical

Ed D

Tomorrow's schools

Team solutions secondment

Serving on a MOE reference groups

Visiting NZ schools

MOE sharing type contracts

Principal advisors

Finding things, I am interested in.

## Appendix 14 Coding sample

### [Sample of coding- Early Career principals group coding for pre principalship](#)

[<Documents\early career focus group>](#) - § 9 references coded [3.77% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.20% Coverage

L For me I think, completing my Master's in Educational Management had a big part in preparing me for Principalship

Reference 2 - 0.82% Coverage

J I think in my situation Principalship probably fell in my lap a little bit. I had been in senior management roles for a number of years. And then I'm one of these woman that had children later in life, and so I had a little bit of time off and then came back into teaching and then came to the school that I'm at now and was; started as a Scale A, then went into Deputy Principal role, and then moved up into Principal position when the position became available.

Reference 3 - 0.45% Coverage

P I don't know whether I was aware that I was preparing myself for Principalship, but I certainly was exploring leadership, as an advisor to schools, working with Principals, and therefore working with people who set up aspiring Principals training workshops.

Reference 4 - 0.22% Coverage

P-the papers I have done for Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Administration focused my, my mind on that kind of work as well.

Reference 5 - 0.27% Coverage

D Yeah, I actually wanted to be a Principal from the time I started teaching. And had a goal in mind right from College to be a Principal by a certain stage,

Reference 6 - 0.12% Coverage

C My pathway was more, more about being guided towards Principalship.

Reference 7 - 0.51% Coverage

B For me it was a, I guess I was guided by Principals along the way, that obviously identified leadership qualities in me that I never saw. Because after probably five years of teaching, I was encouraged to attend leadership courses in middle management and so did them over a number of years.

Reference 8 - 0.37% Coverage

K For myself I, when I took on my first DP's position I knew straight away that if the Principal could do the job I could do it as well. And so I then actively sought doing my Diploma of Educational Management

#### Reference 9 - 0.80% Coverage

I was fortunate enough to go into that advisory position, where I was in leadership management with Apple over there. And what that did for me was also helped me move towards finishing off my degree and then prior to knowing that I wanted to be a Principal, because I'd been a director of a contract, and had the opportunity to work with ministry level in ERO, so just before coming into Principalship I then started Postgrad. Diploma, thinking towards my Master's

### **Appendix 15**

#### **OECD development indicators**

##### **6.10 Policy initiatives to improve the quality of school leadership preparation**

290. Since the reforms of 1989, there has been a range of policy initiatives to improve the quality of school leadership. Following the reforms, a Principals' Implementation Task Force was established to plan and organise a series of seminars around the country to train principals of the day in the key skills and understandings required of their new role in the administrative framework. In 1996, new accountability requirements for the appraisal of teachers emerged as a single prescription for all teachers, including principals. In 1998, 'professional standards' were added, with separate standards and assessment processes for principals, from those for other teachers. (Collins, 2003)

291. Following the research done by the Hay Group (2001) - described in 3.13 - a three tier strategy was adopted for leadership development:

☐ development of aspiring principals and principal appointment – left to the individual aspirant and board of trustees

☐ for first year principals – a state sponsored and controlled, but not mandatory, programme

☒ for principals from year two onwards – a relatively undefined programme to assist principals and boards continue the process of principal development throughout a principal’s career, based largely (at least initially) on information communication technology. (Collins, 2003)

292. To implement this strategy, a package of four principals' development initiatives was announced as part of government' 2001 budget. These were:

☒ an induction programme for first-time principals (FTP, see 6.6)

☒ an electronic network for principals (Lead Space, see 4.12)

☒ development centres for existing principals (PDPC, see 4.12)

☒ guidelines for boards of trustees and principals on professional development for principals. (Ministry of Education, 2002)

(Pg. 68 OECD Report 2007)

### **6.11 Priorities for future policy development**

293. The major priority for future policy development for school leaders is in the area of what Pounder and Crow (2005) call the “Leadership Pipeline”. All current leadership initiatives focus on principalship and provide support for existing principals. There are no programmes yet for aspiring and potential school leaders or middle leaders. A Ministry of Education paper is being developed which explores how aspiring principals might be better supported into principalship. The Minister will be presented with policy options in this area before the end of 2007. Significant progress is being made in work with the primary teacher union to better define career pathways for New Zealand teachers, and to create new incentives for those seeking alternative school leadership pathways to teaching and professional leadership. Development of new roles in secondary schools has been a feature of collaborative work between the Ministry, PPTA, and the New Zealand School Trustees Association within the Longer Term Work Programme. The Minister has indicated that he wishes to see those new and current initiatives leading to principalship and contributing to principal development brought together under what he has called Kiwi Leadership for Principals.

## 6.12 Recent innovations

294. Many leadership development initiatives are recent innovations. The First Time Principals (FTP) programme (see 4.10 and 6.6), Lead Space (4.10), Principals Development and Planning Centre (4.10), and Kiwi Leadership for Principals (6.11) are all innovations of the last five years. Many of the details of the initiatives have been adjusted in recent years in response to feedback from participants or independent evaluations. All of these initiatives reflect a strong partnership between government and external providers. This approach is central to the New Zealand way of working. The timelines below outline some of the key changes in programme details.

### ***First Time Principals***

- ☐ 2001 – induction programme plan developed by Universities of Waikato and Massey, based on Hay Group competencies
- ☐ 2002 – first offering of FTP induction programme, delivered by University of Auckland, under contract to Ministry of Education
- ☐ 2002-2003 – FTP programme 12 months long
- ☐ 2004-2006 – following NZCER evaluation, FTP programme extended to an 18- month long programme
- ☐ 2005-2006 FTP trials and then implements the SALTAL: tool.
- ☐ 2006 (June) – approximately 700 FTP „graduates“ have successfully completed the programme.

### ***Lead Space***

- ☐ 2002-2003 – laptops distributed in batches to all principals
- ☐ 2002 (April) – LeadSpace goes live to NZ principals

☒ 2002 – first LeadSpace facilitators appointed, with a nationally co-ordinated function by Ministry of Education

☒ 2006 – LeadSpace facilitators assume a regional role following a Massey University evaluation of the project.

### ***Principals Development and Planning Centre***

☒ 2003-2004 – first two PDPC pilots held

☒ 2005 (May) – PDPC permanently established, within Ministry of Education oversight, following feedback from the pilots

☒ 2006 (June) – approximately 160 PDPC „graduates“ have completed the programme.

69

### ***Kiwi Leadership for Principals***

☒ 2005 – Ministry of Education prepares a draft Principal Leadership Framework to underpin all leadership development work

☒ 2006 (May) – Ministry calls a two-day long national meeting of all providers and interest groups to explore the notion of the principal as an educational leader

☒ 2007 – a draft Kiwi Leadership for Principals publication will be circulated for consultation with local and regional principal groups.