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GETTING A LIFE:
PRINCIPALS AND DEPUTY PRINCIPALS REFLECT UPON THEIR CHANGED CAREER PATHS

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Educational Administration
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1997
ABSTRACT

The thesis aimed to find out why successful primary school principals were leaving teaching for other careers and why deputy principals were becoming increasingly reluctant to seek further promotion.

The researcher was concerned to learn in the media of increasing numbers of principals leaving the profession and wanted to find out the reasons for this. The factors which influenced mid-life career decisions from the perspectives of two different groups, twelve recently resigned, successful urban primary principals and fifteen in-post deputy principals were critically examined. A between-group comparison of their attitudes and beliefs regarding the principal’s role, role satisfactions and dissatisfactions and the impact of the 1989-1996 educational reforms on their career change decisions was conducted.

A considerable body of qualitative and quantitative research literature has examined the reasons why teachers become dissatisfied and seek new careers. Of particular relevance to this study were those investigations which explored mid-career crises, ‘triggers’ which caused life reassessment and career pattern and promotion studies.

Evidence in this study suggests that some principals resigned because of health-related problems exacerbated by high administrative workloads and stress. Others perceived a lack of attractive career opportunities within education and sought new challenges. Many of the deputies no longer aspired to principalship positions because of the stress, excessive administrative workload and the loneliness associated with the position. A number of members in both cohorts wanted to restore balance to their lives.

In the researcher’s opinion, if talented educational leaders are to be retained and the status of the profession enhanced, an independent, national, professional support body needs to be established for principals. Desirable, clearly-defined, well-compensated career paths must be created and additional administrative support provided to schools in low socio-economic regions.

Traditional career paths of New Zealand teachers have changed and further evidence of the reasons for this is required. The career paths of male and female teachers are markedly different. Additional research is needed to ascertain if, as this study suggests, women seeking principal’s positions are being disadvantaged. Ways must be found which will make the position more attractive to ensure that the best educational leaders are retained in the profession.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to many people. Some started me on this journey of self discovery, some supported me through it and some continue to support me in my life. They are:

- The ex-principals and deputy and associate principals who were the subjects in the study. Without their willing participation, this research could not have been undertaken.

- Associate Professor Wayne Edwards, my supervisor, for his invaluable assistance, wise advice and encouragement throughout the study.

- Dennis McGrath, principal of the Auckland College of Education, who challenged me to start the journey and continued his support throughout the process.

- Dr Bryan Tuck, Reader in Education at the Auckland College of Education for his understanding and invaluable assistance, especially in drafting the figures.

- Ann Hatherley, for her friendship, advice and encouragement throughout this course of study.

- Glenda Potter and Angela Christall, Auckland College of Education, for their valuable guidance with word processing and the development of the tables and graphs.

- Finally, I am indebted to my husband Leo Palmer, for his editing expertise, love and unconditional support.

To my friends and colleagues who encouraged me and kept me on the journey, my deepest appreciation to you all.
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