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CAREER ASSISTANT/DEPUTY PRINCIPALS

Career Assistant/Deputy Principals:

Asleep at the Wheel or Motivated Drivers in Education?

Kevin Shore

2015

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Abstract

This study focuses on a largely unrecognised group of secondary school assistant/deputy principals who have no desire to pursue principalship. Findings from the study have shown that these assistant/deputy principals who, for the purpose of this study are called ‘career AP/DPs’, play a significant role in the leadership of New Zealand secondary schools yet there is little research focused on the assistant/deputy principalship as a vocation. Consequently, the intentions of this study are to develop a more complete understanding of this group in order to ensure that career AP/DPs are a recognised group of educational leaders with a distinct mission to support principals in leading our New Zealand secondary schools.

The research design employed a mixed methods approach. It used a survey questionnaire to identify those AP/DPs who identify as career AP/DPs and then focus group interviews with selected groups of career AP/DPs to develop a more complete understanding of the group.

The findings from the study highlight that career AP/DPs have followed a serendipitous career journey where key colleagues have been crucial in championing their leadership aspirations. Career AP/DPs gain satisfaction from the daily contact that they have with students, caregivers and staff and enjoy the psychological rewards that come from making a difference in their schools. However, they are clearly disappointed that they are not able to make a wider contribution to teaching and learning in their schools and advocate for a more significant role in this portfolio. Career AP/DPs are strongly attached to their leadership teams including the principal and acknowledge them as the most significant professional support they have providing the conditions for them to grow and fully enjoy the psychological rewards that come from serving in this position.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this Doctoral study represents the end of a journey at Massey University that started 27 years ago in 1989 when I started a paper towards an undergraduate degree. In the time between 1989 and 2016 I have only had four years where I was not enrolled at Massey University and given the busy professional roles that I have had in education over this time there is a sense of relief from my family that my educational journey is nearing its end.

Given this situation, I wish to thank my wife Heather for her patience and love as I have never been around when she has needed me, however her support has been ever present. My children Aleix, Ben and Kate have also suffered from the lack of a father at times and my modelling of academic endeavour has had absolutely no positive influence on their desire to pursue tertiary study. I would also like to thank my mother and father, Joan and Barry, for supporting me in my educational journey and for providing me with a set of values that have enabled me to complete such a testing programme.

I need to also acknowledge the executive of NASDAP for supporting the study and the generosity of the dozens of AP/DPs, and particularly those who agreed to be interviewed, who kindly participated in the study despite their hectic role in education.

Finally, I would like to thank my research supervisors Marian Court and Margaret Walshaw for their care and high quality feedback throughout the process of completing this Doctoral Degree. I have valued your wise counsel and your suggestions have not only strengthened my study but have also provided a further educational opportunity. I have learned so much from your input and I remain kindly disposed towards you despite all the changes requested.

Table of Contents

Title	Pages
Abstract	I
Acknowledgements	II
Table of Contents	III
List of Tables	VIII
List of Figures	X

Chapter One: Introduction

Research Context	1
Research Interest	3
Statement of Purpose	4
Research Aim	5
Research Questions	6

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction	7
Concepts of Leadership	7
Leadership for learning	15
An Approach to Address a Crisis in Leadership	17
Implications for this Research and Analysis	19
Careers and Education	20
Historical Roles and Responsibilities	27
Principals-in-waiting or Career AP/DPs?	31
Redefining the AP/DPs Role	34
The Management Development Process	37
Limitations of the Previous Published Research	41
Previous Research Focused on Career AP/DPs	43
Expanding on the Conceptual Framework for this Study	48
Career Anchorage Perspective	48
Job Choice Theory	49

Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Procedures

Introduction	52
Research Perspective	52
A Mixed Method Approach	54
Phase One: Survey Research Design and Analysis	57
Identifying and Accessing Participants	62
Questionnaire Analysis	65
Phase Two: Focus Group Interviews	68
Focus Group Interview Participants	70
Design of Focus Group Interview Questions and Process	72
Focus Group Interview Analysis	73
Validity and Reliability	77

Chapter Four Findings: Personal and Educational Demographics

Introduction	80
Personal and Educational Demographics	82
Gender, Age and Career Typology	83
Ethnicity and Educational Qualifications	87
Career Transitions	89
The AP/DP Career Stage	94
Main Teaching Subjects	97
What Factors that Influenced Respondents to Apply for Their First AP/DP Position	98
School Size, Type and Decile Rating	104
Teaching Hours, Timetable Structure & Hours Worked	107

Chapter Five Findings: Professional Development and the Leadership and Management

Tasks Undertaken by AP/DPs

Introduction	111
PD Undertaken & Level of Satisfaction Regarding Opportunity & Support for PD	112
Management Units & Time Spent on Compliance, Student and Teacher Support	124

Constraints on AP/DPs Ability to Carry Out the Leadership Role	134
Self-Perception of the Chance of Winning a Principal’s Position	135

Chapter Six Findings: The Influence of Job Attributes, Work Factors and School

Context Items on Job Satisfaction

Introduction	140
Job Attributes	140
Work Factors	152
Interacting with Students	152
Problems and Professional Dilemmas	158
Management and Time Demands	161
Supporting Teachers in Their Classroom Practice	163
School Context Items	168
Final Respondent Comments	172

Chapter Seven: Discussion and Implications of Findings

Introduction	178
Section 1. A Career Journey: Identifying the career AP/DP	180
Introduction	180
Age and Career Transitions: A Little Less Haste for Career AP/DPs	181
The Serendipitous Nature of Career Progression	187
The Impact of School Demographics on Career and Aspiring Principal AP/DPs	191
AP/DPs are not Economic Beings	193
The Influence of School Context Items	195
Conclusion	196

Section 2. Role Preparation and Professional Development and Support

Introduction	198
A Lack of Role Specific Professional Development	199
The Support of Colleagues is Important	206
The Senior Leadership Team	207

Professional Networks	213
Barriers to Professional Growth	214
Conclusion	219

Section 3. The Debate Over Management versus Leadership of Teaching and Learning

Introduction	221
Contrasting Views on Management and Administration	221
The Desire to Make a Difference	225
The Pastoral Role is Important to Me	227
Making a Difference to Teaching and Learning	231
Professional Dilemmas	238
Barriers and Constraints to Leadership and Careers	239
Summary	243
Conclusion	243

Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Recommendations.

Introduction	247
Key Findings and Implications	248
1. A lack of control over career progression	248
2. Insufficient or inadequate professional preparation for the AP/DP role	249
3. Work overload is a barrier to undertaking longer in-depth professional learning	250
4. Career AP/DPs have a narrow leadership of learning role	250
5. The psychological rewards of the role provide huge satisfaction	251
6. The importance of relationships and a high functioning leadership team	252
7. The role of the principal in supporting career AP/DPs	253
Significance and Limitations	254
Recommendations	256
Recommendations for Practice	256
Recommendations for Further Research	258
Final Words	258
References	260

Appendices

A. Survey Information Sheet	274
B. Survey Research Questionnaire	276
C. Administrator Confidentiality Agreement	289
D. Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement	290
E. Authority for the Release of Transcripts	291
F. Focus Group Interview Question Guide	292
G. Focus Interview Information Sheet	294
H. Focus Interview Participant Consent Form	296

List of Tables	Page
Table 1. Geographical Location of Survey Respondents	64
Table 2. Example of the Coding and Analysis Process Applied to One of the Focus Group Transcripts	75
Table 3. Focus Group Theme Analysis	76
Table 4. Survey Responses	80
Table 5. Demographic Comparison of Career AP/DPs	82
Table 6. Gender and Career Typology	83
Table 7. Mean Age of Respondents	85
Table 8. Distributions by Gender & Designation	86
Table 9. Ethnicity Breakdown	87
Table 10. Educational Qualifications	88
Table 11. Career Tenure History	90
Table 12. Tenure	94
Table 13. Teaching Areas	97
Table 14. Factors Influencing Application for an AP/DP Position	99
Table 15. Enrolment Size of School	104
Table 16. School Type	105
Table 17. School Decile Rating	106
Table 18. Teaching Hours Worked per Week	108
Table 19. Number of Periods in Daily Timetable	108
Table 20. Hours Worked per Week	109
Table 21. Professional Development Activities Experienced	112
Table 22. Satisfaction with Professional Development Undertaken	119
Table 23. Opportunity & Support to Undertake Professional Development	120
Table 24. Professional Development that AP/DPs Wanted	122
Table 25. Resources Needed to Encourage AP/DP Participation in PD	124
Table 26. Management Units Allocated to AP/DPs	125
Table 27. Distribution of Management Units by School Roll Size	128
Table 28. Distribution of Time Spent by Principal Aspirants on Management and Leadership Tasks	130

Table 29. Hours Worked per Week by Career AP/DPs	131
Table 30. Constraints that Limit the AP/DPs Leadership Role	134
Table 31. AP/DPs Perception of Being Offered a Principals Position	136
Table 32. Why AP/DPs Lacked Confidence in Gaining a Principals Position	138
Table 33. Mean Scores of Job Attribute Categories	141
Table 34. Mean Scores & (Standard Deviations) for Job Attributes	144
Table 35. Mann-Whitney U Test – U Score, Probability and Size effect for Job Attributes	145
Table 36. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and Mann-Whitney U Score for Work Factors Involving Interactions with Students	153
Table 37. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations & Mann-Whitney U Score for Work Factors Involving Problems & Professional Dilemmas	158
Table 38. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations & Mann-Whitney U Scores for Work Factors Involving Management and Time Demands	162
Table 39. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations & Mann-Whitney U Scores for Those Work Factors Supporting Teachers in Their Practice	163
Table 40. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and Mann-Whitney U Scores for School Context Item Scores	169

List of Figures	Page
Figure 1. Job Choice Theory Applied to the AP/DP Position	60
Figure 2. Emergent Themes from Data Analysis	77
Figure 3. Gender, Age & Career Topology	84
Figure 4. Career Typology by Gender	86
Figure 5. Educational Qualifications by Career Typology	89
Figure 6. Tenure as a Head of Department	91
Figure 7. Number of AP/DP Positions Held	95
Figure 8. AP/DPs Specialist Teaching Subject	98
Figure 9. Top Six Factors of Encouragement	100
Figure 10. School Decile Rating	107
Figure 11. Distribution of Management Units for AP/DPs	127
Figure 12. AP/DP Perception of Gaining a Principals Position	137
Figure 13. Impact of Job Attributes on Job Satisfaction	142
Figure 14. Influence of Work Factors on Job Satisfaction	168
Figure 15. Impact of School Context Items on Job Satisfaction	170
Figure 16. Contrasting Characteristics of Career AP/DPs and Principal Aspirants	245