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The Role of
Deputy and Assistant Principals
in the
New Zealand
Secondary School

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and
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A collaborative administrative project
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the
degree of Master of Educational Administration.

We certify that the research paper entitled: The Role of Deputy and Assistant Principals in the New Zealand Secondary School, and submitted as part of the degree of Master of Educational Administration is the result of our own work, except where otherwise acknowledged, and that this research paper (or any part of the same) has not been submitted for any other degree to any other university or institution.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the role and representation of DPs and APs in the New Zealand secondary school in 1999. While significant literature exists on the role of the Principal, there is little published literature on the DP/AP group. Since 'Tomorrow's Schools' there has been significant change in secondary schools yet little is known about how this change has affected the role and representation of DPs and APs.

A previous study done by Manchester in 1983 formed a baseline for comparison. The current study involved conducting a replica survey, by questionnaire, with all DPs and APs in the historical 'central region'. 1983 and 1999 data was then compared. Eight DP/APs from the group of questionnaire respondents were then selected for case study. They were selected from a variety of secondary school types in an effort to make their voices representative. Interviews were conducted with these eight people to provide more in-depth information about what they do and how their current roles and representation affect them.

The previous study identified that women were under-represented in senior school administration. In addition, their roles tended to reflect the traditionally feminine duties of 'hostessing and nurturing activities.' A focus for this study, therefore, was to investigate whether this situation had changed in light of legislative and policy changes in the intervening period.

The present study concludes that change has occurred in both the role and representation of DPs and APs in New Zealand secondary schools. There is movement towards a team approach to management, workload has increased and job satisfaction decreased. The findings support previous New Zealand and international literature about what this group does but questions whether, as a group, they have real decision-making ability that should accompany these responsibilities. Concerns about equity in representation are also highlighted. Females are still under-represented in DP positions. Finally, increasing numbers of DP/APs are looking at options outside education for their future.

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Introduction

In spite of the supposedly enlightened attitudes and significant advances in educational thinking in the 1990s, it appears that the situation for women in senior management in secondary education has changed very little in the past fifteen years in terms of a) representation and b) role definition. The restructuring process which has occurred under “Tomorrow’s Schools” has transformed the scope and substance of senior management roles within secondary schools. Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) legislation within the State Services Act (1988), the Human Rights Act (1993) and the requirement that Boards of Trustees file annual reports on EEO to the Education Review Office should indicate a commitment from government to address an unequal distribution by gender in school management. However, Slyfield (1991) reports little change in representation of women in middle/senior management roles in the period between 1985 and 1990. The Ministry of Education (MoE) (1996), in an update of the Slyfield statistics, reports “little movement towards gender equity” up to 1995. These statistics reveal that the gender inequities, which have traditionally existed, have not significantly changed.

Manchester (1983), in her study of “Roles of Senior Mistress/Master and Deputy Principals in the Central Region” found that women in AP positions still tended to be delegated “traditional...hostessing and nurturing activities” while men in the AP role tended to be given more “administration, such as timetables, buildings, grounds and staff relief” roles. Furthermore, DPs and male APs tended to see their essential role as “administration” while female APs “tended to see themselves as chiefly active in the interpersonal area.”

The purpose of this study is to verify whether any change in representation and roles has occurred by 1999, and to investigate the reasons why this might be so. Phase One replicated the Manchester Survey (1983) to provide current quantitative baseline data on DP/AP male/female roles. This survey also provided some qualitative data, through open-ended questions (see Appendix G), from which we have pursued lines of inquiry in Phase Two. Phase Two involved interviewing a number of DP/APs for further clarification of issues which emerged as a result of the survey. We wished to develop an understanding of: a) what led these DP/APs to their current positions b) the roles they play in school leadership and management and c) their aspirations (and barriers) to promotion.

The nature of our combined research was that of inquiry, probing to find out why certain situations exist. In establishing patterns from responses it was hoped we would build a collection of ideas from which some hypotheses might be developed about why the position is as it exists. However, in relation to the quantitative aspect of the survey, and the statistical evidence to date, the following probabilities formed our starting point:

- That the division of roles of DP/APs in the senior management team in the New Zealand Secondary School is still largely gender determined.
- That there has been little movement in role definition between AP and DP in Secondary schools since the 1983 Manchester Study.

In terms of the survey, the original study (Manchester 1983) was conducted on the hypothesis that there are significant differences in the way APs and DPs do their jobs. In this study we wished to answer the following questions from the survey data collected:

- Has the representation of men and women changed significantly in the time since the previous study?
- If it has changed, in what ways has this occurred?
- Have the roles of men and women DP/APs changed significantly in the time since the previous study?
- If they have changed, in what ways has this occurred?

The research questions for the interview section of the project were not finalised until after the analysis of the survey responses was well underway as these depended on what baseline data was established from the survey analysis and what areas of inquiry were illuminated from the qualitative data the survey provided.

Catherine Marshall states that “the first step in improving (DP/APs’) and others’ valuing of the position is exploring, defining and disseminating information about their work.” (1992, 87) This research project is an attempt to do that for a specific group of DP/APs in a specific group of New Zealand secondary schools. Chapter One explores current literature on the role of DP/APs in secondary schools around the world, and forms a base of thinking upon which we establish our own study. Chapter Two is devoted to a close look at the method which we have employed for this research. It outlines particulars of the qualitative paradigm and presents the actual processes we adopted to facilitate this project. Adie and Lynlee are two researchers working together to complete a piece of work, which each confesses she could not have completed alone. The nature of a collaborative study is such that it requires some individual attention. Chapter Three offers, therefore, a closer look at the collaboration process that these two researchers adopted. Chapters Four and Five show how the New Zealand experience, as seen in this study, supports and negates the experience of DP/APs from overseas. Chapter Four looks specifically at the results from the survey. It itemises how things have changed, and remained the same, for DP/APs in New Zealand in the fifteen years that have passed since the Manchester (1983) study. Chapter Five, on the other hand, delves more intimately into the working lives of eight DP/APs from the ‘Central Region’, and explores the dilemmas and highlights these professionals face in their current positions. Examples of the processes followed, forms used and tasks isolated are given in the appendices. We conclude our discussion with summaries of the main findings and recommendations for further research and action in this area.

This project is Adie’s and Lynlee’s exploration of the nature of the role of DP/AP in New Zealand secondary schools. It works to define what it is that DP/APs actually do, and to disseminate information about their work. It adds to the “meagre” (Douglas 1998) body of work on the position and tasks of DP/APs in New Zealand secondary schools, which is currently available. We trust that it will also allow the reader the opportunity to really understand some of the joys and frustrations associated with this position.