

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

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

**Rosemary (Roz) Ann Palmer**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Educational Administration  
Department of Educational Studies  
College of Education  
Massey University**

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.

---

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	i
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b> .....	ii
<b>LIST OF CONTENTS</b> .....	iii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	vii
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	vii
<b>LIST OF DIAGRAMS</b> .....	viii
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b> .....	viii
<b>GLOSSARY</b> .....	ix
 <b>CHAPTER ONE</b>	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
Background to the study .....	1
What the thesis did.....	3
The nature of the study .....	5
Limitations identified in the study.....	7
The structure of the thesis.....	8
 <b>CHAPTER TWO</b>	
<b>REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</b>	
<u>Part One: International Research</u> .....	10
Career development and theory.....	10
The influence of mid-life and mid-career factors .....	12
Career journeys.....	13
Career patterns and promotion .....	14
Skills needed today by principals .....	16
Career satisfaction within the principal's role.....	17
Career dissatisfaction within with the principal's role.....	19
Stress.....	20
The effects of legislation and politics on principal's careers .....	22
Reasons for leaving careers in education .....	24
<u>Part Two: New Zealand Research</u> .....	25
Research reports and statistics.....	25
The impact of the education reforms in New Zealand .....	26
The role of the primary school principal .....	27
Stress in New Zealand schools .....	29
Reports in the media .....	30
Summary .....	31
Conclusion.....	32
 <b>CHAPTER THREE</b>	
<b>PROCEDURES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	
Background information.....	33
The role of the researcher.....	34
Research methodology .....	35
Selecting the samples .....	40
Ethics.....	43

Data collection.....	44
Analysis of the data .....	49

## CHAPTER FOUR RESULTS

### *The ex-principals*

<u>Part One: Background Details</u> .....	53
Biographical details.....	53
Educational and professional qualifications.....	54
Current occupations.....	55
Important factors of the current position .....	55
<u>Part Two: Teaching Careers</u> .....	57
Factors which influenced career choice.....	57
Reasons for entering teaching.....	57
Career paths in teaching .....	59
Absence from teaching.....	60
Contributions to professional organisations .....	61
Promotional opportunities.....	61
Career goals prior to 1989 .....	61
Major influences on teaching careers.....	63
Satisfying aspects of the principal's role .....	67
<u>Part Three: The Impact of the Educational Changes (1989-1996)</u> .....	71
Educational changes which influenced career decisions.....	71
Principal's workloads.....	72
Educational changes which influenced the principal's role.....	74
<u>Part Four: Career Change Decisions</u> .....	78
Personal situations .....	78
The culture within the school environment .....	80
Changes to the principal's traditional role.....	83
External influences on school environments.....	85
<u>Part Five: The Current Situation</u> .....	86
Advantages of current positions outside of education .....	86
Incentives which might encourage ex-principals to return .....	87
Educational changes which might encourage a career reconsideration .....	89
Summary .....	90

### *The deputy principals*

<u>Part One: Background Details</u> .....	91
Biographical details.....	91
Educational and professional qualifications.....	91
Current positions.....	92
Important factors of the current position .....	92

<u>Part Two: Teaching Careers</u> .....	92
Factors which influenced career choice.....	92
Reasons for entering the teaching profession .....	93
Career paths in teaching .....	93
Breaks in teaching service .....	93
Contributions to professional organisations .....	94
Promotional opportunities.....	94
Career goals prior to 1989 .....	94
Major influences on careers.....	96
Satisfying aspects of the principal's role .....	100
<u>Part Three: The Impact of the Educational Changes (1989 - 1996)</u> ..	102
Educational changes which influenced the principal's role.....	102
Principal's workloads since 1989.....	102
Ways changes in education have influenced career decisions.....	102
<u>Part Four: Career Change Decisions</u> .....	105
Reasons for changed career aspirations .....	105
Why a principal's job no longer appealed.....	110
<u>Part Five: The Current Situation</u> .....	113
Changes to the current education system.....	113
Incentives.....	114
Summary .....	115

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS - THE CAREER JOURNEY

<u>Part One: Three Major Factors Influencing Career Path Decisions</u> ....	117
<i>Uncontrollable variables which influenced career paths</i> .....	118
Personal situations .....	118
Life experiences .....	121
The influence of the demographic situation.....	126
External influences.....	129
<i>Reasons for changing career directions</i> .....	129
The Ex-principals.....	129
The deputy principals.....	134
<i>Aspects of the principal's role which cause the most/least job satisfaction</i> .....	135
The most satisfying aspects of the role .....	135
The least satisfactory aspects of the role.....	136
Summary .....	137
<u>Part Two: Effects of the Educational Changes (1989-1996)</u> .....	137
<i>Educational leader or manager</i> .....	138
The traditional role of the primary school principal.....	138
Perceptions of the principal's role since 1989 .....	139
Summary .....	143

---

<i>The autonomy or control dilemma</i> .....	143
The changed educational environment .....	143
The control of the Ministry of Education .....	145
The control and influence of the Boards of Trustees .....	146
Community involvement and central control .....	147
In conclusion .....	150
<b>CHAPTER SIX</b>	
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	151
<u>Part One: The principal's role in the 1990s</u> .....	152
The situation prior to 1989 .....	152
The situation after 1989 .....	153
Influences on career decisions: circumstance or opportunity? .....	160
<u>Part Two: Ways to retain successful principals and encourage female deputy principals to reconsider the principal's role as a viable career option</u> .....	162
Recommendations for action emerging from this study .....	162
Topics requiring further investigation .....	165
Problems associated with the research .....	166
Concluding remarks .....	169
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	171
<b>APPENDICES</b>	

---

---

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Tables:</b>	<b>Page</b>
4.1 Means and standard deviations for the factors considered important for the current job .....	56
4.2 Means and standard deviations for factors which influenced the informants to take up teacher training .....	58
4.3 Means and standard deviations for changes impacting on the principal's role .....	71
4.4 Means and standard deviations for educational changes impacting on the principals more, the same, or less than in 1989 .....	73

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figures:</b>	<b>Page</b>
4.1 Informants' age at the time of the survey .....	54
4.2 Educational qualifications at the time of the survey .....	54
4.3 Main reasons for absence from teaching in New Zealand .....	60
4.4 Career goals prior to 1989 .....	62
4.5 Incentives which might encourage ex-principals to return .....	87
4.6 Incentives which might encourage deputy principals to take up principalship positions .....	114

---

---

## LIST OF DIAGRAMS

<b>Diagrams:</b>	<b>Page</b>
3.1 The analysis process .....	51
4.1 Significant professional and personal life events - ex-principals.....	64
4.2 Significant professional and personal life events - deputy principals.....	97
5.1 'Uncontrollable' variables which influenced individual career paths .....	119
5.2 Possible reasons for changing careers.....	130
5.3 The principal's role conflict situations.....	139

## LIST OF APPENDICES

### Appendix:

1. Letter to subjects
  2. Consent form
  3. Questionnaire
  4. Interview guidelines
  5. Career path key
  6. Career paths in teaching - the ex-principals
  7. Career paths in teaching - the deputy principals
  8. Photo of wallpaper chart showing themes
-

---

**GLOSSARY**

Board/s	Boards of Trustees
BoT	Boards of Trustees
Department	Department of Education
ERO	Education Review Office
Ministry	Ministry of Education
MOE	Ministry of Education
NZEI	New Zealand Education Institute
NZPF	New Zealand Principals' Federation
PPTA	Post Primary Teachers' Association
STA	School Trustees Association
APPA	Auckland Primary Principals Association
AP	Associate Principal
DP	Deputy Principal
STJC	Senior Teacher of Junior Classes
NZCER	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
CEO	Chief Educational Officer
DSI	District Senior Inspector of Schools
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
ASTU	Advanced Studies for Teachers Units
TQM	Total Quality Management
LEA	London Educational Area

---