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CONFIDENCE AND COMPETENCE?
The capacity of New Zealand Boards of Trustees
to appoint highly effective school Principals.

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ABSTRACT

Academics and lay persons alike freely acknowledge that principals exert enormous influence over the creation, maintenance and enhancement of the learning environment in schools. They recognise that a turbulent educational world presents principals with multiple challenges in sustaining the conditions necessary for student achievement, and that some principals are more successful in this endeavour than others.

This small-scale qualitative study uses a semi-structured interview process to gather data from five Chairpersons of Boards of Trustees who have appointed a principal within the preceding twelve months. The study discusses the professional capabilities that theoretical and empirical research suggests distinguish highly effective principals from capable performers. It adopts a bipartite approach to the literature, examining both academic understandings and the degree to which available official publications inform the thinking of Boards of Trustees prior to embarking on the principal appointment process. The study then explores the extent to which these understandings influence the decision-making of five Boards of Trustees in appointing a new principal.

Research findings reveal a dichotomy between the theory underpinning concepts of highly effective principals and the practice of Boards of Trustees in appointing a principal. Largely unaware of the academic literature and inadequately informed by official publications, Boards of Trustees adopt a problematic generic recruitment and selection process. Uncritical acceptance of the professional knowledge and standing of external consultants and misplaced trust in the advice they proffer leads Boards to proceed on a questionable perceptual basis. Secure in the knowledge that they have obtained the educational expertise they freely acknowledge they lack, Boards are further exposed to prevailing market discourses and internal prejudices which undermine their ability to identify and appoint a principal who possesses the capabilities necessary to exercise highly effective, contextually specific leadership.

This study suggests that the autonomy of Boards of Trustees in their role as employer be sustained but supported through the mandatory appointment of an appropriately qualified advisor and that the involvement of existing advisors be further scrutinized.

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*E hara taku to I te toa takitaki engari te toa takatini
My strength is not that of the individual but that of the multitudes.*

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting the scene

21st century schools face formidable challenges in preparing young people “to know”, “to do”, “to live together” and “to be” (Delors et al., 1996, p. xv). To participate actively and constructively in a rapidly changing democratic world, students will require higher levels of literacy, numeracy and technological capability than ever before. They must develop the capacity to learn on the job, work collaboratively in teams, communicate effectively using a variety of media, and cope with ambiguous situations and unpredictable problems (Hargreaves, 2003). This will demand highly developed metacognitive and interpersonal skills, and the resourcefulness, resilience, reflection and relationships (Claxton, 2002) that underpin lifelong learning.

Schools must therefore ensure that learning experiences build on existing knowledge and skills to celebrate and enhance social capital (Bourdieu, 1971); foster inquiry, creativity, and experimentation; and promote the independent and collaborative learning power (Claxton, 2002) necessary for young people to move confidently towards an unknown future. In essence, they must provide an education which is personalized (Fullan, Hill, & Crevola, 2006) to meet individual need and inspirational in developing it.

The literature surveyed is unequivocal in its assertion that the quality of leadership exercised by the principal is a critical determinant in securing and sustaining educational success. While researchers debate the precise nature of principal effects on student learning, they are generally of the consensus that highly effective schools are led by highly effective principals (Beare, Caldwell, & Millikan, 1992; Calabrese & Zepeda, 1999; Creissen & Ellison, 1998; Day & Harris, 2001; Fullan, 1992, 2002; Hallinger & Heck, 1999; Milliken, 2002; Restine, 1997; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Thody, 1998). Furthermore, highly effective principals have the capacity to turn around failing schools (Harris & Chapman, 2002; Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, & Giles, 2005; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Sebring & Bryk, 2000).

These educational leaders thrive in fluid and exceedingly complex educational environments. They possess the leadership capabilities (Scott, 2003) necessary to not only simultaneously juggle competing human, pedagogical, technical, organisational and policy factors but also align them adroitly to ensure that every child learns to the best of her/his ability (Dimmock, 2000; Fullan, 2001, 2005; Hill & Crevola, 2003; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2000; Stoll & Fink, 1996) and reconfigure them to master the successive adaptive challenges posed by rapidly changing educational contexts (Argyris & Schon, 1978; Collarbone, 2003; Fullan, 2005; Goleman, 2000; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002).

In 1989, responsibility for appointing New Zealand School principals was devolved from central government to over 2700 locally elected state primary, intermediate, secondary and composite school Boards of Trustees (BOTs). This represented minimal change for secondary schools whose Board of Governors had previously appointed the principal, and major change for primary schools whose principals had been appointed by regional Education Boards acting on advice from the Department of Education's inspectors of schools.

Charged with the knowledge that "the success of a school in providing its educational services depends, to a considerable extent, on the success of the board in attracting and appointing an effective principal" (ERO, 2001, p. 1) parent representatives, with wide-ranging abilities and life experiences must endeavour to recruit and select a principal who possesses the capability to create, maintain, review and renew a learning and achievement culture, satisfy demands for external accountability, and guide the ongoing, evolutionary development of the school.

1.2 'Highly effective', 'capable performer' or simply 'successful'?

Interestingly, the nature and scope of effectiveness is ill-defined in the official information available to schools and there is a paucity of guidance for BOTs as to what distinguishes a highly effective principal from a capable performer. Neither Ministry of Education publications such as the *Revised Professional Standards for Secondary and Area School Principals* (Ministry of Education, 1998b), the

Interim Professional Standards for Primary School Principals (Ministry of Education, 1998a) and the *Schooling Strategy 2005-2010* (Ministry of Education, 2005), nor Education Review Office (ERO) reports (1995, 1997, 2001, 2002) discriminate between the terms 'effective' and 'highly effective'.

In New Zealand, success is primarily determined by the extent to which principals meet the terms of their performance agreement and derivative goals which are negotiated annually with the BOT and form part of the professional appraisal process. Standard performance agreements are in themselves derivative, having their basis in the Professional Standards (Ministry of Education, 1998a, 1998b), a set of generic competencies which form minimum benchmarks. The New Zealand School Trustees' Association's *Principal Appointment Guidelines* (New Zealand School Trustees' Association, 2005a) recommend the professional standards as a "fairly good start" but advise boards that they may wish to contextualize these by adding "more specifics" (p. 12).

While official publications contain relatively detailed advice on procedural appointment matters, they devote little space to professional leadership matters, leaving individual BOTs to determine both the nature and scope of excellence evident in the performance of principals who are 'highly effective' in the role.

Whilst the academic literature is a little more discerning, definitions remain problematic. The plethora of leadership definitions - Cuban (1988) argues that there are in excess of 350 - perhaps explains why there are as yet no clear and unequivocal understandings as to what distinguishes 'highly effective' leaders from 'capable' or 'successful' performers. Although the terms 'highly effective' and 'highly successful', 'effective' and 'successful' have been used interchangeably in the academic literature, and distinctions between them remain contested, ambiguity of definition is gradually diminishing as concepts of 'highly effective' performance evolve.

Perceptions of 'highly effective' performance have their origins in the 1970s school effectiveness movement which adopted traditional notions of strongly authoritarian transactional leadership (Creemers, 1994; Sammons, Hillman, &

Mortimore, 1995; Teddlie, Stringfield, & Reynolds, 2000). Proponents of transformational leadership (Bennis, 1986; Leithwood, 1992, 1994; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999) challenged these assertions and proposed new criteria for excellence and effectiveness. Bennis (1986), for example, measured effectiveness “by the extent to which compelling vision empowers others to excel; the extent to which meanings are found in one’s work; and the extent to which individual and organization are bonded together by common commitment in a mutually rewarding symbiotic relationship” (p. 71).

While transformational leadership has gained greater currency, both supporters and critics (Davies & Davies, 2005; Fidler, 2000; Goleman, 2000; Jacobson et al., 2005; Leithwood et al., 1999; Sergiovanni, 2001; Southworth, 1998; Thomson, 2001) acknowledge that this model does not encapsulate the full leadership dynamic inherent in the performance of ‘highly effective’ principals and that the diverse nature of school contexts requires a contextually specific approach. ‘Highly effective’ principals, in their view, are principled chameleons who recognise that unique organisational contexts require different leadership responses. They possess an eclectic repertoire of leadership practices which takes into account “both the internal situation in the organisation and the external context in which the organisation operates” (Fidler, 2000, p. 403), and the cognitive capacity to judiciously match leadership responses to the environment in which they operate.

For the purposes of this study, ‘highly effective’ leadership is perceived to be moral in intent, contextually specific in enactment, and transformational in impact.

1.3 Researcher orientation

The opportunity to gain theoretical knowledge and insights into educational leadership has provided welcome intellectual respite from the swampy reality of daily practice as Deputy Principal in a large urban state secondary school. Postgraduate study has expanded conceptual frameworks, illuminated and refined previously intuitive professional behaviour, enabled the articulation of an

academic rationale for action, prompted reflection on my own and others' leadership, and stimulated research interests. It has proved the catalyst for a reevaluation of twenty two years secondary teaching and a decade in senior management, during which time I have worked with and observed the leadership of six principals whose performance has, in my view, ranged from capable and mediocre to highly effective and exceptional.

Having acted as a professional referee for a number of colleagues over the years, I have at times been surprised by the degree of uniformity evident in job descriptions and referee report formats. While the simplicity of a 'cut and paste' identikit approach has seductive appeal for some BOTs, it belies the diversity of schools which I know professionally and anecdotally to be poles apart, and has made me wonder how on earth the school will find the right principal for them. I have also been bemused by what I have perceived as an atomised task orientation focus and narrow emphasis on managerial capabilities, and occasionally perplexed by the eventual announcement of the successful candidate.

What does it take to be deemed a highly effective principal? How do lay Boards of Trustees know what it takes? How does this knowledge inform their recruitment and selection process so that the candidate most likely to be highly effective is offered the position?

These questions suggest a bipartite approach which considers the views of academics and practitioners. Accordingly, this study surveys both the academic literature and the views of four chairpersons of BOTs and one nominated representative. The literature review also has a dual focus, the first part examining the capabilities of highly effective principals and the second the extent to which official publications inform BOT opinions and processes.

This study's participants come from schools in urban, rural, primary and secondary contexts ranging from decile 2 to decile 10 and have recently, within twelve months of the interview, appointed a new principal. To protect their identity, alphabetical unisex names have been chosen as participant pseudonyms. Rather than avoid reference to participants using subjective personal pronouns, or

assign them one gender, both the feminine and masculine have been used. The reader must proceed on the basis that the assignation of gender has been random.

Ethical research demands declaration of reflexivity. Two motivations arguably drive researchers: the selfish and the selfless. In this case, research promises not only the self-awareness necessary for enhanced leadership performance but also the formal accreditation of a qualification which will advance career prospects. From a more magnanimous perspective, research is conducted to benefit others and inform collective practice for the better. While it does not claim to be exhaustive, a rigorous search of the literature failed to identify a single study on the extent to which BOTs make sense of the voluminous academic literature and utilise this in the appointment of their principal.

Common sense would suggest that this is an area that warrants investigation. Cumulative empirical research provides a litmus test of the perceived value of conceptual theory and its utility for practitioners. To what extent do the findings of academic research benefit lay employers who bear direct and unfettered responsibility for appointing principals? What implications does this have for the future dissemination of research and the employment practice of school trustees?

This study begins to address these questions in the hope that the insights gained might begin to inform the future practice of both researchers and practitioners for the ultimate benefit of tomorrow's students.

A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.
Lao-Tzu

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

*If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.
Isaac Newton*

2.1 Introduction

A review of the literature pertaining to an area of inquiry is an inductive analytical exercise which seeks to condense and distil the research and insight of others in the field. Through examination and reflection, literature reviews identify different paradigms, extrapolate dominant themes, highlight contradictions and reveal silences. In commencing this interpretive endeavour, it is important to acknowledge the expertise and wisdom of those who have gone before and, rather than portend any Newtonian insight, approach the task with humility.

The dual focus of this study necessitates a literature review in two parts. The first surveys a selection of relevant international literature in order to ascertain broad theoretical understandings of the leadership capabilities demonstrated by highly effective principals; the second investigates the literature available to assist New Zealand Boards of Trustees in recruiting and appointing a principal who is likely to ensure that the school sustains improvements in student learning.

In general, educational leadership literature concurs that the quintessential task of principals is to create and sustain an environment which facilitates optimal academic and social learning, enabling students “to know”, “to do”, “to live together” and “to be” (Delors et al., 1996, p. xv; Stoll, Fink, & Earl, 2003).

The literature consulted for this review similarly agrees that principal leadership plays a crucial role in determining the quality of student outcomes. Research by Harris and Chapman (2002), Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki and Giles (2005), Levine and Lezotte (1990), and Sebring and Bryk (2000) suggests that highly effective principals are able to turn around failing schools and, when reassigned from one highly challenging context to another (as has been the case in Britain and the USA), are likely to produce similar results. In short, much of the

empirical research within the selected literature supports the notion that excellent principals create excellent schools (Calabrese & Zepeda, 1999; Creissen & Ellison, 1998; Day, 2000; Day & Harris, 2001; Fullan, 1992, 2001; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2001; Louis & Miles, 1990; Sammons et al., 1995; Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2000; Stoll et al., 2003).

However, this research struggles to define excellence in principal performance and is tentative in explaining why some principals are more effective in this pursuit than others. Notions of what constitutes a highly effective principal remain diverse and contested.

In her introduction to *Leaders and Leadership in Education*, Helen Gunter (2001) makes the observation that:

the real-time real-life nature of educational work means that capturing, understanding and theorising the dynamism, even by those directly involved, is challenging. This does not invalidate the project but, instead, provides us with the opportunity to ask who the knowers are, why they are deemed to know and, perhaps significantly, where are the silences? (p. 2).

A review of the extensive educational leadership literature suggests that the knowers are many and positioned in numerous discourses, including school effectiveness (Creemers, 1994; Sammons et al., 1995; Teddlie et al., 2000), school improvement (Brighouse & Woods, 1999; Hopkins, 1987, 2001; Hopkins, Ainscow, & West, 1994) and critical studies (Blackmore, 1999; Dantley, 1990; Grace, C., 1997; Grace, G., 2000; Gunter, 2001; Smyth, 1989, 1996, 1993; Thrupp, 1998, 2005; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003). The impact of principal leadership is a recurrent theme in all three.

Rather than undertake extensive discourse analysis, this literature review seeks to acknowledge various positions as they have influenced evolving perceptions of highly effective principals. It will focus on the competencies or professional capabilities that principals bring to the task which allow them to infuse meaning and direction, and on the impact of context (the idiosyncratic blend of external

environmental conditions and internal organisation dynamics) on the exercise of principal leadership.

Perceptions of highly effective principals have their origins in the school effectiveness movement which emerged during the 1970s to counter the charge (Coleman, J., Campbell, & Hobson, 1966; Jencks et al., 1972) that schools made no difference to the life chances of their pupils. School effectiveness researchers found that some schools did in fact succeed against the odds and sought to identify critical success factors which could be replicated in other settings (Creemers, 1994). Aggregated scores on standardized tests formed the benchmark by which quality and equity were measured and strong, purposeful principal leadership was consistently identified as the crucial determinant of high educational achievement (Creemers, 1994; Sammons et al., 1995). Effective principals were able to demonstrate success in improving learning outcomes for all students regardless of gender, ethnicity or socio-economic status, at better than expected rates, through high-stakes national assessment results, attendance and retention data, stand-down/suspension statistics, transition to tertiary education and employment figures.

Having established that schools could enhance the life chances of their pupils and itemized the proficiencies of effective principals, education researchers turned from a summative cause-effect examination to a formative focus on the complex issue of how highly effective principals improved school performance. Leithwood and Steinbach (2003) identified two possible trajectories for “especially challenging schools,” both of which began with a common, invariant starting point and both of which were ultimately determined by the quality of leadership:

‘Typical’ leadership does little to mitigate their corrosive effects on pupil outcomes; it also tolerates school conditions that neither add value to pupil learning, overall, nor address the inequities accounting for large gaps in the learning of different groups of students.... On the other hand, effective school leadership reduces the depressing effects of some of those antecedents dramatically, by acting both directly and indirectly to change them ... recasts some antecedents as levers for learning, and creates a productive set of

school conditions in which virtually all students are able to learn in spite of these antecedents (pp. 24-25).

By implication, highly effective principals are atypical. Southworth (1998) suggests that they are “sufficiently different from the rest of us that they are not models everyone, or even many, can emulate” (p. 18). He cautions that the quest to identify the characteristics of highly effective principals, the linkages between these characteristics, and their causal connections may prove elusive:

We should also contemplate the idea that *we may never discover* all there is to know.... School leadership may just be too complex, too organic, too unpredictable and too contingent upon so many variables that we can never be sure of very much (p. 20).

However, Southworth (1998) argues that this does not diminish the worth of the exercise and that the greatest benefit of sketching highly effective leadership lies not in its prescriptive impact but in the power to encourage reflection and provide a stimulus for professional development.

Part One

2.2 Leadership capabilities of highly effective principals

The literature suggests that highly effective principals maintain an unrelenting focus on learning and possess the passion, purpose and capacity to ensure that the school enhances and sustains improvements in educational opportunity, participation and outcome. Leithwood and Riehl (2003, 2005) are of the opinion that principals achieve this through setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organisation. Their transformational leadership model identifies nine specific practices which, according to Leithwood and Riehl, form the foundation for effective leadership in almost all contexts.

Setting directions involves developing and articulating a clear and compelling collective vision, fostering consensus over group goals, and establishing high performance expectations. Developing people requires principals to provide the

intellectual stimulation that prompts reflective and innovative practice, support individual colleagues' ideas and initiatives, and “walk the talk” by modeling important values and practices. Redesigning the organisation acknowledges the malleability of school culture and structures, and the importance of organisational learning. Leithwood and Riehl include in this category the building of professional learning community, processes to ensure broad participation in decision-making and productive relationships with parents and the wider community.

Their tripartite model has been applied in a number of empirical studies of leadership in primary and secondary contexts internationally and appears to be gaining external validity. Leithwood's (2005) synthesis of American, Australian, English, Danish, Norwegian, Swedish and Chinese reports found that they did “not challenge conclusions from earlier research about the value of a common set of ‘basic’ leadership practices for principals in almost all national contexts and the policy environments that they share” (p. 621).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) note parallels in Hallinger and Heck's (1999) consequential categories of practice: purposes, people, structures and social systems, and Conger and Kanungo's (1998) visioning, efficacy building and context changing strategies. This seems to suggest that researchers find the tripartite model useful in conceptualizing effective principal leadership.

However, Leithwood and Riehl stop short of prescription and acknowledge that while necessary, these core leadership practices are probably not sufficient for success. Leithwood (2005) comments that they are “common across contexts in their general form but highly adaptable and contingent in their specific enactment” (p. 622). Before examining the contingent nature of highly effective principal leadership, it is important to examine its commonality in greater detail.

2.2.1 Leading with heart

Highly effective principals possess tremendous passion for the education of children. They are deeply committed to serving and preserving democratic

principles of freedom, equality, and justice (Day & Harris, 2001; Gardner, 1990; Greenleaf, 1977; Sergiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 2004), and to facilitating the ethical “release of human possibilities” (Barth, 2001). Sergiovanni (2001) and Barth (2001) distil the essence of this motivation in one word: heart. Sergiovanni (2001) notes that the heart of leadership – what a person believes, values and dreams about –not only determines personal vision, but also constitutes a leader’s interior world and forms the foundation of their reality. Barth (2001) puts it even more simply: “in addition to a brain, we have a *heart* (italics added) - and we want to put it to use in promoting young people’s learning” (p. xxv).

Barth is referring here not solely to the academic learning measured by standardized assessments, but to enhanced social capital and the enduring intellectual passion that transcends school and drives independent, imaginative and courageous lifelong learning: “If the first major purpose of a school is to create and provide a culture hospitable to human learning, the second major purpose ... is to make it likely that students and educators will become and remain lifelong learners” (2001, p. 18). Implicit in this is a focus on deep learning and the development of what Claxton (2002) terms learning power. This places an emphasis on building resilience (readiness, absorption and persistence in learning), resourcefulness (learning in different ways), reflectivity (metacognitive and strategic learning) and reciprocity (independent and team learning) (Claxton, 2002).

Passion for learning and the educative mission, a phenomenon described by Fullan (2001) as the energy–enthusiasm–hopefulness constellation, permeates the thoughts, words and actions of highly effective principals. It is manifest in the courage, drive, persistence and “unwarranted optimism” (Brighthouse, 2001) with which they pursue educational goals and vision. These principals are insightful enough to recognise and exercise enormous positional power and influence over the quality of intellectual development and professional community among staff members. They are often the instigators of, and catalysts for change.

In advocating a learning-centred approach to leadership, Senge (1990) makes the point that “learning organisations will remain a ‘good idea’ ... until people take a

stand for building such organisations. Taking this stand is the first leadership act, the start of *inspiring* (literally ‘to breathe life into’) the vision of the learning organization” (p. 340). Principals are typically the first to take a stand and play a critical role in “inviting” staff to “build and act on a shared and evolving vision of enhanced educational experiences for pupils” (Stoll & Fink, 1996, p. 109). The concept of invitational leadership (Novak, 2005; Stoll & Fink, 1996; Stoll et al., 2003) blends the personal and professional learning which Senge (1990) refers to as “personal mastery,” with supportive and respectful relationships with others. Other authors refer to this as “servant leadership” (Greenleaf, 1977), “moral leadership” (Sergiovanni, 1992), and “values-led contingency leadership” (Day & Harris, 2001).

Day and Harris (2001) report that a 360 degree study of high performing principals revealed a “surprising consensus” among students, staff, governors (BOT) and parents as to why the principal was effective. Effective heads were values-led and people centred:

All emphasised that the sets of core personal values of the heads were based upon care, equity, high expectations of achievement, which were clear to and shared by the overwhelming majority of the school constituencies and which were the drivers for the life of the school (p. 2).

More recently West-Burnham’s (2004) research into 21 British secondary schools, all of which perceived themselves as being engaged in learning-centred leadership, revealed that the consistent emphasis on shared and distributed leadership had been “created by very determined headteachers whose personal values, vision, commitment and energy are credited by staff as having made the difference” (p. 18).

In an earlier publication, West-Burnham (2001) highlighted interpersonal intelligence, “the authentic range of intuitive behaviours derived from sophisticated self-awareness” (p. 2), as a key determinant in facilitating effective engagement with others. His examination of the links between interpersonal intelligence and leadership led him to conclude that the two “are in such a symbiotic relationship that they are actually tautological” (p. 1). West Burnham contends that because leadership behaviours are manifestations of a moral

perspective rooted in the essential integrity of the individual, they are innate. Whilst he argues that interpersonal intelligence can't be taught, West Burnham maintains that it can be enhanced: "it might be helpful to think of this capacity as a reservoir, each day it is drawn on, and on many days it is replenished" (p. 3). He further suggests that highly effective principals engage in the reflective practice (Schon, 1983; Sergiovanni, 1995) and profound learning necessary to "refill the reservoir and keep it in a state of equilibrium" (p. 3).

2.2.2 Lead Learner and Learning Leader

Highly effective principals are thus, first and foremost, learners (Barth, 2001; Collarbone, 2003) whose intellectual curiosity and pursuit of personal mastery (Senge, 1990) is lifelong. They recognise that individual learning is not only intrinsically enjoyable, but also an essential prerequisite for organisational learning: "Individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning. But without it no organisational learning occurs" (Senge, 1990, p. 139). As visible lead learners (Fullan, 2003), these principals model the habits of inquiry, reflection (Argyris & Schon, 1978) and dialogue that enhance learning; demonstrate pedagogical knowledge to depth; scaffold, challenge and debate; and coach and mentor others. Blumberg and Greenfield's (1986) study found that while leadership in schools was differentiated, highly effective principals were all "willing, from time to time, to disturb the equilibrium of their respective schools in order to challenge assumptions and bring about improvements in teaching and learning" (Southworth, 1998, p. 13).

Barth stresses that the role of lead learner is critical, not only because of the extraordinary power of modeling, but because the world is rapidly changing. Quoting Eric Hoffer, Barth (2001) distinguishes between the learned and learners: "In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists" (p. 28). He further contends that teaching and leadership are not innate for most and that "we teach and lead better when we constantly learn how to teach and lead" (p. 28).

Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003) reiterate the sentiment:

Leadership for learning isn't a destination with fixed coordinates on a compass, but a journey with plenty of detours and even some dead ends. Effective educational leaders are continuously open to new learning because the journey keeps changing. Their maps are complex and can be confusing (p. 103).

Intense and sustained focus on creating optimal learning conditions is referred to as learning-centred leadership (Southworth, 2004, 2005). This is an evolution of instructional (Blase & Blase, 1998; De Bevoise, 1984; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Gupton, 2003; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hopkins, 2003; Lashway, 1995, 2002; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Scheerens & Bosker, 1997) or pedagogical (Macneill, Cavanagh, & Silcox, 2005; Sergiovanni, 1998; Webb, 2005) leadership.

Exercised in small primary settings, this involves principals directly in modeling effective classroom practice, demonstrating broad pedagogical and curriculum expertise and personally leading professional development. In addition, small roll sizes (27% of New Zealand's 1101 full state primary schools have less than 50 students and 48% less than 100) (Ministry of Education, 2006, p. 77) increase the possibility that teaching principals are not only the leading, but sole classroom practitioner. In these contexts, the effects of learning-centred leadership on student outcomes are direct.

A comparison of English and New Zealand research reveals an interesting difference in the priorities of teaching principals. Southworth's (1999) English study revealed that effective teaching principals placed primary emphasis on their educational leadership role, secondary emphasis on their classroom teaching and even lesser emphasis on their administrative role. In New Zealand, Collins (2004) found that principals of one and two teacher schools were much more likely place a priority on "classroom management and teaching" and to work directly with children, staff, parents and trustees to create the foundations for school improvement.

As school size increases, principals tend to withdraw from classroom teaching and focus more on developing the internal school processes that will enhance student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996a). Because principals work with and through others, their impact on student outcomes is indirect and mediated (Hallinger & Heck, 1996a, 1996b; Hattie, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000a) and this led to broader definitions of instructional leadership. Hallinger and Heck (1996a) conclude that this is neither cause for alarm or dismay because “achieving results through others is the essence of leadership. A finding that principal effects are mediated by other in-school variables does nothing whatsoever to diminish the principal’s importance” (p. 39). Southworth (2004) argues that highly effective principals know this implicitly and “work directly on their indirect influence” (p. 102).

They do this in a number of ways. By visiting classrooms, encouraging colleagues to talk about their teaching successes and concerns, and ensuring that meetings of teachers focus on learning, highly effective principals demonstrate that they remain strongly connected to the classroom (Southworth, 2005). They recognise that whereas individual learning is usually defined by the notions of acquisition, storage, and retrieval, collective or organizational learning involves reciprocal learning processes that lead toward a shared purpose of schooling and must be created through dialogue. Schools can learn only when there is explicit agreement about what they know - about their students, about teaching and learning, and about how to change.

Lambert (1998, 2003) thus argues that learning-centred leadership is constructivist in nature. It is:

about learning together, and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. It involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information, and assumptions through continuing conversations; to inquire about and generate ideas together; to seek to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information; and to create actions that grow out of these new understandings (Lambert, 1998, pp. 5-6).

Following in the Greek tradition of *dia-logos*, it requires team members to suspend assumptions and enter into genuine thinking together.

Heifetz (1994) contends that the starting point is for people to identify, investigate and continually improve their own practice as it relates to shared ideals, and to assist others to do the same. By implication, this involves the deprivatisation of practice and a commitment to “practicing their craft in public ways” (Louis, Kruse, & Raywid, 1996). By articulating leadership metacognition and acknowledging that they don’t always possess the solutions to educational dilemmas, highly effective principals expose their vulnerability in a manner which both demonstrates and fosters relational trust.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) identify four dimensions of relational trust: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity. They argue that relational trust “facilitates the development of beliefs, values, organisational routines, and individual behaviours that instrumentally affect students’ engagement and learning” in four ways (p. 113). Firstly, and ironically, exposing one’s vulnerability in a trusted environment reduces rather than heightens it and predisposes people to undertake new and potentially risky activities. Secondly, relational trust facilitates the collaborative problem-solving needed for instructional improvement. Thirdly, it underpins organisational norms of mutual support and open critique. Fourthly, it creates a moral resource for school improvement over the long haul.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) elaborate:

the level of trust within an organisation influences the development of strong personal attachments to the organisation and beliefs in its mission. When school participants hold such commitments, they are more willing to give extra effort even when the work is hard (p. 117).

Their empirical research on levels of trust in the top 100 elementary schools in Chicago (based on gains in student achievement over a five year period from 1991-1996) compared with the bottom 100 led them to suggest a correlation between relational trust and academic productivity. They found that “by 1997,

schools with positive trust reports had a one in two chance of being in the improving group. In contrast, the likelihood of improving schools with very weak trust reports was only one in seven” (p. 111).

Fullan (2003) concurs with Bryk and Schneider (2002) that the four dimensions of relational trust characterise the day-to-day behaviour of highly effective principals and concludes that the principal is instrumental in embedding relational trust “in the culture of relationships across all participants” (p. 43) .

2.2.3 Establishing Professional Learning Community

Relational trust underpins the creation of professional learning communities.

Current research (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, & Weindling, 1993; Dimmock, 2000; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves, 2003; Hord, 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Schmoker, 2004; Senge et al., 2000; Stewart, 2000; Stoll et al., 2003) suggests that professional learning communities enhance student, staff and community learning. In *It's About Learning (and It's About Time)* Stoll, Fink and Earl (2003) challenge the reader to distinguish between a school in which students are learning, teachers are learning and leaders are learning, and a school which is a learning community. They suggest that the defining characteristic of a learning community is the “collective enterprise that ensures that individual learning adds up to a coherent whole, driven by high-quality pupil learning as its fundamental purpose” (p. 131). Leaders of learning put learning at the centre of everything they do: students’ learning first, then everyone else’s learning in support of it.

Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2006) are convinced that professional learning communities are fundamental to the paradigmatic shift necessary to break through the “ceiling effect that so often accompanies literacy- and numeracy-improvement initiatives” and secure “daily continuous improvement for all students in all classrooms” (p. 2). They argue that professional learning communities encourage the twin features of internal accountability (Elmore, 2004): coherent expectations for student learning and the capacity to tailor classroom practice in order to achieve it.

Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2006) label these capacities “personalization”, “precision” and “professional learning.” In their view, collaborative teaching practice encourages a daily focus on instructional goals which places greater emphasis on the quality of teaching than on student outcomes and achievement levels. It facilitates fundamental changes in the way knowledge is constructed and new relationships between students and teachers, both of which depend upon the latter undergoing “continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the setting in which they actually work, observing and being observed by their colleagues in their own classrooms and classrooms of other teachers in other schools confronting similar problems of practice” (Elmore, 2004, p. 127).

While researchers use varying language to frame the concept of a professional learning community, four common themes emerge. First and foremost is the collective focus on learning. Second is the culture of collaboration and collective inquiry which enables team members to gain insights not attainable individually (Senge, 1990). Third is the results orientation and focus on continual improvement. Fourth is the dispersal of leadership throughout the school and the development of leadership density (Lambert, 1998).

The role of highly effective principals in modeling a relentless focus on learning and establishing collaborative practice has already been mentioned, and the latter will receive further attention when aspects of organisational design are considered. In addition to the above mentioned characteristics, the practice of highly effective principals is evidence based and results driven.

Schmoker (1996) emphasises the reciprocal nature of the relationship between leadership, goals and data. He argues that a focus on results is central to school improvement; that incremental, even dramatic improvement is possible under the right conditions; and that educators benefit substantially by emphasizing both short-term and long-term results. Immediate successes energize reform endeavours and are essential if teachers are to gain confidence, increase agency and expand their vision of what is possible (Kotter, 1996).

For data to fully inform practice, principals need to ensure that collection, storage and retrieval methods are timely and adequate (Marzano, 2003; Marzano, Water, & McNulty, 2005), that “those closest to the point of implementation, the practitioners, analyse the data” on a collaborative basis (Schmoker, 1996, p. 35) and that, initially, data is primarily used to reveal emerging expertise rather than identify and eliminate poor teachers. They must also provide staff training, for, as Earl and Katz (2006) state:

becoming a skilled and confident consumer and user of data is not simple or straightforward; nor is it a mechanical process. It is a skill and an art and a way of thinking that includes an understanding of the nature of evidence, from its definition and collection to its interpretation and presentation (p. 17).

Contemporary use of evidence reflects a substantial shift in emphasis away from summative end-point assessments towards formative assessments which inform teaching practice and enable teachers to individualise instruction. In a professional learning community, these form the basis of co-construction meetings and the focus for classroom observation, thus reducing the likelihood of superficial learning that “concentrates calculatively on the measured results instead of on the learning that the results are supposed to measure” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 177).

2.2.4 Distributing leadership

Highly effective principals recognise that educational reforms provide pragmatic as well as philosophical reasons to empower others in leadership roles. Quite simply, the task is too monumental for the principal alone (Elmore, 2000).

Hargreaves (2001) believes that the key to “sustainable success in education lies not in training and developing a tiny leadership elite, but in creating entire cultures of distributed leadership throughout the school community” (p. 36).

Fullan (2005, p. 29) concurs: “Sustainability is a team sport and the team is huge,” a point also echoed by Southworth’s contention that “belief in the power of one is giving way to a belief in the power of everyone” (2005, p. 77).

Distributed leadership assumes that leadership is a social phenomenon rather than a set of individual characteristics, traits or competencies. To Harris (2005), it means “multiple sources of guidance and direction, following the contours of expertise in an organisation, made coherent through a common culture” (p. 165). It is a form of collective agency incorporating the activities of formal and informal leaders who “work at mobilizing and guiding other teachers in the process of instructional change” (p. 165).

Usually referred to as “distributed” (Day & Harris, 2001; Elmore, 2002; Glickman et al., 2001; Gronn, 2000, 2003; Harris, 2005), this form of leadership is also known as “participative” (Leithwood et al., 1999), “transformative” (Shields, 2003), “dispersed” (Lingard, Hayes, Mills, & Christie, 2003), “collaborative” (Wallace, 2002), and “democratic” (Huber, 2004; Maxcy, 1991), although Woods (2004) argues that the latter is distinct from it.

Distributed leadership is not delegated leadership but a “sophisticated web of interrelationships and connections” (Hargreaves, 2005, p. 181). It increases leadership density (Lambert, 1998; Sergiovanni, 2001) and has a multiplier effect, enabling leaders to learn more rapidly than they would have alone. Lambert (1998) echoes Senge (1990) when she concludes that learning-centred leadership is “broader than the sum total of its ‘leaders’, for it also involves an energy flow or synergy generated by those who choose to lead” (p. 5).

Distributed leadership forms the foundation of continually self-renewing enterprises (Barth, 1980, 1990). It hastens the transfer of ownership from external developers to the school and from “knowledgeable teacher leaders” (Coburn, 2003) to all staff. It increases spread, addresses leadership succession issues, enables “planned continuity” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2002), and provides alternative opportunities for potential leaders (Spillane, Halverson, & Drummond, 2001). And, ultimately, it yields higher standards in student learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000b; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Silns & Mulford, 2002).

Fullan (2003, 2005) argues that highly effective principals proactively plan for their succession from day one. He contends that:

the principal who turns around the failing school and obtains substantial gains in literacy and mathematics, is not building enduring greatness. He or she improves the context but does not change it. Changing the context means that what you leave behind at the end of your tenure is not so much bottom-line results (although that too is apparent) but rather leaders, at many levels, who can carry on and perhaps do even better than you did (2003, p. 10).

For Fullan, the ability to change context represents the “moral imperative in its highest form” (2003, p. 11) and the main mark of a highly effective principal.

Lack of attention to leadership succession issues causes Sarason (1982) to conclude that few things in education succeed less than leadership succession and this view is echoed by Fink (2000) and Fink and Brayman (2004). Following a study of four Ontario schools which experienced at least one change of principal in a seven year period, Fink and Brayman (2004) concluded that succession planning should become a major policy issue. They found that schools that planned for leadership transition were better able to secure continuity in philosophy and direction, minimise the “attrition of change” (Fink, 2000; Macmillan, 2000), respond to external pressure, and avoid the crisis or events-driven approach which often characterises site-based management and state intervention in “failing” schools (Stoll & Myers, 1998).

2.2.5 Organisational and systems architect: design and synergy

As the chief architects of the organisation, highly effective principals establish the internal coherence necessary to navigate schools through externally imposed, “disconnected, episodic, piecemeal, and superficially adorned projects” (Fullan, 2001, p. 109) towards an agreed vision, in the process minimising potential dissonance between political agendas and strategic intent. Acting in a considered but often improvisational manner, they align elements of the school system

adroitly to produce optimal learning and teaching conditions, and sustain educational reform.

Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) argue that the relationship between teacher development and educational reform is “not just a matter of better implementation of selected innovations (although it includes this) but more basically a change in the profession of teaching, and in the institutions in which they are trained and work” (p. 6).

While people (and collaborative teams in particular) possess the capacity for leading and learning, the structures in which they have to function are often not conducive to the exercise of learning-centred leadership (Timperley, Phillips, & Wiseman, 2003). At worst, they stifle reflection and engagement, create inertia and deflect efforts to change. Hill and Crevola (2003) believe that “teachers have always shown a strong commitment to learning as professionals, but all too often this has been pursued outside the context of whole-school change” (p. 396).

The failure of most external reforms to bring about lasting improvement has led to a paradigm shift which promotes holistic thinking and “improvement by design” (Dalton, Fawcett, & West-Burnham, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2000). Design involves the application of systems thinking, a phenomenon which Senge (1990) describes as the “fifth discipline” of the learning organization. In his view, systems thinking determines sustainability and prevents new ideas from becoming gimmicks or fads.

Dimmock (2000) concurs:

The sheer magnitude of the challenge – involving many elements, most of which are interdependent – means incremental or piecemeal change is unlikely to succeed.... Schools are complex systems of interrelated parts; to change the parts is to change the system, and vice versa. The process must be holistic and designed with intent (p. 1).

He identifies ten functionally interrelated elements of school design. At the centre, a curriculum based on student learning outcomes, informed teaching

practices, informed learning, and computer technology constitutes what Dimmock terms the “core technology” of the school and maximizes “learning-centredness” (p. 3). The remaining six elements (leadership and management, organisational culture, organisational structures, personnel and financial resources, and performance evaluation) support and further the quality of the core technology, and the interrupted boundary line “signifies the mutuality and reciprocity of influence between all of the elements” (p. 3).

Highly effective principals engage in systems thinking (Fullan, 2005) and develop “an intuitive understanding or *gestalt* of the whole, which illuminates detailed knowledge of the parts” (Hill & Crevola, 2003, p. 397). They act strategically to ensure that critical system elements are aligned in a manner which scaffolds improvements in teaching and enables the organisation to flex and respond to rapidly changing contexts.

This involves reviewing existing structures and processes and establishing new ways of doing things, tailoring the performance management system to reflect organisational goals (Dimmock, 1999; Fitzgerald, Young, & Grootenboer, 2003; Stewart, 2000), and ensuring that recruitment and selection processes result in the appointment of staff whose demeanour, expertise (actual and potential) and agency is compatible with the prevailing or desired organisational culture.

2.2.6 Cultural engineer

Exponents of cultural leadership theories (Bolman & Deal, 1984, 1997; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1984) support Schein’s (1985) proposition that “there is a possibility underemphasized in the research that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture” (p. 2). He defines culture as “the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organisation, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic ‘taken-for-granted’ fashion an organisation’s view of itself and its environment” (p. 6). In Schein’s view, “culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin” (p. 15). Culture embodies the core beliefs, shared values and sense of mission that

explicitly and implicitly shapes norms of organisational behaviour. Stewart (2000) contends that in a very real sense, these are personified in the principal. Recognising that school culture establishes the context of, and readiness for educational reform, highly effective principals heed Fullan's (1992) warning that change efforts that ignore culture are "doomed to tinkering." They consequently devote considerable energy to the management of meaning (Bennis, 1992) and to creating and fostering the healthy cultural norms identified by Saphier and King (1985): collegiality, high expectations, trust and confidence, tangible support, reaching out to the knowledge bases, appreciation and recognition, caring celebration and humour, involvement in decision making, protection of what's important, traditions, and honest and open communication.

Sergiovanni (1984) argues that "higher order" cultural and symbolic leadership forces determine excellence (see Figure 1). He contends that technical and human leadership forces are generic and "thus share identical qualities with competent management and leadership wherever they are expressed" (p. 9). Further, educational, symbolic and cultural leadership forces are "situational and contextual, deriving their unique qualities from specific matters of education and schooling" (p. 9).

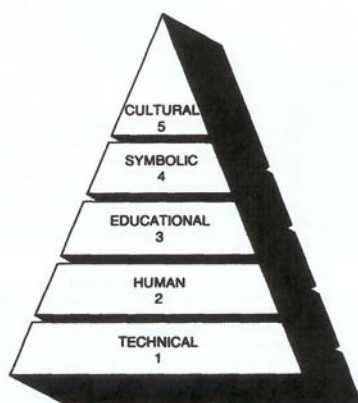


Figure 1: The Leadership Forces Hierarchy

Sergiovanni, T. (1984). Leadership and Excellence in Schooling, *Educational Leadership*, February, p.4.

Sergiovanni concludes that while technical, human and educational aspects of educational leadership are essential to competent schooling, they will not bring about excellence. He adopts a musical metaphor to illustrate the distinction:

The earmarks of an excellent piano performance may not be found in the notes played but in the pauses between them. Clearly excellence is multi-dimensional, holistic. Competence, by contrast, is marked by mastery of certain predetermined essential fundamentals. The piano student achieves mastery and is thus able to play the notes flawlessly and deliver a performance recognised as technically competent (p. 4).

If principals are to become leadership conductors who unite students, staff and community in a common and passionate educative purpose, they must understand the cultural and symbolic aspects of leadership. Excellence demands a high degree of emotional and social intelligence (Goleman, 1996, 1998, 2000; Goleman et al., 2002), accurate and astute perceptions of current reality (Hopkins et al., 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996), attention to rituals and ceremonies (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Deal & Peterson, 1999), and continual communication of a compelling and engaging future vision. It requires consistency between espoused theories and theories-in-use (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993), superior interpersonal skills, resilience and persistence.

2.2.7 Managing change

Highly effective principals recognise that substantive change is messy, “complex non-linear, frequently arbitrary and highly political” (Fullan, 1992, p. 2). Like real learners, it has curves and is neither instant, nor steady, nor immediately evident. An intensely human endeavour, it demands empathy and sensitivity to conflicting emotional responses and a strong understanding of change processes.

Fullan (1982, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2005; Fullan et al., 2006) has written a number of texts on the leadership of change. In *The Meaning of Educational Change* (1982), he argues that change is a process, not an event. He contends that educational change “not only does not work as the [traditional] theories say it should, but more fundamentally ... can never work that way” (1992, p. 2) and, in

a subsequent treatise (1999), that uniquely different contexts make it theoretically and empirically impossible to generate a definitive theory of change. This view is shared by recent authors including Duffy (2003) who maintains that the collision of unanticipated events (reality) with anticipatory intentions (planning) makes change serpentine.

The ability to respond to unanticipated events will determine sustainable schools in the future. Argyris and Schon (1978) maintain that an organisation's key challenge isn't to become more effective at performing a stable task in the light of stable purposes, but to restructure its purposes and redefine its task in the face of a changing environment. Davies and Davies (2003) argue that this requires a fundamentally different planning approach. Whereas predictable environments permit the implementation of linear strategic plans, turbulent environments demand "fundamental changes in the paradigm in which the organisation exists" (Davies & Davies, 2003, p. 81). Highly effective principals cope "with turbulence through a direct, intuitive understanding" (Boisot, 2003, p. 35) that tolerates ambiguity and channels energy into "building organisational capability and competencies rather than assuming that the school has a set of simple linear plans that it can put into action" (Davies & Davies, 2003, p. 84).

Principals must thus balance paradoxical and competing demands: to maintain a sense of urgency about improving their schools and the patience to sustain them over the long haul, to focus on an unknown future whilst remaining grounded in current reality, to adopt a "loose-tight" leadership style which simultaneously encourages autonomy and demands adherence to shared vision and values; and to celebrate successes whilst perpetuating discontent with the status quo (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Highly effective principals recognise that prevailing contextual factors determine organisational readiness to change and the pace at which change can occur. Accordingly, the identification and analysis of these factors is a priority and principals who lack the sophisticated technical knowledge required to undertake a cultural audit themselves readily employ the services of expert consultants. Cultural audits confirm what highly effective principals come to know intuitively:

whether a school is ‘stuck’ or ‘moving’ (Hopkins et al., 1994), ‘cruising’ or ‘strolling’ (Stoll & Fink, 1996), and whether resources should be directed primarily towards improving internal conditions or establishing development priorities.

The diagnosis of current reality thus enables highly effective principals to provide a context of security and challenge which encourages innovation, avoids blame, extends moral support for change agents, and acknowledges the human dimension (Kanter, 1988). They avoid the inherent pitfalls (Kotter, 1996), anticipate the implementation dip (Duke, 2004; Fullan, 2001) and guard against “the tendency to commit to “far more activities and initiatives than anyone could possibly monitor, much less effectively implement” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 426). Schmoker (2004) further argues that “team-based, short-term thought and action” allows immediate successes to be factored in, maintains high levels of motivation and better positions principals to monitor the pace of change. This enables them to sustain momentum whilst protecting staff from innovation overload, a concept that Fullan (2005) describes as “cyclical energizing.”

The importance of cyclical energizing applies equally, if not more so to principals for two reasons. Firstly, burnout undermines school culture and jeopardises its educational vision. Secondly, Fullan (2005) argues that continuous improvement depends on principals building lateral and vertical capacity with the community, other schools, and government agencies: “They make it clear that everyone has a responsibility for changing the larger education context for the better” and are “‘almost’ as concerned about the success of other schools in the district as they are about their own” (p. 68). He concedes that it’s going to be hard: “try it, and you will find that the forces are not with you” (p. 99) but concludes that “ordinarily, leadership gets competence at best. What we need is leadership that motivates people to take on the complexities and anxieties of difficult change” (p. 104).

2.2.8 Risk taking

Among the many leadership dilemmas confronting principals is the need to protect the internal dynamic from external pressure, both in terms of the rapidity and the nature of change. This occasionally places them in conflict with the educational bureaucracy (Ministry of Education, Education Review Office and others) and national policy makers.

The literature suggests that highly effective principals are not always compliant. Boylett and Finlay's (1996) survey of 1000 headteachers identified a healthy disrespect for authority as one of the most important characteristics of effective headteachers. Rather than shy from authority, effective leaders establish priorities, ignore or manage other pressures and risk displeasing those "higher up" by declining to carry out some of their demands (Tye, 2000).

Principals are also forced to reconcile their role as educational leader with their chief executive responsibilities. Day and others (2000) found that the 12 English headteachers in their study were offered the choice of being "subcontractors" or "subversives." In complying with the prevailing political doctrine, subcontractors enforced national policy directives which often compromised their moral authority and professional autonomy. Subversives, on the other hand, resisted implementing managerialist initiatives which were contrary to the pursuit of social justice.

Day and others (2000) contend that highly effective principals "were neither subcontractors nor subversives, but, with integrity they skillfully mediated external changes so that they integrated with the vision and values which existed in the schools" (p. 156). In a similar vein, Law and Glover (1999) suggest that the leading professional and chief executive roles can be combined and that "rather than being mutually exclusive, they can be mutually reinforcing and complementary, helping to create a vital professional synergy" (p. 5).

Far from being synergistic, Bottery (2001) argues that transformational leadership and public accountability models are dichotomous. In the UK context, adherence

to government prescription has “dramatically reduced the possibility of realising a genuinely transformational education and leadership” (p. 215). After studying twelve “effective” schools, Bolam et al (1993) concluded that the Heads’ articulation of vision was constrained: “neither surprising nor striking nor controversial ... [but] closely in line with what one might expect of the British system of education” (p. 35).

Thrupp and Wilmott (2003) also refute the suggestion that tensions can be creatively combined within the current British policy environment. They maintain that this “could occur only if one’s notion of professionalism was defined by an insufficiently critical concern with social justice and genuine education,” and encourage a subversive approach (p. 153). In subsequent research, Thrupp (2005) outlines a range of overt and covert contestation strategies employed by principals against the Official School Improvement policies of the New Labour government, exhorting practitioners to challenge rather than work within the official “market, managerial, performative and increasingly privatized” (p. 9) educational discourse.

In Thrupp’s view, this discourse is antithetical to an instructional and social justice agenda. It is instrumental in narrowing curriculum, restricting individual school autonomy, undermining teacher-student relationships, reducing diversity and fostering inequality through a form of “‘educational triage’ where decisions are made to focus on some students at the expense of others depending on whether or not they are seen to have the potential to enhance their school’s position in the examination league tables” (p. 24).

Across the Atlantic, Dantley (1990) denounces both the traditional school leadership and effective schools paradigms as simplistic and suffering from “systematic autism which fails to take into consideration the social and economic realities in which urban poor schools and students find themselves” (p. 585). He argues that the tenets of the effective schools movement “restrict schooling to the maintenance of the status quo” and that simply putting into place a model of stricter accountability and monitoring while ignoring the concomitant social milieu ... is a demonstration of negligence in the first degree” (p. 594).

Dantley advocates a critical approach to leadership whereby effectiveness will be determined by the degree to which principals institutionalise dialogic pedagogy and empower students to “critically evaluate their present realities, systematically deconstruct the aberrations of democracy currently perpetuated in their society, and to project remedies” (p. 595). In his view, highly effective principals of the future will be critically aware visionaries whose vision is “wedded to the notion of schools as vehicles for social and political reconstruction” rather than “yoked completely to the prevailing cultural hegemony” (p. 594).

MacBeath and Myers (1999) argue that “the deviousness needed to circumvent authority and constraining formal systems of control brings into sharp focus the difference between competencies and competences” because no set of job descriptors would identify competences that “are by definition antithetical to the requirements of any rule-bound organisation” (p. 5). Consequently, rule-breaking is perceived as a heresy, but a necessary one because “the integrity of an enterprise, its value to its stakeholders, must depend on how well universalism (rules of wide generality) is reconciled with particularism (special exceptions)” (MacBeath & MacDonald, 2000, p. 18).

2.2.9 Contextual specificity

Having described a range of dispositions and practices by which highly effective principals set directions, develop people and redesign the organisation, the literature cautions against an atomised approach to determining excellence (Barth, 1990) and suggests that leadership is a *gestalt* phenomenon (Bolam et al., 1993; Duke, 1986). Barth (1990) warns against what he perceives to be two false assumptions of “list logic”: firstly that the cataloguing of desirable characteristics encapsulates the messy and holistic everyday practice of school leadership, and secondly that adoption of these practices will ensure effective performance.

Leithwood and Riehl (2003, 2005) acknowledged at the outset that their model of highly effective principals identifies the basics of effective leadership, those practices which are necessary in almost all situations but probably not sufficient for success. The literature (Hallinger & Heck, 1996a; Leithwood et al., 1999;

Teddlie et al., 2000; Vecchio, 2002) suggests that it is in contextual specificity that the *je ne sais quoi* of leadership lies.

The antecedents of contextually specific leadership lie in situational leadership theory (Fiedler, 1967) which diverged from trait theory (Stogdill, 1948) and shifted the focus away from individual genetic attributes and dispositions towards a repertoire of styles and behaviours applied in diverse settings. The modern hybrid suggests that it is not simply a matter of finding the right person for each particular context, as was the premise of earlier situational leadership theory, but of the right person being able to respond to multiple contexts.

Gewirtz (1995), cited in Harris and others (2003), writes that school principals “need to be multilingual, working within multiple and competing discourses e.g. of managerialism and care, accountability and professional autonomy, competition and collaboration, personal and social education, needs of students and the narrow instrumentalism of government ‘required’ standards” (p. 157).

Sergiovanni (2001) argues that it is no coincidence “that some leaders are more effective than others, even when all are faced with similar demands and constraints....They accept with ease Roland Barth’s (1980) admonition that the issues and problems of education are remarkably similar across the educational landscape,” and understand that it is the “solutions, if there are solutions, that tend to be idiosyncratic and particularistic, and much less generalizable from context to context” (p. 2). Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999) thus argue that “outstanding leadership is exquisitely sensitive to the context in which it is exercised” (p. 4).

In Davies and Davies’ (2005) view, this means that “there can be no quick fixes, no transferable blueprints for a strategic leader to take from one effective school to create a similarly effective school” (pp. 25-26). Solutions cannot be predetermined and need to evolve from within the “unique context, through understanding the culture, and sharing beliefs and values” (p. 26). Davies and Davies (2005) term the cognitive capacity to understand the uniqueness of the

school environment and its interaction with the wider community and educational world “contextual wisdom.”

Contextual wisdom enables highly effective principals to recognise that while all the basic leadership characteristics are important, “some will be more so than others at different times and in different settings” (Southworth, 1998). Thomson (2001) thus argues that understanding of “the game and its logic requires an analysis of the situated everyday rather than abstractions that claim truth in all instances and places” (p. 14). This demands conceptual pluralism (Bolman & Deal, 1984) and a large measure of focused flexibility (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992) on the part of principals. Goleman (2000) writes that the most effective leaders:

switch flexibly among the leadership styles as needed ... [they] don't mechanically match their style to fit a checklist of situations; they are far more fluid. They are exquisitely sensitive to the impact they are having on others and seamlessly adjust their styles to get the best results (p. 87).

Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki and Giles (2005) argue that sensitivity to impact on others is but one aspect of focused flexibility. Applying Leithwood and Riehl's (2003, 2005) model, they examined the leadership practices of seven principals who had effectively improved student performance in seven challenging US schools. Their finding that the mere demonstration of core practices was insufficient in explaining what “actually transpired in the process of moving their respective schools” is consistent with Leithwood and Riehl's. Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki and Giles (2005) discovered that:

The ways in which these practices emerged and how they interrelated over time was neither linear nor formulaic. Each principal, in his or her own fashion, had to constantly recalibrate the contextual conditions and constraints the school confronted and then adapt their core practices to create the conditions necessary to enable school improvement. In each case, conditions and constraints varied over time depending upon the internal and external context of the school and/or its school district, as well as the stage of development a school had reached relative to its espoused goals (p. 611).

Bourdieu (1990) describes the ability to recalibrate and adapt as “a feel for the game” and theorises this through the genesis of *habitus* or the disposition of agents to act. He perceives society as a series of overlapping, homologous and competing *fields*, each with their own logic of practice and hierarchy of capitals (social, economic, cultural and symbolic). Bourdieu argues that not only are the external boundaries of fields highly contested, so too are internal positions. In a struggle for distinction, agents operating within fields attempt to establish a monopoly over specific combinations of capitals by creating subfields. These subfields operate within the general logic of the field but have their own distinct rules.

Gunter (2001), Lingard, Hayes, Mills and Christie (2003) and Thomson (2001) apply Bourdieu’s theory of practice to the educational field, arguing that leadership is better understood not in terms of trait, contingency or transformational theory, but in terms of social and power relations in specific contexts, places and times. They develop the position that leadership involves the “complex interplay of the personal/biographical, that is, the *habitus*, with the institutional/organizational context and the broader social, political and economic context” (Lingard et al., 2003, p. 59).

Thomson (2001) contends that this complex interplay “allows us to recognise simultaneously the invariant properties of the educational field and the situated specificities of leadership work in schools” (p. 15). He argues that the educational field is comprised of subfields which include the school, universities and organisational administration. He perceives organisational administration as a subfield of public sector management, which is in turn a subfield of the political field. Principals are positioned at the apex of the schooling subfield but straddle other subfields and are thus forced to negotiate conflicting discourses and mediate their effects both upward and downward.

Principal *habitus*, the “capacity and disposition to deal with the wholeness of the school and the educational system as fields” (Lingard et al., 2003, p. 74) is formed through a long apprenticeship which begins with compulsory schooling and progressively includes classroom teaching, a hierarchy of middle management

positions and ongoing leadership learning. Fullan (2005) suggests that it takes approximately 10 years of cumulative development to become a highly effective school leader and that reflective, developmental experiences make the job more “doable ... experts spend less energy in dealing with complex matters because they more easily and subconsciously recognise patterns and intuit effective responses” (p. 34).

In a similar vein, MacBeath and MacDonald (2000) argue that the ability of highly effective leaders to read context, discern patterns and respond appropriately with a sureness of touch is an inherent skill that has its basis in more than gut instinct. It arises “from an emotional and social intelligence linked to a well-rehearsed cognitive databank of principles and experiential lessons internalized” (p. 27).

Scott (2003) also emphasises the emotional and cognitive mindscape. His professional capability framework encompasses requisite leadership attributes, qualities, skills, and knowledge in five interlocked domains: generic skills and knowledge, profession specific skills and knowledge, stance (emotional intelligence), way of thinking, and diagnostic maps. He concurs that generic and job-specific skills form the foundation of effective professional performance, but do not guarantee success. Scott argues that highly effective principals also possess a high level of social and personal emotional intelligence, and the experiential schemas necessary to think and act in a contingent manner. They demonstrate “an ability to see the core issue in complex technical and human situations and a capacity to deftly trace out and assess the consequences of alternative courses of action” (p. 4). Scott continues:

A set of “diagnostic maps” developed from effectively coming to grips with previous practice problems in the unique work context ... enable[s] the person to accurately “read the signs,” to figure out what is really going on in each new situation and to determine when and when not to deploy particular generic and technical skills (p. 4).

He concludes that it is the combination of heart and brain that ultimately makes the difference.

West-Burnham (2001, 2003) concurs that what he terms ‘profound learning’ is moral in motivation. He contends that profound learning creates personal meaning and wisdom and creativity. The latter is, in his view, particularly important because it results in “the problem and solution being redefined ... [and] the ability and willingness to challenge orthodoxy” (2003, p. 55).

2.3 Leadership learning

While metacognition, the ability of leaders to reflect on their leadership learning, is deemed essential, the literature is divided as to which developmental experiences enhance this.

Although formal qualifications in educational leadership are a prerequisite for appointment to Principalship in the United Kingdom and United States, there has been little empirical research linking postgraduate professional qualifications and performance excellence. In 2001, Fullan observed that research had yet to establish links between “particular professional development [and] success on the job” (p. 261) and connections between the two remain largely unexplored. More recently, Jacobson and others’ (2005) study of highly effective principals in seven challenging New York schools found that the two most effective principals held doctorates. However, they acknowledged that their research design and small sample size precluded the establishment of a direct correlation and recommended that this form the focus of future research.

Despite the lack of hard evidence, the literature is generally of the consensus that the complexity of the principal’s task makes a postgraduate qualification highly desirable (Bush, 1999; Restine, 1997; Thody, 1998). Fullan (1992) contends that aggregate experience rarely provides the learning and development necessary to create highly effective leaders and highly effective schools. He, along with Sarason (1982), concludes that “being a classroom teacher by itself is not a very good preparation for being an effective head” (Fullan, 1992, p. 7). Cooper and Shute (1998) warn that the “assumption that those who are good teachers automatically become good heads will be even more dangerous than it has been in the past” (p. xi).

In advocating carefully planned and systematically structured preparation programmes, Lortie (1987) contends that “principals who have been exposed to a wide range of educational ideas and practices ... [are] more likely to favour, and when influential, push for change” (cited in Fullan, 1992, p. 8). Harvey (1994) concurs that “the appointment of new principals from cohorts of deputy principals who have not had opportunities to gain competence in educational leadership limits the capacity of the self-managing school to respond to change” (p. 21). Underpinning many formal preparation programmes is the assumption that aspiring principals may be able to access a common body of knowledge and set of generic leadership skills which form a foundation for effective leadership. In some cases, they also provide opportunities through reflective practice, to replenish interpersonal intelligence reservoirs (West-Burnham, 2001) and develop the conceptual pluralism (Bolman & Deal, 1984) and focused flexibility (Caldwell & Spinks, 1992) necessary to become highly effective.

In New Zealand, appointment to principalship is not currently contingent upon any formal educational management qualification or training prerequisite. ERO acknowledged, in 2000, that most NZ principals had not received specific training to prepare them for the role (Education Review Office, 2000). It went on to recommend incentives for aspiring principals to gain high-level qualifications in school management prior to appointment. Cardno's (2003) research indicates that concerns over the adequacy of current training are shared by the profession. 75% of principals and 76% of deputy principals believed that career progression via traditional school-based apprenticeships is inadequate and that pre-employment preparation should be compulsory for aspiring principals. They rejected the notion of a single national programme, preferring instead a flexible programme and provider framework.

Cardno (2003) also recommends that we “take account of the critics of the compulsory national training programme ... in England and Wales. They warn that there are limitations that must be addressed in adopting a narrow functional competency method of training for management development” (p. 11).

Macmillan (2000) argues that developing an understanding of culture should be a top priority for all leadership training programmes in education. He suggests that

the relocation of managerialist “super-heads” into failing schools and the transposing of effective strategies from one context to another will not necessarily rescue them from failure. Huberman (1990) states this even more strongly: “Little attention has been given to the likelihood that strong leadership in one effective school may translate directly into ‘administrative thuggery’ in another” (cited in Southworth, 1995, p. 195). This prompts Thrupp and Wilmott (2003) to caution us to be “extremely wary of the way that UK school leadership training courses ... tend to act as relaying devices for managerialism, and ... get involved in them as little as possible” (p. 179).

Martin and Robertson (2003) are similarly wary of direct policy borrowing. They don’t dispute the need for principals to expertly fulfil administrative and management functions, but conclude that programmes that “focus on tasks to be done, rather than conceptual development of reflective principals ... run the risk of producing yesterday’s principals” (p. 8). Southworth (1995) contends that the development of reflective, critical and ethical leaders depends on programmes of learning which counter the “conservative tendencies of heads and the unexamined orthodoxies” (p. 213). He suggests that universities have a unique role in preparing tomorrow’s principals because even if principals are reflective practitioners, they are rarely provided with formal opportunities to articulate, critically examine and justify their approach to leadership. Restine (1997) expounds a similar view when she states that the “iterative and interactive connection between experience, reflection, interpretation of experience and the construction of meaning is critical for learning and development” (p. 5).

2.4 From theory to practice

A review of the academic literature supports Southworth’s (1998) contention that highly effective leadership is differentiated. Rather than a single formulaic approach, there exist multiple leadership styles and pathways (Glanz, 2002). “However, what this may imply is not so much a matter of individual preference and disposition as finding an appropriate fit with the school’s circumstances and context” (Southworth, 1995, p. 12). This poses BOTs with formidable challenges

in making the most important decision in their tenure: the appointment of a new principal.

The literature reveals universal agreement on the importance of principal leadership and general consensus over the professional capacities commonly associated with highly effective practice. However, it is less united over the developmental activities which best prepare future principals and considerably muted on how BOTs make sense of the voluminous literature in the appointment process.

Part Two

2.5 Appointing New Zealand Principals

Responsibility for the appointment of New Zealand school principals was divested from regional education boards and Boards of Governors in 1989 and placed in the hands of elected parent representatives on newly constituted Boards of Trustees. This initiative was one of a raft of structural changes designed to abolish “layers of administration in order to locate decision making as close to the point of implementation” and to alter the “balance of power between the providers and clients of education” (Education Review Office, 1994, p. 5). Radical in intent and rapid in implementation, Tomorrow’s Schools devolved responsibility for education administration from central government to self-managing schools and transformed the role of the principal.

Prior to 1989, the official literature echoed the international emphasis on instructional and transformational leadership. The Picot Report (Department of Education, 1988a) found the research to be:

clear and unequivocal. An effective principal is a professional and instructional leader who has a coherent vision of the purposes of the institution, who is able to articulate that vision to the staff, and who is able to gain their commitment to it. The research tells us that the most effective principals are those who have developed team management strategies. Whatever system is developed, the collaborative

relationship between principal and staff must be protected and enhanced (pp. 51-52).

Ironically, the system developed once Picot's recommendations were operationalised in Tomorrow's Schools (Department of Education, 1988b) was to intensify principal workloads and fundamentally change the nature of that relationship. Whilst there was continuity in expectations that the principal would act as the leading educational professional and work collaboratively with staff, Tomorrow's Schools emphasised new managerial functions which increasingly diverted their attention from teaching and learning (Codd, 1990). Section 76 of the 1989 Education Act established principals as chief executives responsible for complying with the Board's general policy directions, managing school finances and assets, implementing and monitoring strategic plans, and meeting statutory and reporting requirements. Notman's (1997) analysis of the Picot (Department of Education, 1988a) and Lough (Ministry of Education, 1990) reports led him to conclude that within a year of educational restructuring "the emphasis on collaborative leadership had given way to the efficiencies of managerialism, with the demarcation lines drawn that Boards should govern, principals should manage and teachers should operate" (p. 51).

Few principals possessed the requisite skills necessary to manage new responsibilities and professional development was not immediately forthcoming. In essence, political devolution relied upon "new forms of decentralized agency" which in turn required "newer developed levels of competency through those agents. The neo-political objectives for education gave out managerial power to principals but without activating the supportive training structure to enact the new educational order" (Billot, 2001, p. 5).

To a lesser extent, this was also the case for BOTs. Training varied in coverage and depth, as did individual Boards' competence and confidence (Martin, 2001). While the Secondary Principals' Association assured elected Board members that their "combined wisdom, commitment to the

school, experience and good sense” (Braun, 1988, p. 29) would result in an effective appointment, not all Boards shared this optimism. Notman’s (1997) case study of three principal appointments revealed unease amongst trustees concerning their “limited knowledge of the principal’s job, minimal experience of selection processes, and ... the prospect of maximum risk to children’s learning” (p. 55) if the wrong decision was made. These concerns were echoed in the Lough report (Ministry of Education, 1990) which questioned the wisdom of individual school authorities having exclusive control over personnel issues. Codd, Harker and Nash (1990) raised the prospect of inherent bias and the possibility that “traditionally minded school boards may act on their suspected preferences for male principals at the expense of women” (p. 18). Similarly, ERO’s report on professional leadership in secondary schools (Education Review Office, 1997) noted that only 25% of secondary principals were women and cautioned Boards of Trustees to “have proper regard for merit criteria rather than other considerations” (p. 25).

Notman’s (1997) trustees also voiced disquiet at the paucity of “credible human resources to offer advice, facilitation or actual training in specific selection skills” (p. 55) and the lack of physical resources available. Implicit in the former are the twin issues of supply and expertise. Braun (1988) highlighted the merit in co-opting an experienced principal (other than the incumbent) and suggested that the gravity of the task warranted professional advice “from a consultant or experienced personnel manager” (p. 13). In 2001, an ERO report on the appointment of school principals found that 77% of the 192 schools which had appointed a new principal between January 1999 and late 2000 employed the services of a professional advisor (Education Review Office, 2001). It expressed concern that, in many cases, professional advisors (typically a retired principal or principal of another local school) shaped their own role in the appointment process and recommended that greater scrutiny be given to the quality of the advice that Boards of Trustees received.

Concerns over the quality of advice were shared by the anonymous author of an article published in the June issue of the New Zealand Principals’ Federation

(2001) Magazine who advised readers that while the use of a professional advisor was to be encouraged, it would be “better if these people are Principals who have a full understanding of the Principal role and the type of school rather than a university academic.” Determining what constitutes “full understanding” remains problematic. The New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) continues to endorse the involvement of principal advisors with the qualifier that the absence of a formally endorsed accreditation process obliges the Board to “ensure that they are fully up to date with professional requirements” (New Zealand School Trustees’ Association, 2005a, p. 12).

Measures have recently been taken to attest to the currency of this professional knowledge. In 2002, the Whanganui Ministry of Education School Support Reference Group sponsored a trial training and certification programme for Principal Advisors which focused on the “legislative frameworks within which boards operate, best practice and the role of the principal advisor” (White, 2003). Delivered by the New Zealand Principal and Leadership Centre, initially in the Central-West region, it was extended in 2003 to include Wellington and the Wairarapa (Piggot-Irvine, 2003) and subsequently enabled the Wellington Regional Primary Principals’ Association to list on its website the names of 17 advisors who had completed “relevant courses at the NZ Principal and Leadership Centre” and were available to assist BOTs with the principal appointment process.

Vested interest aside, White’s (2003) conviction that a principal advisor is critical to the process led him to pose the rhetorical question: “With the role of the principal advisor being so crucial to the effective appointment of a principal, why do some boards think they can do it themselves?” In the absence of professional advice, BOTs are able to access a series of publications by the Secondary Principals’ Association of New Zealand (Braun, 1988), the Principals’ Implementation Task Force (1990), NZSTA (1993, 2004, 2005a), ERO (1994, 1995, 1997, 2001) and the Ministry of Education (1998a, 1998b). These resources range from skeletal procedural outlines to lists of desired competencies, performance standards and government commissioned reports.

Braun's (1988) section on *Effective Principal Qualities* merges school effectiveness and improvement criteria and crosses the transactional/transformational leadership divide. The desirability of strong leadership, a "firm discipline and behaviour model for teachers and pupils," and "an atmosphere of order" is stressed along with "consensus-style decision making" and "the building of a unique, strong school culture" (p. 10). Also included, although not attributed, is Sergiovanni's (1984) leadership forces hierarchy. Elsewhere in the document, reference is made to "the employment of one or a combination of a vast range of strategies" (p. 9) and the absence of a "single definitive recipe which will ensure an effective performance from any principal ... [whilst preventing them behaving] like predictably performing fleas" (p. 12), but these are not developed in terms of contextual specificity and the emotional and cognitive mindscapes necessary for principals to respond to this.

In 1995, ERO responded to concerns over the recruitment and training of school principals by employing a consultant to elicit the dimensions of effective principal performance and draft these in a set of competencies. The resulting report (Education Review Office, 1995) acknowledged that principal performance was "often identified by researchers as a critical factor in the effectiveness of a school" and that "Boards of Trustees, in particular, need to know what knowledge, skill and abilities are essential for the principal of their school" (p. 2). ERO intended that publication of core competencies would "promote debate about the demonstrable behaviours of principals that can be sought at recruitment and appointment" (1995, p. 3).

Recognising that the atypical nature of New Zealand schools would require BOTs to expand on core competencies, the report identified 19 sets of behaviour patterns that would enable all principals to demonstrate competence (Education Review Office, 1995; Woodruffe, 1992). These were grouped in five categories (intellectual, results orientation, interpersonal relationships, adaptability, professional/technical knowledge) and amplified by 191 examples of behaviours that principals would be expected to demonstrate. The report stated that whilst Boards could reasonably expect some competencies to be demonstrated on appointment (for example, the ability to gather, retrieve and manage information),

others such as entrepreneurial focus would need to be developed through training. It recognised that competencies were not mutually exclusive and could at times be contradictory: “it is possible that a certain competency could be required in a particular situation but its opposite could be required in a different situation” (p. 7). The report cautioned against a check-list approach and left the assignment of priority to individual Boards.

While the report sidestepped the question of “what makes a ‘good’ principal” as being “outside the scope of this report to explore ... in any detail” (p. 3), it identified “four general characteristics of principals who are able to effect student achievement at their schools: vision, gaining commitment, management skills and personal qualities” (p. 16). These principals demonstrate both the capacity to clarify and reshape vision to fit current ideologies and changing circumstances, and the courage, resourcefulness and far-sightedness to innovate beyond New Zealand educational initiatives. “Ambitious for their students and teachers as well as for themselves” (p. 15), they possess the integrity necessary to foster trust and create strong team cultures, and intuitively know when to take a stand. They cultivate enduring partnerships with trustees and other stakeholders, develop and utilise their own strengths and those of others, and build a high school profile. They maintain a key focus on individual and collective learning, display an aptitude for educational analysis and evaluation which includes their own practice, and employ efficient management techniques.

Using the core competencies, a subsequent report, *The Professional Leadership of Secondary Schools* (Education Review Office, 1997), collated and analysed responses from 154 principals of Year 7-13 and Year 9-13 state and state integrated schools regarding their contextual awareness of the external school environment; their philosophical and practical stance on vision, leadership style and governance; and their perceptions of core responsibilities in managing learning and teaching. The report indicated close links between the performance of the principal and the school’s overall effectiveness in promoting student achievement, concurring with the academic literature that “students do better when the principal of their school is doing a good job” (p. 29). It noted the crucial balance “between an intellectual leadership based on sound professional and

theoretical knowledge and a skilful general management of the work of its teachers, the direction of the school and its responsiveness to its clients” (p. 25).

It documented considerable diversity in practice but did not distinguish those that were adopted by highly effective principals. For example, while consultation and shared responsibility was a recurrent leadership theme, some principals indicated that they matched their leadership style to the occasion, adopting a pragmatic mix of hierarchical and consensual approaches which were “founded in policy or a clear overview, vision or sense of mission” (p. 10). The reader is left to surmise the relative importance of flexibility in leadership style. Despite this limitation, the report did provide BOTs with some useful advice. Noting that nearly 70% of respondents had undertaken postgraduate study in educational administration and school management, the report stated that secondary school boards “should expect to appoint a principal with university and management qualifications” (p. 24). This conclusion echoed the recommendations of the report on the professional leadership of primary school principals undertaken the previous year (Education Review Office, 1996).

NZSTA’s principal appointment guidelines (New Zealand School Trustees’ Association, 2005a) are largely procedural and provide minimal guidance on what to look for in applicants. The list of additional resources alerts Boards to ERO’s (1995) Core Competencies report but this is not annotated in terms of its relevance to the appointment process, nor elaborated upon in the guidelines. The guidelines emphasise both the statutory requirement for Boards to ensure that the person best suited to the position is appointed and the freedom to stipulate the “experience, qualifications and abilities relevant to the position and such other relevant matters as it determines” (p. 7). The guidelines recommend that someone on the appointment panel is able to “test the professional aspects of applicants” (p. 11) and suggest that a professional advisor could usefully contribute to the formation of the principal’s job description, but stop short of a full endorsement.

The section entitled *How Do We Know What Kind of Principal We Need?* recommends that the Board looks to its vision, strategic plan and the professional standards for direction. With regard to the latter, the guidelines state that they

provide a “fairly good start” to “identifying indicators that the principal is having a positive impact on student outcomes” (p. 13). The *Revised Professional Standards for Secondary and Area School Principals* (Ministry of Education, 1998b), which came into effect in February 1999, identify five dimensions of performance: professional leadership, strategic management, staff management, relationship management, financial and asset management, and statutory and reporting requirements. The same five dimensions also form the professional standards for primary principals but, because their union (New Zealand Educational Institute) has not agreed to the proposed amendments, the existing *Interim Professional Standards for Primary School Principals* (Ministry of Education, 1998a) remain in place. The professional standards constitute minimum performance benchmarks which are, for the most part, competence based.

The 2004 guidelines make passing reference to the “real importance [of] the ability to lead and guide staff and knowledge of current curriculum and other accountabilities” (New Zealand School Trustees’ Association, 2004, p. 16), but contain no references to the academic literature, nor any advice on the conceptual, experiential and analytical scaffolds necessary for principals to critically examine and respond to multiple educational contexts.

Official information provided to BOTs means that the seven learnings for leaders of learning: understanding learning, making connections, futures thinking, contextual knowledge, critical thinking, political acumen, and emotional understanding (Stoll et al., 2003) will, if included at all, likely receive less weight than a list of administrative and management skills. This places BOTs in the invidious position of not knowing what they don’t know and reduces their ability to consciously appoint an applicant who is likely to be highly effective in the role.

CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research is motivated by the instinctive human desire to interpret the world in which we live, to gain insight and clarity, to explain the previously unexplained, to offer new explanations, “to come to grips with their environment and to understand the nature of the phenomena it presents to their senses” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 3). More than just casual observation, research can be defined as the systematic, critical and self-disciplined endeavour to enhance knowledge and wisdom.

Any approach to research is determined by ontological, epistemological and methodological beliefs which coalesce in an interpretive framework or paradigm and guide action. Guba and Lincoln (1994) define a paradigm as:

a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It presents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the “world,” the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do. The beliefs are basic in the sense that they must be accepted simply on faith (however well argued); there is no way to establish their ultimate truthfulness (p. 107).

Research enquiry is undertaken within three broad paradigms: positivist scientific, naturalist interpretive and critical post-structuralist; each with distinct ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. Guba and Lincoln (1994) further suggest that these assumptions are “in *all* cases human constructions,” none of which are or can be incontrovertibly right. Consequently, in adopting a preferred paradigm and presenting readers with resultant analyses and arguments, researchers must rely on “persuasiveness and utility rather than proof” (p. 108).

3.2 Conceptions of social reality

Positivists adopt a realist ontological position which contends that the world exists independent of human construction. Through detached observation of passive research objects and controlled experiment, they maintain that it can be known, measured, quantified and articulated in resulting universal laws of nature, society and human conduct. The key tenets of positivist, scientific research are thus quantitative: “objectivity, measurability, predictability, controllability, patterning, the construction of laws and rules of behaviour, and the ascription of causality” (Cohen et al., 2000).

By contrast, antipositivists refute the notion that reality and truth exist in singular form. They embrace a nominalist ontological position which emphasises individual consciousness and cognition, and allows multiple constructions of reality. Repudiating the positivist scientific approach as mechanistic and reductionist, the naturalist interpretive paradigm focuses on human interaction, the description of patterns of conduct and meaning, and “disciplined subjectivity” (Mohr, 2001). It has its origins in Kant’s model of human rationality which argues that knowledge and understanding derive “not only from the evidence of the senses but also from the mental apparatus that serves to organise the incoming sense impressions” (Hamilton, 1994, p. 63) and emphasises the centrality of the autonomous researcher to the research process. Researchers operating within this paradigm thus favour a qualitative approach which depends upon conversation to describe “multi-faceted images of human behaviour as varied as the situations and contexts supporting them” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 23).

In their introduction to the third edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) caution that any definition of qualitative research must work within a “complex historical field consisting of at least eight moments in time ... [which] overlap and simultaneously operate in the present” (p. 2). They label these: the traditional 1900-1950, modernist or golden age 1950-1970, blurred genres 1970-1986, the crisis of representation 1986-1990, postmodern experimental and new ethnographies 1990-1995, post-experimental inquiry 1995-2000, the methodologically contested present 2000-2004, and the fractured future

2005 onwards. Nonetheless, they offer an initial, generic definition of qualitative research as a “situated activity that locates the observer in ... their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3).

Emergent in the 1980s, the third major paradigm challenged the epistemological hegemony of gendered western thought. Habermas (1972), an early critical theorist, argued that emancipatory interest subsumed the previous two paradigms and went beyond them. Critical post-structuralists including indigenous (Bishop, 1995, 1997, 2005; Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Cram, 2001; Durie, 1997; Mutua & Swadener, 2004) and feminist researchers (Blackmore, 1999; Delamont, 1992; Kirsch, 1999; Lather, 1991; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992) censured the interpretive school for excluding dissenting voices and supported Freire’s (1970) contention that enduring solutions have their genesis in the world view of the oppressed rather than that of the dominant culture. Primarily concerned with power relationships, critical research shifted:

the goal of praxis away from the acquisition of knowledge about the Other ... to the formation of a dialogic relationship with the Other whose destination is the social transformation of material conditions that immediately oppress, marginalize or otherwise subjugate the [research] participant (Brown & Dobrin, 2004, p. 5).

Accordingly, issues of initiation, benefits, representation, legitimation and accountability (Bishop, 1995) took on critical importance.

3.3 Research paradigm

An investigation of the theoretical and procedural knowledge and wisdom that individual Chairpersons of Boards of Trustees bring to the appointment of a new principal, and the meanings they attribute to this process, is most closely aligned with a naturalist, interpretive approach. In adopting the paradigm, this study acknowledges that knowledge is uniquely personal, subjective and acquired through interaction with others. It recognises that conversation is a basic mode of human interaction (Kvale, 1996).

From a hermeneutic perspective, people are viewed as conversational beings for whom language is a reality (Geertz, 1973). “Conversation is not just *one* of our many activities in *the* world. On the contrary, we constitute both ourselves and our worlds in conversational activity” (Shotter, 1993, p. vi). Epistemologically, then, knowledge can be socially constructed through conversation (Kvale, 1996; Schwandt, 1994; Silverman, 2003). Indeed, Kvale (1996) argues that “the certainty of our knowledge is a matter of conversation between persons, rather than a matter of interaction with a non-human reality” (p. 37). When this conversation takes place between researcher and participant, Habermas (1984) suggests that a “double hermeneutic” is at work because researchers are endeavouring to interpret and operate in an already interpreted world.

3.4 Research design

A research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connects theoretical paradigms to strategies of inquiry and data collection methods, and addresses critical issues of representation and legitimation. Research strategies put into motion and “anchor paradigms in specific empirical sites, or in specific methodological practices” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 36).

In qualitative research, design decisions permeate the entire research process from beginning to end and involve the researcher in “recontextualising the research project within the shared experience of the researcher and the participants in the study” (Janesick, 1994, p. 210; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). This prompts Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2003, 2005) to liken the qualitative researcher to a *bricoleur* who “stitches, edits, [and] puts slices of reality together” (2005, p. 5).

3.4.1 Research question

The first design decision centres on the formation of a research question which determines the focus and scope of the study. Morse (1994) argues that limited knowledge of the setting often makes qualitative inquiry tentative in the early stages and recommends that the researcher “make the question as broad as possible, rather than prematurely delimit the study with a narrow question” (p.

226). The qualifier in this statement alludes not only to the extent and duration of participant involvement, but also to physical, financial and personnel constraints.

Taking these into consideration, this study asks the question: “To what extent is theoretical knowledge of the professional capabilities of highly effective principals understood and utilised by Boards of Trustees in the recruitment and selection of a new principal?” The research question is bipartite in that an understanding of the theoretical knowledge forms a prerequisite for ascertaining its utility for Principal employers.

3.4.2 Research methods

The second design decision determines which methods will be employed to gather and analyse data. Brewer and Hunter (1989, 2006) suggest that qualitative research is inherently multimethod in focus, a point illustrated by Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994, 2003, 2005) diverse, although not exhaustive list:

semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival and phonemic analysis, even statistics, tables, graphs and numbers ... ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizomatics, deconstructionism, ethnography, interviews, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research, and participant observation, among others (2003, p. 10).

Schwandt (1994) maintains that “while we may feel professionally compelled to use a special language for these procedures ... at base, all interpretive inquirers watch, listen, ask, record, and examine” (p. 119). Importantly, no single method is privileged over another. Citing Wolcott (1988) and Erickson (1986), he contends that methods are the least remarkable aspect of interpretive work and cautions that a focus on methods *per se* “often masks a full understanding of the relationship between method and inquiry purpose” (p. 119).

This study adopts Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) constructivist framework, an idiographic approach which draws on constructivism, hermeneutics and phenomenology. It employs a multiple methods approach (Brewer & Hunter, 1989, 2006; Denzin, 1989) comprising a review of the international literature

surrounding the professional capabilities of highly effective principals, semi-structured interviews of Chairpersons of Boards of Trustees (or their nominated representatives), and document analysis.

Various constraints determine the selection of these methods. The retrospective nature of participant involvement (participants are reflecting on appointments made within the preceding twelve months) and ethical considerations preclude observation. Geographical spread and a desire to minimise the time commitment for participants means that focus group discussions are impracticable. These factors, together with a focus on employer perspectives, limit the usefulness of an in-depth case study approach.

3.4.2.i Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide researchers with a unique opportunity to explore predetermined issues in a manner which best elicits information about respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs and behaviour (Bouma, 2000; Moore, 2000). They afford participants the opportunity to reflect at length, in their own words and preferred order, on aspects of the research that interest them most, and provide the researcher with a vehicle for establishing rapport, scaffolding responses and probing without intrusion. Various referred to as "semi-structured" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Freebody, 2003; Kvale, 1996), "in-depth" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) and "focused" (Bell, 1999), they simultaneously offer the participant a chance to shape the content of the interview and the interviewer considerable latitude in pursuing a range of topics.

Flexibility in the questioning process allows the "participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest ... [to] unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 80). It enhances communication between researcher and respondent, enabling the interview to remain relatively conversational and situational. Open-ended questions provide the vehicle for skilful interviewers to probe responses and investigate motives. Respondents are encouraged to seek clarification, to elaborate and to explain subtleties and complexities. In addition, these interviews provide a range of

supplementary information including spontaneous reactions, kinesics and paralinguistics which illuminate data analysis (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1981).

This makes semi-structured interviews superior to other qualitative methods in yielding “thick description” (Geertz, 1973); rich data which “can often put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses” (Bell, 1999, p. 133) and will “more clearly reveal the existing opinions of the interviewee in the context of a real-world view than will a traditional interview where the interviewer’s role is confined to that of question-maker and recorder” (Tripp, 1983); cited in Bishop (1997, p. 33).

Interviewing appears beguiling in its simplicity – to understand how people understand their world and life, you only need ask (Powney & Watts, 1987). However, they are not limitation-free. Whilst on the one hand, interviews are more inclusive of respondents who would not normally respond to mail questionnaires, on the other they deter those who may feel threatened or intimidated by an interviewer and for whom anonymity is of paramount importance.

Fontana and Frey (2003) suggest that the routine, pervasive nature of interviewing causes some researchers to overlook the impact of an interview’s social dynamic on the nature of the knowledge generated. The researcher, as interviewer, must take cognisance of the manner in which their race, gender (Fontana & Frey, 1994) and status influence the respondent. Feminist researchers (Delamont, 1992; Finch, 1993; Kirsch, 1999; Oakley, 1981) argue that open-ended interviews facilitate the establishment of rapport and democratize the research relationship. Further, Oakley (1981) suggests that the interviewer must be prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship. Conversely, Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1996), cited in Kirsch (1999, p. 26), caution that power differences can not be completely eliminated and the attempt to create a non-hierarchical relationship can “paradoxically, become exploitation and use,” inadvertently reintroducing some of the ethical dilemmas that feminists sought to avoid.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) identify two potential pitfalls during the interview itself. While the use of an interview schedule increases the comprehensiveness of the data and the systematic nature of its collection, flexibility in sequencing can produce substantially different responses and result in the inadvertent omission of salient questions. Semi-structured interviews produce data which is relatively unstructured, costly and time consuming to analyse. Interview samples tend to be small and while this permits penetrating linguistic interpretation, it thwarts comparison and undermines attempts to establish prevalence, test hypotheses of differences among groups, and make statistical generalizations.

3.4.2.ii Document analysis

Analysis of BOT documentation pertaining to the appointment of the principal forms a minor but nevertheless significant part of the research. Reinharz (1992) notes that documents and artefacts possess a naturalistic quality because they are not produced for the purposes of research, nor are they affected by the process of being studied. Consequently, they help to establish consistency between what people say (espoused theory) and do (theory in action) (Argyris & Schon, 1978), and assist in the triangulation of certain aspects of interview data (Denzin, 1989; Hodder, 2003).

This research assumes that Board perceptions of the professional capabilities of highly effective principals influence and are prioritized in the formulation of the Principal job description and person specification. They are further reflected in the job advertisement and in the nature of the information sought in referee's reports.

3.4.3 Access to the field

The third level of design decisions surrounds access to the field. For practical reasons, field parameters were established geographically according to proximity to the researcher's home. The pool of potential participants was derived initially from three sources: the researcher's own knowledge of newly appointed principals, a list of first-time principals accessed through the Ministry of

Education, and scanning of principal positions advertised within the target area in the *Education Gazette*. Further research was then undertaken via the internet, school directories and telephone calls, in order to identify the Chairperson of the Board.

Access to research participants was negotiated using the Principal as intermediary. Recognising that the relationship between the newly appointed principal and his or her Board Chairperson was likely to be in its infancy, and not wishing to jeopardise this in any way, the initial approach was made, in writing, to the Principal. This letter introduced the researcher, outlined the nature and purpose of the research, and provided details of procedural and ethical guidelines. Following a telephone conversation, during which the Principal's support of the research was established, an invitation was extended to the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees to participate in a semi-structured interview of up to ninety minutes in duration. With one exception, principals expressed strong interest in the research, unhesitatingly gave permission for their Board Chairperson to be approached, and alerted her or him to this possibility prior to the formal invitation arriving.

This study involves four Board Chairpersons and one nominated representative. In selecting a small sample, the fundamental intention of the research is to understand the uniqueness of each situation, to identify commonality and difference in experience, and to produce depth of insight rather than form generalizations which can be applied and tested across the entire field (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).

3.4.4 Researcher-participant relationship

The manner in which individuals esteem and honour the separateness of the other person and the ways in which she or he is unique forms the foundation of respectful human relationships. In the research context, respect obliges researchers to consider the rights and welfare of participants and to make ethical decisions at "the conceptual crossroads where methods and morality intersect" (Fetterman, 1998, p. 136).

Principled sensitivity to the rights of research participants is a relatively recent phenomenon which has its antecedents in biomedical research. In 1947, the Nuremberg Code contained a watershed statement of procedural research ethics and rejected the defense that the welfare of the species overrides that of individuals. Consequently issues of respect and ethical conduct took on new and critical significance.

3.4.4.i Research ethics

Four core principles - autonomy, justice, beneficence and the avoidance of maleficence – underpin procedural ethics, compelling researchers to consider the potential risks/benefits to participants and resolve issues of informed consent and confidentiality. Potential risks include a deleterious impact on the relationship between the Principal and Chairperson, and the identification of participants. It is recognised that the Principal risks erosion in professional standing if the employer, as a result of the research findings, perceives them as less effectual. Similarly, the Chairperson of the BOT could experience diminished confidence as a result of their participation. Raising these issues in initial discussions with both the Principal and Board Chairperson is one means of minimising potential harm. The generic nature of the interview questions and acknowledgement that some participants are likely to bring multiple principal appointment experience to the discussion is another.

Full disclosure of relevant information about the research project in the letter of invitation assists participants in understanding the nature and implications of their involvement, and in making an informed decision to accept or decline the research invitation. Informed consent is furnished on the basis that participants have the right to decline to answer particular questions during the interview, to rescind any information provided, and to withdraw from the study without prejudice at any stage prior to two weeks after the accuracy of transcripts is confirmed. This study employs three strategies to protect the identity of participants and their schools. Given New Zealand's size (Tolich, 2001; Tolich & Davidson, 1999) and the tight parameters of the field, the decision has been made to exclude geographic and demographic identifiers (decile rating, school type and size) in addition to

personal descriptors. Participant pseudonyms will be assigned and the importance of confidentiality stressed.

Few researchers would disagree on the four core principles that underpin procedural ethics. However, the challenge lies in applying these principles in a pluralistic cultural environment. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) describe this as “ethics in practice” (p. 267). At one extreme is the view that inquiry should know no restrictions beyond the personal conscience of the inquirer. At the other is the position that “extrascientific moral imperatives require the adherence to externally imposed restrictions and the elimination of any research practices that conflict with those extrascientific controls” (Bower & de Gasparis, 1978, p. 2). Cavan (1977) conveys this more personably when she concludes that: “while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better, even if, in the extreme case, the respect of human nature leaves one ignorant of human nature” (p. 810).

In favouring the latter, this research agrees that “ethical behaviour is not something that can be held in reserve for momentous occasions; it must be a constant companion” (Lashway, 1996, p. 2). It permeates every step of the research process from design to publication. Punch (1986) highlights the need, during an interview, for researchers to respond to ethically sensitive moments “situationally, and even spontaneously, without the chance of armchair reflection” and to make choices in the pursuit of truth (cited in Facio, 1993, p. 78).

Occasionally, important information must be discarded as researchers allow all participants the protection of saying things off the record (Spradley, 1980) and omit sensitive disclosures made when the conversation “meanders into places where neither participant nor researcher expects or indeed wishes to go” (Howell, 2004, p. 325).

3.4.5 Data analysis strategies

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) define data analysis as “a reflexive, reactive interaction between the researcher and the decontextualised data that are already interpretations of a social encounter” (p. 282). The task is challenging and requires researchers to manage the tension:

between maintaining a sense of holism of the interview and the tendency for analysis to atomize and fragment the data – to separate them into constituent elements, thereby losing the synergy of the whole, and in interviews often the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (p. 282).

Kvale (1996) is emphatic that “analysis is not an isolated stage, but permeates an entire interview inquiry” (p. 205). He stresses the need for the temporal dimension of interview design to be kept in mind “from the first thematizing to the final reporting” and argues that “much of the analyzing and verifying tasks should be pushed forward to earlier stages” (p. 99).

Tesch (1990) identifies three core steps common to nearly all qualitative analysis methods: developing an organizing system, segmenting the data, and making connections. In immersion/crystallization, the three core steps are collapsed into “an extended period of intuition-rich immersion within the text. It is the interpreter as editor, who serves as the organising system” (Miller & Crabtree, 1994, p. 345).

Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe three non-mathematical, inductive approaches to analyzing interview data which vary along a continuum ranging from low to high level interpretation and abstraction. The first approach involves the presentation of data in journalese style, the second “interpretive-descriptive” narrative (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) and the third the development of “grounded theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

This research adopts Maykut and Morehouse’s (1994) recommendation that novice researchers employ the second approach and use the constant comparative method pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The constant comparative method combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. Category coding, which becomes increasingly discriminating with second and subsequent readings of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994), involves the collation of unitized data into provisional categories, and the devising of rules (propositional statements) that describe category properties. These rules allow the researcher “to

justify the inclusion of each [data] card ... to provide a basis for later tests of replicability; and to render the category internally consistent” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 347).

Once data has been coded, categorized and codified, miscellaneous cards are reviewed and propositional statements examined. The latter are “roughly formed outcomes ... but are as yet unconnected to each other in meaningful ways” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 144). Some will stand alone; others will form “salient relationships and patterns” and they will collectively become “*outcome propositions*” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 144).

When is data analysis complete? Maykut and Morehouse (1994) provide theoretical and practical answers to this question. From a theoretical standpoint, analysis ceases when no new or relevant information is being uncovered. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as data redundancy. Theoretical saturation point has been reached and categories and relationships between categories are well supported (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). From a practical perspective, other restraints such as the conclusion of the academic year and exhausted financial and personnel resources also impact on data analysis.

3.4.6 Representation and reflexivity

The most important methodological tool in data analysis is the researcher. He or she must simultaneously be attuned to the experiences and meaning systems of others and cognisant of the impact that his or her own biases and preconceptions have on the interpretive process. Powney and Watts (1987) comment that “analysis is every bit as much an act of constructing interpretations as is the interview session itself, and the analyst will bring to it some interpretation of the data, if only by the process of selection” (p. 143). It is both an artistic and political exercise (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

Grundy, Pollon and McGinn’s (2003) research focuses on the accuracy of what is on the record. Like others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1998), they contend that “the more steps removed from the raw experience, the

more tenuous the researcher's account becomes" (p. 11). Wallace and Louden (2000) thus caution that the writing of narrative is a:

journey away from the data – what Latour (1987, p. 241) called 'a cascade of representation' – as we move from the experience itself, to representation as transcripts or field notes, to incorporation into an argument, and finally to creation of a text that submits to the rhetorical and theoretical structures of the field (p. 11).

Grundy, Pollon and McGinn (2003) concur with Kvale's (1996) view that transcriptionists should consider how participants would formulate answers in writing and suggest that the two roles should ideally be combined. They argue that a dual participant-transcriptionist role avoids the "alienation of detached participation" and preserves the integrity of the transcript. Faced with the prospect that "reflective noticing" might produce a significant disparity between the interview and transcript, Grundy, Pollon and McGinn (2003) are not unduly concerned. They conclude:

We would prefer to ... provide ample opportunities for participants to shape and reshape their responses to our interview questions. We are most interested in the meanings that participants ascribe to their life experiences and not the particular word choices that they provide in snapshot interview situations where they have not had the opportunities to fully reflect on their words (Grundy et al., 2003, p. 14).

Mauthner (2000) similarly supports the involvement of research participants in actively constructing and interpreting the social processes and social relations that constitute their lives. The development of text thus becomes a negotiated, dialectical and non-linear process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). While participants in this study will not act as transcriptionists, efforts will be made to ensure that the return of transcripts for participant comment and authorized release involves more than a cursory review.

Participant involvement in constructing and negotiating text increases the likelihood that they will find the results a true and authentic reflection of their own thoughts and experiences, and limits researcher imposition. Ethics also compels interviewers to act reflexively by acknowledging their conceptual orientation, declaring personal biases and coherently linking these to the study and its field material (Muecke, 1994).

Failure to do so exposes researchers to charges of dishonesty, of presuming to use the “God trick” and “paint the Other from nowhere” (Fine, 1994, p. 74).

Acknowledging researcher orientation is not sufficient. Researchers must ensure that the selection, summarizing and juxtaposition of data avoids the inherent danger that their voice deflects and drowns out the participants’ voices (Clifford, 1988; Geertz, 1973).

Reflexivity is an active ongoing process of critical reflection that saturates every stage of the research, including publication (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004).

Rohatynskyj and Jaarsma (2000) suggest that the relationship between the researcher and their audience is of equal significance to the relationship between the researcher and the community under study because “the writing of [research], its publishing, as well as the dissemination of the texts in the world are social acts that impinge on the social activities and identities of those implicated in these processes” (p. 3). Once published the narrative takes on a life of its own (Alasuutari, 1995).

Min-Zhan Lu (2004) develops this further when she suggests that not only researchers but also readers have an ethical responsibility to become more self-reflexive about the politics of representation. However, reader responsibilities lie outside the scope of this research.

3.5 Issues of quality

Wax (1991), cited in Maykut & Morehouse (1994), argues that researchers are not only capable of thinking and acting within the perspective of two quite different groups, but can at times “assume a mental position peripheral to both from which

they will be able to perceive and, hopefully, describe the relationships, systems and patterns of which an inextricably involved insider is not likely to be consciously aware” (p. 124). This partially addresses claims that interview research lacks objectivity. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Kvale (1996) distinguish between biased subjectivity and perspectival subjectivity, and contend that multiple interpretations transcend the subjective-objective dichotomy to add richness and strength to a discursive conception of truth.

Kvale (1996) further argues that verification of knowledge, in terms of its reliability, validity and generalizability, should be addressed throughout the entire seven-stage research process. Reliability refers to the consistency of research findings. During the interview, leading questions can be designed to repeatedly check the reliability of interviewee’s responses and verify interviewer interpretations. Kvale (1996) suggests that “contrary to popular opinion, leading questions do not always reduce the reliability of interviews, but may enhance it” (p. 158) and believes that the decisive issue is “not whether to lead or not to lead, but where the questions do lead, whether they lead in important directions that yield new and worthwhile knowledge” (p. 286). Transcriber reliability can be determined by a comparison of two transcripts of the same interview, and categorization by intersubjective agreement between two coders.

Validity determines whether an interview study investigates what is intended to be investigated and involves issues of truth. Richardson (1997, 2003) proposes that triangulation, the traditional method for establishing validity, be replaced by crystallization. She argues that the crystals “reflect externalities and refract within themselves ... what we see depends on our angle of repose” (2003, p. 517).

Richardson continues:

Crystallization, without losing structure, deconstructs the traditional idea of “validity” (we feel how there is no single truth, we see how texts validate themselves), and crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know (2003, p. 518).

Deconstruction of traditional research measures extends beyond triangulation and validity to include others borrowed from scientific research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that “trustworthiness” becomes the main criteria for quality and that the four components of trustworthiness: “credibility”, “transferability”, “dependability” and “confirmability” are in essence constructivist equivalents of external and internal validity, reliability and objectivity.

Regardless of the terminology used, postmodern validation becomes investigation: a continual checking, questioning, and theoretical interpretation of the findings:

The construction of knowledge is not completed by the interaction of the researchers and their subjects, but continues with the researchers’ interpretations and reporting of their interviews, to conversations with other researchers about their findings (Kvale, 1996, p. 296).

Small scale, qualitative research, such as this study, does not presume to suggest generalizations which can be applied from one data set to another. Holmwood (1996) condemns such an attempt as an example of “the fantasy of coherence,” an appeal to a world that is less messy and more rational than the postmodern one in which we find ourselves. This study fully concedes that the experiences reflected upon and knowledge gained can only be “approached as ‘partial’ in all senses: neither complete, fixed, disinterested, universal, nor neutral but instead situated, local, interested, material and historical” (Horner, 2004, p. 14).

We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are.
Anais Nin

CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Conversations with participants reveal a richness and diversity that naturally reflects different experience and worldviews. Their stories are situated in the challenge of appointing a new principal. While there are points of similarity, points of concurrence, only commonality of the task and the desire to perform this function well fully unite participants. Diversity in personal experience, in school profile and the community each BOT represents means that individual stories are uniquely local, material, interested and historical (Horner, 2004). Accordingly, this chapter seeks to tell each participant's story in their own words and the extensive use of quotations is deliberate. However, it is important to acknowledge that the gaze of the researcher and the demands of academic scholarship inevitably mean that these stories have been subjected to analysis. Mirroring the literature review, they are retold thematically, with excerpts juxtaposed in order to illustrate each proposition. While the research focus inevitably necessitates both selection and omission, care has been taken to preserve the essence of the story, to maintain fidelity to context and, above all, to respect the mana* of each participant.

4.2 "Mountains of stuff"

Given that BOT members are essentially well-intentioned and dedicated amateurs, it is perhaps unsurprising that their knowledge of academic research on the capabilities of highly effective principals is, at best, limited. Asked whether they were aware of the existence and scope of this research, initial participant responses were typically singular and in the negative: "No." Chris, surmising that there was probably "mountains of stuff," conceded that he and the BOT weren't familiar with any research and agreed that it would be useful if this were easily accessible in concise, plain English.

*mana – used in this context to mean person, position, integrity and dignity.

Consequently, perceptions of what constitutes a highly effective principal and the approaches taken to recruit and appoint a principal who is likely to be highly effective in the role are largely atheoretical. Some parallels exist with themes in the academic literature but opinions are primarily grounded in professional experience gained from non-education fields. They are further influenced by group deliberations as a BOT and commonly reliant upon input from consultants. A background in education does not necessarily guarantee familiarity with current research. In this study, two participants had an educational background: one had lectured at tertiary level; the other had extensive prior experience in secondary and tertiary teaching, as a BOT chairperson, a Limited Statutory Manager (LSM) and an educational consultant. However, only one professed to hold even a superficial knowledge of current research literature.

4.3 ‘Chief Executive’ or ‘Professional Leader’?

At the outset, participants were invited to articulate their thoughts on the core role of the principal. Despite operating from different perspectives in different contexts with different personnel, participants revealed considerable consensus of opinion. Chris envisioned the principal as a director whose prime function was to “manage the school, as in a company,” ensuring that “everything is running smoothly and functioning correctly.” Similarly, Blair perceived the principal as the “Chief Executive” whose core responsibility was to “provide leadership, implement the policies, drive the strategic vision of the Board, and manage the day-to-day running of the school.” Erin also adopted a business model, viewing the principal as the Chief Executive Officer responsible for initiating, planning and implementing best practices “that maximise the return which is, in this case, an education for the students who are involved.” Drew was the only participant to differ in her approach, perceiving that the principal’s core role was “to lead the staff in delivering learning that maximises student learning to those students.”

4.4 Leadership capabilities of the right person

Having articulated a broad philosophical foundation, participants discussed a range of leadership capabilities which they believed highly effective principals

demonstrate. They were quick to identify sharply honed intra- and interpersonal skills as hallmarks of highly effective principals, concurring with Day and others (2001) that these professionals are people-centred and values-led.

Drew perceived a passion for children and learning as the driving factor which would sustain principals in their educative mission:

It is such a difficult job that you couldn't sustain it if you didn't have a passion; a) for the children, b) for the staff, c) for the community in which you serve. But underpinning it all is giving the children a chance to excel in whatever strengths they have.

In her view, highly effective leaders would persistently “ensure that student achievement is at the forefront because ... schools are about learning and that should always be the number one focus and, you know, tattooed across people's foreheads indelibly that this is what schools are about.”

Blair echoed a holistic view of achievement which extended beyond academic performance to encompass extra-curricular involvement and social growth. She emphasised the importance of communication in “getting everybody on board as a team and ... the whole school running in the same direction.”

Successfully inviting and uniting others in the pursuit of common vision required not only the ability to communicate passion for learning but also an aspect of humility. Alex expressed this succinctly: “I like it that they don't know everything, or don't think they know everything.” Recognising that “an element of ego” was necessary for leaders “to be driven to achieve excellence,” Erin and Drew felt that in highly effective principals this would assume emotionally intelligent rather than egotistical dimensions. “Comfortable with themselves and ... personable to other people,” such principals would recognise and readily acknowledge their own shortcomings, appreciate that “they're but one part of a team” and publicly value and “embrace the strengths of others and not see that as a threat.”

Drew perceived humility as an important driver for the expression of honesty, trust, integrity and empathy. Implicit in humility was the recognition of human frailty which she believes compels moral and ethical action. This includes the ownership, disclosure and atonement for mistakes, along with the ability to “take it on the chin if you’ve done something wrong, because people are very disappointed when you make mistakes if you don’t take responsibility for them.” Emotional stance was thus perceived to be a fundamental capability of highly effective principals. Drew concluded: “I don’t think a good leader can be a good leader if they’re not a great person ... someone that people aspire to.”

4.4.1 Lead Learner and Learning Leader

The ability to inspire others requires a predisposition to learn and authenticity: consistency of thought, words and action. This notion has Aristotelian connotations: the more virtue is practiced, the more virtuous the person becomes. It also requires leaders to model appropriate behaviour and participants expected that highly effective principals would demonstrate passion for learning by making their own continuous learning transparent, leading professional learning for staff, and maintaining a regular presence in classrooms.

Erin was firm in his conviction that “the principal who becomes purely an administrator loses the ability to be an educator.” He believed that highly effective principals would, through a combination of observation, participation and teaching, “know not just what the government’s latest prescriptive methodology is, but ... how that works in a class.” Erin felt that failure to maintain pedagogical currency and connectedness with teachers would constitute “the first step on the road out.... And if they lose that, then they can be the best leader, the best manager, but they could be in anything....They don’t have to be in a school.”

Blair, Chris and Drew also mentioned instructional leadership and the ability to model effective pedagogy as important factors in establishing credibility as a highly effective principal. Drew expected highly effective principals to be “excellent classroom practitioners” and while she lamented the fact that “we take

our best teachers out of the classroom and put them in management,” she found it difficult to conceive of “a manager who is not a teacher.”

However, none of the participants expected the principal to be the font of all knowledge. Chris expressed the view that they could “walk the talk” by actively participating in staff training alongside their staff. They would recognise where expertise resided, both within and outside the organisation, and utilise this. Erin identified four advantages in doing so, perceiving this to be an exercise in humility which acknowledges limits to principal expertise, publicly recognises and encourages leadership from others, enhances team-building, and furthers the principal’s own professional learning.

While she concurred with Erin that highly effective principals are equally receptive to the ideas of others, Blair believed that continuous professional learning on the part of the principal often provided the catalyst for whole school improvement:

If you’ve got the commitment to drive yourself and do professional development, you’re going to be more open to new ideas and you’re then going to, I think, bring your whole teaching team in with their professional development. You’re going to be aware of opportunities, changes, new ideas in education.

Regardless of whether principals initiated and led professional learning or empowered “others to develop initiatives,” Drew perceived principal involvement to be a critical factor in determining the fate of new initiatives. In her view, these would “succeed or fail because of the support, initially, that the principal gives to those things.” This suggests that the positional power exercised by principals in prioritising and resourcing professional learning, and in modeling, encouraging, persuading and, where necessary, requiring staff to engage in professional inquiry should not be underestimated.

4.4.2 Managing change

Participants were consistently of the opinion that highly effective principals are extremely competent in guiding educational change. Establishing readiness and tempering the pace of change accordingly was seen to be fundamental to securing and consolidating gains. Participants believed that highly effective principals would take the time to establish relationships and ascertain where the school was at, before introducing change. Alex had “seen it happen in some schools where principals have come in and they’ve just changed the whole make-up of the school.” In her view a highly effective principal recognised the wisdom of introducing change gradually rather than dramatically, with due regard for the views of others: “An effective principal to me is one that takes into account what everybody else says and it’s not just about them and what they want.”

Drew highlighted the futility of mandating change without stakeholder consultation or support: “you can’t instruct a staff to do something, or to learn something unless they’re open to it. Like leading horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” She felt that principals who dictated the terms and direction of change would “have a difficult road to travel” unless they created an environment in which “people are open to change and to learning and to improv[ing] pedagogy and performance.”

In her view, highly effective principals would not only generate openness to change but also the “hunger and desire” for improvement. She suggested that hunger and desire could only emerge from shared ownership:

They’re [staff] the ones that will deliver on the vision, so if they’re not part of identifying the vision, it’s difficult to motivate them to deliver on it. So, it’s all about going back to ... what have we got and what do we really like about this place, what would we like to change, what would we like to retain, and what do we see as future aspirations? And those conversations have to be at every level in the staff.

Blair recognised that delivering on vision would not only require collective desire, but also the capacity for action. To determine this, highly effective principals

would spend their “bedding-in time” undertaking an assessment of the prevailing culture, observing, discussing and reflecting on questions such as “What’s the culture? Where are people at? Is it a team to start with?” She acknowledged that concerted team action would likely necessitate changes in the way people worked and interacted, and expected that highly effective principals would be team builders.

Erin related the development of professional norms to culture: “everything I think about a principal doing is all about behaviour and it’s behaviours that lead to culture.” In his view, “developing the right behaviours amongst staff” was a prerequisite for achieving school’s vision. Concurring with Schein (1985) that the prime task of leaders is to manage culture, Erin doubted that principals would perceive or articulate their role in these terms: “I think none of them would probably think they knew how to manage culture, or changes in culture.”

Changing school culture was perceived to be a challenging but not impossible task. Recognising that culture “encompasses the whole community that makes up the school” and was “there whether you do something or not,” Blair felt that it would take considerable expertise for a principal to impact on community, environmental and socio-economic influences outside their direct control and turn around a bad culture:

So, I don’t think culture can change without the support of others but, having said that, there’s examples of schools within this area that have had a not positive culture and they have been turned around by what I would say is exceptional principalship. And, obviously a core Board of Trustees and a community that was willing to change.

Having established a culture of change and the multiple partnerships necessary for this to proceed on a united front, highly effective principals would resist the temptation to “make all the changes in the first year,” demonstrate heightened sensitivity to the personal impact of change on staff, and protect them from innovation overload. Drew believed they would recognise that:

You can't actually do everything at the same time and it's a wise person that says we will concentrate on this and this and we'll make sure we succeed and then we'll bite off the next bit. They say that how you eat an elephant is one mouthful at a time. And I think, for some people, they have to swallow the whole animal.

4.4.3 Distributing leadership

Participants perceived distributed leadership to be an important factor in developing internal capacity and future leaders. Drew viewed teacher leadership as fundamental because every teacher has been “inspired to teach, which is to lead children.” In her view, each “little classroom is really a microcosm of a school environment. So, if it all comes from top-down, you're missing a whole lot of strength in leadership at every level.”

The exercise of collective leadership would potentially strengthen commitment to and hasten realization of school vision, cushion against positional overload, and provide the developmental experiences necessary to secure leadership deputisation, succession and sustainability.

While Erin conjectured that the strategic thinking required over the longer term might impose parameters on acting principalship, he viewed short-term deputizing as entirely feasible: “I think a highly effective principal would be able to walk out, or be taken away for surgery for three months, with someone stepping into an acting role and business as usual.” In the event, Blair was gratified to see that the school “continued to move forward and didn't just stand still. Decisions were made, the day to day business and operation of the school continued, teachers continued to do professional development in that time.”

Blair viewed the development of leadership capacity in others as an important legacy of highly effective principals and gave the “previous principal their due” in identifying others for leadership opportunities because “in a small school the opportunity to move up or have that experience is limited.” She distinguished

between task delegation and the exercise of leadership, arguing that the latter involved empowering people to “take responsibility and to make some decisions.”

Erin also acknowledged the work of past principals in fostering leadership ability within the staff and suggested that the school’s reputation for nurturing high calibre teachers was enhanced by the latter’s promotion to other schools. In his view, highly effective principals would be actively involved in succession planning and “not just succession planning for principals ... one of the indicators of success for [our school] would be to be seen as a training ground for really good principals, senior managers, team leaders, or whatever.”

4.4.4 Preparation for principalship

While they did not discriminate between informal and formal leadership development opportunities, participants recognised the value of on-the-job apprenticeships in grooming aspiring principals. Drew suggested that people “wanting to go that path” could be “attached ... to a senior leadership team or have an opportunity to be aware of things.”

Non-specific over the desirable length of apprenticeship, Drew discussed the potential pitfalls in aspiring to principalship too quickly:

I have seen quite a few uncooked principals, which is a real shame because, if they were a little bit more patient, or there were less expectations put upon them for leadership, they would ultimately turn out to be very fine leaders.

Reflecting that “uncooked” principals were likely to be men who escalated up the primary school career path more rapidly than their female counterparts, she spoke of the profound “damage to themselves, professionally and personally, and ... to their school” that resulted from inadequate preparation:

I have been quite astounded ... at people who have been in the profession two or three years applying for a principalship of a small, rural community. And that’s usually as a teaching principal as well, which is a huge task.

By implication, suitably prepared principals would bring to the position relevant practical experience and the theoretical, conceptual frameworks necessary to become highly effective. Contrary to ERO's view (1996, 1997, 2001) that BOTs should expect to appoint a principal who held a tertiary qualification in leadership and management, participants did not identify this as a critical success factor. When prompted, they agreed that such a qualification would be useful. Their views on formal training for principalship reflected the division that permeates the literature: division over whether leadership is innate or learned and division over how it can be best developed.

Drew was firmly of the opinion that aspects of leadership are innate: "Some of them can't be learned, even though this Monday's *Herald* business supplement* said that most things could be taught. I think there are some qualities of leadership that people either have or they don't have." Whilst conceding that certain skills and knowledge could be taught, she postulated that no amount of training could imbue principals with the qualities of integrity, rangimarie**, empathy and humility necessary for ethical, transformational leadership.

Erin similarly perceived that highly effective leaders possess intangible, innate qualities including an element of charisma: "I think what differentiates people who are leaders, good leaders and excellent leaders is innate and I think a lot of that comes down to personality." In his view, the "teaching of leadership ... works to a point" but can not guarantee progression from competence to excellence:

I think you can develop skills that make you a better leader, and I differentiate between better and good and excellent. So someone can be a poor leader and become a leader ... but the really good leaders, I think, are people who are intrinsically good leaders.... Some of them just have what it takes and they always will. Now, whether they maximise the benefit, or the potential return to themselves, that's part of the environment they choose to get into. But I definitely think that it's there.

* Drew refers to Levy, L. (2006). *Are leaders born or made?* The Business, New Zealand Herald, Monday 17 July, 2006, p. 23.

** rangimarie – used in this context to mean at peace with oneself.

Having concurred that it is possible for principals who possess requisite innate qualities and a predisposition to learn to develop excellence and refine their leadership practice, participants differed as to the best approach. Conscious that most first time principals faced a plethora of tasks for which they had little formal training, Alex, Blair, Chris and Drew agreed that a preparatory programme focusing on managerial aspects of the job would be beneficial. They suggested that finance, accounting, marketing, legal and compliance issues could form the basis of such a programme and alleviate pressure on first time principals to “learn on the hop once they’re into the job.” In Drew’s view, “the new principal’s course happens too late ... when you’re the duck on the water you have to know which direction you’ve got to paddle in. It’s no use having directions when you are afloat.”

Adopting the perspective articulated by critics of compulsory national qualifications in the United Kingdom (Cardno, 2003; Huberman & Miles, 1994; Macmillan, 2000; Martin & Robertson, 2003; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003), Erin felt that such a course would reinforce the perception of principals as “glorified administrators” and expressed strong reservations: “I would hate to see a course based on principalship that was about managing the budget, law, or dealing with disputes ... and missing the point of what a principal is, which is really the head educator.” He opposed a mandatory prerequisite qualification, believing that it would have “more downside to it than upside” because “a formal qualification tends to suit certain people just because you’ve got some letters that say you’ve got a Bachelor of Principalship, or whatever, doesn’t actually mean you’ll be a good principal.”

Deeply suspicious that compulsory courses could potentially generate administrators rather than educational leaders, Erin expressed qualified approval for courses emphasising interpersonal and strategic skills, change management, innovation and leadership. He recognised the challenges that competing tensions and multiple contexts would present course designers and didn’t envy them the task because:

it would be difficult to get it ... balanced enough, so that it’s a true indicator of people having attained a standard that is necessary to be a

principal ... if you couple that with the fact that all schools are different, it's a tall order.

A course based on “people management rather than technicality” would, in his view, require a strong component of vicarious learning: “having already said that leadership's intrinsically hard to teach ... it would definitely need to be something that was practically focused and not bookwork ... case studies, role scenarios, role plays, all those sorts of things.” Systematic, structured reflection would provide aspiring principals with unique opportunities to articulate leadership philosophies, develop conceptual frameworks, and critically examine current orthodoxies (Restine, 1997; Southworth, 1995).

Echoing the need for a strong practical team-based component which would allow people to “role play and do group things and analyse and reflect on their practice”, Drew alluded to the critical role of facilitators in programme design and delivery: “And they will be as good as the people who lead them.” Asked how interpersonal dynamics and leadership aspects could be incorporated into a national qualification, Blair suggested a practicum approach whereby “you actually do go into schools and do a placement and have that experience, or have an acting position for some time.”

Acknowledging the paucity of direct preparation for the role and the potential benefits of systematic leadership development, Erin remained sceptical about causal links between formal training and highly effective principalship:

Now, I don't know what the research out of the US and UK says, as to whether schools that have got, and you'd have to be looking backwards I suppose, schools that are now employing registered principals ... versus schools that didn't, whether they performed any better? And I think you'd still come back to the fact that those schools that perform really well have good principals, whether they are trained or not, and they were good principals for all the things I alluded to: that they were good with people, they act strategic, they're able to implement change without causing disruption. Now, how do you teach that?

4.5 Highly effective principals versus capable performers

Having identified a range of capabilities common to highly effective principals, participants were asked to distinguish between these principals and capable performers, and to consider which of the leadership capabilities, if any, held the key to performance excellence. Interestingly, with one exception, responses tended to focus on individual capabilities rather than a holistic interplay of them all.

In Alex's view, ongoing professional learning and a desire for change distinguishes highly effective principals: "I like it that they like change. I like it that they like to learn. I like it that they don't know everything, or they don't think they know everything." She felt that these characteristics would not be as evident in capable performers and that a preference for the status quo would prevail:

And they'd be kind of stagnant and you can see that in some people. That they're happy to go there and just cruise.... But we're not on a cruise, we're on an [upward growth curve] and we looked for that in our Principal.

For Blair, a willingness to confront problems rather than suffer the paralysis of inaction was the decisive factor. Rather than hope it goes away, a highly effective principal "is going to consider it carefully and then, even if it's not a pleasant situation, is going to make that decision to deal with it."

Chris leaned towards an authoritarian, transactional leadership style. In his view, a highly effective principal would keep "a very tight rein on the disciplinary side", and be more knowledgeable in staff training, finances and the running of the school, than a capable performer.

Drew similarly stressed the importance of knowledge, but placed greater emphasis on pedagogical knowledge and a transformational leadership style:

they have to be educationally sound, for a start.... I think they have to have a sound knowledge of teaching. I think they have to be excellent classroom practitioners. I don't go to the fact that you can have a manager who is not a teacher.

In her opinion, “a great leader gives out a passion and energises other people” in ensuring that “real focus of teaching and learning and achieving” remains at the forefront.”

Erin concurred with Drew that the ability to invite and unite others in a common vision distinguishes highly effective principals. “I think it comes down to ... the vision and influence style. If you have a vision and you are able to influence and get it done satisfactorily, in a reasonable time-frame, and get buy-in and everyone comes along.”

In his view, capable performers would manage the status quo effectively, rather than exercise the drive necessary to lead the school in new directions:

They accept mediocrity in themselves. I’m not saying in the school, because they might be managing a really high performing school, but they’re happy with that. They are not looking beyond the here and now. They aren’t looking for that next vision and they aren’t willing to take that next risky kind of step to go to the next level.

A preference for the “comfort zone” and preparedness to “take the hit” would inevitably cause the performance of capable performers to plateau and decline.

By contrast, highly effective principals not only possess the courage to take the next risky step, but the personal practical knowledge (PPK) necessary to do so successfully. Erin defined personal practical knowledge as the “intangible” ability to “assimilate and then put out in action something that other people haven’t been able to do with the same input.” He continued:

Yes, you need a degree in education, or the equivalent. Yes, you need experience in teaching. Yes, you need certain characteristics around interpersonal skills. Yes, you need a certain level of intelligence so that you can assimilate all the information that you have to assimilate but, at the end of the day, it’s personal practical knowledge. It’s that intangible that you can’t define which differentiates you from a whole range of other people.

Erin adapted and annotated a sigmoid curve to illustrate the difference (Figure Two).

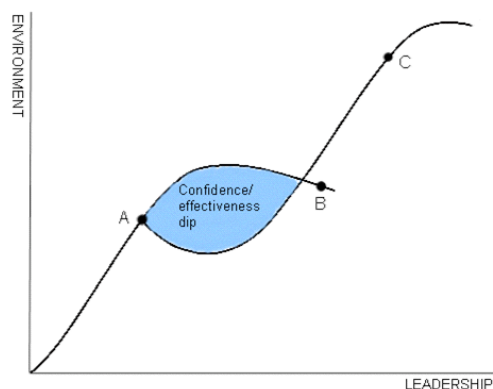


Figure Two: PPK in action (Transcript 5).

Accumulated over time, personal practical knowledge enables highly effective principals to manage change successfully, to recognise the need for and analyse the potential benefits and costs of change (Point A), to negotiate uncertainty and the implementation dip (shaded section) and to achieve progress in the form of improved educational outcomes (Point C). As Erin expressed it:

Point A is critical because the PPK gives them [principal] the ability for the timing, the analysis, and the chance of success. Previous successful experience forms the basis of future intuitive action: “If I’ve done it before, then I rate myself to do it again.” And so the ability to implement that, that really comes down to the leadership thing. And if you’ve demonstrated leadership in doing it before, you rate your chances as high, you know how to analyse the cost and benefit, and you know when the right time is.

4.6 Contextual specificity

Whilst Erin expressed the view that personal practical knowledge enabled leadership excellence, he felt there were “horses for courses” and limits to portability from one context to another. Leadership knowledge and skills including technical mastery of standards and statutes, strong inter-personal skills, adaptability and the “ability to read signs” would easily transfer from one context to another, but different contexts would place new constraints on principals and potentially limit their performance: “I think, in all honesty, from my limited

experience ... [that] some people are really good at leading a highly functional organisation and some people are really good at leading change.” The mismatch of leadership skills and context would mean that a struggling school “with a massively strong leader who was good at managing the status quo ... [would] continue to struggle because they’re good at managing what they’ve got.”

Inherent in the concept of mismatch is the contention that aspects of leadership behaviour are hard-wired:

It’s very hard to learn a different personality and I think it’s very hard to work in an environment where you are challenged and act differently to what your intrinsic behavioural patterns would be. So I think, if you are someone who has a set way of doing something and you’ve been taught to do it differently, when push comes to shove and the pressure comes on, you revert to type.

Over time, Erin thought it natural that the principal might outgrow the school or the school outgrow them and believed that “more principals ought to realise what their strengths are and become portable and look for opportunities where their skills are best suited.” He felt that honest and regular reflection “on their leadership style and what makes them function as a leader” would allow principals to become “conscious when they’ve served their purpose” and prompt the most astute among them to seek new challenges:

Really good leaders, leaders who understand themselves ... spend a lot of their time struggling and learning how to adapt to their new environment and, as soon as they feel they’ve achieved their outcome, they pick a new position that offers the new challenge.

Blair suggested that these principals would exercise discrimination in selecting new challenges, that they would “be able to look at a school and think, ‘I’m not the person for that job’ and make that call too.” She raised the issue of sustainability, pondering whether highly effective people lose the edge and revert to capable performers over time: “Was our previous principal a highly effective person when they joined the team, and when you’ve been there 10 years you get a

bit stale?” Surmising that principals would not universally initiate their own career rejuvenation, and acknowledging that this would require contractual change, Blair supported fixed term contracts because “there’s some really productive years and I think, after that, you actually need to have a change and be refreshed. It would be really neat in this country if we had ... a turnover of principals.”

Drew similarly perceived that changing context – movement from a struggling to rebuilding to consolidation phase – would pose challenges for leadership: “after you’ve moved through that stage, it’s interesting whether the principal is ready to move on or not, or to change their style, which is very difficult and that’s often when some of the tensions arise.”

4.7 From theory to practice

Universally motivated by altruism and the desire to serve their schools well, participants echoed the view expressed in official documents (Education Review Office, 2001; New Zealand School Trustees’ Association, 2004, 2005a) that the appointment of a principal was the most important task that any BOT would be expected to undertake.

While they were mindful of the burden of responsibility placed upon them, they also considered it a privilege. For Alex, it meant an opportunity to shape the primary school environment that her five year old was entering: “he’s just starting at school, and here I was having a say in who was going to be the principal, who was going to be the role model for my son and I felt really good.” Blair reflected that whilst devolution to self-managing schools increased pressure on BOTs, it allowed those most closely affected by the outcome the opportunity to select the applicant that “best fit[s] our school and what we’re wanting to change and develop.” On balance, she reflected that Tomorrow’s Schools reforms were a positive step towards ensuring cultural match between principal and community:

Isn’t it nice though, that we can actually chose our own principals? Yeah, what a privilege, so I’ll give them a big tick for that. It’s a huge responsibility but, at the end of the day, if your Board’s up to it, could [make] a real difference.”

4.8 Confidence and competence

Being “up to it” requires confidence and competence. Participants generally expressed confidence in their ability to appoint a principal, either individually or collectively as a Board. Levels of confidence were generated by personal experience and by the composition of BOTs. Drew brought with her an extensive educational background and had been involved in the appointment of around 10 principals, Blair and Erin had experience in business recruitment and selection, and Chris had appointed a principal previously.

For Alex, the appointment process was entirely new and she felt the weight of responsibility vested in the Board Chairperson:

In appointing the principal, you don't realise 'til you're doing it how much of a big ask it is ... and how the decision rests on you, more or less. You're doing it and you think, 'Oh gosh ... if I've okayed the wrong person, then it's all on me.'

In her opinion, confidence levels would vary according to experience: “If the Board Chair is an academic person, a lawyer or something, maybe they've got the confidence to just know what they're doing and go ahead and do it.”

Blair's experience in recruiting, interviewing and appointing a number of staff in her own workplace provided a solid foundation in employment processes. However, she was quick to acknowledge a lack of expertise in determining professional leadership requirements:

I thought, well, I'm not new to interviewing. It's the education side of it and it's the academic side that's hardest for the Board to get its head around, and to know what to ask. And I guess that's where the composition of your Board's important.

Like Blair, Erin was acutely aware of the strengths and shortfalls in the Board's expertise: “school boards are unique in the fact that they almost always have no-one who has any educational skill.” Reflecting on his own Board, Erin commented:

They're all very skilled people in their area and, as a team, it's a great Board. It's unique. You wouldn't believe how well the skill base on the Board matches up with the areas, the requirements of the school. But we don't know the first thing about being an educator.... We're scientists and engineers and nurses and accountants and IT people. So, it's a different language in some cases.

Differentiating between the appointment of chief executives in a business environment and principals in an education environment, Erin recognised that BOTs often lacked the competence to discern highly effective leadership potential and discriminate between applicants:

In this case, I know what the job needs to do in terms of the outcome, but I don't know about the skill level or the capability, or that sort of thing. So I'm not employing someone in an area that I'm, myself, competent in. So I think that's the key difference.

Aware that this lack of competence exposed BOTs to candidates who presented well but lacked the necessary credentials, Erin's Board concluded that they were "qualified enough, given the right guidance, to pick the right person."

4.9 Finding the right guidance

Participants employed two strategies to secure the 'right guidance': they perceived that appointing a staff representative to the appointment committee simultaneously brought an educational perspective (although not necessarily an academic or leadership one) to the process and satisfied good employer requirements; and they enlisted the services of professional advisors.

Alex, Blair and Erin appointed consultant principals to advise the Board on process and professional matters. Drew, by virtue of her professional practice acted in this capacity. Only Chris decided to proceed without specialist assistance. While he acknowledged that new, inexperienced Boards would find that "outside help is definitely very welcome," Chris believed the cost to be prohibitive. His Board "couldn't see the reasoning for spending the amount of money it was going to cost" and concluded that "relatively, that we were capable as a Board to do it."

Alex, Blair and Erin elicited information about consulting principals from NZSTA and word-of-mouth informal networks. Alex acted on advice from the outgoing principal:

I'd spoken to the principal that was leaving and she gave me a couple of names and I rang those people and they had wives that would apply for this position. And they gave me names, so it was like down the line. And then the guy that I chose, we'd done a bit of board training with, so it wasn't like he was a stranger and we all got on well with him. So, we were quite lucky that he was at the end of our list and he was available. I'd probably take him on board again if I had to do it again.

After holding preliminary discussions with the Board and staff, and canvassing the school community, Blair phoned NZSTA and sought guidance. The rationale for taking this action was that they didn't "want to get this wrong." Despite possessing considerable management, HR and recruitment skills, "we didn't feel, apart from our staff rep, that we were as well informed on the academic side or the educational experience that we should be asking the questions."

In selecting an advisor, participants relied on rapport, trust and gut instinct rather than attempt an assessment of the advisors' concrete specialist knowledge. Erin felt that their advisor "was knowledgeable, spoke in terms that we could understand, didn't try and flannel us, didn't try and sell himself." He conceded that "we could have been snowed," but "we felt we could trust him ... we felt comfortable, so we did appoint that person."

Erin's Board perceived some advantage in using a local advisor because they anticipated that applicants would likely come from within the region and considered that a local specialist would possess personal and professional knowledge which might assist the Board in identifying potential risk:

We had no knowledge of people in the space, so we wouldn't be able to look down the list and say, 'Oh, he's applied for every principalship in the country and he's been kicked out of three.' And they wouldn't feature in your CV and so you can do due diligence and you can ring up and take

references but, at the end of the day, if someone wants to get past your defences, they can.

4.10 Advisor qualifications

Without exception, the advisors selected to assist participants' Boards of Trustees were past or present principals. In Alex's opinion, the advisor had been principal of a school "very much like ours, very much" and this created a natural affinity between the two parties:

So we knew. And then he'd come and talk about the community from that school and it was so much like us that we had the feeling that he kind of knew what we were looking for and his advice was very helpful.

Blair received from NZSTA "two or three choices of local existing principals, their backgrounds, where they were working, what their experience was and the sorts of skills they could bring to our party. So ... we went from there." Erin was similarly confident that their advisor was suitably qualified: "I'm sure this person had been a principal. I'm sure this person had been a school inspector and had managed a number of appointment processes, so was experienced in what we wanted, but was also an experienced educator."

Only Drew expressed reservations about using a neighbouring principal. While supportive of advisors in general, she was conscious that the smallness of New Zealand could potentially compromise confidentiality and jeopardise the camaraderie between schools. Drew's perception that only an "outstanding principal ... would be able to release themselves of their own perspectives and their own school, and put themselves in the shoes of another school and another Board" led her to suggest that neighbouring principals should perhaps be considered a last resort.

Aware that many retired principals are actively engaged in consultancy work, Drew laughed: "And I don't know why I should laugh.... I think an effective principal is someone that almost walks on water because the demands are so

great.” While she didn’t discount their skills, she had reservations about their ability to apply these in different contexts. Drew was similarly wary of employment consultants:

I’m not big on people who have no relationship with the school managing a process, because I think it becomes very clinical. Having said that, I’m shooting myself in the foot because that’s one of the main planks of what I do. But, I think if you let it go without any relationship with whoever is helping you, or giving that out completely, their main focus is on making an appointment and your main focus should be on making the right appointment.

4.11 Person Specification: continuity versus change

In an endeavour to make the right appointment, BOTs brought considerable contextual knowledge to the appointment process and attempted to ensure representative input on the selection panel.

Alex believed that the special nature of the school - “our school is not a standard school” - precluded the appointment of a first time principal and her BOT hoped to appoint an experienced principal:

I know all principals have to start off, but I would find it really hard to employ one that came and this was the first school they came to. We’ve got so many social factors that I think it would be really hard.

Ironically, these schools are arguably less likely to attract highly experienced principals unless they are inspired by a social justice agenda or desire to return to their roots.

Alex felt that their collective decision-making on the capabilities that the successful applicant would require came from the heart: “we have an aroha* here and it’s important to us.” The resulting Person Specification amalgamated the

*aroha – used in this context to mean special love and caring.

diverse opinions of an ICT expert and two lead teachers who provided the academic “mental know how” and the full BOT whom Alex described as “mums” rather than “intellectuals.” They soon reached consensus over content but took longer to determine weightings. Alex believed relationships and communication skills to be key, while others “thought that professional leadership was more important. And we had someone else that thought the management was more important. Then we had another one that said it was curriculum knowledge.” While differences in emphasis meant that it was not a carbon copy of the document used by the previous BOT in appointing their principal, satisfaction with the principal appointed by her predecessor led Alex to use the original as a template and “modernize it more to what we wanted.”

Chris also utilised documents and ideas from previous appointments, but expressed a preference for appointing a first time principal. He perceived that this would enable the BOT to ensure continuity and retain greater control over the direction of school. In his view, experienced principal applicants were more likely to “come in with a broom and clean sweep everything, change everything to what they wanted and we didn’t want that. We voted for the aspect of us educating or training the principal to suit us.”

The continuity/change dilemma also featured in Blair’s deliberations. While her BOT had no wish to “change the core values of the school,” they suspected that a conservative “Steady Eddie” leadership approach meant that “we were probably cruising on our good reputation ... [and] we felt we could be doing better than we were.”

By contrast, Erin’s school had experienced two years of “huge change: staffing, structure, teaching methodology, analysis, performance measuring. All those things had been rigorously worked over for the better and because it was necessary.” Recognising that this had had an enormous impact on staff, the BOT were particularly mindful of the need to pause and review progress:

And so the Board really did need to look at the school as a whole and say, “What sort of principal do we want? We’ve just made a whole lot of changes. Do we want a principal who is going to come in and change it all

again, or do we want a principal who will come in and pick up what they've got, run with it for a while, analyse how its working, reflect on that, change anything that needs to be changed and then implement that?"

In considering the human impact of change on staff and students, Erin's Board recognised that "there were people bedding into new processes" and that the evidence supporting improved learning outcomes would take time to accumulate:

I don't think the educational standards had slipped at all, but I think the kids really were in a position, at that school, to run with what was there for a period of time and see how it all panned out. And I'm not saying everybody thought it was perfect, but we didn't have enough information to say whether it wasn't either.

They consequently concluded that a period of consolidation was desirable and rather than appoint another "change agent," they looked for someone "who was able to bring stability to what was the end of a period of turmoil. And turmoil's a strong word, but you know what I mean."

Drew summarised the importance of contextual knowledge. In her view it was critical that the Person Specification and Job Description emerged from grass roots discussion and were "written by members of that team [BOT] to really reflect the culture and essence of that school" at that "particular time, because some schools are in a rebuilding phase, and other schools are in a consolidating phase, and some are just in an absolutely struggling stage."

4.12 Internal prejudices?

In an effort to establish internal validity and identify unofficial discourses, participants were asked to comment on the critical success factors that would enable them to distinguish between two hypothetically equal applicants. Alex and Blair's responses were coloured by actual experience. For Alex, the deciding factor was "the social side of things." Her board arranged a conference call with each candidate, presented them with two scenarios based on real incidents that had

happened at school (one involving parent conflict, the other “child-based”) and “went by those answers.”

Blair echoed Drew’s comment that different schools attract applicants of different calibre. Because the school enjoyed a good reputation in the community, they were “inundated with really exceptional people applying for the position” and Blair felt that “most of the ones that were short-listed would have been quite capable of being a very good principal. It got down to two people and it was a very hard decision because they both were very, very good candidates.”

Confronted with the dilemma of having to choose between them and wanting to appoint the candidate who would best fit the culture of the school, Blair’s Board arranged psychometric testing.

To her amusement but not total surprise, the results were inconclusive: “both candidates came out almost exactly the same.” On this occasion, the only benefit of psychometric testing was that it provided some insight into “how to actually support that principal once they were in the position.” In the end, “it came back to best fit for our school” and potential tenure factored into this. Blair wanted to avoid “the risk of a younger person using our school as a very quick stepping stone.” She reflected that many of the acting male principals in the senior syndicate tended to be appointed to a principalship in another school within two years. While it was great that the school attracted “really good people who are dynamic and looking for career expansion,” it also meant additional upheaval. Blair believed that “in a principal, you’re wanting somebody for a little bit longer than that. Ideally, I think you’re looking for five years rather than two.... So that probably factored into it a little bit.”

Chris’s board similarly hoped to avoid “a two-year flick around” and appoint someone who was likely to remain in the position for five years. Faced with two potentially excellent applicants, Chris admitted that age and gender impacted on decision making. In his view, younger applicants tended to be more exuberant in expressing “passion with what they’re doing,” were more likely to possess “a clearer vision of where they’re going,” and expected career advancement within a shorter timeframe. However, he acknowledged the need to reconcile the

youth/experience and tenure dilemmas and had “opted for an older candidate” when appointing the previous principal.

Chris believed male principals to be the most effective disciplinarians. In his view, they would impart to students a greater sense of impending trouble for behaviour transgressions and he perceived a need for a “father figure or authority amongst the children.”

Erin adopted the contrary view that lack of day-to-day interaction with the principal minimised “the strong male leadership thing” and was emphatic that gender would not form part of the unofficial selection criteria. While acknowledging societal need for strong male role models, he believed it was “unfair on schools to be expected to provide that” and was conscious of staff as well as student need:

I certainly don’t perceive that as being an important thing for staff. I think staff would much prefer to have someone who is a good leader, someone they could turn to, someone they could confide in, someone they could go to for support, go to for help, guidance, all those things. So it’s more important that they’re approachable actually, than it is that they’re tall, dark and handsome ... and male.

In the event that two applicants were “as close as you say and you can’t separate them on any of the selection criteria which you’ve chosen” Erin considered it important to assess staff feelings because they would have daily contact with the principal: “Boards of Trustees are there for three years. They meet them [principal] once a month in their term of reference, how much can go wrong? Don’t ask the Board of Trustees at [name of school] that, but you know what I mean!”

Should staff indicate that they would happily work with either applicant, Erin believed that it would come down to gut feel: “at the end of the day, if we really can’t decide, it’s intrinsically how do we feel about it? It’s our PPK of what this person brings.” Erin’s personal practical knowledge inclined him towards the

“person who has the most potential to rock” rather than the one whom he most wanted to work with. In his experience, this was often the least experienced candidate because:

they’re probably the person who is easiest to motivate and to get really pumping ... it often pans out as the youngest, but I think that’s just a case that people who are hungry to go somewhere and have got there in a short space of time, they’re probably the person who is going to get in and do the best job for you.

Aware that “it’s no use imposing your view on that community and then moving away because they’re the ones that will be continuing on with it,” Drew emphasised rigorous process, “really good conversations” around selection criteria, and a second interview. Drawing on the findings of American researcher Richard Chait (Chait, Holland, & Taylor, 1991; Chait, Ryan, & Taylor, 2005), she observed that the quality of the relationship between the Board Chairperson and principal was critical: “they actually have to like each other. They have to have a healthy respect and they [researchers] talk about chemistry.” All other things being equal, Drew favoured the applicant most likely to generate chemistry, the person whom she “found most engaging” and “most keen to work with” because “teaching is such an intense thing ... that at times it’s sometimes just goodwill that gets you through.” However, she felt that this scenario would be rare in reality:

It usually seems to me that the best person for the job picks themselves. It’s not often that you get division. If your process is really sound and ... coming from exactly where the school is at and what the school needs, and what the aspirations of the board and the school community are, if all of those things are bundled up in the right way, you will get what you need.

4.13 What needs to be done?

While they were arguably no better informed on how to select the right person for the job, participants made a number of recommendations which they believed would benefit future boards. These included streamlined access to principal

appointment advice and guidance documents, and the provision of physical support in the form of training, advisors and funding.

Alex commented that she received a letter in the mail advising the Board of the support available should they decide to appoint a first time principal but was unaware of advice and guidance documents until a handbook arrived after the process was concluded. Unaware of the enormity of the task when she began, Alex felt that the government should provide more support for Board Chairs and favoured the involvement of consultants.

Discovering that the section on principal appointment was missing from the Trustee Handbook, Blair searched the Ministry of Education (MOE) and NZSTA websites. While she was successful in accessing online support, she found the exercise both time consuming and less than straightforward. This led her to recommend summary guidance which would alert BOTs to the location of detailed information, eliminate the time required for them to solicit it themselves, and minimise the likelihood of them overlooking it altogether.

Blair also believed that consultant principals and/or specialist educational advisors would contribute a valuable external perspective but did not specify whether this should become mandatory practice. Nor did Drew, although she did suggest that the financial outlay for external expertise was “not very much money when you’re considering the alternatives,” particularly the long-term costs of appointing the wrong person.

Erin was “not a great believer in compulsion” and suggested that more could be achieved through “training Boards of Trustees more on principal appointment.” Despite the appointment of a principal being “probably the single most important thing a Board of Trustees gets to do,” he had yet to see any comprehensive training offered. Whilst “quite good guidelines” existed on the NZSTA and MOE websites, and the topic of principal appointment had been touched upon during NZSTA training courses for Boards of Trustees, “it certainly wasn’t in-depth analysis” and the superficial nature of coverage led him to conclude that “there’s no training, really.” Rather than making schools use a consultant, Erin favoured

training which would develop the analytical capacity of the Board and assist it in “defining the state of the school.”

The next chapter analyzes research findings and attempts to define the state of participant knowledge in light of the literature.

CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

Motivated by a magnanimous desire to serve their children and those in their community, trustees are aware of the enormity of the task and the burden of responsibility that appointing a principal brings. As Drew remarked, “nowhere else in New Zealand [do] people give their time so freely and are held so vitally accountable.” Trustees are essentially “good people behaving well ... taking care to appoint honourable and competent personnel, and then trusting them to get on with the job” (Hazeldine, 1998, p. 205).

However, this care is exercised within parameters determined by the varying expertise that trustees bring with them when elected or seconded to BOTs and the variform advice of those they consult to fill perceived shortfalls in knowledge and experience. Consequently, not only are some schools better able to attract highly effective principals but some BOTs are better positioned to identify and appoint them.

5.2 Echoing the literature

While transcripts revealed variance in the breadth and depth of understanding surrounding the capabilities of highly effective principals, several common threads indicated a degree of resonance with aspects of the literature. As has been stated previously, correlation between the participant’s “folk theories” (Bruner, 1996) and academic perspectives is largely coincidental and superficial. There are frequent glimpses of theoretical insight but they often appear to lack coherence and rigour. Nonetheless, participant views on the natural, intuitive, and capacity building practice of highly effective principals are well supported in the literature.

5.2.1 Predisposition to lead

Participants were united in their belief that highly effective principals are born leaders who possess innate moral, ethical and relational qualities. Democratic

values, a predisposition towards learning, the charisma and humility necessary to engage others and the courage to lead schools in a turbulent educational environment were perceived to form an essential and intrinsic foundation for leadership.

Participants echoed the view that formal and informal opportunities for ongoing professional dialogue and leadership development could enhance but not instill these qualities. Whilst they concurred that principals could acquire technical professional knowledge and develop the skills necessary for sound management, participants doubted that any amount of reflection or training would imbue leaders with the ability to inspire others. Authenticity was thus perceived to be a distinguishing characteristic of highly effective principals.

5.2.2 Intuitive practice

Participants endorsed the contention that highly effective principals act intuitively in circumstances that typically preclude the luxury of lengthy deliberation. Experiential lessons internalised over time would enable them to recognise and proactively resolve difficult or unpleasant situations, therefore avoiding a reactionary crisis management approach. Guided by intuition, highly effective principals rapidly evaluate different situations, mediate human reactions, anticipate and ameliorate potential difficulties and “skate to where the puck is going, not where it is” (Fink, 2005, p. 90).

Perceptiveness to the environment includes not only the ability to read and respond to context but also the ability to recognise and analyse their locus in that. Participants suggested that highly effective principals are discriminating professionals who sense when to divest themselves of leadership in one school and take on new challenges in another. While Blair and Erin’s conception of time parameters receives little attention in the literature, it is embodied in “divestiture,” the fourth stage of Gronn’s (1999) career cycle. Both participants agreed that divestiture would occur through the considered, timely and sometimes courageous resolve to leave a school, rather than by default. Highly effective principals would recognise when they had served their purpose and refuse to countenance the

complacency, stagnation and decline sometimes evident in the performance of long-serving tenured colleagues, preferring instead to cross the boundaries from “supportive communities of practice to organisations in which they will remain on the periphery for uncomfortable periods of time” (Fink, 2005, p. 152).

5.2.3 Capacity builders

The ability of highly effective principals to build long-term personal capacity in teachers formed a recurring thread rather than a discussion topic in itself. It permeated views on succession planning and leadership sustainability, and was consistently identified as the most important legacy a highly effective principal could leave a school. While participants did not automatically perceive enhanced personal capacity as a precursor to organisational capacity and a catalyst for changed educational contexts (Fullan, 2005; Fullan et al., 2006), Blair alluded to the importance of team thought and action in achieving school goals and Drew emphasised the power of groups for professional thinking. Implicit in this is the contention that professional dialogue enables individuals to experience more rapid personal growth and the group to discover insights not attainable individually (Senge, 1990).

Gronn (2003) thus argues that recent theories of organisational learning have rendered the individual hero paradigm obsolete, replacing it with a distributed leadership paradigm which emphasises multiple forms of leadership within communities of practice (Wenger, 1999) or professional learning communities (Bolam et al., 1993; Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; Dimmock, 2000; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour et al., 2005; Fullan, 2005; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Hargreaves, 2003; Hord, 2004; Huffman & Hipp, 2003; Schmoker, 2004; Senge et al., 2000; Stoll et al., 2003). In observing that heroic leadership does not resonate well with work intensification in self-managing schools, Grace (1995) provides a pragmatic and even more compelling reason to abandon the heroic leadership model for “leadership teams, and a range of alternative distributed leadership synergies” (Gronn, 2003, p. 18). Equally mindful of the relentless and limitless nature of principal workloads, participants articulated a similar rationale to Grace (1995).

5.3 Conceptual framework

By their own admission, participants are largely unacquainted with the academic literature and consequently oblivious to the implications on a conceptual and practical level. They are poorly positioned to recognise and evaluate the usefulness of the dominant paradigm through which they view the general role of governance and the specific responsibility for employing a new principal. Lack of an overt conceptual framework prevents them from exposing the discourses underlying current policy, from interpreting new educational agendas as being compatible with or contrary to their preferred paradigm, and from rationalizing the latter against competing paradigms.

Failure to consider the appropriateness of various educational philosophies increases susceptibility to political interference and the risk that school trustees become “mere instruments for fostering a technical intelligentsia, instilling the current ideology as the desirable order, and giving effect to government policy” (Johnson, 1994, p. 15). While Johnson’s comments were confined to training providers, it could be argued that this danger applies equally to those who appoint their graduates and other applicants to principalships.

Absence of an espoused paradigm does not preclude one operating. The transcripts suggest that participants were heavily influenced by popular discourses, particularly managerialism and competitive market economics. This was evident in the dominant perception of the principal as chief executive, the emphasis on resource management (physical and human), legislative compliance and external accountability, and the content of the most preferred training model. Consequently, most participants tended to focus on a selection of generic lower order technical, human and professional knowledge/skills (Scott, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1984) derived from the professional standards (Ministry of Education 1998a, 1998b) and adopt the “list logic” that Barth (1990) cautions against.

Little consideration was given to higher order cultural and symbolic leadership forces and participants appeared largely unaware of the vital role played by highly

effective principals in creating, maintaining and sustaining a culture of continuous individual and organisational learning. While they willingly responded to a subsidiary question concerning Schein's (1985) view on culture and leadership, participants did not initiate the topic prior to this and experienced some difficulty both in articulating links between the two concepts and in establishing connections with professional capabilities. They made disjointed references to the importance of identifying prevailing cultural norms and creating an environment in which people were receptive to change, and identified some of the strategies that highly effective principals would employ to "manage culture and changes in culture," but did not individually or collectively conceptualise the role in these terms.

Similarly, participants highlighted aspects of moral and relational leadership and recognised individual capabilities of highly effective principals including lead learner and instructional leader, but remained essentially oblivious to the holistic and contextually specific nature of highly effective leadership. While Erin's view of personal practical knowledge closely approximates West-Burnham's (2001) conception of interpersonal intelligence, Davies and Davies' (2005) "contextual wisdom," Scott's (2003) "diagnostic maps" and Bourdieu's (1990) "principal habitus" and "feel for the game," sensitivity to context would, in his view, be consistently displayed in similar circumstances and the existence of "horses for courses" would impose limits to its portability. By contrast, the literature suggests that highly effective principals possess the capabilities to exercise focused flexibility in multiple contexts and race on a variety of courses.

5.4 Silences

If discussion reveals and silence conceals, the reverse is also true. In interpreting research findings it is important to acknowledge that meaning resides equally in silences and disclosures. The transcripts in this study contain several poignant silences that cumulatively reinforce the impression of a managerial approach to principal appointments. These include learning-centred leadership and

professional learning community, social justice, a futures perspective, systems design and synergy, and risk-taking.

5.4.1 Professional Learning Community

Although Drew perceived that the principal's core role was to "lead the staff in delivering learning that maximises student learning to those students," participants did not articulate their understandings of learning centred leadership and professional learning community in a coherent manner. Nor did they seem cognisant of its potential importance in securing educational breakthrough (Fullan et al., 2006). While a learning and results orientation permeated their thoughts, participants tended to frame their thinking in terms of external rather than internal accountability, individual rather than collective practice, and overlook the role of highly effective leaders in establishing collaborative practice.

Highlighting the need for teaching to be informed by "data results" and ongoing reflection, Drew felt that a highly effective school would sustain high levels of student engagement through "teachers really know[ing] their students" and "a culture of teachers continuing their learning and improving their classroom practices." However, she did not specify the format that professional learning and reflection would take, nor elaborate on the role adopted by highly effective principals in establishing a professional learning culture.

5.4.2 Social justice

When asked to consider Fullan's (2005; Fullan et al., 2006) view that highly effective principals are equally passionate about other schools achieving success, participants highlighted resource issues rather than a desire to change the educational context. Drew didn't "know of a principal that doesn't support and encourage other principals" but acknowledged that "the competitive model of today's educational environment constrains peoples from being collegial." She perceived friction between selflessness and self-interest to result from an inadequate funding model and suggested that if schools were better resourced, they wouldn't be "quite so competitive in trying to attract those students on the

clasp ... of another area.” Erin also mentioned barriers to schools working together, specifically the “worst case scenario” of a roll drop which encouraged principals to compete for more students in order to avoid staff redundancies. However, he also maintained that highly effective principals possessed the capacity to “see the bigger picture, to see beyond [their] school” and look to other schools as a “source of inspiration and loyalty” and mutual support. He believed that in an ideal world, all principals would be “looking across the fence at other schools and saying, ‘Oh, I really like Could I send a team of people to come and spend a couple of days?’ ”

It would be erroneous to extrapolate from this a social justice agenda and commitment to changing educational context. Motivated, initially, by self-interest and the perceived advantages of introducing new initiatives in their own schools, participants suggested that highly effective principals would mediate a professional propensity to assist and collaborate with fellow principals against the potential consequences for competitive market edge.

They remained oblivious to the irony and contradiction inherent in a self-managing market model which simultaneously allows and constrains the implementation of local objectives. Gunter (2001) argues that “the goal of diversity within the school is being resisted by the endurance of diversity between schools” and concludes that the dominance of private rather than public interest has exacerbated the “politics of exclusion” (p. 20). Boyd (1999) similarly perceives the absence of a democratising social justice agenda to have deleterious effects on education and society, warning that we are now raising children in a “socially toxic environment” (p. 284).

Competing tensions between diversity and equity, competition and collaboration present fundamental dilemmas which Glatter (2003) argues arise out of metagovernance and the “paradox of decentralized centralism” (Karlsen, 2000, p. 530). While Fullan (2005; Fullan et al., 2006) advocates tri-level advocacy, participants appeared to accept the status quo and did not of their own volition envisage a political role, either for themselves or their principal.

5.4.3 Here and now

Lack of a futures perspective meant that participants focused on the short to medium term and this was reflected in the emphasis placed upon operational and strategic planning, and the primacy of aggregated data in demonstrating linear, incremental improvement in areas such as literacy and numeracy. Given that Boards of Trustees are elected for a three-year term and rarely stand for re-election *en masse*, it is not surprising this should be the case.

However, participants did not appear to discern that rapidly changing educational environments might thwart strategic planning, compelling highly effective principals to cope “with turbulence through a direct, intuitive understanding” (Boisot, 2003, p. 35) which tolerates ambiguity and channels energy into “building organisational capability and competencies rather than assuming that the school has a set of simple linear plans that it can put into action” (Davies & Davies, 2003, p. 84). Nor did they seem cognisant that a fluid environment with its plethora of problems and sparse solutions (Sergiovanni, 2001) would necessitate the articulation of strategic intents “while the organization builds an understanding both of the nature of the intent and the capability to undertake it” (p. 84). Davies and Davies express the view that internal capacity building is the only way to achieve sustainable transformation and this is endorsed in the literature as a critical component in proceeding beyond implementation to institutionalization, and to changing educational contexts (Bolam et al., 2005; Coburn, 2003; Dimmock, 2000; DuFour et al., 2005; Elmore, 2004; Education Review Office, 2001; Fullan, 2005; Fullan et al., 2006; Hargreaves & Fink, 2002; Lambert, 1998, 2003).

5.4.4 Systems design and synergy

Fullan (2003, 2005) argues that highly effective principals not only change the educational context by leaving behind more leaders within their schools; they also design and build synergy at the school, local and national level. However, participants omitted to mention this as an important capability of highly effective principals, and nor did they recognise its importance in mastering adaptive

challenges (Fullan, 2005). Rather than building the lateral and vertical capacity needed to achieve long-term sustainability and embrace the critical paradigm shift advocated by Grace (1997) and others (Dantley, 1990; Thrupp, 2005; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003), participants remained firmly focused on the 'here and now' in the individual schools which they governed.

5.4.5 Risk taking

Change naturally involves risk. Unlike the literature, participants did not identify risk taking as an important capability of highly effective principals but, when asked to reflect on the views of Boylett and Finlay (1996) and Tye (2000), they offered the consistent opinion that calculated risk taking was an essential component of educational change. According to Drew, "anyone who is not a risk-taker hasn't actually walked, let alone run and we actually want our principals to fly."

While take-off could occur without permission from national air traffic control, Erin believed that it would be determined by what principals perceived on balance to be good for their school:

Do I do all six averagely and I see no net gain for the school, but I keep my superiors in the Ministry happy, or do I stick with two and do them really, really well and show an increase in the school's performance and use that in any defence I might have to form?

Like the other participants, Erin expressed hypothetical willingness to support and defend calculated non-conformist action provided the BOT approved the flight plan. That none of the participants provided concrete examples suggests a degree of comfort in operating within a managerial market paradigm and complying with current government directives.

Lack of awareness of alternative paradigms similarly indicates political alignment. A general disinclination to pursue a critical approach to educational leadership is perhaps understandable given lack of exposure to discourses within the literature, limited tenure as trustees, the competitive market environment in which schools

operate and a poor history of inter-school collaboration. As Fullan (2001) wryly observed: “schools are in the business of teaching and learning, yet they are terrible at learning from each other” (p. 92). Similarly, there is little if any evidence of inter-Board co-operation and participants needed to look elsewhere to procure specialist advice on appointing a principal.

5.5 The right guidance?

The selection of an educational advisor requires a discriminating approach and remains problematic. Unaware of the literature, participants were in the catch-22 situation of not knowing enough to be able to select and give appropriate direction to an advisor (Education Review Office, 2001).

None of the participants considered educational leadership centres as a source of independent specialist advice. Erin’s comment that he “never considered going to the university” reflected lack of awareness rather than any criticism of the relevance or quality of advice: “No, just in retrospect, it never crossed our mind, actually.” Ironically, participants avoided the source most likely to challenge conservative tendencies and unexamined orthodoxies (Education Review Office, 2001; Restine, 1997; Southworth, 1995), relying instead on informal networks and recommendations from NZSTA.

When invited to reflect upon the core role of the principal, participants in this study framed their responses in pragmatic rather than paradigmatic terms. Failure to mention dominant lenses or a guiding framework gives rise to speculation that these were either discussed and not apportioned any weight or that they did not feature in discussion at all. The openness with which participants discussed the appointment and the different perspectives of people involved suggests that the latter is more likely.

This leads one to conclude that consulting principals did not predicate their advice in paradigmatic form and to posit that they too conceptualise leadership in the narrow functional terms evident in the appointment documentation. This is not to decry the value of the huge practical experience that consulting principals bring to

the appointment process, but it does raise the possibility that this experience is framed and frozen in the official orthodoxy of Tomorrow's Schools rather than the learning-centred leadership discourse which research suggests provides the path to educational sustainability in a post-modern context. Inherent in this is the risk that yesterday's advice will lead to the employment of yesterday's principals and limit the capacity of the BOT to consciously appoint applicants with the professional capabilities (actual or potential) to be highly effective in the role

The perspective adopted by participants suggests that the priority in initial pre-employment deliberations was to contextualize rather than conceptualise the role of the principal. Participant comments surrounding the use of consultant principals suggested that the rationale for their appointment differed from actual practice and that, rather than advise the BOT on educational leadership issues, their input was largely confined to educational management and procedural matters. This was evident in the resulting job descriptions and person specifications which concentrated on curriculum, resource and personnel management and were consistent with similar documents produced by BOTs nationwide (Education Review Office, 2001).

The emphasis on specific types of knowledge, skills and abilities, task performance, and the application of proven solutions to known problems meant that the job descriptions and person specifications reflected a managerial paradigm which skewed the appointment process away from the learning-centred leadership paradigm exhibited by highly effective principals, complicating, if not actually preventing their identification and subsequent appointment. Gronn (2003) makes the point that "homogenised attributes and skills among the recruits of standards-based preparation" will frustrate "community expectations of social heterogeneity" (p. 20).

5.6 Internal prejudices

While they had clear ideas on what they needed a new principal to do, limited understanding of the holistic nature of educational leadership led participants to favour a disaggregated technicist approach which Glatter (1999) argues

oversimplifies the requirements of principalship and fails to reflect the realities of the job. This made it difficult to discern between applicants, exposing boards not only to candidates who presented well but also to internal prejudices including age and gender.

The tendency to equate youthfulness with professional energy reflects an underlying assumption that career cycles progress in linear stages along the lines of Katz's (1972) 'survival', 'consolidation', 'renewal' and 'maturity', Gregorc's (1973) 'becoming', 'growing', 'maturing' and 'fully functioning', and Gronn's (1999) 'formation', 'accession', 'incumbency' and 'divestiture'. While career cycles in school principalship did not feature prominently in the literature consulted for this study, a number of researchers (Barth, 2001; Brighouse, 2001; Fullan, 2001; Schon, 1983; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2001; West-Burnham, 2001) have implied that the propensity of highly effective principals to engage in continual reflection, reframing, innovating, energy-replenishing and self-renewal behaviours is not bound by age and length of service parameters. However, they do concede that because leadership development is largely experiential and grounded in reflective learning practice, it takes time to develop. This lends support to Drew's views on rapid career advancement and "uncooked" principals.

The impact of gender on leadership styles and appointment processes lay outside the scope of this study. However, because gender was raised by Alex and Chris, it is worth commenting upon briefly. The literature suggests that discriminatory employment practices against women are at odds with their ability to be highly effective educational leaders. Feminist researchers (Blackmore, 1999; Coleman, M., 1996, 2002; Regan & Brooks, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1995, 1999) have long argued that women are more likely than men to display the behaviours associated with transformational leadership and that there is nothing to indicate that they are less effective disciplinarians.

Male researchers, too, are beginning to acknowledge that "management literature traditionally was written by men for men, and its values – individualism, competition – define success in a masculine way" (Brandt, 1999, p. x). Grace's (1995) analysis of 88 English headteacher accounts revealed a fundamental

difference in headteacher responses to the changed culture of leadership in English schools. Male headteachers were inclined to perceive their role as primarily managerial and to believe that “greater management effectiveness would generate an improved professional performance from the school and its teachers” (p. 73), whereas women were more likely to place an emphasis on collegial relationships and attempt to implement reforms in a manner which did not distance them from staff, students and pedagogy.

Sergiovanni (Brandt, 1999) suggests that the evidence indicates that “while women are underrepresented in principalship, they are overrepresented in successful principalships” (p. x). Available New Zealand evidence supports the former, but the absence of readily accessible information precludes assessment of the latter. In the primary school context, Brooking (2003) found that “men are six times more likely to win a principal’s position disregarding experience or qualifications, than women” (p. 1) and that the human factor caused many BOTs to veer “right away from stated criteria at the final decision making stage and [appoint] a principal according to other unstated criteria” (2005, p. 25). Official statistics (Education Review Office, 1997) would suggest that gender bias is almost as prevalent in the secondary sector.

Drew voiced the commonly held view of participants that a selection process which “bundled up in the right way” perceptions of “exactly where the school is at and what the school needs, and what the aspirations of the board and the school community are,” would secure the appointment of the best person for the job. However, my review of the literature suggests that sound process and contextual knowledge are in themselves insufficient to guarantee the appointment of a highly effective principal. In-depth understanding of the professional capabilities required of applicants is the missing ingredient that allows unofficial “local logics” (Brooking, 2003) undue influence and often prevents BOTs getting what they need. In effect, it limits their agency and increases their susceptibility to populist discourses which “define the terrain in ways that complicate attempts to change” and “conceal their own invention” Bacchi (2000, p. 48).

5.7 What needs to be done?

Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2006) make the salient and obvious point that “when you don’t know what you don’t know, it’s difficult to see what needs to be done” (p. 7). Determining the ability of principal applicants to change their leadership style according to context requires not only cognisance of the literature and belief in its applicability, but also the resolve to incorporate this in the person specification and selection process. While ignorance of academic literature reflected an almost total lack of exposure to theoretical and empirical research, it would be speculative to assume non-receptiveness to its message. On the contrary, parental concern and a benevolent commitment to ensuring the best possible education for the children in their school suggest that the reverse is more likely the case.

Participants themselves alluded to the need for advice and training, a conclusion similarly uncontested in the literature (Brooking, 2003, 2004, 2005; Martin, 2001; Notman, 1997). While concurring that training has yet to be provided in a systematic and sustained manner, this study suggests that the nature of current advice and training remains problematic. The greater challenge for educators lies not so much in ensuring its provision but in determining its focus. This raises issues surrounding the accreditation and regulation of training providers and professional advisors.

In the current environment, independent professional advisors enjoy the same degree of autonomy as BOTs and are not subject to regulation by a professional body. There are no barriers to entrepreneurial people offering their services as educational consultants and consultancy is often perceived as a highly credible natural progression for principals who for a variety of reasons are disenchanted, or nearing retirement. Nor is it uncommon for business specialists such as Beattie Rickman, Deloitte, EQI Global, and Multi Serve, to be contracted to recruit principals.

BOTs who undertake the recruitment process themselves typically adopt Blair’s approach and contact their umbrella organisation for information regarding the

existence and availability of advisors. Perceiving itself as a strong independent voice in education, NZSTA's mission is to lead and strengthen school governance in New Zealand, through the provision of information, training, support and advocacy. These mechanisms are closely aligned to BOT responsibility for enacting centrally determined legislative, regulatory and other requirements, and ensuring that community views are reflected in local objectives.

Evidence available in NZSTA publications suggests that while an "adequately, and equitably, state funded system of education" (New Zealand School Trustees Association, 2005b) is upheld as a core value, the major political focus on securing ongoing government commitment to self-governing schools and a "permissive legislative environment that allows boards to exercise change as to the most appropriate options for their school" (New Zealand School Trustees' Association, 2006) is potentially contrary to a social justice agenda. Inherent in these aims are tensions between education as a public and private good, between central legislation and local decision making, between institutional autonomy and wider community interests, between diversity and equity, and between system coherence and fragmentation (Glatter, 2003).

Questions thus arise over the basis on which independent advisors and consulting principals were recommended by NZSTA and participants were unable to elucidate further. They took recommendations at face value, trusted that advisors possessed appropriate qualifications and expertise, and proceeded on the basis of rapport established in initial discussions. This approach, combined with a largely atheoretical perspective, severely compromised the ability of participants to evaluate the quality of advice provided and reinforces rather than ameliorates ERO (2001) concerns.

5.8 Unfortunate consequence or deliberate agenda?

Lack of exposure to the academic literature is hardly surprising given the constraints imposed upon BOTs. Unlike full time professional trustees whose remuneration is commensurate with their qualifications and skills, school trustees are essentially well-intentioned lay people who, in addition to being employed in

other fields, devote inordinate time to the task of governance and frequently refuse to accept the financial pittance offered them in recompense.

Given espoused awareness of the importance of a knowledge society in securing New Zealand's economic future and official recognition of the importance of the principal in creating conditions necessary for lifelong learning, there is a perplexing lack of logic in the failure to adopt the contextually specific, transformational educational leadership paradigm which literature suggests is most likely to secure the professional capabilities required.

Reservations over the political capture of training providers aside, there has been no move to introduce an element of uniformity by extending the MOE Whanganui trial (White, 2003) nationwide and compelling the training and registration of advisors. Nor has government considered the introduction of legislation which would make the appointment of an approved advisor mandatory for principal appointments. A reluctance to review and curtail the powers of BOTs preserves their position as the most autonomous self-governing school bodies in the western world (Wylie, 2002). As Brooking (2003, 2004, 2005) has pointed out, not only are BOTs able to appoint whomever they like, but there is no accountability required at any level by central government in the appointment process.

While Brighouse (1988) suggests that innovative local education administrators were, by the late 1980s, marginalised to the point where they had become "eunuchs" (p. 102), England did at least require LEA membership on governing boards. In New Zealand, by contrast, practitioner representation beyond that of the principal and staff representative was dispensed with. Failure to impose limitations which would safeguard Ministry of Education interests effectively removed a specialist professional perspective.

In the same way that over-prescription and the standardizing of content is perceived by some researchers (Barlow & Robertson, 1994; Gambell, 2004; Kohn, 2001; Meier, 2000) as part of an anti-intellectual crusade to deskill and undermine the professionalism of teachers, perhaps the deskilling of principal employers by the very omission of qualified educational advisors leads to the

appointment of principals who are less likely to challenge the current context and official orthodoxies.

The chasm between political proclamation and policy lends credence to earlier research (Ministry of Education, 1990; Notman, 1997) which suggested that deregulation had no noticeable impact on educational outcomes and was purely driven by fiscal expediency and a managerial market discourse which “subtly set limits to the possibilities of education policy” (Ball, 1990, p. 23). One could further speculate that the crux of political reform lay not in an ethical desire to locate decision making as close as possible to the point of implementation in order to provide communities with the “means for a greater say in the running of their schools and for expressing their expectations about children’s education” (Education Review Office, 1994), but in an arguably more calculated intention to tip the balance of power toward the clients in order to maximise administrative efficiencies and control the ‘providers’ of education.

Speculation aside, the reality remains that the participants in this study were largely unaware of the literature surrounding highly effective principals. They were naturally inclined to operate within the familiar managerial paradigm common to their own fields and, in all likelihood, endorsed by NZSTA and consulting principals but consistently discredited in the educational leadership literature. As a consequence, recruitment and selection processes were skewed away from a transformational learning-centred leadership discourse, compromising the ability of BOTs to accurately discriminate between candidates and giving reign to internal prejudices and “local logics.” Although governed by “rational” and evidentiary criteria, this study shows that some BOTs are susceptible to perspectives which are contrary to Equal Employment Opportunity legislation and which subvert the appointment process from not only an educational leadership standpoint but also a legal one.

CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to make concluding statements regarding the participants' level of understanding concerning highly effective principals and their utilization of this knowledge in the appointment of a new principal. It also presumes to suggest a way forward. Accordingly, it is not my intention to repeat in detail the main themes in the literature review, nor this study's research findings and discussion.

6.2 Serendipity rather than design

The atheoretical approach taken by the BOTs in this study means that the appointment of a principal who is likely to be highly effective in the role occurs more by serendipity than design. Largely, and in some cases totally unaware of the academic literature, BOTs judged the educational leadership capabilities of principal applicants based on professional experience in non-education fields and ad hoc, often arbitrary advice from uncredentialed teacher representatives, professional advisors and consultant principals. None of the participants questioned the sagacity or qualifications of those who provided this. The immediate assumption that external advisors are automatically experts inclined them to place total trust in the quality of the external advice and to proceed with the appointment process on a dangerous perceptual basis.

Acting within a narrow educational perspective, BOTs are prone to capture by managerial and other populist discourses, and unduly influenced by official "local logics." If they are to appoint principals who are highly effective in adapting their leadership style to new, complex and rapidly changing circumstances, and to changing the educational context in which they operate, it is essential that a current and evolving educational leadership discourse dominates their thinking.

Given that past calls for systematic training in principal appointments have gone largely unanswered, I support the contention that serious consideration be given at a political level to the mandatory appointment of an approved professional advisor to BOT principal appointment committees. While this raises issues surrounding advisor certification and regulation, it would avoid the ‘just in case’ versus ‘just in time’ BOT training dilemma, ensure that BOTs are exposed to theoretical perspectives and consequently increase the likelihood of the best person being appointed to the position. A flexible programme and provider framework endorsed by educators would allow an element of choice and, in all likelihood, focus on competing ideologies, thus minimizing the risk of capture by neo-liberal policy agendas and assuaging critics of compulsory national training courses (Cardno, 2003; Thrupp, 2005; Thrupp & Willmott, 2003).

As an interim step, the Working Party on New Zealand Primary Principals’ Appointments (Kelly, 2003) recommendation that government funding be made available to employ an advisor who meets specific criteria has considerable merit. The Ministry of Education’s position that most Boards do not need additional support (Kelly, 2003) is fiscally convenient but can not be substantiated in the absence of appointment accountability measures. It is also at odds with the views expressed by the participants in this study, all of whom enlisted additional support or would have done so had it been free. The view that Boards at risk of not managing the selection process could receive targeted support presupposes their identification; a bureaucratic exercise which in the current climate would be so fraught with personnel, resource and timeframe difficulties that the concept would be rendered impotent.

While university educational leadership centres offer an independent and informed perspective, they are rarely approached for assistance. This poses major challenges for tertiary institutions if research is to fulfil its major purpose of informing practice. There is a clear need for academics to collate and communicate research findings in concise accessible language and be proactive in disseminating this to Boards of Trustees, NZSTA and government departments including the Ministry of Education and Education Review Office.

6.3 Limitations to study

Themes extrapolated from small scale qualitative research can only ever be tentative and the co-construction of new knowledge often raises more questions than it answers. This is the nature of the dialectic between researcher and participant, between research and practice. Over time and after repeated research, it is conceivable that knowledge might accumulate and understandings deepen to the point where generalizations can be developed and applied. The attempt to do so on the basis of insights gained from five vignettes in a single study in a largely unexplored field is an exercise in futility and contrary to the purpose of this study.

6.4 Further research

While theoretical research on the capabilities of highly effective principals is vast and empirical research growing, the literature is silent on the degree of uptake by Boards of Trustees who have the sole responsibility for employing Principals. This study offers one small contribution. For it to benefit others, the scope of research needs to be both broadened and deepened. The stories of many more trustees need to be recorded and shared. Case studies need to be undertaken in which researchers are present throughout the entire appointment process. The range and quality of advice provided by advisors, employment specialists and consultant principals needs scrutiny.

The importance of the task should not be underestimated. It is fitting that one of the study's participants should have the final word. As Drew so aptly said, appointing a principal who is likely to be highly effective:

goes right back to making sure that you know what you need, you know the skills that the school is requiring and you know the values that that school puts on personal attributes, because it is a jigsaw, it's a tapestry and there isn't one colour or thread. It's an amalgam of a whole lot of things and if you get the picture right, there's harmony and if you don't there is discord. And it's vital that we actually find ways to make the appointment process as good as it can be because, you know, students will only be year nine students for one year.

Ensuring that a current and evolving educational leadership discourse dominates the thinking of Boards of Trustees is the key to achieving just that.

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