

**EXPERIENCED PRINCIPALS' ACCOUNTS
OF THEIR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT:
THEIR INSIDE STORIES**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to examine experienced principals' stories of how they gave account of their character development and how this made an impact on their practice as leaders. Six experienced primary school principals from low decile schools in Auckland were selected. The research was in the form of a narrative, with the data being collected using semi-structured interviews and were in the form of stories.

Each interview revealed the unique character and values of each participant. Personal values were shaped from mostly their early lives from parents and in some cases extended family or other people. Most of the values focused on behaviour that revealed the importance of caring for others, trust, family, and humility. Further to these historical values, the participants revealed significant others in their lives decreased as they became more experienced as principals. Before becoming a principal, several people they mentioned who had impacted their lives, though this did not reflect their current situation. Principalship was also seen to be the context where most of the character development took place, suggesting that learning when applied to a leader's character, is lived experience; it cannot be taught first.

The findings indicated both character and competence play a strong role in the participant's principalship. Participants who developed their own self-awareness and awareness of others were able to lead effectively by creating teams that complemented their strengths and weaknesses. Values and beliefs also proved to be an important aspect, as these dictated the way the participant handled their governing educational values and their interaction with staff. Moral dilemmas for the participants were more or less confined to taking action in relation to staff and community issues. There was a suggestion that larger dilemmas could occur when the participant's governing educational values conflicted with changes being asked of their school by policy makers. Therefore, an overall finding of this study is that leadership is

more than developing a set of skills but also includes the character of the leader, and that character and its development is unique which in turn makes it difficult to find a general definition of leadership.

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Finally, I wish to thank the six principals for giving me a little of their valuable time and telling me their “inside” stories of their leadership life journey. Each of you left me with a little reminder about leadership in education:

Participant A –Leadership can have times when it looks as if it is ‘trial by fire.’

Participant B –Leaders don’t know everything; they need to use the expertise of others by sharing the load and that is best done as a team.

Participant C – Educational leadership is not just about creating a school to improve numeracy and literacy. It is about developing the whole child.

Participant D – It should never be about the glory and accolades the leader can get, but about serving those that are with us on the journey in order to fulfil the mission.

Participant F – Leadership can be a lonely position at times.

Finally, I have left Participant E to last with his wise words, when it comes to educational leadership, “I better know what I am doing,” reminding us that learning as a leader never stops in terms of skills and as this study has emphasised, also in terms of character.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

The role of the principal plays a very important part in an educational organisation. The key player in school effectiveness, according to claims about successful school leadership, is the principal (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006). Blasé and Kirby (2009) argue that principals affect virtually every aspect of school life. Coombs (2003) adds, “The fast pace environment of modern schooling makes the role of principal a complex one. Trends towards decentralised decision making and centralised accountability have increased role ambiguity and conflict” (p.1). The influence of the leader has an important part to play in any educational organisation and it is for this reason that this study investigated experienced principal perceptions of how character has contributed to their leadership development.

Study Background – My Narrative

Over the years I have been very interested in leadership character. While a young leader, leadership for me occurred both in and out of education. Within education, leadership was all about skills: being able to manage a school through effectively managing budgets, property, performance management, and ensuring effective teaching was happening in the classroom. As an experienced principal, I have become increasingly concerned that there is no criteria on how principals should behave as leaders within the National Standards for Principals. They are more about performance and results. Hence, from my own experience, some school leaders were less effective in managing and treating staff and in some cases lack sufficient relational skills, which caused high turnover of staff on a continual basis.

Out of the education context, I attended what one would call today, a fundamentalist christian church. Developing a high moral character was continually taught, especially when you were in leadership positions. However, the actual skills of leading were not taught. Character development

mostly involved being aware of yourself and developing your character with very little emphasis being placed on the awareness of others, except the way one should treat or respond to followers. In addition, the work of non-christian academics were regarded as humanistic and shunned. However, the promotion of principles, such as having integrity, honesty, humility courage, and self-discipline, are aspects of good character most people in the western world more than likely accept.

As character is not emphasised in the educational leadership field compared to leadership skills, I have longed to find out how it developed in educational leaders in a nonsecterian environment, its importance and what influence it had on their leadership practice. I wanted to see how this looked and developed in an educational setting. This is my 'inside' story on the motivation to do this study.

This study is about the "inside story" of six experienced principals in Auckland leading schools in low socio-economic areas. It is their story of how their character has contributed to their leadership development throughout their lives and how it has informed their practice. This study required the participants to be open about and share their stories about past experiences and how these had influenced their character. The depth that these stories went equated to what I would call the difference between snorkling and scuba diving. Most of the stories only went to snorkling depth and resulted in looking at their leadership development rather than their character development. Reasons for this are presented in Chapter Six.

RATIONALE

In recognising the importance educational leadership plays in New Zealand, professional development programmes have operated for aspiring, first time, and experienced principals in New Zealand. However, where some operate continually, the experienced principal's programme has been a 'one off' to date. In addition, there are the professional standards for principals, both primary and secondary (Ministry of Education, 1998), and also the Kiwi

Leadership Model for principals (Ministry of Education, 2008). These primarily deal with what Bell (2010) calls leadership competence, the 'how' of educational leadership. Developing the 'how' of leadership has just not occurred here in New Zealand but also around the world. Bell (2010) states the worldwide eighty billion dollar leadership training industry primarily focuses on visible behaviours or competencies. Kets de Vries (2010) argues that many management scholars limit themselves to a mechanical view of life in the work place and they look at surface phenomena which is a 'two dimensional' way of looking at the world of work. According to him, they don't include a third, unseen dimension, that of character.

Leadership is much more than acquiring the right set of behaviours or skills (Bell, 2010). Skills need to be developed and addressed, but such a focus follows an 'outside-in' approach. There also needs to be an 'inside-out' approach; developing sound educational leadership principles from which leaders can understand the values that inform their practice. George (2003) adds that it is important that leaders develop their own leadership style that is consistent with their character and personality. This statement would indicate that it is extremely important that principals understand their own character and also develop their own leadership practice.

Character is what lies below the surface. Scholars and writers of leadership use character in different ways. Mellon (2011) uses the term 'solid core' of leadership and adds that this is the 'soul' of the leader, which includes instinct, inner conviction, inner compass, character, and integrity. Bell (2010) uses the term 'soul' as well, stating that it is made up of the leader's awareness of self and others, their moral compass and the philosophy of leadership. Most commonly used is the term authentic leadership (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, and Walumbwa, 2005; George, Sims, Mclean, & Mayer, 2007; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Begley (2006) adds that "authentic leadership is a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration. This is leadership that is knowledge based, values

informed, and skillfully executed” (p. 570). Authentic leadership encompasses character as well as leadership competencies and behaviours.

The character of principalship, is linked to behaviours of effective principalship. For instance, Day, Sammons, Harris, Hopkins, Leithwood, Gu, and Brown (2010) argue as one of their ten strong claims about successful school leadership, that principals’ “values are key components in their success” (p.7). This claim is also backed up by Robinson, Hohepa and Lloyd (2009) who argue that personal integrity is a “criterion used to judge leader trustworthiness” (p.185). Given the importance afforded to personal integrity and values, this research sought to explore how experienced principals perceived the development of their own character and how it has influenced their current practice.

The development of character is an on-going process. Kets De Vries (2006) states that character is a form of memory, in other words we are the products of our past. Therefore, this study explored the life stories of six experienced principals in order to understand how the development of their character has evolved and impacted their practice.

AIMS

Therefore, this research aimed to examine experienced principals’ accounts of their character and stories of how this made an impact on their development and practice as school leaders. The following research questions provided the boundaries for this research project.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is character and how is it related to leadership?

2. How do experienced principals account for their development of character with reference to:
 - a. the development of their self-awareness and awareness of others?

- b. their leadership principles?
 - c. their espoused core values?
3. How do experienced principals perceive their character has facilitated their growth as school leaders?

The six experienced principals were selected from a pool of twelve, all of whom were working in schools in low socio-economic areas. In New Zealand schools are given decile ratings based the household occupations and income, household crowding, educational qualifications and income support (Ministry of Education, 2009). A school situated where there is high household crowding, low incomes per household, and where there is a lot of income support will have a low rating. Principals selected for this study came from schools with decile ratings of one, two, or three. In addition their schools had been placed on an Educational Review Office review cycle of 4-5 years and each of these principals had been in their school for over five years. In preparation for their one hour narrative interview, a questionnaire was developed to help them prepare for this interview.

THESIS ORGANISATION

Following this chapter, Chapter Two provides a detailed summary of character, leadership character and its development. The literature review explores the view that character is an important part of leadership, followed by discussion around what character is, especially with regard to leadership, and how it can be developed. Finally, it focuses on three aspects that make up a leader's character, that being, awareness of themselves and others, leadership values and principles, and finally their moral compass.

Chapter Three provides a rationale and justification for choosing a qualitative methodology for data collection and analysis for this study. It describes the narrative methodology and strategies employed for the semi-structured interviews. Data management and analytical procedures are also explained.

The chapter concludes by identifying and addressing ethical issues and limitations of the study.

Chapter Four details the findings gathered from the six semi-structured interviews. These are structured so that each narrative account is presented separately from the others. Each account follows a similar structure, in that it looks at the leader today, followed by summaries of their narratives of their character and leadership development. These were grouped into the following; influences and experiences they encountered and ways they gained leadership knowledge.

Chapter Five maps out a cross-case analysis technique in order to draw out themes that make important links and provide discussions that help to contextualise and define the issues pertaining to the research questions.

Finally, chapter six summarises the relationship with the research questions and the conclusions derived from this study. Within the recommendations there are a number of issues to consider in the area of the character of the leader. The limitations help to realise how the research could have been improved and the concluding statement encapsulates the important issues around leadership and character.

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Influence is the essence of leadership and very strong and powerful leaders can have a significant impact on their followers and the future of the organisation they lead. Over the latter part of the twentieth century there have been a number of major losses within companies along with employees, investors and shareholders becoming victims, due to unethical behaviour emerging from some of those leaders at the top (May, Chan, Hodges and Avolio, 2003). According to Yukl (2010); "Powerful leaders can advance their own careers and economic gains at the expense of organisation members and the public" (p. 329). Hinrichs (2007) adds that unethical practices of leaders that appear to be legitimate can make their followers engage in 'crimes of obedience'. George et al. (2007) add that people have developed a distrust of leaders over the past few years and this is becoming more evident as we move through the twenty-first century. There are calls for a new kind of leader. Begley (2006), looking from an educational leadership perspective, adds that, "in recent years management has been negatively portrayed as mechanistic, relatively short sighted, and a precedent focused enterprise" (p. 570). Consequently, in education there has been more emphasis placed on the skills or the competence of leadership with little or no regard to the importance of character.

This chapter explores the view that character is an important facet of leadership, followed by discussion around what character is, especially with regard to leadership, and how it contributes to leadership development. Finally, there is an examination of three aspects that make up a leader's character; namely, their awareness of themselves and others, the beliefs and values they hold and finally their moral compass with regard to issues of ethics and integrity.

A Different View – Leadership from the Inside

The unscrupulous behaviour of some leaders has raised the need for an overt emphasis on ethical behaviour. Yukl (2010) states that there has been a rapidly growing interest in ethical behaviour within leadership along with the influence of a leader's values and integrity, which has led to a rise in different theories on leadership being developed. These are placed under the umbrella of ethical leadership and include terms such as, authentic, servant, spiritual, and ethical leadership. The common thread in each of these theories, according to Avolio and Gardner (2005), is that they all focus on interpersonal relationships between the leader and follower, with an ideal relationship being one of mutual respect, trust, cooperation, loyalty, and openness. Yukl (2010) states that these;

theories all emphasise the importance of leader self-awareness (about values and beliefs) and consistency between values and behaviour. The positive values or attributes in the theories are very similar, and they include honesty, altruism, kindness, compassion, empathy, fairness, gratitude, humility, courage, optimism, and resilience. (p. 348)

It is these common threads that relate to the character of a leader.

George (2003) argues that leaders today need to consistently put into practise their values, and be able to demonstrate a passion for their organisation's purpose. Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, and May, (2004) add that, "the unique stressors facing organisations throughout society today call for a new leadership approach aimed at restoring basic confidence, hope, optimism, resiliency, and meaningfulness" (p. 3). Goleman (1995) goes on to say,

every business person knows a story about a highly intelligent, highly skilled executive who was promoted into a leadership position only to fail at the job. And they also know a story about someone with solid –

but not extraordinary – intellectual abilities and technical skills who is promoted into a similar position and then soured. (p. 82)

It is therefore quite evident that today there needs to be more focus on leadership beyond skills, so that character is included.

In the latter part of the twentieth and continuing on in the twenty-first century, leadership has become increasingly complex (Bell, 2010). This is backed up by Coombs (2003) who adds, in relation to the education context, “the fast paced environment of modern schooling makes the role of principal a complex one” (p. 1). Professional competence is an extremely important component of leading today. This includes the skills needed to lead people as well as the knowledge and skills needed to run an organisation. However, according to Cashman (2008) and Bell (2010), there is more to leadership than competence. They advocate character as being an important aspect, especially as leadership involves working with people.

Schools, like any organisation, are essentially social constructions which are driven, animated, or operated by people and often a small number whose interests the organisation serves (Begley, 2006). Leadership is about human behaviour, revolving around the highly complex interplay between leaders and followers in a particular context. It is about understanding the way people and organisations behave, about creating and strengthening relationships, building commitment, establishing group identity, and adapting behaviour to increase effectiveness (Kets de Vries, 2006). In order for this to occur, it must not only be about the skills of the leader but also the character of the leader.

Unethical behaviour can have several manifestations and in an extreme form, can become a character disorder. Each person’s character exists within, as well as outside, their conscious awareness. As Kets De Vries (2006) asserts, we are all equipped with a defensive structure that controls impulse thoughts and ideas. Therefore, we may not be fully aware of our character. As a result, we may not be aware of how our some of our actions or behaviours can affect

others. When this blindness is regarded as extreme we get a character disorder, which one could say is a secret that you don't know you are keeping. The American Psychiatric Association (2000) lists ten personality types that have the potential to wreak havoc in the workplace, even more so if it is the leader that exhibits them. For example according to Ket De Vries (2006), a paranoid personality type, is someone who is hyper vigilant, distrustful, apprehensive and concerned that someone will deceive them, while a sadistic personality type is a person who is intimidating, abrasive, power orientated, opinionated and abusive in dealing with others. "Leadership is always about character" (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, p. 142), but character can determine whether a leader's behaviours are acceptable or not to others.

CHARACTER

Recent literature on leadership and management reveals that character is an important aspect of leadership. However, defining character has perplexed several generations of social science and organisational scholars (Wright & Goodstein, 2007). They go on to define character as "those interpenetrable habitual qualities within individuals, and applicable to organisations that both constrain and lead them to desire and pursue societal good" (p. 932). This gives the notion of moral discipline or self-restraint. However, Kets De Vries, (2006) states "character is the sum of the deeply ingrained patterns of behaviour that define an individual" (p. 175), creating a more general definition, which excludes the moral discipline or self-restraint. It is our character that distinguishes us from others. Kets de Vries (2006) goes on to assert, that it is like a stamp that is impressed upon us, by nature and nurture, defining who we really are, and a composite of habits that we choose and develop, that eventually drive us. He also argues that character can determine motivation and ambition and also can dictate the way a person relates to his or her internal and external world. This, he claims, affects one's relationships and the way one pursues their goals. It is both these definitions of character by Kets de Vries and Wright and Goodstein, that have informed how the interview questions were developed for this research project.

The life experiences that we all go through determine some of our current character. Kets de Vries (2006) states that, “character is a form of memory” (p. 12). He goes on to argue that there are a number of conflicting forces, both primitive impulses and defences that challenge our rational side and make up our inner emotional life. This is part of our humanness and we need to understand these inner forces that test and tempt us. It is what lies below the surface that influences our character, which in turn also affects our behaviour. Because leaders are in positions of authority and influence, it is important they understand who they are, so they are aware of how their character could affect those around them.

A person’s character, if based to some degree on memory, can be authentic, if one behaves in accordance with that character. ‘Authenticity’ especially applied to leadership is another word that is used by many writers who deal with the subject of character. It has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy, but a modern conception has emerged in the past eighty years, which draws from positive psychology literature (Seligman, 2002; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). Authenticity involves both owning one’s personal experiences and acting in accordance with one’s true self. Kernis (2003) defines authenticity as “the unobstructed operation of one’s true, or core, self in one’s daily enterprise” (p.1), for good or for bad.

CHARACTER AND LEADERSHIP

As stated earlier “leadership is always about character” (Bennis & Thomas, 2002, p.142). Hannah and Avolio (2011) suggest that few would disagree that character is an indispensable part of sustainable leadership performance. They go on to add that even though it is a necessary component, it is not sufficient for effective leadership, arguing that it involves both character and competence.

There is still debate over how character connects to leadership and how it can be researched. One reason is the metaphysical nature of character and

leadership (Wright & Quick, 2011). Leaders learn from experience through the processes of observation, diagnosis, and interpretation, which can be termed leader-in-practice (Parry, 1998). This requires an interpretative approach to researching the leadership construct. On the other hand, Hannah and Avolio (2011) view the leadership and character construct using a meta-framework. In their terms, separating the 'locus', which they define as personality, values, moral reasoning and identity, from 'transmission,' these being the actions of the leader and finally, 'reception,' is how the behaviours, and, attitudes informed by character, are perceived and received by the follower.

There are drivers that make up the character of a leader. These drivers are produced and drawn from the past, both recent and distant, and come out of the conscious and unconscious (Kits de Vries, 2006). It is the life and leadership experiences, along with the amount of reflection and learning, that will determine how character is developed in a leader.

For educational leaders, character needs to be authentic. "It is not enough for school leaders to merely emulate the values of other principals currently viewed as experts. Leaders in schools must become reflective and authentic in their leadership practices" (Begley, 2006, p. 584). The character of a leader and its development, will always be unique as a leader can learn from other people's experiences but can in no way be successful in trying to be like them (George et al., 2007). It is for this reason, that it is very difficult to clearly define the profile of an ideal school leader. George et al. (2007), go on to add, that during the past fifty years a number of leadership scholars have conducted more than one thousand studies in an attempt to determine the definitive styles, characteristics and personality traits of great leaders, however none have produced a clear profile of the ideal leader. Shamir and Eilam (2005) state that authentic leaders are originals not copies, adding,

their conviction, cause or mission may be similar in content to those of other leaders and followers. However, the process through which they have arrived at these convictions and causes is not a process of

imitation. Rather they have internalised them on the basis of their own personal experience. (p. 397)

Bell (2010) asserts that leadership is made up of both competence and character and that both are equally important. While competence involves both professional and leadership skills needed to lead, it is developed from the “outside” through training, character and its development, is authentic to each leader and is therefore developed from the ‘inside,’ based in part, on life experiences (Cashman, 2011; Kets de Vries, 2006).

It must also be acknowledged that the term leadership character has been viewed and explored in different ways depending on the writer. Some refer to this as the soul of a leader (Bell, 2010). Kets De Vries, (2006) regards this as the third dimension of leadership. The most common is when it is applied to the term authenticity in the form of authentic leadership (Begley, 2001; Gardner et al., 2005; George, 2003; May et al., 2003; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Avolio et al. (2004) define authentic leaders as,

those individuals who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values/moral perspective, knowledge, and strength; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient and high on moral character. (p. 4)

Begley (2006) adds “authentic leadership is a metaphor for professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices in educational administration” (p. 570). A person’s character is very unique as it is a form of memory (Kets de Vries, 2006) and therefore the character of a leader is in itself authentic if there is alignment between it and behaviour; memory always involves the past.

To conclude, due to the abuse of power, poor ethics and morality by some leaders within organisations, different theories of leadership have been

developed which emphasise the importance of character. The character of a leader is unique, as each leader's life experience is quite different. It is the unique nature of character that makes it difficult to define the ideal leader.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN LEADERS

Some writers have taken on slightly different views regarding the development of character in leaders. Peterson and Seligman (2004) take the position that character is to a degree malleable. Other research has suggested that it is a result of hereditary influences and life experience, suggesting that it can be developed (Avolio, Rotundo, & Walumbwa, 2009). Hannah and Avolio (2011) take the view that it is consistent with the constructive development theory posed by Kegan (1982). They suggest that people develop a more complex understanding of their world by going through and cataloging the experiences that life brings, which creates a cognitive and moral maturation process. They add, "as these cognitive structures become more complex, individuals increasingly accrue the ability to view their experiences more objectively and better assess the adequacy of their actions and their impact on others" (p.331).

Looking from a slightly different perspective, Wright and Quick (2011) suggest that the driving force in character development could well be found in the search for self-awareness. Kets de Vries (2009) found in clinical research of global leaders that a lot of the difficulty and suffering they encountered was due to low levels of self-awareness. This suggests that self-awareness is necessary in the development of character in leaders. Wright and Quick (2011) state, "Self-awareness is developed through the grounded theory process of self-examination and structured feedback about actions, behaviour, and the consequences" (p.987), highlighting for leaders the importance of getting good feedback on themselves as leaders along with being able to reflect honestly about themselves.

Parenting practices or orientations have also been suggested as having an impact on the character development of a leader. Avolio (2005) asserts that

parents are the first leadership coach, in that the child learns from them how to make sense of experiences, treat others, persevere under challenging situations, how to develop and perform. It is this form of socialisation, which accompanies affective parenting, that can help children understand the values, beliefs and perspectives that influence their thinking and behaviour later in life (Ashford & Saks, 1996). Parenting orientations are used to explain how children come to learn self-discipline, and to make right choices later in life when facing challenging situations (Avolio et al., 2009). An authoritative parenting style has been positively related to characteristics that predict who will move into leadership roles (Bass, 1990). It has also been shown that children who have been raised and experienced authoritative parenting are much more likely to have a higher achievement orientation, levels of moral orientation, self-confidence, independence, self-efficacy and internal locus of control (Baumrind, 1998; Parker & Gladstone, 1996).

Most leaders today operate in a turbulent environment in which they need to address problems with flexibility in order to succeed. Leaders need to learn from past experiences, including mistakes they have made. In this way they are more likely to be open to be challenged and therefore change their assumptions, beliefs and the mental models about influencing others (Yukl, 2010). McCauley (2001) argues that the way a leader confronts, interprets, and resolves earlier barriers or problems is one process in life that contributes to leadership emergence.

Leadership is viewed as a source of power and competitive advantage in many organisations (Van Knippenburg & Hogg, 2003). However, there is no one general model for the development of leadership (Day & Halpin, 2004). Shamir and Eilam (2005) found that leadership development happened in several ways. Firstly, it is a natural process. Here they found that there were “born” leaders who displayed leadership qualities from an early age to those whom they class as “late bloomers,” where their inherent talents around leadership arose when an opportunity presented itself. Secondly, it develops out of struggling and coping with difficulties, usually defining experiences,

namely ordeals that contributed to transforming the leader. Cooper, Quick, Quick and Gavin (2006) add to this point stating that strength of character is often forged in a crisis, which offers both opportunities as well as dangers. They go on to assert, that in these times, the leader has the opportunity to draw on character strengths formed from past life experiences while at the same time making decisions, as well defining and redefining aspects of character essential to moral leadership. Next, they argue there is development through finding a cause and this is where identification with a movement or a cause and finding a sense of direction helps develop the leader and their character. Finally, as Cooper et al. (2006) claim, it is through self-improvement when learning from experiences. This is not the learning that comes out of the struggles and ordeals, but a variety of different experiences such as training sessions, learning from role models, parents, other family members, teachers, mentors, superiors, and peers.

Gardner et al. (2005) state that a leader's personal history and key trigger events are the antecedents for developing authentic leadership. Trigger events could include dramatic or subtle changes that affect the leader's circumstances. All these combine to produce personal development. Avolio (2005) goes on to add that trigger events, when viewed from a life span perspective, can serve to stimulate development, adding that these do not need to be negative events such as the loss of a loved one, health problems or financial hardship. They could also be positive, such as a major promotion, expanded responsibilities, a career change or forming a relationship with a significant other.

THREE COMPONENTS OF CHARACTER

In examining the literature around leadership and character, three main important components of character emerge. Writers also have explored the different components of character and in some cases used different terms associated to it. The first is around the leader continuing to develop an understanding both of themselves, and of those around them. The term 'self-awareness' has been used by a number of writers (Bell, 2010; Kets de Vries,

2006; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). A common theme within this area is that of emotional intelligence. The second component is the values and the beliefs a leader holds. May et al. (2003) argue that leaders must be totally immersed in their core beliefs and values. However, Shamir and Eilam (2005) use the term 'self-concept clarity,' which implies strongly held values and convictions, which refers to "the extent to which one's self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined and internally consistent" (p. 398). The term 'values' is used consistently again by many other writers (Bell, 2010; Deal & Petterson, 1999; Henderson, Thompson, & Henderson, 2006; Yukl, 2010) but not with the term 'beliefs.' Where writers group other elements along with values they tend to use over arching words such as 'Philosophy of Leadership' (Bell, 2010) where values are grouped with beliefs and worldview. George et al. (2007) use the term 'leadership principles' which they describe as "values translated into action". The third and final component is to do with the leader's moral compass. Here some writers use the term 'ethics,' or 'integrity.' George et al. (2007) regard this as the leader's ethical boundaries. It is also important to note that each of the components do strongly interlink and in many ways cannot be separated as they each affect each other.

Component Number One: Awareness Self and of Others

The literature points very strongly to the importance that leaders need to be continually developing an awareness of themselves and others as part of their leadership character and its development. Leary and Tangney (2003) argue that understanding the way that we perceive ourselves strongly informs our feelings, beliefs, attitudes, goals, and behaviour.

It is through our emotions that we give the world a glimpse of the person within. Yukl (2010) states, "emotions are strong feelings that demand attention and are likely to affect cognitive processes and behaviour" (p. 65). People who do not know themselves sometimes get locked unwittingly into dysfunctional behaviour patterns, and when extreme, move into the character disorders mentioned earlier and are poor judges of other people (Kets de Vries, 2006). This is why self-awareness is also the first step towards effective

leadership (Kets de Vries, 2006). Kets de Vries (2006) goes on to assert that there are three components with regard to emotions and the leader. Leaders first need to understand their emotions, secondly, they must then also learn to manage them and thirdly, they need to learn to recognise and deal with the emotions of others.

Even though Daniel Goleman did not invent emotional intelligence (EQ), he did raise its profile. He emphasises five elements that make up EQ that are important to the character of a person; these being self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, motivation and social skills (Goleman, 1995). Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, (2002) later defined four dimensions of EQ within leadership. Two are internal self-awareness and self-management, and two are external social awareness and relationship management. Salvoy and Mayer (1989) developed an elaborate definition of EQ by expanding it into five areas. Firstly, knowing one's emotions; this is about the ability to monitor our feelings moment by moment. Leaders who have a greater certainty about their feelings are better able to pilot their lives. Secondly, managing emotions. This is about handling feelings and therefore having the ability to shake off emotions like, anxiety, gloom or irritability that come with failure. Leaders who manage their emotions will bounce back far quicker when life's setbacks strike. The third is motivating oneself. This is marshalling the emotions for the development of a goal. Leaders who are able to motivate themselves tend to be more effective and highly productive in whatever they undertake. Fourthly, there needs to be the recognition of emotion in others. They call this empathy and is a fundamental people skill. Finally, there is the area of handling relationships, which is in essence, the art and skill of handling the emotions of others.

The term "to know yourself" is a well-known phrase. It is the first component of EQ (Goleman 1995). Understanding self or self-awareness is one of the important aspects of character development (Bell, 2010; Branson, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2006). But knowing oneself at a deep level is not easy, because understanding our character is complex. Without it, the leader will have

difficulty regulating their emotions, controlling fears and avoiding impulsive outbursts when feeling threatened or rejected (George, 2007). Leaders who do not really know themselves can also get caught up in going after external symbols of success rather than becoming the person they want to be (Bell, 2010). George et al (2007) go on to assert that many leaders in their early years of leadership are trying very hard to carve out a career for themselves and that success is usually achieved in tangible ways that are recognised in the external world, such as money, fame, power or even status. As these leaders age, some do discover something missing in their lives. This is usually the realisation they are holding back from being authentic.

Bell (2010) states that effective leaders are acutely self-aware, because “leaders who are aware of their limitations are more likely, on one hand, to recruit staff who compensate their weaknesses and, on the other, to focus their energies around their strengths” (p. 62). Motivation and behaviour can take place outside of conscious awareness making it vital that the unconscious is brought into the conscious (Kits de Vries, 2006). According to Yukl (2010), leaders who continually develop their self-awareness are more likely to solve complex problems, make better decisions, adapt their behaviour to the situation and manage a crisis more effectively. Awareness of their behaviour and its influence on others can make it easier to learn from experience and discover their strengths and weaknesses (Coombs, 2003).

Van Knippenburg et al. (2004) go on to argue that self-awareness is dynamic, it is the knowledge of competencies the leader has or does not have, attitudes and values, like and dislikes, and aspirations. Different situations bring out different aspects of self to the fore and the exposure of external stimuli can change the self-awareness of the leader. Kihlstorm, Beer and Klein (2003) state that self is a knowledge structure that helps people organise and give meaning to memory and behaviour. Gardner et al. (2005) add they view, in part, self-awareness being linked to self-reflection in order to gain clarity and concordance with respect with their core values, identity, emotions, motives and goals.

It is by reflection that leaders can gain a better understanding of their core values, motives, goals, and identity. People are more successful if they are aware of themselves and their reactions to the world, making it easy to manage their reactions. Shamir and Eilam (2005) go on to add that leaders are people that have self-knowledge and a personal point of view that clearly reflects their values and convictions.

Self-Management

Goleman (1995) argues that the biological impulses that drive our emotions, even though we cannot eliminate them, can be managed by the individual. Managing one's feelings and being in control of them is extremely important for the leader. A leader that can manage their emotions can create an environment of trust and fairness, reducing politics and infighting and increasing productivity. George (2003) adds that leaders are always under the microscope with their behaviours being discussed, observed, and dissected by their followers as well as outsiders. It is for this reason that leaders need to behave with consistency and self-discipline, not letting stress colour their judgement. Goleman et al. (2002) add that this includes a number of positive psychological characteristics, among them optimism, emotional self-control, adaptability, initiative drive for achievement, and authenticity.

Social Awareness and Relationship Management

Social awareness and relationship management is the art of learning to recognise and deal with the emotions of others (Kets de Vries, 2006). This also includes effectively managing the outworking of another person's emotions and behaviour. Yukl (2010) puts this under the heading of interpersonal or social skills, which include ability to communicate clearly and persuasively, along with the ability to understand the motives attitudes and feeling of others. Begley (2006) adds that in order for a leader to lead effectively, there needs to be an understanding of human nature and motivations of individuals.

A key term that is used by some writers around the awareness of others is empathy (Yukl, 2010). He goes on to state that “empathy is the ability to understand another person’s motives, values and emotions” (p. 64). Leaders need to be able to put themselves into someone else’s shoes. Bell (2010) adds that leaders who can connect with others through empathy know that people are moved more by emotion than logic, they know how their people feel.

To conclude Callan (2001) remarks that leaders who have high levels of EQ are able to suspend judgement and to think before they act. They show trustworthiness and integrity, are able to cope with ambiguity, and are open to change. In addition, they are empathetic, are able to demonstrate an ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people, showing skill in treating others according to their emotional reactions. Kets de Vries (2010) adds the leaders with high EQ create stronger interpersonal relationships, are good at motivating others and themselves, are more creative, proactive and innovative, work better under pressure and are more at peace with themselves.

Component Number Two: Beliefs and Principles

The second component of character that seems to have gained some attention is that of the values and beliefs of a leader. All leaders have values and beliefs around leadership, which shape the way they lead. It is through their behaviours and reactions, consciously or subconsciously that determines how they lead. Some behaviours are shaped unconsciously and one of the reasons is that they are formulated in the past. We are a product of our past. The tragedy of life is that you can only understand it backwards but you have to live it forwards (Kets de Vries, 2006).

According to George et al. (2007), values are derived from beliefs and convictions. It is these, that when translated into action, form leadership principles, adding the need for leaders to have a solid base of values that when tested under fire, become leadership principles. The literature shows

strong emphasis being placed on a leader's self-belief or leadership belief and values as being an important component of leadership character along with a strong link between the leader's self-awareness and their understanding of their values. George (2007) states that leaders, in gaining an awareness of who they are, also need to understand their values and the principles that guide their leadership. Shamir and Eilam (2005) in discussing authentic leadership, state that these leaders are portrayed as having self-awareness and a personal point of view that reflect clarity about their values and convictions. Luthans and Avolio (2003) go on to say that authentic leaders are guided by a set of values that are aimed at doing what is right and fair to all stakeholders.

Deal and Peterson (1999) describe values as concepts or mental constructs that capture and express what is important to us. Henderson, et al. (2006) add that they are the sum of our preferences and priorities. Preferences are what we would rather have in our lives and priorities indicate how important each preference is in relation to another. Bell (2010) states that:

values have the quality of deep-rooted conviction. They are held dearly and are entirely consistent with your worldview, even if subconsciously so; in fact, uncovering your values can help you understand your worldview. Values are typically few but firm. They are non-negotiable. And, of course, they drive behaviour. (p. 59)

Yukl (2010) asserts that values are internalised attitudes about what is right and wrong, what is ethical, unethical, moral and immoral. George (2003) adds that leaders are defined by their values and character. Begley (2001) goes on to state, "values appear to be derived from both within the individual's psychology as well as from the individual's interaction with collective groups, organisations and societies" (p. 356).

Begley (2006) does suggest that there is still debate as to where values come from, questioning whether we are we born with some, being hardwired as part

of our nature, or whether they socially acquired. George et al. (2007) argue that true values come out when tested under pressure. It is when the leader's success, career, or even life hangs in the balance, when leaders learn what is important and what they are prepared to sacrifice, trade-off or not. It is these tested values that form the principles used in leading.

Shamir and Eilam (2005) use the term self-concept instead of leadership principles, which they refer to as the extent the leader's self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined and internally consistent. They go on to add that stable and coherent self-concepts provide leaders with an important source of coherence, and a framework for defining their existence, predicting future events, organising experience, and guiding social interactions. Hodgkinson (1996) adds, "if the unexamined life is not worth living, the unexamined value is not worth holding" (p. 8). Begley (2006) goes on to add, that all leaders consciously or unconsciously use values to guide them in interpreting situations and suitable administrative action, adding leaders should know their own values and ethical predispositions, and be sensitive to those of others.

Component Three: A Clear Moral Compass

Leaders need a clearly defined moral compass and those that do not have this moral framework are beginning to have a shortened shelf life as leaders compared to a few decades ago (Bell, 2010). A faulty moral compass may succeed for a while, but in a matter of time, such leaders fall. People will eventually rebel against a leader with a faulty moral compass. Thompson (2009) adds that a moral compass is the reflective, intentional, adoption of values and behaviour as a framework for realising the good in oneself, in others and the social material environment. He goes on to add that it is "reflected in character, decision making, relationships and the impact on the social and material environment" and finally he adds that it is "grounded in a wisdom tradition such as philosophy, religion, or culture" (p. 7).

The base of leadership morals are the leader's values and standards. Ethical boundaries or morals can place limits on actions. However, these mean

nothing unless they are tested and put under pressure. The leader who has a clear moral compass can more easily withstand the pressures when they appear (George, 2007). Thompson (2009) adds that a leader's morality is a framework of values, principled reasoning and agency, that is tested through performance and in conditions of risk, danger and uncertainty.

A leader's morality is a framework of values, principled reasoning and agency, that is tested through performance and in conditions of risk, danger and uncertainty. Moral issues are typically those that can harm or benefit others (May et al. 2003). It is therefore important that leaders model morality, create moral climate and make decisions involving others in response to competing values and moral claims. Leaders are also accountable for their exercise of power, their morality, the moral climate they create, and the moral quality of their decisions (Thompson, 2009).

Leadership is a process of morality to the degree leaders engage with followers on the basis of shared motives, values and goals (Burns, 1978). George (2003) states that the various qualities of a moral leader can be summarised in one word: authenticity. It is the most important characteristic one has to have to be a leader. It stands for moral commitment to a purpose or a mission: authentic leaders are people who live by their values every day and who know the true north of their moral compass. Blasé and Kirby (2009) state that principals "may have been deemed effective largely because they honoured their personal moral code" (p. 106). Without a moral compass, any leader can wind up like the executives who are facing possible prison sentences today because "they lacked a sense of right and wrong" (George, 2003, p. 20).

Today there is a need for authentic leadership that pursues ends for the greater good of others. Moral leadership seeks the good of the organisation, the good of the people and the good of those touched by it. Collins (2001) describes such a person as a 'Level Five Leader.' Some of these qualities stated by Collins are:

demonstrates a compelling modesty, shunning public adulation; never boastful. Acts with quiet calm determination; relies primarily on inspired standards, not inspiring charisma, to motivate. Looks out the window, not in the mirror, to apportion credit for the success of the company-to other people, external factors, and good luck. Looks in the mirror, not out the window, to apportion responsibility for poor results, never blaming other people, external factors or bad luck. (p.36)

Having a clear moral compass involves the leader having integrity, humility, care and courage. These are internal qualities that can be seen visibly by those that are following in the actions and words of the leader. Integrity implies honesty, fairness, justice and dependability (Bell, 2010). George (2007) does not define it in this way, he asserts that it is integrating all aspects of your life, so that you are true to yourself in all settings. Yukl (2010) expands on this by putting both statements above together and stating, "integrity means that a person's behaviour is consistent with espoused values and person is honest, ethical, and trustworthy." He goes on to say that "integrity is a primary determinant of interpersonal trust" (p. 56).

Humility is the ingredient that keeps leaders approachable, that allows them to laugh at themselves and keeping them from taking things too seriously, but it also keeps them growing and learning (Bell, 2006). Kets de Vries (2010) states that humility is rooted in accurate self-perception. Effective leaders realise that no conquest is their's alone.

Caring is basically one person's compassion and concern for another. It is the primary purpose and the ethical glue that holds people together (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This term cannot be confused with being nice. Effective leaders genuinely care for the people they lead but they may not be nice to them. Bell (2010) states that care can be shown in two ways. Firstly, through a willingness to sacrifice others for the benefit of those that the leader leads.

Secondly, through connecting with others. This is the ability to connect with people through emotion and empathy, a quality mentioned earlier as EQ.

Finally, courage takes many forms and expressions. Bell (2010) states that courage is acting on principle not popular opinion, accepting responsibility for mistakes, having a willingness to sacrifice for others, selecting strong leaders to work alongside, a willingness to look inside and acknowledge weaknesses, to be authentic and finally to face unsolved questions and perhaps live with them. Courage in the end, is a function of commitment.

CONCLUSION

At its heart, leadership is about human behaviour. It revolves around highly complex interplay between leaders and followers, all put into a particular situational context. It is about understanding the way people and organisations behave, about creating and strengthening relationships, about building commitment, establishing group identity, and about adapting behaviour to increase effectiveness. In addition, it is also about creating meaning. Leaders should be merchants of hope, speaking to the collective imagination of their followers, co-opting them to join them in a great adventure. They should inspire people to move beyond personal, egoistic motives – to transcend themselves, as it were – and as a result they get the best out of their people. In short, good leadership makes a positive difference, whatever the context (Bass, 1985; Bennis & Nanus, 1986; Burns, 1978; Stogdill, 1974). In essence this cannot be taught or mandated as a set of skills to leaders. The degree to which the above is effective must involve also the character of the leader.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Character is a form of memory (Kets de Vries, 2006) and memory is based on life's experiences. This study aimed to explore the life experiences of principals in their development of their awareness of themselves and others, leadership values and beliefs and core values and how this influences their practice today. Data were collected in the form of stories, as individuals use stories to make sense of their lived experiences (Pentland, 1999). This chapter provides the rationale and justification for the qualitative methodological approach of this particular research. It identifies the method used to gather data and considers the principles and practices for applying this method. Considerations for strengthening reliability and validity are identified and ethical issues related to the study are discussed.

METHODOLOGY

All research has a certain epistemological framework that it sits within. An epistemological position demands consideration of what is acceptable, legitimate knowledge, how it is acquired and how it is communicated to others (Bryman, 2008; Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). There are two main paradigms that guide the choice of epistemological position taken, either it is a positivist, or an interpretive paradigm (Cohen, et. al., 2007). A positivist paradigm takes the view that knowledge is objective and tangible and has strong links to the natural sciences. However, an interpretive paradigm is more personal and subjective and can be linked to the social sciences (Bryman, 2008; Cohen, et. al., 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

Because this study sought to explore and examine the concept of character and its development, it lent itself to being studied from an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is characterised by concern for the individual (Bryman, 2008; Cohen, et. al., 2007) and seeks to understand an aspect of the subjective realities of human experience. In order to understand

how the character of experienced principals informed their development, it was important to carry out the research in such a way to discover through life stories how their character evolved over time.

Creswell (2002) proposes that qualitative research is useful when the researcher is unsure of the important variables to examine, especially in such instances when the topic is new or has never been addressed with a specific sample group. Therefore, a qualitative approach was appropriate to this study, given that the literature related to educational leadership character is limited (Russell & Stone, 2002).

Qualitative research fits within an interpretive paradigm where the researcher seeks to study and understand phenomena in relation to the meanings people attribute to it (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It is argued that this requires significant differences in the way these things are measured, as compared to the measurement strategies applied to quantitative research (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Working from within a framework of a mainly qualitative methodology enabled me to view the topic of character through the eyes of the participants.

A number of methods and approaches related to qualitative research are described in detail in the literature (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Not one method is viewed as better than another in qualitative research. In reviewing research method literature in light of my research it quickly became apparent that a more specific qualitative approach, namely a narrative, would be appropriate for the purpose of this study.

Narrative inquiry is a particular type of qualitative inquiry. Mills (1959, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) argues that what distinguishes this form of inquiry is the trilogy of biography, history and society. It is a narrative of life experiences as narrated by those that have lived them. Narrative theorists define narratives as “meaning making through shaping or ordering of life experience, a way of understanding one’s own actions or others’ actions, of organizing

events and objects into a meaningful whole, of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time.” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 423).

There are several approaches to narrative inquiry. This research took a ‘storytelling as a lived experience’ approach. In this approach, narration was the practice of building meaningful selves, identities, and realities. This is where researchers treat an awareness of storytelling practices as critical to what the narrators are communicating (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach has been used to explore a broad range of topics and the use of in-depth interviewing is one of the usual methods with this approach.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Selection of Participants

The main criteria of selection were school leaders who were experienced and had been in their school for five years or longer. The Ministry of Education indicates that experienced principals are those who have been in the position for five years or more as they are eligible to apply for the experienced principals’ professional development courses. In addition, principals who have submitted sabbatical reports will be experienced, as sabbaticals are only given to a Ministry of Education sponsored principal once every five years.

This study involved hearing the ‘inside character stories’ of six experienced principals. The selection of these leaders was narrowed down to the Auckland area and came from low decile schools with an Educational Review Office Report that stated that the school’s next review was to be within the next four to five years. This ensured it was not an ‘at risk’ school, being on 1 or 2 year review cycle or having a commissioner. Previous to the recent new review cycles, reviews were done every three years, if the school was operating well. Schools that were seen as a concern were reviewed more regularly. Therefore a three year or a four to five year review cycle indicates that the school was operating well.

In order to find these principals, I went to the New Zealand Ministry of Education, “Educational Leaders” website. On this particular site can be found information to help educational leaders and related research, but also sabatical reports which include the names of the principals and their schools. I only looked at those submitted reports from the Auckland area during the period of 2009-2011. I also obtained a list of schools in Auckland area that the Educational Review Office (ERO), through their public reports, had put on a 4-5 year review cycle. This gave me a list of potential participants. To narrow the list down even further, potential candidate’s school Education Review Office Reports were read, to determine the decile. Those participants of schools with a decile of 5-10 were deleted from the list as this study was targeting decile 1 – 4 schools. To ensure that I obtained a good representation. The list indicating schools with a 4 – 5 year review was also cross referenced with the list of potential participants to see if there were any more possible experienced principals that had been omitted.

Using a 2007 Waterman’s School Directory, which has all the schools and their principals in Auckland, as well as current 2012 one, a cross check was done to see which of the possible participants were still at same as school. A final refinement was done using the ERO reports looking for positive comments which mentioned the quality of the leader. An example being seen below from an ERO Report;

The school is well led by a capable and knowledgeable principal. He is well supported by his senior managers to build leadership capability to sustain curriculum developments and initiatives. His comprehensive reports to the board allow trustees to make well informed decisions about the school and there is a strong foundation for good governance by committed trustees.

As a result the names of twelve possible educational leaders were obtained.

The selection to find my six principals involved placing the twelve names into a hat and writing down the order in which they were pulled out. A phone call was made, starting with the first to be pulled out, to informally enquire whether they would be interested in being a part of this study. The first six that were contacted all agreed to do the study. As principals can be very busy a tentative interview time was arranged at that point for three weeks later. A formal invitation and information about the study (Appendix One), along with the consent letter (Appendix Two), simple questionnaire (Appendix Three) and the possible interview questions (Appendix Four) were sent to all the final participants.

Questionnaire

Each of the six principals completed a brief base-line questionnaire to gather information around their experience leading up to their current position. It was used to gather information on their current context as to school size, ethnic make-up, staffing and so on (See Appendix Three). None of this data was used as it was primarily to further ascertain the experience of the leader and to start the participant thinking about their 'character leadership stories' in preparation for the interview.

Semi-Structured Interview

The main method of collecting the data for this study was in the form of stories. These were elicited through carefully crafted open-ended questions that enable the participants to tell their stories around the themes of this study. Therefore the tool used came in the form of a semi-structured interview (See Appendix Four). Through this semi-structured approach the intention was to provide a framework with flexibility so that the participant could relate their own life story experiences, but stay within the related themes of this study (Cohen et al., 2007). The most important aspect of the interviewer's approach is conveying the attitude that the participants' stories are valuable and useful. The interviewer's success depended on how well this was anticipated and practised in their ethical issues.

Interviews have particular strengths as they yield data in quantity quickly. It is a powerful way to gain knowledge of educational leadership issues through understanding the experiences of those working in this field. Interviews provide in-depth data on topics being researched from the perspective of the interviewee. The interviewer can also immediately follow up on a given answer to gain further clarification (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). This supports the argument that a narrative approach was the best one for this study.

Analysis

The lenses to access the meaning which human beings attribute to their experiences, was through the narrative method of study of lives which views individual descriptions, explanations and interpretations of actions and events (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005). This method is interpretative as the story itself represents an interpretation of the narrator's experiences but also the researcher will uncover meanings embedded in the story. Underlying themes are unlikely to be found in an explicit form, as most people avoid abstract theories and most storytellers reveal in the concrete terms as they remember it (Gardner, 1995). It is therefore the researcher's task to draw from life history narratives the principles on which the stories are founded, not the task of the storyteller (Musson, 1998).

The approach was taken that stories were 'depositories of meaning' (Gabriel, 2000) and they were looked at from the perspective that asked about the 'meaning' from an effective leadership development point of view. The aim was not to reconstruct or interpret these stories but was to distil the central themes.

In order to get robust data careful thought was put into the interview questions. Ideas for questions were researched from different sources such as books, journal articles and research thesis on similar themes. Examples of these were from authors such as Cashman, *Leadership for the Inside Out* (2008), George, *True North* (2007) and Collins, *Good to Great* (2001). Each of

these authors placed the questions used in their research in the appendix of their respective books. These were modified or became trigger points for the questions that were developed for this study. These are attached in Appendix Four.

Once the questions had been established a mock interview was undertaken. This enabled the researcher to iron out any issues with regard to interview technique and the selected questions, but also to pretest a set of initial codes that had been developed. Codes were established to align with the interview questions. Testing of the reliability of the codes were done by a test and retest method. This is where the researcher coded the material once without looking at the results then re-coded the same material to see whether the first and second coding agreed. Codes used in this research are attached to the Appendix Five.

Miles and Huberman (1994) state that there are two main types of codes, descriptive and inferential, going on to add that coding will start by being descriptive, requiring little or no inference beyond the piece of data. At a later stage, codes may be more interpretative requiring some degree of inference beyond the data, which was also done in this study. This involved looking for pattern codes. These codes pull together material into smaller and more meaningful units. In addition, memoing occurred while coding. Glaser (1978) defines memoing as, “the theorising write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding ... it can be a sentence, a paragraph or a few pages ... it exhausts the analyst’s momentary ideation based on data with perhaps a little conceptual elaboration” (p. 83-4).

In order to get accurate data, each interview was recorded. These were transcribed and each participant’s transcript was given back them to comment on, for both accuracy and to add any additional information. Opportunity was also given for another shorter interview so that additional information could result in greater clarity. These were also going to be recorded and transcribed if the participant wished, which again would have been returned again to

ascertain accuracy. None of the participants requested a second interview.

The data in the form of the transcripts were read and reread to identify major themes, highlighting and identifying key points and ideas, in order to get a clear picture of their leadership and character development. This was done through a coding and memoing process, individually at first and then compared with each other.

The concrete operational steps for coding relevant information depend on the nature of the information and the interviewing methods used. Two methods of data analysis were used. Firstly, each transcript was read and each fragment of relevant information was underlined and each were labeled. However, this did not allow the whole analysis to be seen at a glance, which does not allow a quick comparison of one interview to another. Therefore, a second method was used in this study, that of a “long-table” approach, which “allows the analyst to identify and catagorise results” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 132). Each section, from each of the participants was laid out so they could be read and reread to identify possible codes and subsequent themes, as mentioned above. This involved printing transcripts onto coloured-coded paper, keeping a hard copy for reference and then cutting up further copy into individual, but identifiable quotes. A descriptive summary could then be prepared to characterise the emerging themes.

Generalisability

Generalisability of findings that come out of the data will be very difficult in this study due to the small cohort of participants and thenarrow field in which they come from. In larger studies which are quantitative it can be easier to make statements in relation to the findings. Therefore, the findings and statements applying to this study cannot be regarded as applying to all situations.

Validity and Reliability

To strengthen the validity of the interview the process, there needed to be an awareness of bias. Cohen et al., (2007) suggest that the sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the respondent and the substantive content of the questions. Therefore, to increase the validity the interview there needed to be clear open-ended questions aligned to the aim of the research and the research questions. In addition, the interviewer needed to be able to listen carefully and to probe for more information without offering their opinion. To help, each interview was audio recorded.

Data collection for an interview, and in this case a semi-structured interview, needed to be well thought out in order to maximise the quality of the data. Punch (2011) states that there are common sense things that can be done to get this quality. Firstly, the researcher needs to think through the rationale and logistics of the data collection, planning it carefully. Secondly, practice/pilot test the procedures, especially if instruments are being used. Finally, the researcher must not assume they know how to do it but needs to look for guidance and training where necessary.

Appropriate skills need to be mastered. In order to ensure the interview went well I first sought out a person with interviewing skills to discuss interviewing, seeking advice. Secondly, I conducted two mock interviews. Participants in these were advised not to share information of a sensitive nature of any kind, nor were these recorded. They were told that these interviews were being conducted to give me some experience in interviewing and the participants were asked to give feed-forward information on how it went and how it made them feel during this time.

In order to gain maximum information from the participants, the proposed questions that were to elicit their stories were sent to them beforehand so they had opportunity to think and reflect first on their story before telling it.

To conclude, the selection goal was to find six experienced principals with five or more years experience and five or more years in their current position. In addition these schools in which these principals led needed to be in a low decile area, have a review cycle of four to five years and have a reference within the school's Education Review Office Report of the leadership team being effective. All of these goals were met.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Six principals were selected who were experienced and have been in their current school for more than five years. I did not interview potential participants who were either local colleagues or friends. The principles of informed individual and organisational consent and of anonymity of the schools and participants did apply (Cohen, et al., 2007). Participants were provided with the opportunity to check their transcripts for accuracy. This process enhanced the reliability or dependability of the research in that it can then be surmised that over time, similar results would be achieved (Cohen, et al., 2007).

The process of selection was followed as stated above. The aim was to identify at least twelve principals. When twelve had been identified, the first six that were pulled out of the hat were sent an invitation to participate. The invitation had a detailed outline explanation as to what the research is about in order for them to make a final well-informed decision. If there was a decline to participate the next participant drawn (the seventh name) would have been approached. This process would have continued until I had my six participants. If at the end of this process I still did not have the six principals I would have extended the area to include Waikato principals.

Once I had my six participants and they were fully made aware of the research, they signed the necessary consent form (See Appendix Two). As this research involved the telling of life experiences, which may have included positive and also negative experiences, assurances was given around the data obtained to ensure the safety of all, that no names or schools will be

revealed and the raw data will not be shared by the researcher and locked away at all times in researcher's home office. Each participant's transcript was given to them to view for accuracy before analysis occurred. Each of the participants was given a summary of the research when completed in acknowledgement of their participation and contribution.

CHAPTER FOUR - FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the narratives of the six experienced principals who have been in their schools for longer than five years and have been in educational leadership as a principal for that period of time or longer. The six primary school principals were all in decile one to four Auckland schools, with rolls no smaller than 150 children. They will be known throughout the rest of this study as Participant A, B, C, D, E and F. Three of the participants were male, B, C, E, and three were female, A, D, and F.

The analysis of the data taken from the six interviews is presented in the following way for each participant. The start of each participant's analysis begins with a picture of how they described their leadership character today, as it was represented in the interview. Following this, their stories revealed a range of influences that they believed have developed their character and shaped their values and beliefs as a leader. Included were stories of dilemmas they faced in day-to-day principal practice. There are a range of lengths with regard to each narrative, based on the depth to which each participant chose to go during the interview.

PARTICIPANT A

The Leader Today

During the interview Participant A painted the following picture of herself as an educational leader. She acknowledged her leadership style was still very much evolving but had gained a lot of experience and knowledge in running a school, especially with the relational aspect of leadership. To her, this included effectively handling the finances and creating a learning environment for all. However, she stated that she is too optimistic and does not see the fishhooks all the time.

Obvious from an early stage in her career, she regarded herself as a “good practitioner”, when it came to teaching, even though she was no longer in a class fulltime. She believed she was observant in the sense that she knew what was happening in the school. She described her brand of leadership as one that was reflective and someone who shared leadership with others, knowing that she could not do it all herself.

She has taken a number of professional development opportunities and had travelled in order to view other educational systems. She believed this had given her a wider knowledge of educational leadership, which she stated had been used to guide her leadership practice.

Influences that Shaped Character

Early Years

In her early years, Participant A was not encouraged to become a leader. One of the most striking influences, as she recalls, were her parents and their expectations. Girls were not to go to university, but instead there was “an expectation I would grow up to be a corporate wife”. As a result she left home at an early age and supported herself through tertiary education and as a result she stated:

My family were horrified and there was certainly no finances that followed me. I think that helped me as a leader because from an early age I've had to be utterly independent.

She added that her early years doing a lot of outdoor activities gave her opportunities to take risks. These were the early development of what she called a ‘can do’ attitude and a dislike for deficit thinking today. Her first recollection of leadership was that of club captain at a pony club.

Significant People

Throughout the interview this participant mentioned several people that have influenced her to become the leader she is today. In her early life she stated

that she saw no reason to be at school because of parental expectations and therefore did not put a lot of effort into her school work. It was not until she was challenged by a history teacher in her later years at high school who encouraged her to settle down and use “the brain” she saw she had. It was this belief in her that prompted the desire to go on to further education after high school. This led to being invited to listen to a presentation on going to Teachers’ College and becoming a teacher, which she subsequently did.

In addition, several other people shaped and influenced her leadership. Even though her parents had no aspirations for her to go to university, they still had high expectations and she said this contributed to her having these of herself and others. She added that the whole staff have high expectations:

I have expectations that things are done, but you know the classroom programmes delivered to a certain standard ... Yeah we’ve got high expectations. I think teachers have high expectations of each other, high expectations of themselves, they enjoy it, they see what it does.

In another story she mentioned an uncle who believed strongly in her. He was in education and had his own beliefs with what she could do and would tell her that could be whatever she wanted to be. She added that the nuns at the school she attended influenced some of her values, such as being truthful and holding fast to and not bending them to please other people.

Her husband she also regarded as being influential, in that he is a businessman. She talked about some of his advice of coming back to the school’s mission statement and the decisions made should in essence be around that, to prevent being ‘tossed around in the wind.’

She also spoke of the time before taking on a formal leadership role where she revealed that she made a conscious effort to observe leaders. Here she stated she would watch and evaluate what was good and not so good, noting what

they did for future reference to be included or excluded from her style of leadership.

Experiences

The stories this participant shared about her experience throughout her roles in educational leadership has influenced her to make some profound changes to her leadership practice. One statement she made indicated that if she were to start another school she would bring to it a lot of experience:

I would bring a whole lot of experience to it. It would be interesting to do another one because I have a lot of knowledge, a lot of experience.

It is this continual experience around leading a school plus several incidents that she recalled, as to why her leadership is something that continues to evolve.

She shared another experience when moving from a senior teacher position, to take on the role of an Assistant Principal in a large primary school and while her children were still young. Personal circumstances made shifting to this role more necessary for financial reasons. Later, when having moved to a Deputy Principal's role, she began to prepare herself for the next step of being a principal by starting a formal qualification in educational leadership.

Conflicts and Trials

In commenting on her current leadership style she stated that it was "evolving." She acknowledged her leadership style evolved through her experience in dealing with conflict in many different contexts. Her comment came in light of her first role as principal where she stated:

And it was a hell hole. Absolutely the worst you could ever imagine. And it was trial by fire all the time. We used to have to get the police in to break up fights. It was horrific.

The challenging experiences she faced in her first leadership role were due to dealing with an under performing school. It also included dealing with challenges with the Education Review Office, police, teachers' union, community, staff, children, and the Ministry of Education. One story that she relayed was dealing with staffing where the teachers' union was involved. She stated this was a new experience and made stressful with her dealings with one union delegate:

I wouldn't have gone through the angst and the anxiety just to see her pull up in the carpark. Just have a lot of knowledge now about the process and what you've got to do.

She revealed that if she were to be asked to take on another underperforming school, her comment was that she would now bring a lot of experience to it and the stress would not be as extreme.

Dealing with People

Her stories also revealed that dealing with people has influenced her leadership. She added that another major influence in her leadership development was dealing with inexperienced staff. After she had dealt with any incompetent staff, she only could manage to replace them with beginning teachers. Working with these teachers and the experiences that they all went through in getting the school back on track, contributed to her ability to share leadership:

And that's made me really good at being able to share, totally share leadership, and bring on leaders, leadership is a strong focus of this school right from the kids, and I think that's why, because we all went through that together.

Therefore this participant's introduction into the world of principalship was an experience that could be likened to 'trial by fire.' The school was underperforming and in major need of being turned around. Her reflection on

this is interesting. She stated that she survived because of the experiences of her youth,

And I think that was because I had developed so much independence at a young age that I was able to do that.

She added that the experience gained in these early years meant that:

I could come at it with more knowledge and experience. I wouldn't have let the union knock me around as much as they did.

In asking what moral dilemmas she faced, her response was around people and children. The story she told was of going through competency process with a staff member. According to her, this particular teacher was not good enough nor did she have the skills to adequately teach at any school. What made it emotionally difficult and challenging to move the process to completion and see the staff member removed from the school, was that this staff member claimed that she was the sole money earner in her family. This staff member went on to argue that being unable to get another teaching job was amounting to her not being able to feed her own children. It is balancing the needs of the school's children and their learning that determine at what point educational leaders need to act when a staff member that is not performing and the result when the leader takes action can create a range dilemmas.

Development of Beliefs

Over the years in leading her first school, her belief around what leadership is has evolved as well. In talking about her current leadership and her role she stated,

I believe it is very much my job to get what people need, not just furniture or buildings, but to always be watching out for opportunities that will help people.

When asked what experiences brought her to this point, she again referred to the start of her time in this underperforming school. This she described was “hell” which included getting rid of “terrible” people. But it also included growing a group of people from very small beginnings.

As a leader she stated, that in her school she was not going to have negative or disgruntled people. If there are, she stated, they are “met head on and solved one way or another.” When asked where that came from her response was, “just life’s experiences”.

She regarded the opportunities for learning and growth as most precious and valuable. Again her response was that it was something experience had built up over her life. However, when probed as to whether this was always the case, she went on to reveal that when applied to children from low socio-economic backgrounds it had changed,

I don’t think so. No. I don’t think so. A big bit of it, would be having seen the change in this school in 10 years and what children can aspire to and what they can go out with and equipped for. I’ve got a much greater awareness of what early education does and the link through to good high school results, which leads to a positive future.

Gaining knowledge

Knowledge Through Reflection of Experiences and Professional learning

This participant acknowledged that her growing ability to reflect influenced her leadership. She stated that she is far more reflective now than what she used to be. She revealed that it is the experiences that she went through that have improved her ability in this area.

Just experience. Just things to reflect on I guess. Different ways things might go, different outcomes, I would evaluate situations more

closely. I would look outside the square more. Check up on my own thinking more. Just experience.

From experiences this participant has gone through and her ability to reflect she acknowledged a greater educational leadership knowledge has been gained. She qualified this by stating if she was asked to turn around another school she would “*come at it with more knowledge and experience.*” This indicated that the experiences she went through were ones she learnt from and therefore would be far easier to go through a second time.

Her gaining of knowledge started when she was an assistant principal. This knowledge was in the form of academic study in order for her to acquire a principal’s position. This gave her the skills to be able to do the job. Academic study and the knowledge gained from this influenced who she is and her leadership. This also trained her to be more reflective.

I think I’ve been trained to be more reflective through my Masters degree. You know up and down the ladder of inference and all that stuff.

Later, she added to assure herself that it was appropriate in dealing with a situation:

And you know using that whole ladder of inference and checking whether you think someone thinks this, asking do they really, making sure you’ve got the clear picture, checking my own theory, am I really acting what I’m saying I’m doing that, am I really doing that and checking it out with people.

She also added other professional development contributed to her both being more reflective as well as adding also to her leadership knowledge.

Knowledge Through Travelling

She also acknowledged that travelling has been another way she has increased her knowledge which has influenced her leadership. She did a lot as a young teacher, but this has continued when in leadership positions. This has widened her outlook further than just her school.

I've had the opportunity to travel and look at other education systems. So I think about it more widely than just one school.

When discussing work ethics she viewed this from a global perspective. She revealed that she sometimes lacks tolerance with some staff when they call in sick and added that no one without a good work ethic will survive in her school. She stated, "working big New Zealand hours" is nothing when you compare this to the hours worked in countries such as Vietnam and places like that.

Knowledge Through Failure

Failure has played a part in her leadership and the fact that she has become more reflective enables her to learn and develop for this. There have been things that have worked and those that did not. From this she relayed a tragic event that affected the whole school. This event:,

...was a terrible sense of failure that, you know. None of us picked it. It was just awful. So I guess that builds more reflection again of what you see might not see what is going on at all."

In asking how this has changed her perception of staff she added:

I looked at them very closely. We had to watch very closely for reactions and people who might go down through that. And its funny the ones you might be most concerned about like the classroom teacher, he's just been brilliant. Other people have gone way down

through it. It's amazing really. Yeah. Made me feel very, not incompetent, but you know, gee am I doing this properly."

Summary

To sum up this participant's leadership development you would have to say it was 'trial by fire.' Even though she had leadership positions in the way of senior teacher and deputy principal roles, it became very apparent that during the interview she developed most of her leadership skills and her character in turning around a poorly performing school.

Experience and reflection have been the key to her development and walking alongside this has also been the knowledge gained in her travel and academic study. One comment that she made was that if she was asked to go in and turn another school around, it would be a lot easier now she has walked that road, but she strongly recommended that new leaders not be put into this position.

PARTICIPANT B

The Leader Today

During the interview and the stories that came through the following information was presented as to what the participant's current leadership looked like. One of the main points to come out in several of his stories indicated that he was a team player. He believed that leadership is something that needed to be shared. He acknowledged that he is not scared to say that others have more expertise in some areas and they are the people that need to be given the opportunity to be leading these.

I think leadership to me is something that is a shared thing. But as the leader it still comes back to me and I am prepared to take that final responsibility. But it's something that is shared and it's everyone who contributes to it.

He revealed that he enables his staff to have the opportunity to develop their ideas. He is prepared to let them have a go and realises that they may make mistakes. When they are in charge of an area or a budget, he stated that he does not interfere, but still monitors. However, he acknowledged that, in the end, the buck stops with himself.

But it's still finally my responsibility here. The buck falls with me in the end. And if someone has made mistakes along the way, I won't go to the parents and say well actually it wasn't my fault it was theirs, it was their idea.

He emphasised that he is someone who can listen to the concerns of the community, especially parents. More importantly he saw himself as community orientated, wanting to involve the community in the school.

Another strong point about his leadership that he divulged came out in more than one story presented; that is, his leadership has evolved and something he has developed during the course of his career.

I guess my own leadership is something I've developed and I know very well when I do finish here the leadership is going to be quite different to me and I'm certainly not saying my leadership's going to be better.

Finally, this participant could not describe what brand of leader he was.

Influences that Shaped Character

Early Years

Several stories that this participant told indicated that early in life team sports had a major impact on his leadership. Playing both summer and winter team sports, including being captain and representing his province, showed him the importance of people working together toward common goals, but also gave

him early leadership experience. Later this sporting leadership led to school leadership.

Significant People

In his stories several people came out as having had an impact on his leadership. He stated that he had learned from both good educational leadership and bad. He acknowledged the way his parents, wife and children have influenced his leadership over the years.

His Parents

His parents were mentioned in a couple of his stories both on the positive impact they had on his leadership, but also some of the negative things he chose would not be helpful when it came to leading others. His father was quite autocratic, which he later stated made him quite uncomfortable in seeing the same kind of traits in other leaders.

And he was you know very strict in our upbringing and I thought, he's got a lot of good qualities but there are also things that I thought, "No I don't want to be like that myself." Arrogant. It's got to be done his way, there is no other way, that sort of thing.

When talking about his values and work ethics, one of his stories placed great emphasis that these were primarily an influence coming from his parents. He recognised that his parents instilled in him the importance of family, reliability, honesty, and trust. He went on to state that these are very important in his leadership today.

I think in our job people need to think you're trustworthy and I think the community trusts me because I've been here a long time but you have to build up trust.

His Children

He stated that having his own children was the 'trigger' that enabled him to become a better listener and accept different points of view.

Having your own kids, over time, I think I've become a much better listener to parents and to parents' concerns, hearing their story rather than me saying, no that's not right, you shouldn't do this or that way. I think I've developed into a much better listener and prepared to listen to other people's views, whether it's staff, or whether it's parents.

Educational leaders

Throughout his stories he noted that there have been several principals that have impacted on him as a leader. They either reinforced what he thought was important to leadership or showed him what was not. His first experience of educational leadership was a principal who was always in his office or out of the school. As a result, he found himself teaching in a poorly functioning school. He revealed that he was given a position of leadership and used this to change the situation. However, his conclusion in viewing this leader, was that effective leadership cannot occur by isolating oneself.

I think my very first principal taught me that you don't isolate yourself from your staff. He was the one that stayed in his office, hardly had a staff meeting, the staff was split, but over that time he had done nothing about it.

The second principal that he worked under, he recalled was a team player. Seeing how well the staff functioned and got on with each other in very trying and difficult working conditions reinforced his belief that staff need to work as a team to succeed. But more importantly, he stated that this principal was the sort of leader he wanted to be later on.

I've found that he was probably the sort of person that I thought that I might like to be later on as his principal. Got on well with staff. Got them working together in very difficult circumstances

In one school he came across three principals in a relatively short period of time. The first was retiring and very much autocratic. This he declared reminded him a lot of his father and his own up-bringing. Aspects of this sort of leadership he did not want to be like, especially as he viewed this principal as arrogant. This reinforced again that this was not the type of leader he wanted to be. The second was an Acting Principal position and he enjoyed this person's leadership style, as he was a 'people person,' a team player, very similar to the second principal he had worked under. The third was more of an ideas man changing everything very quickly without looking at the benefits or non-benefits of the change. Interestingly, he added, these ideas were not based around discussions, but they were the leader's only. He went on to add that this principal regarded the school as his and he was going to put his stamp on it no matter what. Participant B revealed that this was not for him and confessed as a result he sought a teaching position in another school.

Experiences

Dealing with people

One of his stories of a significant experience influencing his early leadership occurred in his fourth year of teaching, and was around creating a team when he was made acting Deputy Principal. At this particular school the staff were split into two syndicates that did not associate in any way with each other. Through the experience he had gained, both playing team sports and in his role of captain, he and a colleague successfully brought the two syndicates together so that the school operated as a team.

So I think bringing teamwork and working as a team I think right from that early stage I thought that's something that is really important in teaching.

In discussing if he would handle that situation differently today he stated that he would be more direct by stating that this was to stop and give reasons why.

He recalled his first experience as a principal, that of a very small school. The interesting comment that came out of this was that he revealed it was here “you quickly learned what leadership was, working in a rural community.”

In moving from a principal of a small school to a deputy principal of a large school he told the story of where the principal did not like the other deputy principal. As a result he was given all the release time, which meant he did not have classroom responsibility. He stated that this principal was great to work for and in a sense he was able to develop and interact with the parents, which he acknowledged, “helped hugely in my leadership development.”

He recalled a story of an educational leader who had a personal relationship with another staff member many years ago. He said it was a difficult time for him as he wanted to be loyal to the principal but also the staff had suddenly turned against this person when it was discovered what was going on. He added that the staff refused to talk to the leader and used him instead as their voice. This placed him in a dilemma in so much as hearing the negative comments and at the same time supporting his boss even though he disagreed with his actions. He revealed that this showed him the need for leaders to have integrity and when it was not there he had learnt that things can change dramatically in a very short period of time.

Development of beliefs

Participant B stated that by the time he got to his current school, through his previous experience, he had developed his core beliefs around leadership. These he revealed were based on the importance of getting the community on side by working alongside them. This he acknowledged came from different experiences which included, his sporting days when he played with a variety of people from different ethnic backgrounds, as a first time principal needing to get out into the community and at his second school, which was a similar environment to the current one. Secondly, his belief around teams and sharing leadership, which also came from his early days of playing team

sports and also the styles of leadership he worked under. Finally, the values that he held came primarily from his parents.

Gaining knowledge

Observing other Leaders

He mentioned getting his degree which was not one that centred on leadership but helped him with his curriculum knowledge. He stated that his increase in leadership knowledge was primarily due to observing other educational leaders and other people, learning from them and taking on board what was good and rejecting what was bad. He also emphasised that his knowledge increased by simply 'doing leadership.'

Summary

In looking at Participant B's stories it becomes apparent that his leadership today is as a result of every school he has been in, there has been something that he has taken, whether they were good or not so good experiences and learning. These are what have moulded him to what he is today. He showed that in observing leadership and learning from their strengths and weaknesses, he was very reflective. He did make a very strong point that his greatest learning as a leader happened when he was in the position of principal. As for his personal and leadership values, these came from his mother and father along with his own family, including his own children and their children.

PARTICIPANT C

The Leader Today

During some of this participant's stories he revealed the following about himself as an educational leader today. He confessed that he is a bit of a perfectionist, who has high standards, loves the arts, and does not tolerate people who are ill-mannered. Nor does he like informality. He stated that he enjoyed the challenge of taking on responsibilities and any opportunities but also that he was stimulated by life.

I think I have high standards, high expectations, try and speak other languages, love travelling, all of those things make a huge difference and you have to be able to communicate and network well with people.

As an educational leader he strongly advocated for children, wanting them to have every opportunity. He believed that his teachers should be looking for strengths in their children, and provided a Maori proverb or 'whakatoki,' meaning, "Highlight my strengths and my weaknesses disappear." As a leader of a school he recognised that it was about being able to identify the good things and not to focus on the deficits, adding that there are so many cultural factors that affect diversity, including where you come from, who you are, and the languages you speak.

He stated that he believed in making sure there was variety in the curriculum, and the differentiation of the curriculum was really important at primary school. He added that it was not just one teacher with a group of children, but it was actually giving them a wide range for experiences, particularly for children who had learning difficulties. As a leader in a school he stressed that he knew how to teach, he knew about the New Zealand Curriculum, and he knew what good classroom practice looked like. This he declared meant that he knew when there were issues in a classroom.

Another one of his current beliefs around his leadership, was that of vulnerability. While he felt some leaders tried to cover their vulnerability, he revealed that it was critical that leaders showed their followers that they were vulnerable. It was because of what he had seen with other leaders that he had come to this conclusion, especially in relation to the competition among principals.

Finally, this participant could not describe what brand of leader he was. But he did go on to say that he wanted his school to have a point of difference equating it to being like Gucci or Chanel or a private school.

Influences that Shaped Character

Early Years

Participant C stated he did not have any leadership opportunities in his early life. He revealed he was very shy. He did acknowledge who he was now came from his childhood, how his parents perceived education, their expectations and the people he came into contact with.

He revealed that his first leadership position was that of a senior teacher after only two years of teaching. He was seconded to a school in South Auckland to run a syndicate. This was followed by taking a deputy principal's position before going on to complete a diploma in special education. On finishing the diploma he took on another role as an assistant principal before moving overseas to work.

When overseas he worked as a consultant, training other teachers. He did this for a number of years before realising that in order to continue teaching in New Zealand he needed to keep up his teachers' registration which required teaching in New Zealand. He also tried to negotiate with the person he was working for for more remuneration, as she was making a lot of money out of him. Unfortunately she was not prepared to negotiate and he moved back to New Zealand.

Significant People

A high school teacher got him involved in the arts, which is still an influence on him today, including his educational leadership. When telling the story of his early leadership years and being seconded to run a syndicate in south Auckland, he noted that he was encouraged to take the position.

The person who chose me said "Look Participant C, I'd think you'd be great" – he saw the talent in me and said "You go ahead and do this." So you know, the challenge was there and I went off and I did it.

Experiences

His stories revealed that through his experiences in seeing, as he puts it 'horrible stuff,' happening in some schools with the way leaders interact with one another or the way children can be treated in so many negative ways, has made him an advocate for marginalised groups. However, he also added that this has been a part of his 'make up' for a long time. It was seeing these negative behaviours that made him want to create a welcoming and caring school community.

I would think if you were to walk around here, most people will say hello, how are you? Can I help you? People will generally talk to you and I expect that. If I'm bringing children or parents to the school I expect those teachers to smile when I walk into that room and I say hello.

One of the strong experiences that changed his leadership, he acknowledged, was his time overseas. This was an international adult education context where he was working with adults, teaching them about teaching and learning. As a result he felt he can now read an audience, walk into a school and work over several periods of time on developing classroom practice and being able to share his expertise. In addition, he stated he was also wanting to 'marry' their strengths with what they had to offer.

So it wasn't a smartass coming and was saying, it was being able to facilitate, being able to coach, being able to listen, being able to collaborate, those are really important skills.

Dealing with People

He stated dilemmas arose when dealing with parents. He struggled with situations where parents he has spent time with and supplying resources to, in order improve their situation, verbally attack him in an aggressive way and accuse him of not assisting their situation. He struggled reconciling his efforts to assist and their ungrateful response.

Experiencing Failure

When asked if there were any stories where failure had been instrumental to developing his character, he stated that failure had not played a part in who he is today. Later, he did add, that he was very happy to accept failure, if it is in terms of making a mistake. When he makes a mistake he stated that he reflects and then moves on. He, at the same time, stated the point that he was not competitive.

Gaining knowledge

Academic Study

Participant C obtained qualifications in an area other than leadership and acknowledged that he would like to look at gaining a leadership one at some time in the future. The qualification he has is in the area of special needs and does influence his leadership today.

We've got lots of kids here with special needs. Now that's not negotiable in my view. I believe these kids have a right to be in the mainstream, I want them in the mainstream. I don't want to hear people talk to me about barriers to learning or this isn't fair that this teacher has to put up with this. I want us to rise up, take the challenge and see what we can do to unpack and make it successful.

Beliefs

He acknowledged that it was critical that children, especially in low decile schools see good role models. In order for that to happen he stated that he needed good staff and that he also needed to create an environment that would keep staff at the school.

When it came to the experiences people go through in life, he believed that "we are the people we become because of the experiences we have had and that's the critical thing". He stated that his belief about teaching and learning and education was that they have to be rich in terms of experiences within the

children's lives. With regard to the experience in his life and his leadership he stated:

I believe as you get older and more mature, you learn to pick your battles. I think that really means you learn to prioritise what's important. Gaining more experience over the years means also I have gained more confidence in my ability. I still have anxiety around some of the things that I have to do.

Values

Within his educational leadership he revealed the thing that he valued the most, was people. He did not want conventionalism, but was interested and looked for talent. Also he stated that he like to see what made people successful and looked to help them succeed. When it came to some of the more general values, he talked about the ones his mother had which he still held onto. He added that he "hated" that some groups in society can be very judgemental. This he eluded to, were because of the experiences of life's injustices he had seen. Finally, he revealed in his stories, opportunities that had come from life's challenges.

I think to be real in life, to be really able to do things, you need to experience some challenge. Because it's the challenge that gives you that the opportunity and I'm saying that everything is an experience. Oscar Wilde talks about that, experience is the name we give to our mistakes, but you know it's a critical part of our life, and that opportunities sometimes come from hard times, and this shapes the sort of person you are.

Summary

In this interview this participant shared much about who he was today as a leader. There were some indications as to why he is the way he is, which does stem from several sources including his parents, some of his teachers and the experiences he has gone through and seen.

PARTICIPANT D

The Leader Today

As far as describing her leadership as a brand, Participant D regarded herself being able to be several kinds of leader depending on the situation and gave examples of being transformational, moral or strong or one that was emotionally resilient. She also added that she can be dictatorial but know how to have fun and that she has a sense of urgency but has compassion with it. She described that she operated best by creating a flat management approach, stating, "I do believe that my part is equal to anyone else in the school." She adds that,

It's just that my strength happens to be putting that team together and working creating in the school with a very strong culture. I have people in school who are so much better than me in so many different things, it's just that it's my job to pull it all together.

She regarded herself as someone who was self-effacing, that struggled to accept compliments and therefore struggled to talk about herself. She felt it important that she knew all who worked under her and therefore relationships were important. She acknowledged that she strongly felt that the most pivotal aspect of her leadership was that she was a team player and built a strong team that worked together towards a common vision.

I'm a big one on relationships. I'd say it's the most pivotal thing as a leader to have a very strong team and to build a team together you've got to know how to work with people, and how to present their strengths and how to pull them together and how to go on a vision together.

Another aspect she related as part of her leadership was one of growing others, including their values and passion to do their job.

Influences that Shaped Character

Significant People

The first real person she stated had an impact on her was a high school teacher who encouraged and mentored her while working with special needs children as mentioned above. At the time she did not realise it, but for her, on reflection, it was the first time someone saw something in her. She described this teacher by stating,

I just thought here was a wonderful woman who was a inspiration to me, who inspired me in lots of ways, about plays and a whole aspect of learning for myself. So that is what I found inspirational for me and my growth.

The next person she revealed who was pivotal in her life and leadership development was a senior teacher she worked under. She said this person believed in her and guided her in getting her to do a post graduate diploma in special needs. She also acknowledged that this senior teacher also gave her opportunities to develop by trying out ideas and giving her room to make mistakes.

And you know when I looked back I kept thinking what was it about, all these things, and its about people believing in you. And, knew how to grow me which was to give me the freedom to try things and pick me up if they didn't go quite well and back me if they didn't go quite well.

The thread of 'believing in' and 'giving opportunity' involved several people in this participant's leadership development. Following on from the senior teacher there was a principal who again believed in her. She particularly stated that he gave her the opportunity to be acting principal for a year in his absence. This year had a great impact on developing her as a leader and who she is today.

She briefly stated that she worked under another educational leader who cemented her own beliefs on leadership by operating in a quite different

manner to what she believed a good style of leadership would look like. Her words around this stated that the “mismatch really resonated.”

Experiences

Leading

In one of her stories she recalled that being given the position of acting principal had a major influence on who she was as a leader today, but at the time she did not realise it. This was her reflection and learning concerning the team she developed around herself and the synergy that was created. This learning is applied to her leadership today. She stated that she still kept in contact with each of them, even though it has been a number of years.

Outside of and in education is to count your blessings and to keep your staff positive, because its very, very, easy to have a bitch and moan about your staff. We all do. But I learnt back then I actually had fabulous staff, we had a great team. I don't know if I told them often enough how great they were and I really regret that because we were doing something really special at that school.

Dealing with People

In another story she mentioned having to deal with a very difficult family in her early years of being in leadership. It was a very stressful encounter but she dealt with it in a very calm manner, even though that was not what she felt on the inside. She never really spoke about what happened but she did discuss what she discovered about herself.

The strength is in the way we deal with that stuff and that in fact, by keeping your cool, and keeping your values and not being reactionary and coming down to the core of why we're sitting there and trying to deal with that, is a huge strength to have, even though it doesn't feel like it.

She revealed that she still gets stressed when handling difficult situations but now has the confidence to handle them well. Initially when she handled these situations as described above, she regarded herself as being “pathetic” because she did not respond, but sat there and listened. It is now her choice whether she says something or not and realised the importance of responding in a calm way no matter what the situation is.

The sort of moral dilemmas she faced were related to parents and their children. She spoke about a family who sent their child to school sixty percent of the time and so she needed to talk to them. In raising the issue, the family became aggressive, threatening to get people on to her. She stated that there needs to be a line drawn as to what the child needs and the parents not valuing education.

You know that’s our job and its about having to draw a line sometimes. I mean that’s an extreme case, but there are other cases that aren’t so extreme but you still have to make a judgement and or are challenged by the situation.

Gaining knowledge

Through Reflection

An interesting point about this participant’s leadership stories was not so much the experiences that she shared and the way her leadership has changed, but the knowledge she has gained through reflection about her experiences in and out of education. She acknowledged that it took her a long time to feel that she was a “good” principal. She put that down to her perception that she was quite self-effacing, adding that it was her team that made the school so good.

The knowledge gained from being in an acting principal position was used when she became principal of a much bigger school. She revealed that she regretted not honouring staff in that early situation and in the new school she was determined to make it a priority. In addition to this story, she also

revealed that she wanted, in the current environment, to create a similar management team spirit by modelling what was expected and therefore create a team culture that permeated through all the staff.

Through Failure

Her story around failure revealed that she thought she did not handle it well. But it made her stop and think why it happened, and she acknowledges that she bounced back quickly, which she put down to having developed resiliency through the failure.

I don't do failure very well. It makes me stop and really think about why that didn't happen. I have to lick my wounds, but I can do that pretty quickly and that goes back to that resiliency that I was talking about. ... I have to let it settle and then I've got to go back in and go what was that all about, what was my part in it and what do I need to do differently. So its just being reflective about and being able to own that you make mistakes.

Leadership Beliefs

She asserted that some of her leadership beliefs that relate to both herself and dealing with people came out of her childhood and up-bringing. These she called her core beliefs and were influenced by both her parents and grandparents. She stated they were very humble and positive. However, she emphasised that her grandmother had a pivotal place in impacting who she is today. She described her as a humble woman, bringing up a family with 'no money.' The learning to her was that you can be driven, knowing where you are going, but the use of wisdom and compassion were the 'keys'.

When it came to this participant's values she stated that these had not changed over time. What had changed was her confidence, which she said was more about having a belief in herself. She added that from her childhood came values such as honesty and integrity, but also being driven and true to

yourself. On the other side, she revealed that she disliked lying, cheating and dishonesty.

She spent time talking about the importance of integrity, adding that it is something you live and challenge when you see it not happening. She then related that there were some difficult conversations that needed to be had around integrity and work ethics in order to get the culture of the school where it needed to be.

Summary

Participant D did have academic qualification other than her teaching. However, she has completed no leadership papers and the only professional development she had completed was one run by the Ministry of Education for experienced principals, and other short courses.

Her development, as far as her leadership was concerned, came from the encouragement she has received from a variety of people, what she had observed in other leaders, the values that had been instilled in her from an early age, but more importantly the experience she had in running a school as an acting principal. This, she stated, is what she used as a base for the current school she is in.

PARTICIPANT E

The Leader Today

As a brand Participant E acknowledged that he was a relatively conservative educationalist, in that he felt schools were here to ensure children learn. He also asserted that children needed to come to an environment that was a safe and happy place. He added that he wanted children to come to a school “that they can be proud and feel part of. I don’t want them to be at school hungry. They need to be looked after and ready to learn as far as possible”.

He asserted also that he was driven by the belief that he needed to know what he was doing and so he had continually undertaken professional

development in some form or another. His belief was that as a leader he does not tell his staff what to do, but “allowed” them to grow. However, he did have a bottom line to what had to happen and what was required.

It’s amazing what kids will do when you stop telling them what to do and it also follows it’s amazing what staff can do if you stop telling them what to do.

In allowing staff to do what they believed was right he stated that he ran a high trust school and he acknowledged, that with it there was high risk. However, his view was that with high risk there was high reward.

If you want higher rewards you’ve got to wear some risks.

He was also a leader that liked to be able to give the staff what they needed to do their job. He also hoped he was a good role model as an educationalist.

Influences that Shaped Character

Early Years

This participant expressed his leadership experience outside education was very limited. He admitted that he did not tend to get involved in, and in fact avoided, any sort of leadership role beyond the school. However, on becoming a teacher he was promoted to Deputy Principal in only his second year of teaching. He revealed that he went into teaching by accident after dropping out of university, deciding to go to Teachers’ College.

Growing up

He disclosed a situation with his father that meant that he had a ‘cross to bear’ being the oldest child. This taught him as a child under 10 years old, that life was tough. In another story he stated that children at primary school and below are arguably the most powerless people in society and these people need someone looking after their interests. This came from his experience as a child. It was one of the reasons that kept him in the primary school sector.

He recognised early that education was a way out of poverty. This was brought out in a story of when his dad at fifteen had to leave school. Luckily for him, his mother knew the importance of education and all her children could stay at school forever.

And I think from that I learnt that education is the way out of being the son of working class itinerant farm worker.

Significant People

Educational Leaders

He divulged that there have been several educational leaders who have influenced the leader he is today. One was when he became a deputy principal in his second year of teaching. He stated this principal was very good who continually helped him to develop his skills.

Experiences

After a number of years being a deputy principal he got his first position as principal of a small school. He stated that now there was no longer someone above him. He relayed a story that on the first day in the job he got a profound thought that has stayed with him to this day. He expressed that when he went out at lunchtime on his first day to say hello to the children, he recalled thinking to himself that this is their school, that they come here every day to learn and get on. This, he declared, is a 'pretty important' part of their life and here he was, their principal. It was at this point he thought,

I had better bloody know what I'm doing. And ever since then, ever since then it's been a quest to know what I'm doing.

There were other things he relayed in his story around this school and his first experience as principal. One was about developing confidence and as he put it, "having confidence in what you are about to do, whatever it is, is probably the right thing". He expressed another important time of learning that came

out of his first experience at leading a school, but admitted that it took a bit longer to work out. He now recognised that the easy decisions leaders make were the ones that followed rules or policies. He went on to add that the more difficult decisions leaders had to make were ones where there were no clear rules or policies. That is when, he asserted, true leadership occurs.

True leadership happens when you really don't know what to do because you cannot personally go along with the easy option or the one people expect, or what's been done before. Once you start to fall back on your personal beliefs systems that's when you've got to actually make a difference in peoples' lives and help people understand that there might be another way and even might be a better way of doing this. You've then got to decide how you're going to bring it about, and I think there is only two ways, you either tell them heavy handed, a bit like the army or you have to persuade people and let them come to the realisation that this might be a good idea.

One of his statements that came out about his leadership was that he did not like telling people what to do, but there was a bottom line. His story on why this came about was when he was in one of his deputy principal's roles, the principal had asked the staff to do something that he thought was not important, he admitted that spending a lot of time on this totally frustrated him.

I had tears in my eyes with it and it was such a waste of time and so stupid. I just loathed it. But I couldn't say anything or do anything. I was the Deputy Principal. I had to shut up and go along with it. So I was determined to be a principal that people could work for.

Failure

In his stories around failure he confessed that for a long time he was terrified that someone would find out that he really did not know what he was doing. He never really mentioned in his stories any particular events but conceded that he did make silly mistakes that he regretted, but that he learnt from them and

moved on ensuring that they were not repeated. Currently, when it came to failure, he admitted that he was afraid that the job will get too big for him and he will “crack up”. He felt the role of principal was becoming too stressful and big to be done well.

Gaining knowledge

Academic studies in one form or another influenced his leadership. The need to get qualifications and the on-going study that in his words went on and on, was partly due to him making sure he knew what to do. In addition he stated,

It forced me to look at particular issues and to learn how to weigh things up and question things at a much deeper level in myself and in a way gave me that confidence to think, well this is probably the right the thing to do.

He added that his studies had given him a much broader philosophical view of things. He also emphasised that he gained a better understanding of educational leadership through the international travel he had undertaken throughout his career. Looking at schools, education systems and educational leadership throughout the world, gave him a “global appreciation of what is going on.” He went on to add,

It even reinforces what you’re doing or it gives you another way of looking at it. And even going to a place like Japan, and looking at schools in Japan and multicultural societies has helped me understand what I need to do here in a multi ethnic school.

In amongst all this travel he revealed that he had met a variety of people which as a result had influenced his leadership. These people ranged from international and national networks he belongs to, to university academics here and around the world and other principals, whom he says he learnt most from.

My international experience is where I've seen people doing vastly different things and getting equally good, if not better results, or in some cases, equally bad, if not worse results. As a result I tend to force myself to be a lot more trusting in people, more accepting of parents and a lot more trusting of schools.

During mentoring sessions recently with other educational leaders he revealed that he read an academic paper on the differing degrees teachers come to school with professional leadership. This paper looked at the two extremes of teachers who come to their school; those who are 'raving educationalists' to the other extreme, those who do it as a job. His story went on and stated that while doing an academic paper at university a lecturer pointed out something he noticed about him, bringing him to the point as he states below,

I have such a strong belief in that education, as a power for people, to help people, that its almost a faith and what I had to learn was, not everybody has that and for some people its just a job and for some people its just a second job.

This he conceded, taught him to be more accepting and to understand, adding that someone could be a good teacher but not feel as passionate as he does and go the extra mile.

Beliefs and Values

When it came to his leadership beliefs around education he felt there was a clash around what he believes schooling should look like and what was being forced upon schools.

If I was happy with national standards, and league tables and charter schools and reporting processes and nova pay systems and more responsibility, I'd be happy and I could manage the implementation very easily. I can still manage the implementation easily, what I can't

manage, what I can't reconcile is the philosophical position that I'm in and what these are espousing.

He added that he does mesh them together where he can, but declared that he changed his part of the world to the way he wants it to be.

Another belief he disclosed around leadership, was that people are different and think differently. His wife made this point to him when she told him:

If he thought exactly about things as you do, then he'd be in your job and you wouldn't have it. And secondly, do you want everyone thinking like you? No you don't. It's a team effort. You don't want everybody being the same.

When it came to stories about his values and whether they had changed, he emphasised that everyone grows up with certain beliefs and everyone has a story during their early years that helped mould who they are today. One of the things he revealed that had changed for him was that now he is more tolerant and has more confidence. Also he believed that when leaders are pushed into a corner and they do not know what to do, but must do something, they will fall back to their inner beliefs.

The moral dilemmas that came out in this participant's stories were around dealing with children. He mentioned that a current issue about a parent wanting to enrol a special needs child into the school and the dilemmas around this. Firstly, that the child cannot be adequately be supported and there being a higher than not probability that he would be suspended and that he as a principal struggled to suspend any child. Added to this was his belief that education can make a difference and every child has a right to be mainstreamed. At the time of the interview he had not made a decision as to what he was going to do

Summary

Participant E clearly acknowledged the influence of his professional development, involving academic study and shorter courses, along with the networking with other leaders. He also stated he had gained leadership knowledge from the experiences both as a deputy principal and as a principal. However, he did express the event that started him seeking to know what to do was being out in the playground on his first day as a principal and the thought he got while meeting the children, "I had better know what I am doing."

PARTICIPANT F

The Leader Today

This participant explained that she was a fair, collaborative leader who listened. She affirmed that her confidence in her leadership meant that she had no difficulty sharing the load and distributing jobs, along with trusting people to get on with it. She understood the need to nurture leadership within the school, taking into account and determining other people's preferences and strengths.

I can distribute some of those jobs and trust people to get on with them because that's another thing I think has grown - the ability or the recognition that you can trust people to get along and do these jobs that you've given them or these responsibilities.

Participant F acknowledged that her leadership includes caring for and looking after the staff, children and parents. She admitted that she was a 'hands-on' leader that liked to get into the classroom to observe teachers and spend time with children. She expressed that in leadership you cannot be all things to all people and that it can be a lonely position.

Well one thing and I've said it before is that it's a lonely position being a Principal.

As an educational leader she disclosed that she was not tolerant of people who want to tell her what to do in her own school, when they do not work there. She regarded herself as being confident and able to separate herself from negative comments.

As a leader she expressed that she continued to ensure she was learning through professional development and reading. She kept abreast of current trends, but understood the need and had the ability to, filter information, ensuring only that which is important is 'digested.' Finally, this participant could not describe what brand of leader she was.

Influences that Shaped Character

Early Years

Her first experience, was teaching Sunday School at the age of fifteen. She felt very important at that time having this responsibility. Within education she revealed that after five to six years of teaching she became a senior teacher. She was asked to take on the position and felt very flattered as a result. From this experience of leading a team she learnt very early that leadership was about stepping out of your comfort zone.

Significant People

As an Assistant Principal in her early years of educational leadership she expressed that she was given opportunity by her then principal to spend one day a fortnight in his office while he spent time in the classrooms. This experience resulted in her gaining the confidence to apply for principal positions.

The principal was very very helpful and he allowed the DP and I to sit in his chair one day a fortnight. You know, we'd take turns and he would tell us about the things that he had planned to do that day that we could do. I mean you kept it fairly simple, but we had to respond to any queries that came in and he went away and sat in classrooms and

had a wander around the school for the day. And that was very helpful.

Experiences

Dealing with people

As an Assistant Principal in one school, she disclosed that she came across a small group of staff that were very unpleasant and it was through this experience that she realised that in leadership, upon reflection, “you couldn’t be everybody’s friend anymore, because it wasn’t going to work.” She went on say that:

I am the leader. I do have to and I am responsible for getting these people to move with the times, do this or do that, and you can’t be friends with everybody all the time.

Again, these thoughts were reinforced when she won a principal’s position over a Deputy Principal who was an internal applicant. This Deputy Principal made it rather unpleasant for her and she stated again that it made her realise that you cannot be a friend to everybody. Speaking later in the interview she added to this story by stating she would not change what happened as this person needed to work through her issues over the situation. However, she emphasised that the experience had given her more self-assurance to say more than she did and address the issues with more confidence.

Another leadership story where she experienced growth was around staffing competence. Over the years of leading and teaching she stated that she was now able to very quickly pick teachers who are not up to the job. She stressed that this is something this has developed over many years of seeing both excellent and poor teachers. With that understanding she revealed that she is able to deal with those not performing.

Leading the Big School

She conceded that the experience of leading a large primary school caused a shift in thinking. The large school meant a change in leadership style. More staff, more children, more parents meant she could not do everything. She stated that the experience in leading a large school meant she had to distribute jobs. Along with distributing jobs she had to begin to trust people to do them.

I can distribute some of those jobs and trust people to get on with them because that's another thing I think has grown, the ability or the recognition that you can trust people to get along and do these jobs that you've given them or these responsibilities. And you have to because you can't possibly do them all.

Overcoming Barriers

She contended that in endeavouring to become a principal back before Tomorrow's Schools, which was introduced in 1989, she had to overcome a sexist barrier, where men were more than likely to win a principal's position. As she put it,

And they would favour men in front of women, even though you were at the top of the tree as far your grading was concerned and there was some angst to women because you felt you were being marginalized somewhat which, I think we probably were.

But at an early stage in her leadership she confessed she had a determination when overcoming this sexist barrier by stating, "so there was a kind of gosh, I will show them". As a result she won her first principal's position in a difficult school situated in a low socio-economic area, where there was a high crime rate.

Gaining knowledge

This participant talked about the need to keep up with trends, and continuing with professional development. She stated that the most precious and valuable thing was the support she got from good friends and colleagues. She also acknowledged making time to continue to do her own learning such as going to conferences and professional reading was important to her.

One of the moral dilemmas for this educational leader was around the issue of a staff member who was not up to the job. She found it hard, “as the principal is where the buck stops,” and it was her role to discuss serious performance issues with staff.

I think sometimes the hard thing is that you are where the buck stops and when it is time to tell somebody that they are actually not competent or they are not succeeding or not doing their job then one has to be the person to tell them that. And that's sometimes very hard because you know it's not going to make their life any easier.

Summary

Even though the term ‘on reflection’ was never used during the interview, some of the stories relayed revealed that reflection was used as a tool to develop her leadership. This can be seen in her early years when in positions of senior teacher and Assistant and Deputy Principal positions where she commented on situations she faced when dealing with the negativity of other people and the conclusions she reached as a result.

Secondly, as well as her ability to reflect was her growing confidence. This she stated grew simply from the different experiences that she has had in the different leadership roles. This case, demonstrates that character development walks hand in hand with the acquisition of experience and the determination to make a difference irrespective of the barriers.

CONCLUSION

The stories from each of the participants reveal the range of experiences that these educational leaders went through, from their childhood to their current context of where they are leading today. These included the number of schools they lead or were part of the leadership team, along with the experiences they encountered that shaped the educational leader they are today. It was their journey, their discoveries about themselves that made their leadership authentic, and unique.

There are, however some common threads that do come out in the stories. All faced dilemmas of one kind or another, they had similar values, and that they understood that they needed to operate their school as a team as they acknowledged that they did not possess all the knowledge. They all acknowledged that other educational leaders and people influenced their leadership character, even though each situation was quite different with diverse results.

CHAPTER FIVE - DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the character of six experienced primary school principals and the impact this has on their current practice. It is structured around the research questions of this study. The essence of this chapter suggests character makes individual leadership difficult to generalise. Leadership literature suggests one reason for this is that leadership has an authentic side, which involves owning one's personal experiences and acting with one's true self (Harter, 2002). Leadership is viewed as much more than acquiring the right set of behaviours or skills (Bell 2010). Skills need to be developed and addressed, but such a focus follows an 'outside-in' approach. There also needs to be an 'inside-out' approach: developing sound educational leadership principles from which leaders can understand the values that inform their practice. The development of character is an on-going process. Kets De Vries (2006) states that character is a form of memory, in other words we are the products of our past. Therefore, this study explored the life stories of educational leaders in order to understand how their character developed and changed and what impact this had on their practice today. What follows is a discussion of the themes that are threaded across the six interviews reported in the previous chapter.

CHARACTER AND UNIQUENESS

I would like to start this discussion by looking at the idea presented by authors such as Cashman (2011) and Kets de Vries (2006), stating that character is unique and is therefore formed from the 'inside,' based in part, on life experiences. The data in the stories, from each of the six interviewees, revealed that their educational leadership and life journeys were quite different. One participant stated that her leadership has 'evolved' and went onto say that it is "still" evolving. The data indicated that right from each participant's early years there were differences. These stemmed from those

participants that had some degree of leadership experience to those who had none during their schooling years. One stated he did not look for any form of leadership at any stage until being asked to take on an educational leadership role in his second year of teaching. Another participant indicated that during his sporting days he captained the team he played for, indicating that this was his early leadership opportunity.

Family influences were also quite different, with one principal stating that the expectation from her parents was simply for her to marry and be a corporate wife and certainly not to go to university. Yet another talked about difficulties he had with his father as a very young boy. One participant said that her parents had high expectations. Yet another revealed that his father was very autocratic. One participant acknowledged the person he is now was a result of his parents and childhood.

Each of the participants acknowledged that people had significantly influenced them throughout their lives, but particularly as they entered into their early leadership positions. In some cases they stated that people encouraged them and gave them opportunity, adding the reason why was because they believed in them. These influences also came in the form of observing other leaders or people who demonstrated to the participants what they felt were negative leadership characteristics, reinforcing to them the behaviours that should be avoided. Another interesting observation, was that each participant had come across principals that either reinforced the sort of leader they desired to be or supported their beliefs about what was good leadership. Many of these situations involving other principals occurred before most of the participants obtained their first position of principal. It would suggest that they had already established fairly firm values and ethical behaviours in relation to dealing with people and situations in an education setting.

Each principal had a totally different set of experiences that helped formulate their character. One participant described her first principal's position as 'trial by fire.' Two other principals stated that they were put into leadership

positions very early in their teaching career. Regarding the number of schools each have run, two have only had principalship of their current school, while the other four have led two schools, either as the principal for a few years or as an acting principal.

The data clearly showed that each participant had travelled a distinctly unique road, with a different set of experiences and influences bringing them to where they were at the time of the interview. A person's character is very unique, as it is a form of memory (Kets de Vries, 2006) and therefore character of the leader is in itself unique, as it has developed out of the past. It is this authenticity coming from past experiences that influences a leader's character, which in turn makes leadership difficult to generalise. Shamir and Eilam (2005) add that authentic leaders are originals, not copies, adding,

their conviction, cause or mission may be similar in content to those of other leaders and followers. However, the process through which they have arrived at these convictions and causes is not a process of imitation. Rather they have internalised them on the basis of their own personal experience. (p. 397)

When asked about their leadership and what sort of brand they would be, two just did not know and struggled to answer the question. One indicated that he was a relatively conservative educationalist, which he said was brought about by a deep conviction that education for most people is their big chance in life, which was also a reflection back to his childhood. Another stated that she did not know if she a particular brand, but went on to add that she is a bit of everything, transformational, dictatorial, moral, depending on the situation. Finally the last participant considered his form of leadership consisted more around sharing, a shared leadership approach. This, he stated, developed because of the experiences and situations that he went through when he first started in his current school.

To conclude, each of the interviewee's data revealed similarities in the sense that their character was shaped by their past experiences, both within and out of education; influences that came from people such as family, colleagues and professional development. Roads each have travelled from their earliest experiences going back to high school and their family backgrounds have also affected who they are today. But more importantly, even though each had these broad similarities, the individual experiences, the influences, and family backgrounds were very different and it is these differences that support the statement by Harter (2002) that each leader's character was unique.

INFLUENCES AND EXPERIENCES THAT DEVELOP CHARACTER OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Early Years and Family influences

Some of the participants revealed that their parents played a part in aspects of their leadership character development other than influencing their values. McCauley (2001) argues that the way one confronts, interprets, and resolves earlier barriers or problems is one process in life that contributes to leadership emergence. Some of the data supported this, as was seen in some of the participants' early years. Though the research did not look closely into their childhood, some snippets did come out. Participant A stated that she was not expected to go to university, but she was to marry a corporate man and be the housewife. This resulted in having to support herself when she did decide to go to university. She attributed this experience to surviving the early years being a principal, where she stated it was "trial by fire." Another participant saw his father as autocratic and in one of his stories he reflected on this type of parenting, stating that this shaped his leadership, as he did not want to be like that. Another participant told of his father's personal difficulties, having some influence on his leadership in who he is today. In addition he mentioned his mother who also had a positive impact by instilling the value of education. This is a strong value he holds today, as he leads his school.

Experiences

Shamir and Eilam (2005), state that leadership development can occur in three ways. Firstly they claim it is a natural process. Secondly, it is through struggling and coping with difficulties. Thirdly, by finding a cause, and finally through self-improvement when learning from experiences such as role model, parents, and training. In this section I discuss the findings in light of these.

As a natural process

Shamir and Eilam (2005) claim that there are born leaders, displaying leadership qualities from an early age, to those who were late bloomers, where their inherent talents around leadership arose when an opportunity presented itself. Most of the participants seem to fall into the late bloomer category. Prior to any form of educational leadership, only one participant had any role that would be regarded as a leadership position when he captained a sports team. One participant avoided leadership and another stated he was too shy. What was more interesting was all, except one participant, who did not talk about her first leadership position in depth, were asked or encouraged into their first educational leadership role. Another interesting point to note is that all these roles occurred within their first five years of teaching, some as early as two years.

Role Models and other People

Shamir and Eilam (2005) claim that learning from role models, parents, other family members, teachers, mentors, superiors, and peers is another way leadership character is developed. Without question, role models and people played a very big part in the development of their character of each of these educational leaders. Each interviewee had stories about significant people in their lives that encouraged them or helped mold the leader they are today. These people came at different times of their lives and ranged from family to other school principals.

Family members played a role in each participant's development, most suggesting that their values originated from their parents. Other educational leaders also seemed to have had major influences in the lives of each participant. One reflected that over five other principals influenced his leadership. Some of them he regarded as great role models and yet others he observed as behaving in a way that reinforced the things he as a leader would not do. Other interviewees talked of significant people coming into their lives and giving them opportunities or encouraging them, even walking alongside when they were given responsibility and helping them.

One interesting point in the analysis of the data was, for each participant, from their early life until the time of this study, that significant people became scarce as they entered the role of principal. Role models and mentors seemed to have disappeared from their life the longer they spent in their current position. Apart from some stories around networking and one mentioning her husband, none of the participants revealed any significant person influencing their leadership in recent times. The question needs to be asked; why this may have happened? Looking at the data as a whole, it would seem that experience plays a part. Leadership development involves in part, the ability to reflect on experiences. These leaders appeared to have that ability to reflect on experiences and data indicated growth in their leadership as a result. Therefore, the need for support or mentoring seemed to diminish. This may also be attributed to the intensification of the principal's role in New Zealand over the past two decades (Hodgen & Wylie, 2005), though none of the participants clearly indicated that as a factor that worked against the disappearance of role models and mentors.

Struggling and Coping with Difficulties and other Experiences

Participants did, to some degree, tell of difficult periods during their educational leadership. Cooper et al. (2006) claim that strength of character is often forged in a crisis, which offers both opportunities as well as dangers. They go on to say that it is in these times the leader has the opportunity to draw on character strengths formed from past life experiences while at the same time make decisions and define and redefine the inner strengths of

character so essential to moral leadership. The data seems to support this claim as revealed by participants who shared stories of being changed in some way when they encountered difficult situations. One participant claimed the struggle putting herself through university and the growth in her character that came from that helped her when dealing with a failing school. She later stated that the whole experience, with this particular underperforming school had given her more experience knowledge and confidence in dealing with staff, especially around performance issues. Another participant found himself in a difficult situation when dealing with a split staff while he was a deputy principal in his very early years in education. This had an impact on his leadership, as it demonstrated to him early in life, the need for building teams and working as a team.

Other more general experiences seem to have had the greatest impact on the character of these participants. One participant told the story of a move from running a small school to a large one. This experience meant she needed to do a shift in her thinking in the way she distributed responsibilities, but more importantly trusting those under her to do the job. Another told of the time she was asked to be acting principal, adding that the whole experience changed her. Four of the participants acknowledged that their experience in going overseas had an impact on their character, as it broadened their thinking. For one it was just social travel, but the other three saw other education systems and this knowledge made an impact on who they were as a leader today.

Professional Development and Academic Study

Professional development also emerged as an area that influenced the character of some of the participants. The type of professional development differed from one participant to another. One particular participant had continued on with his academic study throughout his time as a principal and had a number of networks in the academic field. Two participants have not completed leadership qualification but one had been on the professional development programme run by the Ministry of Education for experienced principals. The professional development had different effects on the

character and leadership of each of the participants. For some it gave them knowledge and therefore confidence and understanding to handle situations they faced and informed their values and beliefs. To others it reinforced that they were doing things well and again increased their confidence and confirmed and strengthened their values and beliefs .

First Time Principal's Position

The data revealed another interesting observation that is worth discussing. It was not until each participant found themselves in the position of principal that real development of their character occurred in relation to being an educational leader. With four of the participants there were some very clear statements that revealed that educational related character development occurred in their first role as a principal. These included profound statements such as “I had better know what I am doing,” leading to a lifetime of professional development. Another participant stated, the success she had in the acting role moulded her to the leader she is today. Yet another simply stated that you learnt what leadership was in a rural community. This supports Avolio (2005) who asserts that trigger events when viewed from a life span perspective can serve to stimulate positive growth and development adding that these do not need to be negative events, they could well be positive, such as with this participant being promoted to a principal's position.

The stories from these participants support the assertion made by Hannah and Avolio (2011) when they take the view that is consistent with the constructive development theory posed by Kegan (1982). They suggest that people develop a more complex understanding of their world by going through and cataloging the experiences that life brings, which creates a cognitive and moral maturation process. All of these principals' character changed and grew over time with the different experiences they had.

To some degree the data also supported the assertion made by Wright and Quick (2011) when they claim that leaders develop through the grounded theory process of self-examination and structured feedback about actions,

behaviour, and the consequences is a greater awareness of themselves as leaders. This was also seen in some of the different types of experiences expressed as stories, that follow.

THREE COMPONENTS OF CHARACTER

Component Number One: Awareness Self and of Others

Right through the data there are indications that these interviewees thought they were self-aware and to a varying degree aware of those around them. One of the areas that this became apparent, was in the way their stories revealed that they were reflective. It is by reflection that leaders gain a better understanding of their core values, motives, goals, and identity. Begley (2006) argues that leaders in schools must become reflective and authentic in their leadership practices. Understanding self or self-awareness is one of the important aspects of character development (Bell 2010; Branson 2005; Kets de Vries, 2006). Participants showed in a variety ways that they were self-aware especially with regard to reflection even though all except one did not use that word. Participant E stated that when she moved into a leadership position, that she needed to get people to perform. It was here that she realised that she could no longer be a friend with everyone. This reflection made it easier to accept that leadership can be a lonely role. It took a comment from his wife to make another participant reflect that other people did not have to think the way he did. One principal told how he reflected over situations when things did not go well, but then stated he moved on and tried to learn from such situations. These are some of the many examples within the data that show that growth in character comes from reflection.

An example of the participants having understanding of themselves and who they were was stated within their stories in some way, in that they were team players. They acknowledged that they were not the only expert in the school and that other people did have more knowledge in certain areas, but more importantly they were prepared to step back and to use the strength of others. This supports Bell's (2010) claim that effective leaders are acutely self-aware, because they know their limitations and therefore are more likely, on one

hand, to recruit staff who compensate for their weaknesses and, on the other, to focus their energies around their own strengths. Another example given by a participant was that over his time in educational leadership, he had become less authoritarian, partly through coming to the realisation that sharing responsibilities was part of being a team, but also reflecting about his father and other educational leaders who had an authoritarian nature. One participant stated that she needed to be aware of the fact that she can be too optimistic and overlooks the fishhooks all the time in some situations.

As each went through more experiences in their different leadership roles, in particular the principal positions, some stories reflected quite a lot of change in the way they would do some things if they were to happen again. One principal stated that he would be more direct with some people if he were to go back into a split staff. Others found having difficult conversations easier, even though it still would be stressful. The data showed that these similar, but earlier experiences, had been mentally analysed and reflected on. As an example, one participant talked about a meeting with a family that became heated. She stated that she reflected on the meeting, then came to some conclusions about who she was and the way she behaved in the meeting. She realised after the way she handled the meeting reflected who she was, as someone who did not raise their voice and allowed people to voice their concerns, but would also not be swayed away from what they thought was right. She added that this part of her character was observed by teachers back when she was at high school. She determined at that point that future meetings like those would be handled in a similar manner. George (2003) adds that leaders are always under the microscope with their behaviours being discussed observed and dissected by their followers as well as outsiders. It is for this reason that leaders need to behave with consistency and self-discipline, not letting stress colour their judgement.

A leader who can manage their emotions creates an environment of trust and fairness, reducing politics and infighting and increasing productivity (Goleman 1995). The data would support this statement by Goleman (1995). All

participants indicated they were team players as stated above. Some participants went further by stating that they trusted those they gave responsibility to and let them get on with it without interference. This also demonstrated that there was awareness of others, social awareness and relationship management. Yukl (2010) puts this under the heading of interpersonal or social skills, which include the ability to communicate clearly and persuasively, along with the ability to understand the motives, attitudes and feeling of others. The data showed that there were links to the participants working with others and their values and leadership beliefs, which will be discussed next.

Component Number Two: Beliefs and Principles

Each participant, during their interviews, expressed who they were as a leader in some way. Some participants disclosed more information about their leadership than others. However most participants did seem to have a good understanding of their leadership even though some could not narrow it down into a few words. As stated earlier Participant B believed that leadership tasks/responsibilities was something to be shared. Participant F regarded herself as a fair, collaborative leader. On the other hand, Participant E stated his job was to grow people and not to tell them what to do. These beliefs are driven by values that lie within the participant (George et al., 2007). Therefore, values play an important role in the belief system or character of these leaders.

Deal and Peterson (1999) describe values as concepts or mental constructs that capture and express what is important to us. The literature shows much emphasis being placed on a leader's self-belief or leadership belief and values as being an important component of leadership character, along with a strong link between the leader's self-awareness and their understanding of their values. George (2007) states that leaders, in gaining an awareness of who they are, also need to understand their values and the principles that guide their leadership. When looking at how each participant viewed their leadership, their values came through. Participant B talked strongly about the

need to work as a team. Some of the values regarding this would be around trust, openness and honesty. He stated that trust and honesty were the values that came from his parents and added that his experience in his role of a sports captain also informed him of the importance of creating a team. Another participant who stated that she was someone who was self-effacing, later went on to tell a story of her grandmother whom she regarded as having a pivotal influence in who she is today. Her grandmother was a humble and a positive woman, which she acknowledged was something she learnt and modeled from her. She also mentioned that the values, of honesty and integrity, also came from her childhood.

Not only did personal values come out in each of the participant stories but another set of values also. These were around the area of education. Some very clear statements were made by some of the participants, which revealed their values and beliefs in relation to education. One stated that he strongly advocated for children; that teachers should be looking for strengths in the children. Another ascertained that children needed to be in a safe environment and that they came to his school to learn, and if hunger stopped that from happening, he would feed them. He was also driven by strong educational beliefs about what was needed to run an effective school. Another participant just stated she cared for the children, the staff and the parents. The nature of the position and the responses from these principals showed that not only do they have their personal values that, in most cases were instilled by their parents and life experiences, but they also had educational values around learning and children.

Component Three: A Clear Moral Compass

Luthans and Avolio (2003) say that authentic leaders are guided by a set of values that are aimed at doing what is right and fair to all stakeholders. It is here where possible causes of moral dilemmas evident in stories are revealed. George (2003) adds, that leaders today need to practice their values consistently and be able to demonstrate a passion for their purpose. Taking these statements into account, moral dilemmas faced by the

participants did not involve money or resources, but people, children, parents and staff. It was the conflict between their personal and their educational values where dilemmas arose.

The participants gave examples of having to make decisions that, by their very nature, pulled them in two directions. Each of their personal values were challenged by their educational values or visa versa. A couple of participants explained the dilemmas they faced when dealing with incompetent staff members. As an example, one participant stated that a staff member she was dealing with, argued that she was the “bread winner” of the family and so the fact she may be out of a job would affect her whole family. However, the participant needed to balance that with the issues of the children in this staff member’s class who were not being given the teaching that was required. Another participant talked about the dilemma of enrolling a child, knowing that the school could not meet the child’s special needs and that this posed a possible danger to other children. On the one hand, there were his beliefs and values that every child had a right to come into his school and be in a safe environment. He also added that he did not punish children by suspending or excluding them. However, the dilemma was that he knew this child had serious behavioural concerns that could eventually lead to either a suspension or exclusion if enrolled. So here, his values on ensuring all children get a good education in a safe environment, were in conflict with this one child that has that same right, but could very well put other staff and children’s safety at risk, therefore creating an unsafe environment. He also pointed out another dilemma he faced as an educational leader. His beliefs on what a good education system looked like at times conflicted with changes that were being introduced by the policy makers.

Values play an important part with regard to leadership. They stem from what is important to the individual and are instilled from childhood by their parents and a variety of other sources and experiences. The more self aware a leader becomes, the greater knowledge they get of themselves, and their values and beliefs. While all people have values which inform them of what is important,

when moving into educational leadership there does, from the data, seem to be a new set of values that are created, educational ones. Dilemmas seem to come when leaders need to put aside their personal values as the governing value set, look at the bigger picture and make decisions around this. Even though the leader may have very strong personal values of caring, these seemed to be placed in a secondary, rather than a governing position when it came to the needs of the whole school and all those in it. It would therefore seem that the responsibility of leadership, more so when one is actually the leader, that an additional set of governing educational values come into being that intersect with the leaders personal ones creating at times a dilemma if only their personal values are used to inform a decision. This was evident in situations where principals showed care for both personal staff and the learning needs of the all the children. However, care was not sufficient to address the problem until the principal drew on a set of governing educational values that were informed by being responsible for ensuring that the learning needs of all children were met. Within the character of the leader are the personal values, which seemed to be overridden by these governing educational values. When this happens, dilemmas develop, as the leader works through the consequences of what needs to be done in relation to their own values. This also indicated these leaders are aware of others and the effects of decisions related to governing educational values will have on their staff.

HOW CHARACTER FACILITIATES GROWTH IN SCHOOL LEADERS

From the data there are two areas that character facilitated the growth of each of the participants. Firstly, the values and beliefs that were imparted to them at an early age, by either family or by significant people in their lives. Secondly, the experiences that occurred in the lives that moulded their character and enabled them to grow and develop. Therefore, this part of their growth as a leader was something that occurred quite frequently in their early years as a leader, but did to a certain degree slow down, as seen also by the lack of significant people in their lives today. They learnt from experiences

that changed and developed their character, which then enabled more growth to occur in their leadership.

Parents provide a form of socialisation that assist children understand the values, beliefs and perspectives that influence their thinking and behaviour later in life (Ashford & Saks, 1996). Avolio (2005) asserts that parents are the first leadership coach, in that the child learns from them how to make sense of experiences, treat others, persevere under challenging situations, how to develop and perform. This was seen in all the participants, that their parents did contribute to the values and beliefs they hold today and it is some of these that enabled them to develop as leaders. One participant stated that his parents instilled the values of reliability, family, honesty and trust. All of these values would be needed in order to successfully run teams which was something he believed was important to his leadership. Another participant quite clearly stated the person he is now was due to his parents and their values around education. This developed his leadership in creating a school that valued learning for all, especially the marginalised. His general values primarily came from his mother. One participant stated that she had high expectations, something that she got from her parents. These expectations had always been part of her character and were still present, which had contributed to her leadership. These were outworked within the school with her staff, as she stated had also acquired these high expectations. Another participant talked about both her parents and extended family influencing the values she held today. Some of these had developed her leadership when dealing with difficult situations.

Unfortunately the data only touched on how these participants' values and beliefs helped them grow as leaders. However, there was some evidence that these values were needed to be able to achieve the growth in their personal leadership journey.

Leaders can learn from past experiences, including mistakes they have made. In these ways they will be open to be challenged and therefore change their

assumptions, beliefs and the mental models about influencing others (Yukl, 2010). McCauley (2001) argues that the way one confronts, interprets, and resolves earlier barriers or problems is one process in life that contributes to leadership emergence. Character can be described as deeply ingrained patterns of behaviour that define an individual (Kets De Vries, 2006). Therefore, for it to facilitate the growth of the participants as leaders it would be something that comes out of their character that has had a positive impact on them. Participant B, from an early age, knew the benefit of groups of people working together as a team and right through his leadership years this has grown. These are based on values, such as trust and sharing. This has helped him grow as a leader as he moved from one educational leadership position to another. Another participant revealed he was a perfectionist and also had high standards of himself. Early in his life he began to develop an affinity for the marginalised. This has developed and as an educational leader and he stated that he strongly advocated for children, especially those with special needs. Participant D stated she has a self-effacing character. As a result she acknowledges that she cannot do everything. This has developed her leadership by building on her abilities to create caring, high performing teams. Participant E believes in having high trust in his staff. This has enabled him to allow staff to grow and make mistakes, but only after he learnt that not all people think as he does.

CONCLUSION

The data does strongly suggest that these leaders developed and refined their character as they travelled through life. Avolio et al. (2009) discuss that aspects of character are a result of hereditary influences and life experience. However, how much each participant's character is hereditary, and has influenced their leadership development is very unclear from the data. However, there were the values that each participant knew they had acquired from their parents that would have had an impact on their leadership development.

CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

The title of this study “Experienced principals’ accounts or their character development: Their inside stories”, eludes there is more to leadership than competence, that is, having the skills to lead. There is also a ‘why’ to leadership which is about why leaders do what they do. This ‘why’ is about the character of the leader (Bell, 2010; Cashman, 2008). Bell (2010) goes on to argue that the character of a leader is just as important as having the competence to lead. In order to find out about character, this study needed to explore aspects of the inner workings of the leader by hearing their stories and reflections. In this chapter I endeavour to draw some conclusions around the three main research questions in light of the literature, followed by some of the strengths and limitations of this research. Finally, some recommendations for further research, leadership development policy review and possible follow up are made.

An Overview of Research Study

The overall purpose of this study aimed to examine experienced principals’ accounts of their character and stories of how this made an impact on their development and practice as school leaders. Three research questions have formed the basis of this study. They were:

1. What is character and how is it related to leadership?
2. How do experienced principals account for their development of character with reference to:
 - a. the development of their self-awareness and awareness of others?
 - b. their leadership principles?
 - c. their espoused core values?

3. How do experienced principals perceive their character has facilitated their growth as school leaders?

CONCLUSIONS

The study identified that the character development of each of the participants was very different. One of the central themes of this research is based on the statement by Kets De Vries (2006) where character is a form of memory and by inference must be unique as each participant in the study had quite different life and leadership experiences.

The way each participant's educational leadership character had developed over their lifetime to the leader they were at the time of the interview, showed that each had travelled a very different road and as a result their character was different. It showed that the influences and experiences followed the findings of Shamir and Eilam (2005), which revealed that leadership character development is a natural process; it can form out of conflicts and difficulties, through finding a cause and also through self improvement. However, the detail of each participant's experience and the influences on their lives were very different and as a result their character was also very different. This showed that obtaining a generalised profile of an ideal leader would be problematic, as asserted by George (2003). This finding has implications for implementing programmes that deal with leadership development, which will be discussed later.

Another important finding that the data revealed showed that the experiences which produced a great deal of impact on the character of the leader occurred when they were in a principal's role. This does not diminish that character developed before this period, but it is evident that being in the role of principal has a significant influence on the participants. This has implications as to which direction is best for young leaders to develop as future principals if they chose this path.

Based on the argument that character is a form of memory, one could assume that each person's character would go through different degrees of change as they live their life. However, the degree character is changed in a positive way must be to some extent related to how they have learned from their experiences. In order for this to happen they need to be aware of themselves. From the data, being able to reflect had a very strong influence on each participant's character and development. As a result it would indicate that reflection is a key to being aware of themselves and others. This supports the view of Gardner et al. (2005), who argue that reflection is linked to self-awareness. The degree a leader is able to reflect on experiences and gain a better understanding of themselves and others seems to suggest a positive growth in character.

Self-awareness was another important aspect of character development that can be concluded from the data. All the participants assumed they had a clear sense of their strengths and weaknesses. They said they knew what they could do and needed to do themselves but they also enabled and trusted people to operate their strengths in the areas where each participant was weaker. This is supported by Van Knippenburg et al. (2004) who argue that self-awareness is dynamic; it is the leader's knowledge of the competencies they do or do not have that is important, rather than needing to be competent in everything.

What also emerged from the data was that all participants said they were team players. They realised they did not have all the answers. This again points to the area of self-awareness. For teams to be effective it requires the leader to be aware of others and to manage relationships (Belbin, 2010). The data indicated for the participants that this was also an important aspect of leadership character and development. Being a team player also showed another important aspect to their character and their values. Effective teams need to operate with values that contribute to an atmosphere of trust and support. These values seemed to be present in the participants' stories of their experiences.

Therefore, awareness of themselves and others seem to be an important aspect of character. It develops in several ways, through reflection on experiences, dealing with different people and situations, professional development, and learning from failure. It can also be concluded that values also play an important role in the area of self-awareness.

When it came to the values and the beliefs of the participants, the data supported those parents and other family members, along with a 'significant' other person or persons contribution to the current values that each participant held. This supports Begley's (2006) argument that some values are socially acquired. However, the data did not ascertain whether some of the values were 'hardwired', in other words, ones they were born with. Most of the participant's personal values, according to the data, came from parents. Values such as humility, care, trust, and esteeming the role of family, played an important role, in that they appeared to contribute indirectly to the development of team and school culture for each participant. Alongside this were the participant's beliefs and these seemed to be aligned with their values. Where trust was highly valued, there was also a belief that teachers could be left alone to get on with their work. This suggests that values and beliefs are an important part of the character of an educational leader, especially if it enables others.

The data also revealed that there was another set of values and this presented itself through the stories the participants told about the dilemmas they had faced in their leadership role. Participants in this study, were dealing with a set of educational leadership values that related to their position as a leader. These seemed to be governing educational values, which had the capacity to override their personal ones. These governing educational values centred on creating an effective and safe learning environment, and beliefs about what education for children in their school should look like. George et al. (2007) argue that values are derived from beliefs and convictions which are translated into action. The way governing educational values are actioned

seemed to be dependant on the personal values of the leader. This was seen in stories where the education of children was suffering because of poor teaching and the need to deal with staff members. How this was actioned, reflected the personal values of the leader and in some cases created a dilemma. Even though the governing educational values were dominant, the leader's personal values dictated the action of how these values were to be implemented. All six participants showed a coherent awareness of themselves and others and this resulted with the creation of a dilemma for some with staffing issues. Meeting the educational needs of the children meant that a poor performing staff member's income and career could be affected. Even though the governing educational values took priority, the participants were aware of the effect this could have on a staff member revealing that their personal value of caring for others was for the children as well as the poor performing staff member. To solve the dilemma, care was not enough. Participants needed to draw on the governing educational value, in order to fulfil the requirements of the organisation, and decisions around these needed to be made and were made, but each participant knew and had an awareness of the consequences as a result.

As part of this study I wanted to look at the moral compass of a leader in light of what was happening in the world with large and small companies being affected at times by the unethical and immoral behaviour of the leaders. This study found these six educational leaders had to make moral decisions but it very rarely, according to them, involved the issue of money. Issues that arose centred on people and as stated above, these centred more on their governing educational values rather than their personal ones. One participant did point to issues around the moral dilemmas when political policy makers require educational leaders to function or to require them to run their school in such a way because this went against their governing educational values.

To conclude, the data revealed that character played an extremely important role in educational leadership. It was self-awareness and the awareness of others, working alongside the values and beliefs of each participant that

determined the quality of their character and their effectiveness as a leader. All of these participants, for example, had a degree of humility, which was seen by them emphasising how they were team players, understanding they did not know it all, and that others had expertise in other areas and were prepared to let other use their expertise without too much oversight. In conclusion, leadership is always about character (Bennis & Thomas, 2002).

RESEARCH STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THIS STUDY

Quality of Data

The data collected from each participant were in the form of stories. These stories centred on the influences that had occurred in their lives until the day of the interview and how their character had influenced them as educational leaders. This was based on the premise that character is a form of memory (Kets de Vries, 2006).

The strength of doing narrative research and using a semi-structured interview approach meant more probing questions could be asked to get deeper into the story and extract some rich data. In order to get good quality data the participants needed to share some stories of either profound moments or memorable past experiences or influences. These could be stories going back to possibly early childhood or of more recent times. In the analysis, I likened the depth of data gathered, to that of snorkelling or scuba diving. Snorkelling was where the data just sat below the surface while with scuba diving the data had a richness around it as it went deep into the lives of the participants. Each participant had stories that described who they were today but only skimmed the surface of the events or experiences that created that aspect of their character as an educational leader. In some cases no events or experiences were told. However, when moving deeper, the number of stories varied from participant to participant. There are several reasons the researcher acknowledges could have contributed to this.

Trust

In doing a narrative of this form, participants needed to trust the researcher. Where I had had previous professional dealings with a participant, there was more of an openness to talk. Two participants I assumed had a wealth of stories, based on what I had heard about their school over a number of years, were reluctant to share these. I would recommend that for future narrative studies the researcher should build a relationship with the proposed participants before the time of the interview.

Lack of prior preparation

Some participants, even though they were given the questionnaire that was designed to help them think about their stories before the interview, had only briefly read or answered it. This unfortunately was due to the busy nature of the principal's role. Where participants had completed the questionnaire the stories went much deeper. I would recommend for future study that as the researcher spends time getting to know the participants, information is also presented about the study in such a way that it helps the participant think about their life experiences prior to the narrative interview.

Probing skills

In reflection, my interviewing skills, even though they were adequate, may have needed more practice. More probing questions may have needed to have been prepared. Another recommendation is that the interviewer carries out several mock interviews if they are inexperienced at interviewing. Some possible video analysis of the interviewer in action could help them to develop questioning skills that probe more deeply.

Time

The hour interview seemed to be a good time frame but I suggest that if trust has been developed and the data is rich that a second interview may be needed.

Participants

The study was limited in the sense that only six principals were interviewed, which makes the data simply a snapshot of the character of six experienced principals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Professional Standards for Principals

The conclusions of this study point to the importance of character in leadership. However, the Professional Standards for Principals in New Zealand do not emphasise this. I recommend that the Professional Standards be adjusted to represent the importance of character as part of educational leadership. Below is an example that I have created.

Effective school leaders demonstrate personal and professional behaviours consistent with quality practices in education and as a community leader.

Appointment of Principals

Leadership is always about character and therefore it is important that schools have effective leaders with good character who are aware of themselves and others and have the appropriate values and beliefs to develop staff and maintain effective staff relationships. As educational leaders retire or move to other schools or out of education, Boards of Trustees, along with an educational consultant are charged with employing a new principal. I recommend that an aspect of both the interview and any referee statement needs to explore, not only whether the potential candidate has the competence but also the character to lead as well. Therefore, some of the questions at the interview need to have probing questions that draw out a leader's character.

Professional Development

Some of the participants' leadership character was influenced through some form of professional development. However, professional development needs to cater for a leader on an individual basis if it is to effectively influence

character. Individual leadership development postgraduate study, such as the Educational Leadership and Management qualification run at places such as Unitec and the University of Auckland should be encouraged. However, there are time costs involved that are a disincentive when in the role of a school leader. Therefore my recommendation is that obtaining a leadership qualification, as apposed to a general educational one, should at its completion carry some kind of financial reward.

Leadership Development

To a degree, the development of skills can be created as a 'one size fits all' approach, knowing that some potential or current leaders will have different strengths and weaknesses. The development of character, based on the findings of this study, will need a different approach; one that is more individualised. Taking into consideration the finding that these participants had growth as leaders when they were in the role of principal, one could conclude that the best way to grow younger leaders is by encouraging them to take on principalships of small rural schools, before moving on to the larger ones, so they gain more experience. This does not diminish the road taken by some where they moved into a principal's role from their position of Deputy Principal of a fairly large school.

It is therefore my suggestion that the Ministry of Education explore ways to attract good quality younger leaders into principal positions of small schools, but support them with experienced mentors. However, based on the data, good quality mentors need to be chosen who will develop the relationship needed to both influence and improve not only the competence but also the character of the young leader, particularly in relation to governing educational values.

As stated above, in supporting young leaders through mentoring, careful selection of appropriate experienced leaders will be needed. From the findings, participants sat under a variety of leaders that influenced, in a positive way, both on their character and their leadership skills. However, they

also stated that there were principals that did not command any respect and therefore had little or no influence on their development both in skills and character. I would suggest that careful consideration be given to those chosen to mentor or those who want to mentor to get the best fit for the young leader.

This also suggests that the participant's experiences of being under negative role models, demonstrates that there are less desirable qualities of character and competence. However, this research does not identify what these are and would recommend this as a future study.

CONCLUSION

Without question, why experienced principals do what they do, is about their inside story, their character. Bell (2010) asserts that leadership is about competence and character and according to the data presented in this study he is correct with this assertion. Character is an important part of leadership. I will finish this study repeating the important messages given by each of the participants in their own words.

Participant A –Leadership can have times when it looks as if it is 'trial by fire.'

Participant B –Leaders don't know everything; they need to use the expertise of others by sharing the load and that is best done as team.

Participant C – Educational leadership is not just about creating a school to improve numeracy and literacy. It is about developing the whole child.

Participant D – It should never be about the glory and accolades the leader can get, but about serving those that are with us on the journey in order to fulfil the mission.

Participant F – Leadership can be a lonely position at times.

Finally, I have left Participant E to last with his wise words, when it comes to educational leadership, “I better know what I am doing,” reminding us that learning as a leader never stops in terms of skills and this study has emphasised, also in terms of character.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1



EXPERIENCED PRINCIPALS' ACCOUNTS OF THEIR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: THEIR INSIDE STORIES

Dear

My name is Gus Klein. I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Educational Leadership and Management degree in the School of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course, which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The title of my study is, "Why experienced principals do what they do: Their inside story." The aim of my project is to examine experienced principal's stories of how they give account of their leadership character development and how this has made an impact on their practice as leaders. In other words a leader's character has been formed by life and its experiences. This study seeks to explore some of these life experiences in the form of stories and how they have influenced the leaders character and therefore their current practice.

I request your participation by completing a short questionnaire that aims to give me a little background on you as a leader, followed by an individual face to face interview, to last up to one hour. The interview data will be recorded using a digital recorder. You will have the opportunity to check the transcript

of your interview if you so wish and to make changes up to two weeks from receiving the transcript. If agreed to, a possible supplementary interview can be held to gain further clarity which could also be recorded and transcribed and again you will have the opportunity to check this for accuracy.

All data will be analysed and stored for a minimum of five years, in a locked cabinet in my office at home. Only the supervisor and I will have access to the data. Neither you nor your organisation will be identified in the Thesis. The results of the research activity will not be seen by any other person in your organisation without the prior agreement of everyone involved. ***You are free to ask me not to use any of the information you have given up to ten working day after you have received the transcript***, and you can, if you wish, ask to see the short report on my findings before the thesis is submitted for examination.

I hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find your involvement interesting. If you have any queries about the research, you may contact my principal supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology. My supervisor is Howard Youngs phone 815 4321 or email: hyoungs@unitec.ac.nz

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (2012-1069)

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from (31.7.12) to (31.7.13). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Yours sincerely

Gus Klein

APPENDIX 2



EXPERIENCED PRINCIPALS' ACCOUNTS OF THEIR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: THEIR INSIDE STORIES

CONSENT FORM – Primary School Principals

TO: Gus Klein

FROM:

DATE:

RE:

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project for the Master of Educational Leadership and Management. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports, and that I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided for this project without penalty of any sort up to **ten working days after viewing the interview transcript**. I have also informed my Board of Trustees that I have agreed to take part in this study.

I agree to take part in this project.

Signed:

Name:

Date:

APPENDIX 3



EXPERIENCED PRINCIPALS' ACCOUNTS OF THEIR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: THEIR INSIDE STORIES

Leadership Background Questionnaire

Thank you for doing this questionnaire. It is really aimed at giving me some background information about you as a leader as far as where you have come from and your experience. All three parts should not take that long to complete. However, could I ask that you spend time thinking about part three before completing it as this will assist me in our interview of which I have attached the proposed interview questions I will be asking.

When completed can you please send it back in the enclosed envelope or contact me and I will collect it personally.

Name: **Age:** **Sex:** M /
F

Part 1. Information about current leadership context.

Type of School: Primary / Full primary / Intermediate

Decile: **U. Rating:**

Years of current service in this school:

Part 2. Previous Leadership Experience (Leading peers and/or adults)

A. Previous School Leadership

Acknowledging that teaching children is leadership list down in chronological order the leadership experience that you have had within education. Please add any leadership responsibilities (in charge of sport or Music, etc.) you may have had before winning a formal leadership role such as Senior Teacher, DP, or Principal etc. Attach extra pages if necessary.

Position/Role	Date started to date finished

B. Leadership Outside Education

Leadership does not just happen within the education setting. List the leadership responsibilities you have held either from your earliest memories, leading peers (class councillor, prefect etc.) to adults (Chair of Rotary, captain of some team etc.) Use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.

Leadership Responsibility	When/Time Period

Part 3. Major influences on current leadership practice

List up to 10 events positive and/or negative (key turning points) that you know has influenced who you are as a leader today. Eg. Sitting under an autocratic narcissist as a DP 1999, or Winning my first large school 2001 or getting married 1988. These may be used as starting points for you to tell me your story on your leadership character development.

Event and Year	Continued this column

APPENDIX 4

Proposed Interview Questions

As this interview will be only semi-structured in nature not all questions will be asked. Based on the responses given maybe one or two extra questions below will be asked in order to gain further clarity. If a second interview is agreed to then the questions will still come from this list. The main questions are in bold type.

The nature of this study and the data by way of your experiences may mean discussing issues of a very personal nature. I wish to reiterate that the content of this interview will not be disclosed to any person other than my supervisor. At any stage you may ask for the recorder to be stopped and I will take notes only or change names and places to both protect yourself and the people involved. Please feel free to disclose what you are comfortable in doing so.

LEADERSHIP – INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

Tell me about some of your strongest growth experiences as a leader.

Possible additional questions in no set order.

1. Tell me about your first memories of being a leader in education?
2. Taking your first memories and looking at you the leader today, what significant events both positive and negative, can you recall have either changed your style or cemented it?
3. If you were a brand, what brand of educational leadership would you be and what experiences has shaped that?
4. What do you hope people will thank you for contributing, at the end of your life?
5. Imagine yourself observing a follower talking about your school leadership with admiration, what would he/she be saying?
6. Which people and experiences in your early life had the greatest impact on you?

7. I was interested to read in Part C of the questionnaire about
expand on that a little.

8. Describe what leadership means to you.

UNDERSTANDING SELF AND OTHERS

A. Think about your early years in educational leadership and your own reactions to the different situations you faced back then. What reactions have changed if you were faced with similar circumstances? Tell me about some of the events/experiences (within your leadership role or outside this role) that have contributed to these changes in your reactions. In what ways does this impact on your leadership practice in your current setting?

Possible additional questions in no set order.

1. What are some of the conscious beliefs about yourself as an educational leader? What experiences in your leadership journey has brought you to these?
2. Can you give an example of how failure has played a part in the way you lead people?
3. What are you most afraid of and what in your life do you believe has created this feeling?
4. What do other people consistently tell you that you need to work on or develop as an educational leader?
5. What do you perceive to be your weaknesses to be as an educational leader?
6. What tools do you use to become self-aware?
7. I was interested to read in Part C of the questionnaire about
expand on that a little and how that may have influenced your personal reactions to situations.

B. Leadership is around working with people. Think back again to your early years of educational leadership and in what ways have your views of those who work under you changed? Tell me about some of the events/experiences (within your leadership role or outside this role) that have contributed to these change of views. How does your current views on people as a whole influence or have an influence on your leadership practice now?

Possible additional questions in no set order.

1. Most educational leaders have a belief about people, what are your current beliefs and what in your life and experiences has brought you to this?
2. What do you believe is your impact or influence on others within your school?
3. I was interested to read in Part C of the questionnaire about expand on that a little and how that may have influenced your views on other people.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

Leadership principles are based around your values and self-beliefs you have of yourself as a leader.

- A. Can you describe some of the experiences in your life that have influenced you as a leader today of what you regard as most precious and valuable?**
- B. What values have not changed over time and where do you think they have come from?**
- C. Can you tell me about what values have changed over time and what life experiences have caused these to change?**
- D. Can you tell me how your values inform your actions as a leader today?**
- E. Reflecting back, how have your beliefs changed about your leadership? Tell me about some of the experiences you have had that have altered these beliefs.**

Possible additional questions in no set order.

1. What as leader is truly important to you?
2. What have the trumas and loses in your life taught you about what is most important?
3. I was interested to read in Part C of the questionnaire about expand on that a little and how that may have influenced the values/self-beliefs you hold today as a leader.
4. What are your most deeply held values? Where did they come from? Have your values changed significantly since your childhood?

CORE VALUES/ MORAL COMPASS

This is about integrity and ethics, and the dilemmas faced by leaders with regard to these, during the course of their leadership journey. These issues can be of a very sensitive nature and I refer you to second paragraph at the start.

- A. Describe a situation that you would say is one of the most difficult things you've had to do that challenged your moral code. Explain what were the moral dilemmas you faced and how you worked through them.**
- B. In reflection what did it tell you as to what was truly important to you? What you now define as right from wrong? Your moral absolutes?**

How would you define work ethics?

Integrity is very important. What life experiences have you gone through to bring you today to what you believe is your integrity? How does this now inform your leadership practice?

CONCLUDING QUESTION

Do you have any other experiences that you can share that will enable me to see how over the years your leadership character has developed? How has that influenced your leadership today?

APPENDIX 5

Coding Categories

Early Years character influences and Leadership Experience

Pre high school
High school
Family
Significant people
Situations
Values/Moral development
Conflicts
Other

Teaching leadership Experience (pre Principal) and character influences

Other leaders
Situations
Experiences
Professional development
Dilemmas
Conflicts
Other

Non-Teaching leadership and character influences

Sport
Family
Family values
Partner
Children
Travel

Principal Leadership and Character influences

Professional development
Conflicts
People
Situations
Dilemmas
Leadership Brand
Beliefs
Values/Morals