

Leadership Development for Experienced New Zealand Principals: Perceptions of Effectiveness

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Abstract

This article presents the perceptions of approximately 300 experienced New Zealand principals who participated in a pilot leadership development initiative funded by the Ministry of Education. The Experienced Principals Development Programme (EPDP) underwent a rigorous evaluation that included formative (mid-point) and summative (end-point) feedback to participants and providers over an 18-month period. As the literature on leadership development indicates, particular issues arise for those who are experienced in their leadership roles and have progressed beyond early career challenges. To sustain and develop experienced principals, leadership development programmes need to be relevant, personalized and unique. The evaluation methodology used in this study employed a mixed methods approach comprising quantitative and qualitative analysis of two major participant surveys and data collected for three case studies via observation of delivery events and focus group interviews with participants. The findings confirm that the programme was highly relevant for the participants because it was responsive to individual needs and learning styles. A highly effective component was the school-based inquiry project which was viewed as a conduit for personal development and school improvement. Overall, the programme provided opportunities for both personal and professional learning.

Keywords

development, experienced principals, leadership, New Zealand

Introduction: a New Zealand leadership development initiative

As a small nation with ability to centralize provision of leadership development, New Zealand has embarked on several successful initiatives to strengthen the professional leadership of principals (Wildy et al., 2009). These include well established induction provision for newly appointed principals (Robinson et al., 2006) and aspiring principal development. A recent initiative was a Ministry of Education funded nationwide programme offered by 10 providers for the leadership

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development of experienced principals. These leadership development initiatives were part of the Government's response to school principal supply issues highlighted in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008) school leadership report for New Zealand and reflective of the international trend of governments starting to recognize the key role of school leaders (Crow et al., 2008). In New Zealand this supply issue is also reflected in the ageing population of school principals. In 2004, 8.74 percent of school principals were aged 60 or over, by 2010 this had risen to 17.13 percent (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Three hundred experienced primary and secondary school principals participated in the most recent programme delivered in a variety of provider-selected modes but with common core aims to be achieved. The overall aim of this initial commitment to provide leadership development for experienced principals was to develop their capability to lead change to create the conditions for effective teaching and learning in their schools (Youngs et al., 2010).

The Experienced Principals Development Programme (EPDP) spanned a period of 18 months with several common elements and activities. In most cases a pre-programme activity was the administration of a school-wide survey of leadership capability designed and administered by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research that was intended as a form of needs analysis for identifying areas for leadership development in the school and for each individual principal. In all cases participants engaged in a school-based change initiative or developmental project of some kind. All providers engaged in both face-to-face meetings and electronic communication with participants, and in every case some form of mentoring or coaching of individual or group learning occurred. Each provider delivered the EPDP in their own distinct way although they had to adhere to the same set of national criteria in relation to meeting expected results. This article focuses on one aspect of the evaluation of the programme: the self-reported views of principals about what they deemed to be effective elements in the delivery of the programme in relation to its relevance for them as experienced practitioners and leaders, features that enhanced their learning and the impact of this learning on their schools.

Research about leadership and management development for experienced principals

Although commonly called leadership development in the more recent literature, the term implies a focus on management development as well. As organizations require both the objective perspectives that management provides and well as the visionary aspects of leadership (Bolman and Deal, 2008) the terms are used interchangeably in the generic literature. Bush et al. (2010: 5) comment that, 'In practice, schools and colleges require both visionary leadership, to the extent that this is possible within a centralized curriculum, and effective management.' Furthermore, it has been argued (Cardno and Fitzgerald, 2005: 317) that use of the term 'management development' 'signifies an interpretation of management that encompasses the notion of leadership within it rather than a separation where leadership is often elevated and management denigrated to a level of mere managerialism'. Principals of New Zealand schools are both managers and leaders of learning (Ministry of Education, 2008a). Several authors also assert that in relation to the leadership and management development of educational leaders practice must be underpinned by a clear sense of educational purpose (Bush et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2009). This makes the nature of educational leadership development unique in as much as it is directed towards achieving the ends of education which are improvement of student learning outcomes. Because educational leadership is a shared, distributed function of many people at many levels in educational organizations there is a need to develop both leaders and leadership capability in general.

Developing leadership

Leadership and management development is inherently a personal responsibility but it is also an organizational obligation. As Margerison (1991) asserts there is both an individual and an organizational commitment needed to develop managers. For the individual it is a process for gaining the skills and abilities needed to manage self and others. At the organizational level it is a learning process that extends from induction into the organization to on-going expectations for self-development throughout career stages that are supported by the organization. Leadership development is a wide concept that refers to the development of many leaders across a system or organization and its purpose is to create a pool of capable and motivated leaders for the future and to progress people through a series of career stages to provide leadership at many levels (Weindling, 1999). Van Velsor and McCauley (2004) draw a marked distinction between development of leadership in the organization (or system) and the development of leaders as individuals. In relation to school leadership, Robinson et al. (2009) also distinguish between leadership capability in schools (vested in many people and distributed in form) and the capability of the principal as a leader.

Developing individual leaders

When the focus is on the individual leader, the literature is consistent in establishing the importance of self-management and social management as essential facets to be developed (Van Velsor and McCauley, 2004). In relation to appropriate development for experienced principals, Dempster et al. (2009) have suggested that leaders need different areas of knowledge to be developed at different career stages. In particular, experienced and long-serving principals need attention paid to the personal and relational capabilities that will help them deal with the complexity of their roles and sustain them over extended service. A similar notion is expressed by Woodall and Winstanley (1998) who refer to an advanced stage of management development focusing on team effectiveness which includes capability to manage self and others in the process of teamwork. Hence, when individuals are the target of development there is strong evidence in the literature that points to the importance of skill-building to develop awareness and management of self and relational awareness and relational management in working with others.

Relevance of specifically targeted programmes for experienced principals

Approaches taken by various countries to the professionalization of educational leaders vary greatly and fall into two marked categories – before and after appointment to principalship. Generally principal preparation relates to strategies used to develop the capability of aspirant's *before* they are appointed to principalship. Career progression and development strategies are involved *after* appointment (Cardno, 2003; Macpherson, 2010). The notion of leadership and management development applies to both pre- and post-appointment strategies and is intended to be ongoing throughout career stages ranging from the aspiring stage to newly appointed principal stage to the stage of being an experienced principal. What is appropriate or relevant to the preparation and induction of potential and newly appointed principals may not be relevant for experienced principals. Catering for experienced principals is where many of the challenges associated with appropriate and effective leadership and management development are encountered (Cardno and Fitzgerald, 2005; Dempster et al., 2009).

Weindling (1999) has suggested stages of transition through headship that confirm the need for particular types of professional development at particular career stages. Catering specifically for

development that is appropriate in the later stages of career transition appears to have attracted little research interest compared to the vast literature that exists about the preparation of principals (Brundrett and Crawford, 2008; Bush, 2010). Yet an understanding of these characteristics of transition for experienced school leaders is essential to generate an appropriate strategic response to their developmental needs. This is similar to the conclusions drawn by Dempster et al. (2009) in a study of Australian principal development. In their view, leaders need different areas of knowledge to be developed at different career stages and that in particular, experienced and long-serving principals need attention paid to the personal and relational capabilities that will help them deal with complexity and sustain them over extended service.

Appropriate forms of learning for experienced principals

Empirical research about the actual needs and modes of delivery preferred by experienced principals is extremely limited (Leithwood et al., 2004; Stroud, 2005). Research conducted with experienced primary and secondary headteachers in the UK affirms a critical need for experienced school leader development, and concludes that there should be a unique approach to the way professional development is provided for at this career stage (Stroud, 2005). School leaders in this study felt they were in need of revitalizing and re-enthusing and that they should play a significant part in decision making about the sort of interventions for professional growth that they participated in. In particular, they felt that diverse needs might be met through coaching and a wide selection of other opportunities.

Both coaching and mentoring have a place in personalizing development programmes and these strategies could serve well in programmes that cater for a range of experienced principal capabilities (Solansky, 2010). Similarly, there is evidence of the effective employment of coaching and mentoring in principal preparation and the early career stages of principal development (Bush and Coleman, 1995; Robinson et al., 2006) but a dearth of literature about the employment of these personalized methods in relation to the development of experienced principals. One exception is a report of an Australian initiative to partner experienced principals with trained coaches (O'Mahony and Barnett, 2008). This research concludes that careful planning and support is needed in this kind of provision which hinges on the capability and credibility of the coaches and the establishment of sustainable trusting relationships between principals and coaches. This theme is also echoed by others (Reiss, 2007; Robertson, 2008). Key advantages of leadership mentoring and coaching proposed in the literature relate to the flexibility of this process and its focus on achieving a meshing of both individual and organizational goals (Ely et al., 2010).

Reflection and problem-solving experiences are also identified as effective forms of learning in leadership development (Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson et al., 2009). A particular type of critical reflection is necessary to resolve complex problems of practice and this type of skill-building should be central to any development programme for experienced principals (Cardno and Fitzgerald, 2005). This is a process requiring intrapersonal and interpersonal appreciation and application of the principles that build interpersonal skills and relational trust which, in turn, have implications for solving the critical problems related to student achievement. Dempsey et al. (2009: 331), suggest that leaders at all stages need to be knowledgeable about educational purpose, aspirants and new appointees in particular need heavier emphasis on task and context knowledge, 'but experienced leaders responsible for larger and more complex schools need a realistic knowledge of *self* and *others* that is essential if they are to sustain themselves over extended service'.

Problem solving is recognized as a central skill for school leaders at all career stages (Ministry of Education, 2008) and particularly important for practising principals who continue to learn over the course of their careers according to Leithwood et al. (2004: 68), who say:

For experienced, expert practitioners, [. . .] problem-solving draws on a large repertoire of previously acquired knowledge. This knowledge is applied automatically to routine problems and, through reflection, in unique patterns which appropriately acknowledge the demands of more complex, novel and/or unstructured problems. [. . .] Expert practical problem-solving by practitioners such as principals depends on ready access to an extensive repertoire of problem-relevant knowledge.

The issue of sustainable leadership relates to long-serving principals in particular because sustaining interest and enthusiasm in the role is a constant concern (Stroud, 2005). Professional renewal is fundamental to the success of programmes for experienced principals and is consistent with the principle of ‘challenge’ suggested as an essential development element by Van Velsor and McCauley (2004). The challenge should be of an intellectual nature (Cardno and Fitzgerald, 2005; Dempster et al., 2009) developing cognitive and meta-cognitive skills that enable participants to engage in the theory and practice of critical inquiry to build self and management capability which are the foundations of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998).

A further strategy suggested to sustain enthusiasm in the later stages of principalship is the employment of school improvement initiatives embedded in leadership development opportunities – a form of authentic on-the-job development (Leithwood et al., 2004). When principals learn to be critically reflective about the status quo and plan incremental improvement around actual change initiatives they can engage in authentic learning through action research (Piggot-Irvine, 2006; Robertson, 2008) and self-directed inquiry projects (Piggot-Irvine, 2011) related to school-wide reform and improvement initiatives. This school improvement context for leadership development also serves to provide opportunities for teacher professional learning (Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009).

Methodology

The evaluation methodology used to make judgements about the effectiveness of the programme employed a mixed-methods approach comprising quantitative and qualitative analysis of data that was collected to answer the following research question:

To what extent was the Experienced Principals Development Programme (EPDP) effective leadership development for experienced principals?

The evaluation of the programme was also guided by a set of evaluative criteria linked to the common core aims of the programme and categorized into three types: *delivery and design* criteria; *purpose* criteria; and *result* criteria. The delivery and design criteria and purpose criteria were evaluated where the focus was mainly on the 10 providers. For the purposes of this article, which captures the views of principals themselves regarding effectiveness, our findings are mainly confined to the category of results of the programme. The evaluation criteria used to judge results of the programme included investigating the participants’ awareness and application of new knowledge to lead change to enhance the conditions for effective teaching and learning.

The choice of a mixed-methods approach was made in order to evaluate the programme from a range of viewpoints and contexts as the 10 providers were selected to deliver the programme to

cohorts of principals across the country. The multiphase triangulation design developed by Youngs and Piggot-Irvine (2012) was adapted and used as the foundation for our mixed methods research design owing to its 'goodness of fit' to the delivery of the EPDP and the criteria that we had developed. Consequently throughout the programme's delivery, we were able to provide formative findings to the ten providers and summative findings to the Ministry of Education so that overall conclusions could be made. The research design was multiphased so that data from the principals could be collected and compared between the mid and end points of the programme and multileveled so that general data from across all the principals could be compared and triangulated with the finer-grained principal data that emerged through three provider case studies. The national data was collected through two questionnaires at the mid and end points, whereas the case study data was collected through a combination of observation and focus groups with samples of the principals. The combination of these types of data provided a complementary and robust basis for analysis required for mixed methods design (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Questionnaires

The two questionnaires were tailored so that sufficient data could be compared between the mid and end points of the programme as well as provide self-reported views of principals about what they deemed to be effective elements of the delivery of the programme in relation to their leadership and management development. The mid-point questionnaire was sent out to all the EPDP principal participants in February 2010 and the end point in September 2010 via surveymonkey.com (an online tool for electronic questionnaires and their administration). National results and the specific provider results from the mid-point questionnaire were relayed back to the providers as a formative measure to help them refine the design and delivery of the EPDP. In order to create a basis for evaluating on-going impact of the programme, principals were asked to create their own identification code when they responded to the first mid-point questionnaire so that individual principal responses could be tracked across the two questionnaires. The mid-point questionnaire had a response rate of 63 percent ($n = 188$), whereas the end-point questionnaire had a response rate of 55 percent ($n = 166$). Of those who completed the two questionnaires, 84 principals provided their self-selected identification codes. The two questionnaires covered the following common question areas which are pertinent to the focus of this article. These were:

- expectations regarding the programme design and delivery;
- the effectiveness of curriculum and content; and
- participant learning and its application.

The data generated through the questionnaires were mainly quantitative, though principals were also provided opportunity to add comments to the question areas listed above. Analysis of the quantitative data was achieved by reducing into means principal perceptions of statements using a consistent six-point rating scale where 'totally disagree' at one end equated to 0 and 'totally agree' at the other end equated to 5. Good internal consistency of the six-point scales for each questionnaire was evident with Cronbach alpha coefficients of 0.981 and 0.968, respectively. Means and standard deviations were calculated and PASW 18.0 software was used to carry out further analysis of the data. The means were compared between the two questionnaires for the same statements using paired samples *t*-tests at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance analysed at an individual

principal level where individual principal self-identification codes could be matched between the two sets of questionnaire data.

Rating means were also analysed by utilizing the demographic data. When the rating means could be split into two groups for comparison (for example, female and male) then independent samples *t*-tests were carried out at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance. If the rating means were split into more than two groups (for example, location = rural, town or city) then one-way between groups ANOVA tests were carried out at the $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance.

All possible pairs of the data from two rating scale questions were compared for mid-point and end-point questionnaires respectively to ascertain whether there were any statistically significant associations between rating scale questions within each questionnaire data set. To do this correlation coefficients between each pair of data sets for two rating scale questions were calculated. Due to the number of statistically significant correlations that emerged we have only reported those that exist at the $\alpha = 0.01$ level of significance and were $r = 0.7$ and above so that only the stronger associations between rating scale questions are identified.

Case studies

Three providers were randomly selected to provide a context for conducting a small case study of the EPDP in action. The researchers visited three development events and observed aspects of the programme being delivered in real-life settings. In order to study the delivery of leadership development in depth, a case study approach was employed using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). In each setting a focus group interview was conducted with 8 to 10 principals participating in each interview in the different settings. The purpose of these evaluation research events was to observe activity at first hand and to elicit from participants their response in order to determine how the programme was meeting specific evaluation criteria, especially those associated with the results of the programme. In particular the aim of the case studies was to establish the extent to which principals reported awareness and application of new knowledge to assist their change efforts and to establish the principals' perceptions of the most effective components of the EPDP design. Qualitative data obtained in the case studies was analysed using the evaluation *results criteria* as a framework and searching for common categories and themes in the responses that linked to the quantitative findings and qualitative themes emerging from the questionnaires. Thus through an integrated multi-methods analysis a form of rigorous triangulation of data was achieved that included methodological triangulation between different data collecting tools, time triangulation between data emerging from the mid and end points of programme delivery and combined level triangulation between the 300 principals as one group and the more detailed data that emerged from the three case studies.

Findings: principals' perceptions of effective leadership development

The findings of this study related to principals' perceptions of what was effective in the EPDP programme have been consolidated to focus on aspects of curriculum and content, design and delivery, participant learning, and application of learning to achieve change.

Programme curriculum and content

While all 10 providers were expected to deliver leadership development that had a common aim and purpose they were encouraged to deliver their programmes in a variety of ways. The general

purpose requirements of the EPDP included a commitment to providing principals with specific knowledge and piloting a leadership assessment tool called the Educational Leadership Practices survey (ELP) designed to capture staff perceptions of leadership practices across the school and for use by the participating principals as a needs-assessment mechanism.

It could be said that the objectives of the EPDP that come close to shaping a curriculum are related to a requirement for the providers to make use of key Ministry of Education policy and research documents to inform participants. These included *Kiwi Leadership for Principals* (Ministry of Education, 2008a); the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) on *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying what works best and why* (Robinson et al., 2009) and *Ka Hikitia*, a document aimed at meeting the educational needs of indigenous Maori (Ministry of Education, 2008b). These resources could be viewed by New Zealand principals as new knowledge to be acquired to inform the way they implemented change to achieve conditions that could impact on teaching and student learning. A further requirement of the programme was to ensure that every principal undertook a school improvement inquiry project that was conducted as part of the programme. In many instances, the direction provided by the needs analysis tool (ELP) were utilized by both providers and principals to set direction for the inquiry project. One provider described this link as follows:

... it's influenced our thinking but we didn't have a set plan for the delivery of the whole curriculum. We wanted people to identify what their needs were and then we would build around each of them individually the best way we could support them with that [inquiry] project.

Programme design and delivery

Programme design was deemed to be effective when the principals perceived it as relevant in relation to their leadership and management development needs. When the programme providers catered for a variety of preferred learning styles the data from the end-point questionnaire indicated that the programme was more likely to be relevant for the principals ($r = 0.8$). In general the EPDP also became more relevant and effective for the principals as the programme progressed over time. The sample of principals we had been able to track anonymously across the two questionnaires revealed that some shifts had taken place with their perception of the relevancy of the EPDP both in terms of their preferred learning styles and their leadership development needs. These shifts are displayed in Table 1 in order of the effect sizes.

Among the most highly rated sources of development for principals were those illustrated in Table 2.

In general, principals placed a high value on the opportunities that programme design provided for face-to-face and relational contexts to be employed. They see an effective programme design as one that caters for individual needs, provides contact and communication opportunity and enables principals to link the content of professional readings and workshops to their own school setting.

Central to the establishment of these links is the role of a mentor or coach. In relation to the effectiveness of the mentoring/coaching component that all providers arranged in varying degrees, principals had this to say:

I think the mentoring for me was critical. Being in a sole charge position we can be very subjected to professional isolation and having another professional person there just nudging along and providing an ear if nothing else – although she did provide a lot else. It's nice to have that professional dialogue.

And that's [the formal workshop times] happening with our group too because we have met with our facilitator outside of the meetings and look at what to do in our inquiry project and try to focus on something that we really want in our Kura [school]. So it's [time with the facilitator beyond formal workshops] been actually good in telling us these are the things you should be reading in handouts that will help us.

Table 1. Principal perceptions of shifts in EPDP relevancy.

Question	n	Rating mean		t	Effect size	Paired samples t-test Comment
		Mid point	End point			
Principals' preferred range of learning styles were catered for	76	2.88	3.50	4.494	0.212	Large effect size implying that it was likely that principals preferred learning styles were better catered for as the EPDP progressed
The EPDP was highly relevant in relation to principals' leadership and management development	80	3.39	3.71	2.671	0.083	Moderate effect size implying there was some possible improvement with the EPDP being relevant to principals

Table 2. Principal end-point ratings of sources identified as developmental.

Source of development	n	mean	Standard deviation
Other EPDP principals	138	3.95	1.160
Provider personnel expertise	138	3.65	1.283
Mentors/coaches (or equivalent)	121	3.57	1.425
Professional readings	144	3.52	1.191
Workshop/teaching sessions	137	3.47	1.154
Accessibility of provider personnel	135	3.42	1.315
Professional learning groups/circles	130	3.42	1.424
Guest presenters	133	3.28	1.250
Utilizing the ELP school survey data	128	3.09	1.247
Provider leadership development diagnostic tools (not including the ELP)	99	3.05	1.306
Visiting other schools	111	3.04	1.686
(Inquiry) school-based project	116	2.87	1.483
e-learning	122	2.30	1.374
Portfolios	87	2.25	1.466

Participant learning

At the end of the programme principals confirmed that the programme had helped them to become more reflective about their practice and that in particular they were on the whole better equipped to identify and change the conditions that impact on teaching and learning because of the development activities they had engaged in. The rating scale means for how the programme had helped with reflective practice (3.38) and helped them to identify and change school conditions that affect

teaching and learning (3.42) indicate this type of learning was generally evident across most principals who completed the end-point questionnaire. In addition, case study on-site observations provided evidence of principals engaging in personal reflection that enabled them to link research knowledge (for example the findings of the Robinson et al. (2009) Best Evidence Synthesis on School Leadership) to their own practice.

According to the principals at the end of the programme most of the content that was covered by the providers emanated mainly from the Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) on *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying what works best and why* (Robinson et al., 2009) (113 references), *Ka Hikitia* (Ministry of Education, 2008b) (71 references) and *Kiwi Leadership for Principals* (Ministry of Education (2008a) (70 principal references). Principals in the end-point questionnaire were also asked to list any other areas of school leadership that were effectively covered during the EPDP beyond these documents. They listed:

- difficult conversations (36 responses);
- professional learning and quality teaching (17);
- teaching as inquiry (16);
- distributed, shared or collaborative leadership (14); and,
- the recently revised *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) (12).

The principals also identified areas of school leadership that they thought were not effectively covered or overlooked during the EPDP. Sixty-three responses were made and one-third of them related to the human resource management role of school leadership including, managing staff and the respective relationships, coaching, mentoring and conflict management. In support of this the case study observation of delivery of the programme by one provider indicates that principals wanted a deepening of the focus of the programme to include strengthening of their skills in aspects of human resources management with a particular focus on dealing effectively with interpersonal conflict.

Application of learning to achieve change

There is evidence to suggest that the programme enabled the application of new knowledge to practice (mean = 3.44). Of particular note is the data from a case study focus group that illustrates how several principals responded to new knowledge (research and theory related to practice). These principals believed that as their confidence increased in assimilating this new knowledge they were able to share this with their staff. So application of this type of learning went further than personal development and was often in the realm of school development.

The most significant findings relate to application of learning enabled through the inquiry projects that had an impact beyond the personal development of principals. Although the principals did not rate this element as highly as others in terms of a source of individual development (see Table 2), the end-point questionnaire results reveal that it has had considerable impact in terms of sustaining development for some principals. Table 3 shows how principals rated the effectiveness of this aspect of the EPDP.

Being able to link their inquiry project to staff professional learning/development planning appears to have been the key factor for principals in this table. Correlation coefficients possibly indicate that if principals had established these links to professional development plans they were more likely to see links between their project and the following:

- improving the conditions of teaching and learning;

Table 3. Principal ratings of inquiry projects in relation to school development.

Question (end-point questionnaire)	<i>n</i>	mean	Standard deviation
Creating opportunities to improve the conditions for teaching and learning	138	4.38	0.871
Linked to staff professional learning/development planning	137	4.31	0.950
Linked to 2011 school goals	136	4.15	1.035
Integrated with other school initiatives	136	4.14	0.989
Going to continue throughout 2011	136	4.13	1.143
Further developing leadership across staff	132	4.11	1.071
Impacting school culture	132	4.08	1.055
Informing staff appraisal	137	4.02	1.202

- impacting school culture, and;
- having their project linked to school goals.

The strengths of the relationship between these variables are displayed in Figure 1.

The continued implementation of the inquiry project beyond the time span of the EPDP (for example, goal-setting for 2011) suggests that for some principals it has provided a form of sustained, authentic on-the-job leadership development. In some cases this also provided opportunities for teacher professional learning as suggested in the leadership development literature (Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004). Figure 1 indicates associations between the inquiry projects and school activities such as staff appraisal and developing educational leadership. These associations appeared more likely if a principal had prioritized the linking of the inquiry project to staff learning/professional development planning as indicated by the number of links emanating from this variable at the top of Figure 1. This appeared for some principals to be a key activity that tentatively suggests some association between aspects of experienced principal development and developing conditions that improve teaching and learning thereby impacting school culture.

While there is some evidence to suggest that some inquiry projects were associated with improving the conditions for teaching and learning, principals also indicated that they encountered some major challenges. These included time and workload pressures (65 out of 136 responses) and the difficulty of getting staff buy-in (30 out of 136 responses). Nevertheless, the programme had provided the opportunity for them to undertake, with support from providers, a substantial endeavour in which their learning on this programme could be applied in a reflective and relevant way.

Contextual variables

Throughout the evaluation of the EPDP we also analysed the questionnaire rating means against principal demographic variables such as gender, experience, whether they had postgraduate qualifications in educational leadership and management or whether they had completed the Ministry of Education's First-Time Principals programme or not. We found that these variables did not appear to be key factors that contributed to principals' responses in the questionnaires.

In terms of school-based variables, socio-economic school decile ratings did not appear to be a factor, as did school type in terms of primary or secondary. Where some differences were apparent was in relation to school size. Principals from smaller schools tended to provide some higher

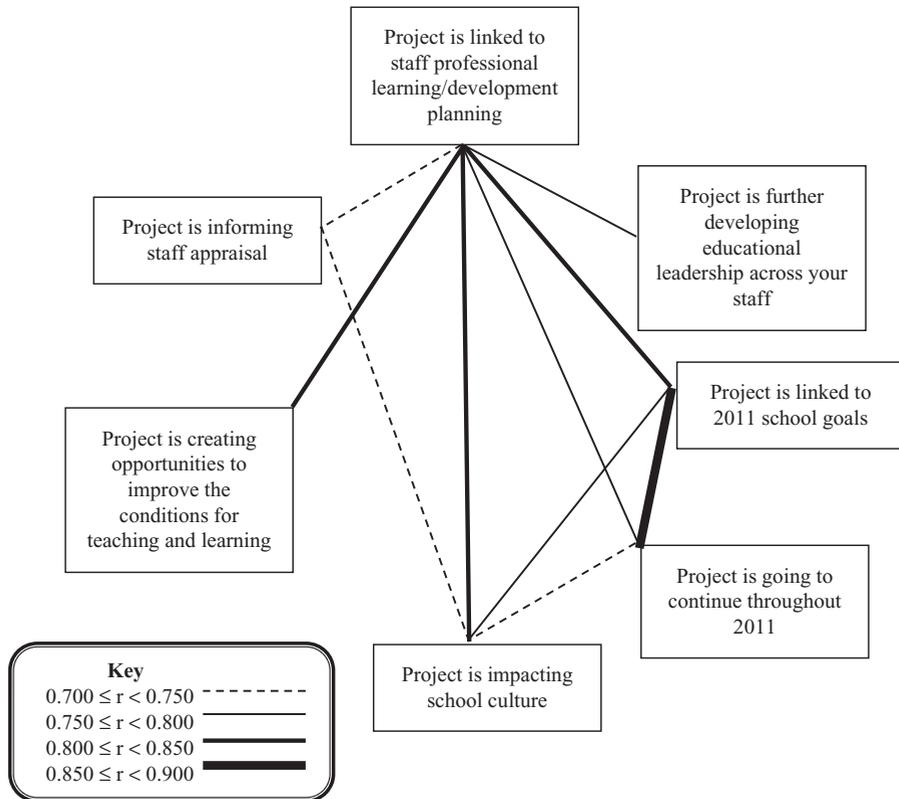


Figure 1. Associations between variables – the inquiry project and school development.

ratings across some rating items from both questionnaires when compared to principals from schools with rolls over 300 suggesting that there are some different development needs based on school size where more emphasis on the knowledge of others and associated interpersonal relational skills are required (Cardno and Fitzgerald, 2005; Dempster et al., 2009).

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study point to some key messages about effective leadership and management development for experienced principals. First, this form of development has to be highly relevant for the participants and this requires the design to be responsive to individual needs. Second, effective development of this kind, spread over several months in a variety of forms, required sufficient duration for the learning to be reflective, applied and sustained. Third, effective development for experienced principals can be a conduit for extending development to others thus achieving not only leader, but also leadership development if certain conditions are present.

In keeping with what the literature (Dempster et al., 2009; Stroud, 2005) advances as the cornerstone for developing programmes for experienced principals, the EPDP utilized approaches that were relevant for principals at this career stage. What is appropriate for principals in early career

stages is not necessarily relevant for long-serving principals (Weindling, 1999). Previous research has established that experienced principal leadership development programmes need to be individualized and personalized so that they are unique and responsive to the needs of participants (Stroud, 2005). This can be achieved through the provision of individual attention in mentoring or coaching contexts (Solansky, 2010) and this arrangement was one of the most highly rated sources of development for principals in this study. However, the literature cautions that coaches themselves require attention paid to their capability and competence if they are to establish trusting and effective relationships in the coaching partnership (O'Mahony and Barnett, 2008).

Programme duration has also been identified as a critical effectiveness factor. For the provision of relevant programmes time is needed to identify individual needs and make adjustments to meet those needs. If time is provided for experienced principals to engage in a meaningful curriculum that includes an inquiry project of some substance and duration then they are able to engage in the sort of school improvement opportunity that Leithwood et al. (2004) call a form of authentic on-the-job development most suitable for experienced principals. The evaluation of the EPDP has confirmed the value of this form of development and the perceptions of principals show its impact has been significant.

What has also been found to be effective in terms of the leadership development in the EPDP is captured in principal's views about the links between their own development and the development of others through implementation of the school-based inquiry project that has been part of the national core curriculum for this initiative. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) assert that a school improvement context for leadership development has the potential to provide opportunities for wider staff development. The findings of this study support this as some of the principals have reported that implementing their inquiry projects created opportunities to improve the conditions for improving teaching and learning and link their projects to staff professional learning and development. The findings also suggest that the inquiry projects provide a context in which leadership development of many staff might occur. Thus the effectiveness of these projects extends beyond leader development to leadership development in a more distributed form (Robinson et al., 2009; Van Velsor and McCauley, 2004).

The value of applying new leadership development learning in the context of organizational improvement is also supported by Woodall and Winstanley (1998) who refer to an advanced stage of management development involving work with teams. These authors refer to the need for particular context in management development that focuses on skill-building to develop both self and relational management capability. In the findings of this study a notable omission is the absence of a specific emphasis on interpersonal skill development in relation to solving complex problems as a core content component. The generic and educational leadership literature strongly advocates for this emphasis, particularly for experienced principals as a crucial element of renewal and rejuvenation that makes such programmes relevant (Cardno and Fitzgerald, 2005; Dempster et al., 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004).

In conclusion, the evaluation of the EPDP has confirmed that it has resulted in the participating principals gaining and applying new knowledge. According to a majority of the principals who completed the end-point questionnaire the EPDP has also had some impact on increasing the likelihood that they will now stay longer in their role. This in itself points to the success of the EPDP especially given the principal supply issues that currently pervade the educational environment. These principals have also attested to the overall effectiveness of the programme and have assisted with the isolation of particular design and delivery elements that in their view have made leadership development possible for them. In the words of one principal:

I know that New Zealand is facing a problem of a lot of principals leaving, maybe going to rural schools and then burning out, or getting into situations and being completely left alone ... I can see this programme possibly saving some principals and keeping them in their positions for a lot longer.

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