

Features of Effective Leadership Development Provision for Experienced New Zealand Principals

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Abstract: *This article reports knowledge gained from an evaluation of a nationwide leadership development initiative for experienced principals in New Zealand. The Experienced Principals Development Programme (EPDP) was piloted with 300 primary and secondary principals as part of the New Zealand government's strategy to refresh and retain experienced school leaders. In spite of a highly positive reception by participants, the initiative was discontinued. However, the formal evaluation of the programme has contributed to the knowledge base on effective school leadership development. The article captures the perspectives of the providers of the programme, who pinpointed particular successful and challenging features. Overall, the findings point to the success of delivery modes with small cohorts that include clarity of expectations, timely initiation, the inclusion of internal and external coaching/mentoring partnerships, and context-related activity around school improvement. The learning from this study could inform the shape and delivery of similar programmes for experienced principals in other nations so that sufficient experience is maintained across the principalship.*

Background

In New Zealand both the preparation and development of principals is optional. Optional development pathways for principals can usually be any one or a combination of an educational leadership postgraduate qualification, or the Ministry of Education's aspiring and/or first-time principals programme. An Experienced Principals Development Programme (EPDP) was also established as part of a wider New Zealand government and Ministry of Education strategy to strengthen professional leadership in schools. The EPDP was a priority in the Ministry of Education's 2009-2010 Professional Leadership Plan that aspired to create a cohesive approach to leadership development from middle leadership through to the differing stages of a school principal's career. Already in place at the time were the programmes for aspiring principals (Piggot-Irvine & Youngs 2011) and first-time principals (Robinson, Irving, Eddy & Le Fevre 2008). The EPDP was intended to extend development provision to the experienced segment of school leaders, for whom no state-funded leadership development was available, in an effort to retain and revitalise this group.

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This nationwide development plan was part of the government's response to school principal supply issues highlighted in the OECD's school leadership report (Swaffield & MacBeath 2009) and reflective of the international trend of governments starting to recognise the key role of school leaders (Crow, Lumby & Pashiardis 2008). In New Zealand, the supply and retention issue also reflects the ageing population of school principals. In 2004, 8.74 per cent of school principals were aged 60 or over, by 2010 this had risen to 17.13 per cent and it has continued to rise using the latest figures available at the time of writing this article, reaching 21.5 per cent as of April 2012 (Ministry of Education 2015a). Most attention internationally in addressing this supply and retention issue has however been on aspiring principals; little attention has been given to retaining experienced principals so that nations do not experience a future dearth of human capital in the principalship through a wave of principal retirements (Marks 2012). The EPDP was therefore a strategic move to ensure school principalship remained an important aspect of New Zealand's education system into the future.

The Experienced Principals Development Programme (EPDP) was piloted with 300 experienced principals and delivered by ten regional providers, who successfully contested for contracts to deliver the pilot from mid-2009 through to the end of 2010. Experienced principals in this case were those who had at least ten years of experience as a principal, so participants would generally be in mid- or late-career stages (Oplatka 2010). Changes in government policy and Ministry of Education priorities have since resulted in the removal of the Professional Leadership Plan from official websites, whilst initiatives for aspiring and first-time principals continue. Rather, the government and Ministry of Education are hoping experienced principals will contribute to the latest initiative, Communities of Schools (Ministry of Education 2014), as system leaders of ten or so schools who collaborate around an agreed goal with the Ministry of Education in the hope of raising student achievement. It is therefore unlikely the EPDP initiative will be resurrected anytime in the foreseeable future, in spite of the overall success of the pilot from the perspective of the participating principals (Cardno & Youngs 2013). In an earlier article that reports what principals deemed to be successful features of the programme, Cardno and Youngs assert that:

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. (2013: 264)

This article explores why the EPDP pilot was deemed to be a success from the perspective of the providers and the nature of the challenges they encountered. The participants' perspectives are used to examine which features of provision were particularly effective. In it, we focus more on the providers than the principals, although both views are necessary to paint the overall picture. A brief overview of the literature on experienced principals' development is presented followed by an explanation of the mixed methods evaluation research design we used. The findings are reported in two sections. The first focuses on the programme initiation challenges faced by the providers and the second focuses on the effective features of provision. The article then concludes with a discussion of the key features of leadership development provision that proved to be effective in this case.

Literature on the Development of Experienced Principals

Although the approaches taken by countries to professionalise educational leaders vary greatly, they fall into two marked categories: before and after appointment to principalship. Generally, principal preparation relates to strategies used to develop the capability of aspirants *before* they are appointed to principalship. Career progression and development strategies are involved *after* appointment (Macpherson 2010; Cardno 2003). 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.

At the pre-employment stage, participants in leadership and management development are usually aspirants. In many cases, a university-based specialised qualification or completion of a national training programme is a pre-requisite for principalship, and this is certainly the case in the USA and the UK (Cardno 2003; Hallinger 2003; Notman 2010), though it is not so apparent in a comparative study of Commonwealth nations (Moorosi & Bush 2011). In other cases, programmes for aspiring principals have been developed which involve participants volunteering or being selected (Piggot-Irvine & Youngs 2012; Robertson & Earl 2014). Newly appointed principals are in many systems inducted into the role, though this is not always a mandatory requirement (Robinson et al. 2008; Moorosi & Bush 2011). There is acknowledgement in a comparative analysis of European nations that challenges can exist in trying to balance supply and demand through programmes (Møller & Schratz 2008). Catering for experienced principals is also where many of the challenges associated with appropriate and effective ongoing leadership and management development are encountered (Cardno & Fitzgerald 2005; Dempster, Alen, & Gatehouse 2009; Marks 2012).

Experienced leaders are defined in several ways. For example, in generic writings about leader development, Day (2011) alludes to the ten-year role tenure associated with developing expert performance, and Lord & Hall (2005) argue that leaders' identities tend to have more of a collective orientation, rather than an individual one, as their expertise and experience develops. This implies knowledge related to leader development would be different for a beginning principal compared to an experienced one, and cannot be restricted to new education reforms. Experienced school principals are normally well established in their careers, have at least a decade of experience in principalship, and many have held several such posts. Some of these incumbents are also late-career principals or aged over 55 years (Oplatka 2010). Literature referring to the ongoing development of this profile of leaders is scant, although there is some reference to a lack of attention paid to the needs of these experienced principals (Scott & Rarieya 2011; Marks 2012). In relation to educational settings, Ribbins (1999) argues for an approach that 'makes available continuing professional development at every career phase' (p. 87). He suggests an incumbent goes through an immediate period of initiation, a later phase of development and growth, a stage of autonomy where they are more prepared to collaborate with and trust others, and then a period of disenchantment, although this is not universal by any means, and long-serving principals can remain enchanted with the job (Oplatka 2010). Ribbins (1999) asserts that an understanding of these characteristics of transition for 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 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. Furthermore, the individual and differing development needs of an experienced leader require some degree of differentiation due to the complex interaction of social

and cultural capital accumulated in their respective schools over many years (Day, Fleenor, Atwater, Sturm & McKee 2014; Youngs 2014).

Leadership Learning Approaches for Experienced Principals

Empirical research about the actual needs and modes of delivery preferred by experienced principals is limited (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom 2004; Stroud 2006). Research conducted with experienced primary and secondary headteachers in the UK affirms a critical need for experienced headteacher development, and concludes there should be a unique approach to the way professional development is provided for at this career stage. In Stroud's (2006) study, school leaders felt they were in need of revitalising and re-enthusing and that they should play a significant part in decision-making about the sort of interventions for professional growth they participated in. In particular, they felt that diverse needs might be met through coaching and a wide selection of other opportunities. Both coaching/mentoring and individual assessment of capability have a place in personalising 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 (Barnett & O'Mahony 2008; Robinson et al. 2008), but a dearth of literature about the employment of these personalised 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 & 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 (see, for example, Reiss 2007; Barnett & O'Mahony 2008; Robertson 2008). Key advantages of leadership coaching proposed in the literature relate to the flexibility of this process and its focus on achieving a meshing of both individual and organisational goals (Ely, Boyce, Nelson, Zaccaro, Hernez-Broome & Whyman 2010).

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 2006). 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 (Van Velsor, McCauley, & Ruderman 2010). The challenge should be of an intellectual nature (Cardno & Fitzgerald 2005; Dempster et al. 2009), developing cognitive and metacognitive 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). Leader development is likely to be more effective and sustaining if it is recognised as a 'highly individualised process' (Day: 42). In this regard, there are several processes that increase self-awareness and support self-development, including feedback and learning goals.

The literature is consistent in advocating for context-based learning as a powerful developmental tool for the experienced leader (Day 2011; Moorosi & Bush 2011). Bush (2008) proposes a 21st century model of leadership learning that is context-responsive and team oriented. This aligns with the notion of embedding school improvement initiatives in leadership development opportunities – a form of authentic on-the-job development (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom 2004). When principals learn to be critically reflective about the status quo and plan incremental improvement, they can engage in authentic learning through projects involving action learning or action research (Day 2011) related to school-wide reform and improvement initiatives. This school

improvement context for leadership development also serves to provide opportunities for drawing others into the professional learning experience so that both leader and leadership development are possible (Cardno & Youngs 2013).

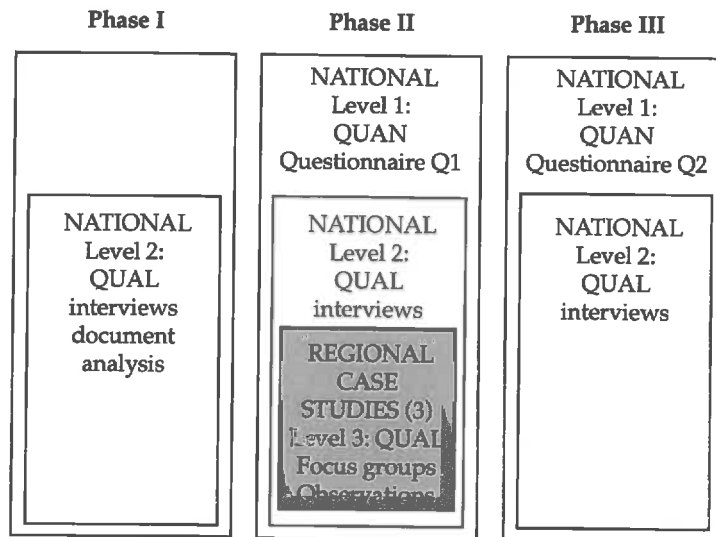
Research Evaluation Design

The Experienced Principals Development Programme was designed to allow each of the ten regional providers to select their preferred programme delivery mode and cohort size. The evaluation of the programme involved looking at the whole programme as an entity and separately evaluating unique settings of regional provision. The variety of contexts required a multi-level approach where both a national and a regional view could be gained. Owing to the number of principals involved in the programme and the requirement to provide overall evaluative findings, the design required a data-collecting tool that suited quantitative analysis. At a national level, the plan to conduct interviews with regional provider co-ordinators required an approach that suited qualitative analysis. Complementary to the national level, data-collecting tools were also required at the regional level so that principal's perspectives, as individuals and group members, could be gained mainly through qualitative analysis.

Another component that informed the evaluation design was our intention to provide formative feedback to the regional providers and the Ministry of Education throughout the evaluation period, as well as reporting summative findings. Hence a mixed methods and multi-phased research design was needed. The multiphase triangulation design developed by Youngs & Piggot-Irvine (2012) for the evaluation a New Zealand leadership development programme for aspiring principals was adapted and used as the foundation of this evaluation design because of its 'goodness of fit' to the evaluation criteria for the EPDP.

Evaluation occurred at three levels and in three phases. Levels one and two were designed to gather data related to the overall national findings and level three was designed in parallel to provide insights into what was occurring with a selection of regional providers. Overall principal perceptions were collected through questionnaires at level one, whereas overall regional provider co-ordinator perceptions were collected through interviews at level two and were complemented with a document analysis of espoused provider programmes. The evaluation was spread over three phases: the provider programme initiation phase, an expected programme delivery mid-point phase and a programme end-point phase (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Experienced Principals Development Programme - phases of evaluation



Findings Part One: Programme Initiation

The overall Ministry of Education aim for the Experienced Principals Development Programme (EPDP) was to develop the capability of experienced principals to lead change in order to create the conditions for effective teaching and learning for every student. This aim was evident in the provider plans submitted to the Ministry of Education. There was an emphasis on both managing change and improving teaching and learning. A unique feature of the programme design was the flexibility of delivery – allowing providers to propose a mode and cohort details for each site. This provided a variety of very different types of programme across the regions. However, the Ministry of Education required that some common components feature in every programme. Firstly, each principal and their respective school were required to complete an Effective Leadership Practice (ELP) survey that was administered through a national research body. The purpose of the ELP was to provide some indication to the principal and their provider about individual leadership development needs. A second demand that needed to be met by both providers and participants was related to the expectation that principals and provider would engage in relevant e-learning activity to enhance communication and development. The third requirement related to the Ministry of Education insisting that the programme be used to disseminate key strategic and policy documents relevant to the principal's role.

To achieve their plans, nearly all providers provided opportunities for their cohort of principals to come formally together, usually for seminar-type sessions. The use of Professional Learning Groups (PLGs) was widespread throughout the providers' plans, as was the use of mentors/coaches. Some providers provided formal training to PLG coaches, whereas others matched principals with less experience with those who had greater experience and could act as critical friends. Face-to-face components were complemented with a range of online tools such as wikis, learning portals, Moodle and online forums. The most common and consistent feature of provision across programmes was

the expectation that all principals carry out an inquiry project in their school as a means of blending their own leadership development with aspects of school improvement where the focus was on improving the conditions for teaching and learning. The programme evaluation confirms the most significant finding in terms of expanding and sustaining principals' own development and extending development to others related to the impact of the school improvement inquiry projects (for further details, see Cardno & Youngs 2013).

Recruitment

Principals were either recruited for the EPDP directly by a regional provider or became aware of the programme through Ministry of Education communication, advertising or their own professional networks. Just over half the principals had heard directly from a local regional provider and their responses to programme effectiveness rating scale questions were compared to principals who had not heard through a local provider. For 14 of the 47 rating scale questions, t-tests showed principals who were contacted directly by a provider rated their responses higher than those who heard otherwise. This finding, though not conclusive, when viewed alongside other data collected through our evaluation suggested that if a relationship did exist between the provider and the principal prior to the programme's start, then those principals were more likely to rate aspects of the EPDP higher compared to those who had not encountered the provider before.

Some providers indicated that in hindsight they would make changes to their recruitment process if they had the opportunity to establish another cohort. In particular, they would provide clearer guidelines on what was expected of principals and check the principals' understandings of what they were committing themselves to regarding participation. Providers offered the following sort of comments:

- We would probably take time out to interview principals. What is it that they want to get out of it? It is clear to us, it is probably a relatively small number but probably 10 per cent came in to this simply because it was on offer. They actually had no idea, they weren't too concerned about what it was and they found it very demanding, very demanding indeed. (Provider B)
- I would want a greater early, formal commitment from the principal to meet with other people on a regular basis. (Provider C)
- We would be making it really clear that this is a piece of PD [professional development] that does have high expectations of them in terms of participation and what they are actually going to do ... it came as a bit of a shock to some that they actually had to do some things in terms of expectations and that there were high expectations that they would actually do something quite different in their schools. (Provider A)

Challenges Faced by Providers

Across providers there was a strong view that during the early months of programme delivery, a setback to the provision of programme activity occurred because of the delayed administration of the Effective Leadership Practice (ELP) survey. Even though the survey was later deemed to be a success by providers and principals, it was still in its pilot testing phase at the start of the EPDP. The delayed release of Ministry of Education documents was another frustrating issue for providers. For example, the public release of a key initiative document, the *School Leadership and Student Outcomes Best Evidence Synthesis* (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd 2009), was not timed for release prior to the start of the programme. Though providers did have a draft version, they still had to wait another

three months for the public release. As a consequence, some providers found that throughout the first few months they were still grappling with establishing for principals the alignment between the purpose of the EPDP and multiple Ministry of Education publications. In the case study of one regional provider, both observation and focus group data confirmed the participants were unaware of the importance of a focus on government initiatives as an expectation for the programme. No one disagreed with the expressed view that principals are, or should be, aware of government initiatives, but several commented they would have preferred to have been made aware of this from the outset. The issue for participants appeared to be the extent to which providers should make themselves aware of Ministry of Education agendas or 'official' expectations in relation to the invitation to participate in 'free' professional development funded by a government.

There was a perception from two out of the ten providers, in particular, that time was wasted at the start of the programme. Another factor that hindered timely programme delivery was related to the e-learning expectations and what may have been assumed about principals' knowledge of digital learning environments. One provider stated:

I think, it seems to me that the, the technical capabilities of a number of the participants are not strong. So, where we had hoped to do a lot of the work online, and with some of the web-two tools and so on, it seems to me now that we're going to be moving, working more face to face. I'm not sure that we're not going to get the proficiency with some of the web2 tools that we would have hoped for. There are some enthusiasts and some experts in the group who will go down that track, but I would say that certainly won't happen across the whole cluster. (Provider D)

Findings Part Two: Perceptions of Effective Delivery Modes

In general, the programme became more relevant and effective for the principals as it progressed over time and as providers made adjustments based on formative feedback. A sample of principals we had been able to track individually and anonymously across the mid- and end-points of the programme revealed some shifts had taken place to cater for their preferred learning styles and leadership development needs. These shifts are displayed in Table 1 (where 0=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree).

Table 2 presents the specific impact, according to the principals, of different tools of learning used in the EPDP to enhance their leadership and development (in rank order of rating means).

Table 1: Principals' perceptions of shifts in relevancy of the programme

Question	n	Rating mean		Paired samples t-test		
		Q1 Mar 2010	Q2 Oct 2010	t	Effect size	Comment
Principals' preferred range of learning styles were catered for	76	2.88	3.50	4.49	0.212	Small effect size implying that some principals preferred learning styles may have been 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	2.67	0.083	Very small effect size implying there was some possible very small improvement with the EPDP being relevant to principals

Table 2: Principals' ratings of possible sources of development

Source	n	mean
Other EPDP principals	138	3.95
Provider personnel expertise	138	3.65
Mentors/coaches (or equivalent)	121	3.57
Professional readings	144	3.52
Workshop/teaching sessions	137	3.47
Accessibility of Provider personnel	135	3.42
PLGs/PLCs (or equivalent)	130	3.42
Guest presenters	133	3.28
Utilising the ELP data	128	3.09
Provider diagnostic tools	99	3.05
Visiting other schools	111	3.04
(Inquiry) Project	116	2.87
e-learning	122	2.30
Portfolios	87	2.25

The findings related to Table 2 revealed that principals regarded the relational face-to-face contexts as the most appropriate for their continued leadership development. Two sources of development that appeared to be less affected by how the provider delivered the programme were the relationships principals established with other EPDP principals, and professional readings.

Professional learning groups, often facilitated by a mentor, were the cornerstone of delivery. The end-point questionnaire revealed the principals with one provider, when compared to the other providers, had possibly experienced PLGs and mentors/coaches as more substantial factors to their leadership development. This provider (Provider G) ensured the PLG coaches were appropriately trained prior to the PLGs being implemented. Another provider stressed how the PLGs took time to work effectively:

In April we noticed that the type of discussion and the openness in the discussion changed. They became far more trusting it seemed of each other because we'd talked through the protocols for discussion in the group. We have a process that you can talk about to other people what we were discussing but there'd be no names and no identification of who might've said the various things. So we had to establish this whole idea of trust and we felt this was critical to the culture of the group, that they could be open in their discussion. (Provider H)

In the end-point questionnaire, principals working with Provider H rated other EPDP principals from the same cohort as a programme component that contributed more to their development than other aspects of the programme such as workshops, the ELP, inquiry projects, PLGs and mentors. This provider described in an interview how principals had developed 'activities and exercises around what it meant to be a critical friend'.

Another variable that appeared to make a difference to principals' perceptions was the size of the cohort their provider had set in place. A comparison of the two larger cohorts with all of the small cohorts suggested that cohort size may be a factor that contributes to how principals rated their satisfaction and learning in the EPDP. Of the 47 scale items of the end-point questionnaire, the responses of the principals from the smaller cohorts (n=15-25) rated statistically significantly higher for 36 of the rating scale means compared to principals from the two large cohorts (n=60+). A similar trend was also evident with the mid-point questionnaire data, suggesting that there comes a point where the overall group size starts to work against the professional learning environment of workshops when the whole cohort is expected to attend. Principals working with the two larger providers preferred a 30-40 per cent lower maximum size for the overall group than what they experienced, and preferred the minimum size to be at least 20. Principals working with providers with smaller cohorts generally preferred the cohort sizes to be between 10 and 25, similar to what they had experienced.

Discussion

One of the most effective features in programmes for developing experienced principals is the inclusion of an inquiry project related to developing an initiative or resolving a school problem. Overall, the ten (very varied) regional programmes contributed to developing the capability of experienced principals. Where providers had assisted principals to make the necessary connections to their goals for school improvement through a manageable inquiry project, principals' capability to lead change was more likely to be enhanced (Cardno & Youngs 2013). This finding is aligned to Bush's (2008) argument that relevant leadership development requires work-based learning.

When learning occurs in a context that is authentic and linked to a project, its impact is likely to be effective and sustainable (Day 2011).

Second, overall the findings indicated that all varieties of the programme were at least moderately successful in the view of the participants, but a small cohort was a distinct feature of success. Smaller cohorts of under 25 participants were able to develop closer relationships with providers and amongst the participants. Face-to-face learning encounters that built relationships were seen to be extremely effective by the participants. We know that principals in this study rated learning from other colleagues on the programme, learning from provider expertise and learning through coaching/mentoring very highly as sources of development. Asynchronous delivery of online modes was only effective if a principal had sufficient digital expertise and made time to become engaged.

A third feature of effectiveness is captured in participants' comments about the impact of working in small collegial groups (such as Professional Learning Groups) with appropriate coaching support. This was particularly the case when a small group of principals was in regular contact with the coach/mentor/facilitator, who also maintained contact with each individual principal. This confirms that coaching/mentoring has a core place in leadership development (Solansky 2010) and that careful planning and support is required for this kind of provision, which hinges heavily on the expertise of the coaches/mentors (Reiss 2007; O'Mahony & Barnett 2008; Robertson 2008).

A fourth feature of programme success is the capability of the provider to get the programme 'off the ground' as quickly as possible in spite of difficulties created in the delivery pipeline. In this national initiative all ten providers were hampered by delays affecting document availability and the administration of a pilot needs analysis survey, but some were able to surmount these difficulties. Smaller cohorts were possibly able to be more responsive to local needs, and this is reflected in the overall satisfaction of their participants.

As part of the end-point questionnaire, principals were asked to rate the overall impact of the EPDP in relation to their desire to continue as a principal. Their responses can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Principals' perceptions of the overall impact of the EPDP

Question	n	mean	Standard deviation
Since being part of the EPDP principals are more likely to continue in their role	136	3.52	1.495
The EPDP has provided rejuvenation for principals	151	2.90	1.587

These responses indicated that the EPDP did have some impact in increasing the likelihood that a number of experienced principals would stay longer in their role. This in itself pointed to the success of the EPDP pilot, especially given the issues of supply of principals and future retirement that pervade the educational environment. The slightly lower rating of rejuvenation could possibly have been related to the busy lives of principals, who participated in the EPDP as well as carrying out their roles in their schools. Other evaluation findings did, however, suggest that rejuvenation through the EPDP could possibly have been associated with increased reflective practice linked to attempting to enhance the conditions of effective teaching and learning by the principal in their school. One principal summed up their thoughts of the EPDP pilot by stating:

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.

Despite the positive views of most of those involved in the EPDP, and our own recommendation as the evaluators that the EPDP should continue, albeit with minor changes, the programme has never been run again. Instead, the Ministry of Education has moved on to a more generic approach in which any development for experienced principals is indirectly wrapped up within government reforms of education. The most recent *Statement of Intent*, spanning the period 2014-18, identifies raising the quality of leadership as a strategic priority (Ministry of Education 2014), but is somewhat silent on any dedicated leader development programme for experienced school principals.

Conclusion

A key learning from this evaluation of a nationwide initiative in experienced principal development is that varied modes of delivery – some of which include face-to-face opportunities amongst experienced principals – are necessary. In summary, using cohorts of 10-20 participants, clarifying expectations at the outset, providing support through coaching in small groups, engaging participants in a school-based inquiry project and getting off to a timely start are some of the features that lead to programme delivery successes. Providing intentional space for collaboration and networking amongst experienced principals is essential, though care is needed to ensure principals have both the time and skills to engage in any online asynchronous activity.

These findings align in some way with a comparative analysis of Canada, Kenya and Tanzania as part of the International Study of the Preparation of Principals (ISPP) project. Scott and Rarieya (2011) found that delivery needed to be both flexible and multi-modal, with any online component best delivered in an asynchronous manner. However, the discontinuation of the EPDP after its successful pilot does raise questions as to whether enough is being done in New Zealand to alleviate any possible future shortage of experienced principals. Whether the recent Communities of Schools initiative (Ministry of Education 2015b) is sufficient as a strategy to complement the aspirant and first-time principal programmes is still an unknown. The key is whether governments are doing enough to ensure that, in the years ahead, there is no drop-off in human, social and cultural capital of experienced principals in their education systems, even if the pipeline of aspirants will be sufficient to ensure every school has a principal.

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