Self-assessment and coaching in New Zealand aspiring principals' development

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Abstract

The research study outlined in this article describes the findings from a self-assessment and coaching leadership pilot in New Zealand as part of the international project "Professional learning through reflection promoted by feedback and coaching" (PROFLEC) (Huber & Hiltmann, 2011). The self-assessment inventory was integrated as part of the National Aspiring Principals' programme, which included peer and group coaching, professional learning groups and online learning communities. The study involved 41 participants and the methodology included a survey monkey questionnaire and interactive interviewing of every participant and their coaches.

Six major themes emerged from an analysis of the findings: the overall impressions of the CPSM inventory; the context-related issues of the inventory; the emotional engagement with results; the power of the coaching paradigm and experiences; self-awareness and reflective growth; and developing bravery and courage in leadership efficacy. The tool served as a way to observe one's own perception of practice from a different perspective and was an effective stimulus to discuss issues of educational leadership. It not only highlighted strengths and areas for development but also offered a chance to compare capabilities with others. The results of the self-assessment tool required specific coaching and feedback in the ongoing leader development process.

The continued use of this CPSM tool, with the related feedback and coaching, may ultimately depend on the ways in which the tool can become a more integrated component of the aspiring principal development, and into principalship, to warrant its continued inclusion. It also needs to be viewed alongside alternative, indigenous self-assessment tools and what information is helpful for understanding one's current leadership strengths and areas for future learning and improvement to meet the long-term policy needs of a unique and bicultural New Zealand education system.

Keywords: *Leadership; learning; coaching; self-assessment; aspiring principals; New Zealand*

Introduction

This article outlines a research study of a self-assessment pilot in New Zealand as part of the International project "Professional learning through reflection promoted by feedback and coaching" (PROFLEC) (Huber & Hiltmann, 2011). The Competence Profile School Management (CPSM) self-assessment and feedback tool is but one component of a multi-learning professional development programme originally offered in Germany and then trialled with country partners in Switzerland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, England, Czech Republic, Spain, Cyprus and Australia, with a critical friend attached to the project from the United States of America (West & Skedsmo, (n.d)). The New Zealand project described in this article explores the potential of this psychology-based self-assessment inventory, CPSM, integrated as part of the National Aspiring Principals' Programme. The CPSM tool generates personalised feedback reports, detailing the influences of high or low scores, and how they manifest in different areas of leadership practice. This self-assessment tool was part of a comprehensive year's programme of feedback, coaching, curriculum and dialogue in professional learning communities. It was thus complex to ascertain the actual impact of this particular tool against all of the other contributing components in the participant's leadership learning throughout the year.

Literature review

Interest in leadership learning is not a new phenomenon. Syntheses of research have highlighted how education systems have long recognised the importance of high quality school leadership for ensuring student learning and achievement (e.g., Hallinger, 2011; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009). Huber (2011) argues that the development of school leaders is a central concern for educational policy makers in many countries and appears high on policy agendas. Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins' (2006) seven claims about what constitutes effective leadership have been widely circulated and often cited, especially with their first claim stating "school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (p. 1). Similarly, four years later, further work undertaken by Day et al., (2010) has highlighted headteachers as being the main source of leadership in schools. Together these two reports have helped to endorse the connection between leadership work and student and teacher learning. Bush (2009) suggests such widespread belief across developed and developing countries is "recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their students and learners" (p. 375).

Bush (2009) reminded us that despite agreement that leadership does make a difference, "there is ongoing debate about what preparation is required to develop appropriate leadership behaviours" (p. 375). Questions to ask of education systems must then focus on those provisions and whether they are able to help prospective leaders feel well-prepared to be leaders of learning. Country reports from the OECD (2008) on school leadership reveal a range of formal and informal approaches to leadership learning. These have included variations of headship programmes both before and after appointments, mandated programmes resulting in formal headship qualifications (e.g., Scotland and Ontario, Canada), optional programmes (e.g., New Zealand's First-time Principals' Induction Programme) and programmes for aspiring and middle leaders (e.g., New Zealand, Australia, England, Singapore). The components of such programmes have included personalised coaching and mentoring, work-based inquiry projects, and self-reflections.

Table 1: A framework of research-derived criteria for judging the quality of leadership and professional learning

High-quality leadership learning programmes should be:
1. Philosophically and theoretically attuned to individual and system needs in leadership and professional learning;
2. Goal-oriented, with primacy given to the dual aims of school improvement and improvement in student learning and achievement;
3. Informed by the weight of research evidence;
4. Time-rich, allowing for learning sequences to be spaced and interspersed with collegial support, in-school applications and reflective encounters
5. Practice-centred, so that knowledge is taken back into the school in ways that maximise the effects of leadership capability;
6. Purpose-designed for specific career stages, with ready transfer of theory and knowledge into practice;
7. Peer-supported within or beyond the school, so that feedback helps to transfer theory and knowledge into improved practice;
8. Context-sensitive, and thus able to build in and make relevant use of school leaders' knowledge of their circumstances;
9. Partnership-powered, with external support through joint ventures involving associations, universities and the wider professional world;
10. Committed to evaluating the effects on leaders, as well as on school practices to which their learning applies.

Studies into the types of professional learning and development needed by teachers moving into leadership work reveal that the learning required needs to include both formal and informal opportunities, with system provisions as well as opportunities for support at school sites of practice, and new leaders taking some responsibility for identifying their own learning needs. Flückiger, Lovett and Dempster's (2014, p. 564) framework of research-driven criteria for judging the quality of leadership professional learning similarly reinforces the need for many types of leadership learning. The ten criteria are shown in Table 1.

Three matters of importance have been recognised by Hunzicher (2012) in an American study exploring how elementary teachers learned to exercise formal leadership in the schools and districts in which they worked. These factors included "exposure to research-based practices, increased teacher self-efficacy and serving beyond the classroom" (p. 267). Moreover, Hunzicher explains that it is work designed "to improve teaching practice paired with job-embedded collaboration" which the teachers value in learning to lead. These capture Hunzicher's (2011) earlier work which named five principles underpinning effective professional development. These are equally applicable for leadership learning, namely: the need for learning to be "supported, job-embedded, instructionally focused, collaborative and ongoing" (p. 177). Hunzicher (2012) emphasised the importance of teachers' learning to exercise leadership gradually over time whilst accumulating professional experience. This signals the critical need for support from leader colleagues at their sites of employment who can identify potential and nurture it, an aspect picked up by Flückiger, Lovett and Dempster (2014) in their criteria 'time-rich' and 'peer-supported', as featured in Table 1.

Likewise, Huber (2011) endorses the use of multiple learning approaches for continuous leadership learning. Huber frames leadership learning in terms of knowledge and practice referred to as "knowing and doing" alongside "theory and praxis" (p. 638). These capture knowledge, which can be gained from "courses (external/in-house), self-study (textbooks/software), collegial exchanges (learning communities/networks), concrete experiences (simulation/practice) and feedback (self-assessment)" encapsulated within a "portfolio for reflection and planning" (p. 639). Such a model shows that leadership learning is multi-faceted and not restricted to one particular type.

Bush (2009) proffers two models of leadership learning which show the traditional versus twenty-first century models of leadership learning. These he says are polar opposites. The traditional leadership learning model is described as prescribed, standardised, off-site, classroom-based, content-led, to scale, and about leader development. In contrast the C21 model is emergent, personalised, onsite, work-based, process-rich, in-depth and about leadership development (p. 229). Bush states that these models can be used as a starting point to think about programmes and how they can meet individual needs.

Concern about the need for more balance between system provisions and individuals taking responsibility for determining their leadership learning needs is a point raised by Lovett, Dempster and Flückiger (2015) who argue:

> The provision of and access to leadership development opportunities are generally the preserve of education systems. In other words, system authorities set leadership development agendas and decide who attends, where programmes will be run and why they will happen. The role and responsibility of individuals for the planning of their own leadership learning seem to be missing from the professional development equation. (p. 129)

In their attempt to draw individuals into decision-making about their professional learning, Lovett et al. (2015) promote the notion of personal agency. This is first and foremost about individuals recognising what their own learning needs are and then taking responsibility for how those needs might be met. Lovett et al. (2015) suggest that heuristic tools can similarly help individuals to ask themselves what they have learnt and what they still need to learn. Clarke and Wildy's (2011) heuristic of four focal points (people, place, system and self) is one example of a way to focus attention on learning needs. Lovett et al. (2015) extended Clarke and Wildy's heuristic tools with

the addition of a fifth focal point – 'pedagogy' – as a way to emphasise the moral purpose of education, namely making a difference to students and their learning, and highlighting the connection between leadership work and student achievement. Such a heuristic tool can then help individuals and their mentors to focus on next learning steps.

Likewise, other leadership programmes have incorporated the need for individuals to identify learning strengths and areas for further development through a range of self-assessment tools followed by opportunities for professional learning conversations with experienced leadership coaches (Robertson, 2016). These kinds of tools have typically focussed attention on the social, emotional, psychological and cognitive aspects of leadership in order to help leaders understand themselves as leaders, and how that knowledge might in turn help them to understand their colleagues and develop shared commitment to making a difference to the lives of students as learners. New Zealand's "Educational Leadership Practices Survey (ELP)" is a 360-degree type survey tool designed to help leaders identify their dispositions, strengths and weaknesses around nine aspects of performance which are most likely to impact on teaching and learning. Those aspects include goal setting, strategic resourcing, curriculum quality, quality of teaching, promotion and participation in teacher learning and development, a safe and orderly environment, educationally powerful connections with families, whānau and community, Māori success and principal leadership (Wylie & Hodgen, 2010).

Table 2: CPSM Inventory dimensions. Adapted from Huber (2013, p. 532)

Job requirement areas	Dimensions
Work motivation	Achievement motivation Avoiding failure Work engagement
General skills	Planning skills Process thinking Analytical text comprehension Analytical thinking Speed of thought
Self-management	Self-monitoring Stress resilience Self-efficacy
Approach to change	Power motive Ambiguity tolerance Active pursuit of innovation
Social approach	Affiliation motive Team motivation Empathy Feedback orientation
Leadership	Leadership motivation Enthusiasm Assertiveness Desire for social acceptance Avoiding influence by others Recognising limits of feasibility

Huber (2011) states that the CPSM tool helped to describe the complexity of leadership as leaders move through self-assessment to a greater understanding of their own leadership identity. This CPSM inventory tool adopts items under six categories. These are shown in Table 2.

Now, having presented an overview of literature on professional learning to support school leaders, we turn to a specific focus on the use of this self-assessment leadership inventory tool.

Methodology

The participants were a group of 41 primary and secondary aspiring principals based in one geographical region of New Zealand. They were part of a year-long programme of aspiring principal study for 200 participants, which included experienced-leader coaching four formal times and regularly online, online peer coaching, four professional learning group meetings including group coaching, an online reflective leadership journal about their in-school inquiry, and four online modules of work on the principalship, in dialogue with all other aspiring principals in an online learning community.

All participants in the programme were to complete a self-assessment. The 41 research participants received a personalised email from the Academic Director of the programme (Jan Robertson, author), in late January before their involvement in the programme had formally begun, telling them about their opportunity to pilot an international self-assessment tool. The email explained that their reports would be confidential to them. It explained that there was no right or wrong or pass or fail – but that they would have an opportunity to see their scores on a norm-referenced scale of other participants' results from 11 other countries. They were told that this would be an important part of their programme, alongside their coaching and professional learning groups. The participants then received an email and a personalised link to the online survey from the PROFLEC administrators. Within two weeks all research participants received an email to tell them that their reports were ready to download. The other aspiring principals completed a curriculum-based reflective tool to ascertain confidence and competence in areas of leadership such as self-development, leading change, leading people, modern learning environments and the role of the principal.

The coaches met with their participants at the first professional learning group workshop approximately two weeks after the participants had completed the survey, by which time all participants were expected to have completed the self-assessment and downloaded their report. At this first workshop, the coaches explained the tool and its report, and focused on one aspect to explain more fully. Each participant also discussed their report – or one aspect of it that surprised them – with their peer coaching partner.

The experienced-leader individual coaching began later in February and there were four formal sessions of one-on-one coaching throughout the year as well as regular online coaching in their reflective portfolios. At the professional learning group workshops (four times per year) there were always opportunities for the participants to participate in their group coaching sessions, with four participants. The experienced-leader coaches (kaiarahi) were not formally a part of these group coaching sessions, but coached the coaching practice where necessary.

University ethics approval was received for the research this paper outlines, which was a mixed-methods study, gathering quantitative data through a Survey Monkey instrument, and qualitative data through interactive interviews. In August an information sheet and a consent form that outlined the research commitment from the aspiring principals, were sent out with an accompanying explanatory email. The consent forms were collected at their third workshop. The research was carried out during the participants' final professional learning group workshop in the November.

At this workshop, every participant completed a short 10 question Survey Monkey questionnaire at the beginning of the day. They had received this notification on the weekend before the workshop series began, and some had already completed it. This gave every participant a chance to reflect on questions and write responses.

Over a period of three separate days of workshops, each participant was then interviewed in pairs. The two kaiarahi were similarly interviewed together. They too had completed the inventory and received feedback reports which meant they were able to more fully understand the experiences of the NAPP participants, as well as reflect on their own leadership throughout the year.

The researchers then analysed the data using major themes identified by previous PROFLEC research, as well as the Survey Monkey data. These themes and their analysis now follow.

Findings

The findings will now be discussed under six themes:
- The overall impressions of the CPSM inventory;
- The context-related issues of the inventory;
- The emotional engagement with results;
- The power of the coaching paradigm and experiences;
- Self-awareness and reflective growth; and
- Developing bravery and courage in leadership efficacy.

Overall impressions of the CPSM inventory

There were four areas of note within this first theme: the comprehensiveness of the survey; the challenging nature of the self-assessment tool; the importance of the coaching sessions; and recommendations for future use.

Comprehensiveness of survey

A common response to the question seeking the participants' overall impression of the CPSM inventory was to describe it as both comprehensive and daunting (SL#1). This was endorsed by the NAPP participants and their kaiarahi. One NAPP participant captured this succinctly saying it was "overwhelming in size, content and analysis" (JR#1). However, despite commenting about the considerable length of time required to complete the inventory, almost none of the NAPP participants or kaiarahi had completely dismissed the value of the inventory as a leadership learning tool. One NAPP participant who had been a little reluctant to start reading the inventory report said,

> *I left it sitting a little while and one night (late) I started easily and continued. It caught me unawares and took me past midnight. I thought it was interesting and in some areas it nailed what I'm like. It was 70% accurate. I liked the poles and descriptors and not being positive or negative. (JR#7)*

For another NAPP participant, the inventory feedback report had "exposed a lot of different facets about leadership" (JR#9) broadening understandings about what leadership could and should be.

Results from a Survey Monkey item exploring the comprehensiveness of the inventory supported these findings with 80% of NAPP participant ratings either 'very comprehensive', or 'somewhat comprehensive'. In response to dealing with the participants' feelings of being totally overwhelmed by the detail in the feedback report, one kaiarahi explained, "I told them not to worry about the later part of the inventory. Instead I asked them to focus or identify 2 or 3 aspects from the earlier part and that made it manageable". Likewise, the other kaiarahi had narrowed down the scope of the feedback report to focus discussions on elements which had surprised the participants. Both kaiarahi realised that there was much more to the feedback reports than they were able to maximise in the time they had as coaches. Another concern was that the inventory was a supplement to an already full programme agenda. In looking back at the year's coaching, one of the kaiarahi admitted, "it needed the whole year for everyone to see its potential. It wasn't until later that we could see possible links".

Challenging nature of the self-assessment tool

The inventory items/questions were seen as challenging, sometimes repetitive and asked in different ways which were a source of annoyance for some NAPP participants, yet accepted by others as merely the way these kind of surveys worked to confirm responses. Others admitted to trying to 'second guess' what was being asked and revealed that they did not quite know how to answer some questions because they were not yet in the principalship role. One example from a NAPP participant in a team leadership role (JR#9) revealed some frustration at not being able to apply that role to the statements and having to make a response because there was no response category of 'not applicable' for the statements. Likewise, another participant expressed difficulties in matching her experience to the statements and commented, "I didn't know how to answer those – about the ideal or what I would do. I seemed to be extremes [in the feedback report] and I felt disheartened as I thought I was here" (JR#7). Yet the positive for this participant was expressed as "I liked that they gave ideas of what to do next" (JR#7). One more respondent, who admitting to having been completely overwhelmed by the challenging nature of the inventory as the first task in the programme, had continued despite wondering what else was in store for her (SL#13). A similar sense of feeling overwhelmed by the inventory and yet feeling obligated to complete it was apparent in the response:

> *I didn't understand what was being asked of me. I delved in and out over several days. I just felt, 'that's what you would want' and I did it. I didn't have enough knowledge about leadership, but it would be different now. If I had seen it before NAPP, I wouldn't have applied. (JR#8)*

In this case the inventory was accepted as a component on that learning journey. Even one of the kaiarahi said: "I'm in favour of the direction and purpose of a tool like this" but "I had to think hard myself as a principal with 28 years' experience".

The importance of the coaching sessions

Typical responses about the feedback report had been to indicate initial panic and then a change to seeing at least some value in the feedback which NAPP participants attributed to the skills of the coach. A kaiarahi stated "it was a scary experience which had left some starting NAPP feeling inadequate". Similarly a participant said "it was confronting and forced me to question. I thought it was inaccurate but we had a really good conversation about it" (JR#5).

Other NAPP participants similarly combined a positive and negative reaction to the inventory feedback report. One said "I thought it was a lot of reading. By myself it was not helpful but with the coaching it came to life" (JR#2). A recurring theme here, was the importance of having time with an individual coach to interrogate the feedback. This was mentioned by all of the NAPP participants as they had all received an individual coaching session on the inventory. Results from the Survey Monkey asking whether the kaiarahi coaching had increased understandings of the self-assessment inventory revealed 51% responding 'very', and 34% as 'somewhat increased understanding'.

Recommendations for future use

One of the reasons for interviewing the NAPP participants at the end of their year's programme was to determine whether it should be used again. We asked NAPP participants whether they would recommend the use of the inventory to other colleagues. 35% ticked that it had been a 'very useful' option, and 35% 'somewhat useful'. A similar question was specifically related to future NAPP programmes and whether it should be incorporated again. The responses were similar with 44% ticking 'very useful' and 24% 'somewhat useful'. Another said "the assessment would only have value if it had a coaching component to go with it. Having the whole report to digest by yourself would be very overwhelming". While another summed it up by saying, "The value of the resource is directly related to how much honest self-reflection and analysis a participant does".

Having given us multiple ratings on their thoughts about the self-assessment leadership inventory, results for the final question indicated that there was definitely merit in repeating the inventory with another NAPP cohort. A couple of participants even commented that it would be useful to repeat the inventory at the end of the year to see how things had changed. Ten percent attributed the inventory as having a 'very strong influence' on their leadership practice, with a further 55% saying 'some influence', 25% 'a little influence' and 10% 'no influence'. Helpful suggestions were likewise made about how we could improve the inventory by giving more introductory explanations and guidance about how to complete and read the reports as well as making stronger links to the feedback throughout the whole NAPP year. The kaiarahi similarly supported the need for better links to be made between the inventory, the feedback report and the rest of the NAPP programme. One of the kaiarahi intimated "in an ideal world we would have had a prior session to explain the tool. This didn't happen".

Kaiarahi replies to the same question asking whether the inventory should be used again in the future were somewhat neutral as opposed to being clearly for or against its continued use. One said "if we can refine and cull some of it then it would have my full support". Other improvements which they suggested were front-end additions like "speaking to the participants before they received the inventory and explaining how it might be used throughout the year, its purpose, and any other actions which would help to demystify it". One of the kaiarahi admitted that the fact that some of the participants had been anxious about their feedback responses gave an opening for dialogue. An example he recalled from his coaching was when he had used the words – "here's an opportunity" to deal with an aspect which could have been seen as a weakness.

Context-related issues of the inventory

To compensate for the generic questions which had been designed for the international inventory, ten extra statements were added to explore the extent to which the NAPP participants understood and practised bicultural and multicultural leadership practices. These followed the same pattern of using "I" statements with five options on the Likert scale as in the rest of the inventory. Unfortunately, it was not possible to include the results for this section in the inventory's feedback reports to the participants as the international reports had been devised around the main set of questions and had been normed across the country data sets. There was no international data for such cultural intelligence. Discussions about these areas were covered through the remaining aspects of NAPP. Nevertheless, the NAPP participants seemed accepting of the generic nature of the inventory. "Leadership is leadership" (SL#8) and it was only when we drew their attention to this area that they thought about the absence of a New Zealand flavour in the inventory and how it would be helpful to have New Zealand items "sprinkled throughout the inventory" (SL#8).

The language of the inventory was seen by some as fitting a 'business' rather than school mindset which some accepted, whilst it irritated others. One commented, "It was removed from teaching but that was not necessarily a bad thing" (SL#12). Another described it as "managerial, like sitting a test" (SL#11). The concepts overwhelmed one participant who said, "there were concepts I had not heard or thought about or didn't happen" (JR#8). It was seen as relatively non-threatening by another who said "it was written in a way that isn't right or wrong" (JR#2).

Emotional engagement with results

Denial and surprise were two responses we gleaned from the interviews about the inventory's feedback. Some, but not all NAPP participants, had sought conversations with others they knew, namely spouses, partners or their principals to check whether those others agreed with the inventory's feedback report. Likewise, the kaiarahi realised that the NAPP participants seemed to need a third party to confirm the positions revealed in their feedback reports. One who described the inventory results as "weird" had not referred to it again, preferring instead to work from personal goals which had been set (SL#10).

Overall we noted that those who were less enthusiastic about the feedback presented tended to be those who encountered surprises, namely finding their perceived strengths coming out as weaknesses and vice versa. "Such opposites were hard to configure" (SL#11). Others used the terms 'contradictory' and 'confusing'. One who did encounter surprises intimated "I was intrigued with the headings and questions. It was hard to interpret the terms as they did not connect with the way I think". One person admitted having resorted to the dictionary to look up the terms. A further example of a disconnection with the inventory feedback on an initial reading was the comment: "As for the feedback report, it sounded like it was for a stranger. I enjoyed the conversation with my coach much more" (SL#11).

One NAPP respondent who had found that the inventory had revealed a whole pile of weaknesses was less concerned about needing to agree with those results. Instead that particular respondent explained its value was "thinking about why those results came up. I changed my inquiry quite significantly… some I thought were weaknesses, I then saw them as positives" (JR#1). One who also made special mention of the accompanying descriptors, suggested that these were what mattered rather than the scores. The words 'if you are here, you could be seen as…' had provoked considerable thinking for one participant (JR#7). Thinking about the inventory was not just about the self as leader but extended to how others led. For example, one said,

> It made me conscious of things I wanted to see the principal doing so I could get more exposure to that and ask deeper questions that led to more knowledge about why decisions were made. (JR#9)

Another said,

> I knew where I was, but understanding the high and low and the impact on others was the biggest learning for me. It smacked me in the face as to what I needed to do to become a good leader. The stress tolerance item took me out of myself to think about others. (JR#2)

It was the coaching sessions which typically served to alleviate concerns about the inventory results.

The power of the coaching paradigm and experiences

Experienced leader coaching

The kaiarahi also mentioned how some of the NAPP participants had sometimes found it hard to reconcile the feedback report results with their own perceptions of themselves as leaders. Both kaiarahi agreed that this was something they could explore in the coaching sessions to understand why and what might be done. An example of a way one of them had used the feedback from the inventory was to use it as a can-opener. That kaiarahi stated he "would build it up by saying, this is the sort of thing you might be asked …. if you feel uncomfortable about this you might….".

One NAPP participant recalled the item on affinity and working together as revealing a low score and how the coach had said, "let's look at that and the strengths in that … and what happens in that leadership" (JR#6). The participant then explained how being very relational yet having a preference for working independently had played out in the team-orientation item. "I knew I would be low but not that exceptionally low. I can and do work well with others. I need to have trust and faith in others." This had become a valuable topic for a conversation with the coach as it had served to reinforce the notion that being a principal is not about doing everything yourself. Rather "a good senior leadership team is about drawing out the strengths of its members".

Their coach's skill in helping them to identify something of interest amongst the many pages of the report and indeed across all aspects of NAPP, was clearly apparent. "There was a lot in the inventory, but we only focussed on a couple of things. I would now like to go back and look for other things" (SL#3). Another said "we needed to be tuned in [by the coach]". Even those who had questioned the validity of the results having not liked

or agreed about what it had revealed, still claimed a positive outcome from the experience. One told us "I still recognise it [the inventory] as a basis for reflection with a colleague" (SL#8).

The type of questions asked by the experienced coaches helped the NAPP participants to make more of their inventory feedback. One explained this in more detail saying, "X was incredibly challenging with the types of questions he asked about my leadership. I had to justify my thinking and actions as we talked through the specific areas I had highlighted" (JR#1). Similar endorsement was given by two others (JR#1,2), one of whom said, "X was invaluable, affirming and empowering. He doesn't give answers but makes you think. Invariably you do know where to go. He reminded me of my strengths and restored my confidence and belief" (JR#2). Another participant appreciated a 'low key' approach to the inventory feedback and recalled feeling comfortable initiating and exploring how a low score on the self-efficacy dimension related to her specific school context with her coach (JR#5).

The coaches were commended for personalising discussions about the inventory to the participants' schools and their particular inquiry projects (JR#7, 8, 9, SL#3). One NAPP participant, who would have liked even more time with her coach said "Y was really helpful. He helped unpack my understanding and how it fitted with my inquiry" (JR#8). One participant even suggested that it was the inventory which had ensured the coaching sessions had a clear focus (SL#11). An ability to stop and wait for responses was another commendation for both coaches. "X did not fill the silences" (SL#6). Neither were the coaches seen as solution-givers. One explained this as "X didn't tell us anything but instead acted with prompts to have us dig deeper using words like 'what could that mean for you?'" (SL#8). Another referred to the word 'challenge' being seen as a positive when associated with 'opportunity' and how this had become a chance to "step up and prove what I can do" (SL#5). NAPP participants also noted how their coaches had remembered to check progress on particular dimensions which had been discussed at earlier coaching sessions and how such a strategy similarly encouraged depth of discussion on a number of occasions (SL#4). A recurring theme here was that the coaching sessions were about the participants. One described a coaching session as being "more of a conversation about me" and "I led it" (SL#13).

We also asked the kaiarahi to provide comment on the ways they had been able to link the inventory to the other aspects of the NAPP curriculum. One did not think that the potential of the tool had been realised. He explained how he had aimed to refer to the inventory in each of the coaching sessions but said, "time was an issue and sessions were often rushed. It [the inventory] needed to be higher up on the agenda but the inquiry topics dominated. I looked for links but they were not always authentically there". Likewise, the other coach reported purposeful attempts which he said "sometimes worked well but at other times felt contrived". His tendency was to use the introductions to the coaching sessions as the time for link-making. 40% of the participants said they had made specific links to the feedback report in their inquiry reflective journals.

Peer and group coaching

While most of the NAPP participants told us about their experience of individual coaching with the experienced coaches (the kaiarahi), each participant also had a peer coach from the NAPP cohort. In the Survey Monkey question which asked for a rating on the extent to which the peer coaching increased their understandings of the inventory, just 17% responded 'very', whilst 37% responded with 'somewhat'. These results probably reflect the reality that whilst it was helpful to talk over the feedback with a peer in NAPP, what was more useful was the kaiarahi coaching. These findings were commensurate with the quality of coaching relationship developed with a peer. Across the NAPP cohort there were differences in the extent to which the peer coaching opportunity had been used. One explained how the pairing had been geographical and admitted "We could have done a better job than we did" (JR#6). For others, the opportunity to work closely with a peer coach had been realised and frequent meetings held, sometimes weekly where participants had sat down to work together on the online reflections and readings, preferring to work in a collaborative way rather than by oneself.

Coaching groups were set up with clear protocols about how and when members could question and give feedback. For the impact of group coaching on their understanding of the inventory feedback the ratings were 20% at 'very', 39% at 'somewhat' and 29% at 'a little'. In interview the peer group coaching experience was declared to be "really beneficial. I realised my challenges were true for others and I was not alone. That was affirming" (SL#2). A similar reflection from another participant said

> I often feel alone as a leader. Now I realise we are in the same boat. We share, take risks, trust one another and see others as there to help. I got energy from this group. The sharing was different from that possible in my own environment. I now regret I did not make more use of this network but I intend to keep the connection. (SL#2)

Others similarly noted its value saying:

> It was enjoyable and challenging. It was hard to remember the active listening and not jumping in. I had to remember the question I needed to ask in five minutes' time. I found it hard not to give answers. (SL#12)

The challenge of coaching was apparent in many of the responses such as "practising holding back, not solving others' problems and really listening and summarising" (SL#11). One had even tried this strategy out with teachers at his school saying "it has helped me with my appraisal meetings and now I have staff who are taking responsibility for their next steps" (SL#12). Another who had also taken the idea back to school commented how challenging the other teachers had found it but with time they were listening and beginning to ask deeper questions (JR#9).

The level of trust was a key for the groups; one said of this, "it was non-threatening. When we asked 'why' questions to each other, we could laugh about our mistakes. Others remembered and asked questions about it next time" (SL#6). It was difficult here to see their specific links to the inventory and its feedback report although the focus of their group coaching were elements from the report.

Self-awareness and reflective growth

In the survey 93% believed the inventory had an impact on their level of self-awareness. We also used the interviews to explore the impact of participation in the inventory, feedback and coaching had on the NAPP participants' self-awareness as leaders.

The information in the feedback report helped nudge the participants' abilities to reflect on their leadership and what it meant for them and those with whom they interacted. It was seen as constructive and informative in their self-reflection. Again the role of the coach/kaiarahi was crucial in starting that process of reflection. One said "initially I was hard on myself but when I talked with my kaiarahi, I realised I was doing things and just needed to be more conscious of it" (SL#3). The greatest learning for one participant stemmed from the coaching and the questions asked around "who I was as a leader" (JR#2). This was true for the participant who said, "the whole point to questioning my leadership is why I wanted to lead and am I a better leader now? I am a better leader because of that thinking" (SL#2). Completing the inventory and receiving the feedback report had helped another gain a deeper level of thinking about the nature of leadership. Her realisation was that there is no such thing as a perfect person or leader. "A leader can morph and change at different times and demonstrate different qualities" (SL#11). A sense of being on a leadership learning journey was noted by another who said, "it gave me the keys to unlock the door… It forces you to keep thinking about how you are doing things…" (JR#7).

Developing bravery and courage in leadership efficacy

The comments we received included many examples of particular aspects of the feedback report which demonstrated new insights in particular areas. An understanding of the need to build relationships was one

example (SL#13) which another endorsed by suggesting this was about "having everyone on board working as a team" (SL#3). For another, learning how to work as a team was an important point of learning. "I was more outcome-task focussed but I wasn't getting others to step up" (JR#1). A further example was about work-life balance where a participant said, "my score seemed negative. That I didn't care about my job, but when I talked about it we realised I couldn't walk away and get on with my life. I needed to think about the positive and negative with someone" (SL#3). Values was an area raised by one participant who said, "It has made me think more deliberately about my leadership. The biggest influence is understanding my values, that time to reflect is really important as a leader" (JR#9). Another participant was working on the empathy dimension from the inventory. Indeed, a particular strength of the inventory realised by one kaiarahi, was the extent to which the inventory tool had included dimensions covering emotional and social intelligence, which he referred to as the softer skills.

Discussion

The findings will be discussed against relevant literature under four areas:
- Using a self-assessment inventory as a starting point for professional learning;
- Using coaching to help leaders to act on findings;
- The complexity of leadership activities; and
- Raising self- awareness of the impact of leadership practice.

A self-assessment leadership inventory as a starting point for professional learning

Many of the NAPP participants appreciated the CPSM leadership inventory because it had provided them with an understanding of their developing leadership identities and their current capabilities. This was something new and different which had specifically targeted leadership work rather than classroom teaching. One participant, who clearly would have liked to have made more of the inventory and its feedback report during the year, had referred to it as "a missed opportunity" which was another indicator of its perceived value. Likewise, we encountered others who would have liked an opportunity to repeat the inventory at the end of the year in order to check their development as a leader. Such responses from the NAPP participants are positive indicators of the possibilities to be had from such a self-assessment leadership tool as well as raising questions about how its implementation could be further improved. These align with the intentions of Huber and Hiltmann (2011, p. 67) who claim that to date "elements of self-assessment and feedback have not been sufficiently integrated" in leadership programmes as they can provide a "good starting point for identifying areas which need improvement and for planning [development]" (p. 67).

In the NAPP programme, it was not just a matter of individuals completing the inventory and reading their feedback reports as it was in some country studies. The New Zealand participants were supported by their leadership coaches (kaiarahi) who assisted them to make sense of their results during the individualised coaching time by making links to practice thereby bridging the theory-praxis gap. Goldring, Huff, Spillane and Barnes (2009) suggest that leadership knowledge and expertise are key mediating factors between professional development and principals' practice saying "what practitioners learn from professional development depends in part on what they already know, their prior knowledge, as well as on new knowledge they've learnt" (p. 198). Leadership learning should not be left to chance or simply as learning-on-the-job which is why a self-assessment tool such as CPSM is deemed necessary to help measure leadership knowledge and expertise both in preparing teachers for leadership roles and inducting them once in those roles. In the NAPP programme, the CPSM was trialled as a new initiative within the programme. This was both a strength and a challenge for the participants and their kaiarahi who had to understand and integrate a new learning tool.

Dealing with surprises and unexpected views became the grounds for professional learning conversations exploring why and what such results meant for current and future leadership practice. The value of dealing

with surprises rather than dismissing them is also recognised by MacBeath (2009) who states, "leadership for learning is ever open to surprise, leading in order to learn, learning so as to lead more effectively" (p. 18). These words help to justify the actions taken by the kaiarahi who typically focussed on one or two surprising results as discussion starters with the NAPP participants.

Timperley (2015) also recognises the value of smart tools or resources to identify effective practice. Creating self-awareness is a key part of professional learning (Robertson, 2013). This is something that a leadership self-assessment tool brings to the fore, albeit sometimes in a confronting manner when results are not what participants might expect.

Coaching helps leaders to act on findings from self-assessment inventories

A frequent comment from the participants was their appreciation of time spent with their assigned kaiarahi to interrogate one or two aspects of their feedback report and engage in deep learning conversations (Robertson, 2015). Timperley (2015) also argues:

> Effective professional development depends on the quality of conversations as teachers negotiate meaning with one another and learn from those with specialist expertise…. It is the interpretive conversations that transform the information and artefacts into actionable knowledge. (p. 4)

Wayman and Jimerson (2014) highlight the importance of collaborative sense-making in their work exploring the intersection between professional learning and educational data use. This is also a feature of Katz and Dack's (2014) work showing the importance of 'intentional interruption' which when likened to these aspiring principals' learning experiences could be seen as both the stocktake on an individual's leadership competences through the CPSM inventory and the conversations with the kaiarahi on the inventory. That the kaiarahi did not avoid the surprising results but instead chose to confront them and pose reflective questions about what those results might mean for future practices could be considered to be an intentional interruption. This demonstrates that leadership coaching can be a useful conduit to more professional learning and deepening of expertise.

The complexity of leadership activities

Learning about leadership involves knowing oneself and thinking hard about what kind of leader one should be. The New Zealand Aspiring Principals' Programme promoted the concept of moral purpose for equity and culturally responsive practice in order to help participants see that their leadership work should be driven by a quest to make a difference to the inequity of student learning in their schools through their leadership practice. However, the CPSM tool and report made no reference to policies or practices with indigenous or multicultural intelligences and leadership practice. At the same time, those learning to lead need to see leadership work as relational, involving a range of people and contexts. The CPSM inventory explores dispositions about the self and actions involving others with its aim being to highlight existing strengths and to signal future areas of development. Huber (2013, p. 536). says of the inventory's purpose:

> The participants experience it as an enriching learning opportunity which promotes reflection and the motivation to gather more information about one's own behaviour in day-to-day practices, supports other learning opportunities and promotes the participants' professional competencies in areas they identify as beneficial to improving their practice.

The six categories of dimensions the inventory uses also highlight the complexity of leadership work and the multi-faceted role of the principal, and for this work, in absentia, the cultural uniqueness of a country such as New Zealand. Two comments, in particular, from participants highlight the importance of this: "The inventory was not reflective of the unique kiwi leadership principles – the context seem to be removed from NZ issues in leadership" and "I think it needs to include the cultural aspects that reflect New Zealand leadership".

Raising awareness of the impact of leadership practice and actions on others

Huber and Hiltmann (2011) argue that professional development needs to become more diagnostic by making explicit links between self-assessment and feedback, and highlight the need for individuals to understand how their motives, values and interests correspond with the demands of their leadership role. The interviews with the NAPP participants revealed many examples of how an element from the feedback report, often one of the surprising results, had raised their awareness of how a particular way of working now needed to be changed. One said, "I changed what I did to focus on how I work as a team. Relational and restorative practices" (JR#1) while another said "I was more outcome task-focussed…". Likewise, others referred to examples such as the empathy and stress resistance dimensions and were now thinking about how their ways of working impacted on others who might have been polar opposites. The inventory's measurement of personality traits provided many opportunities for self-reflection.

Our research endorses Huber and Hiltman's (2011) findings on the benefits of the CPSM tool. They were that:

- it serves as an orientation to observe one's own self-perception from a different perspective;
- it offers the chance to compare one's capabilities with those of relevant peers;
- it provides a basis for reflection on personal strengths and weaknesses;
- it serves as a stimulus to discuss issues of educational leadership;
- the results may prompt participants to ask for specific feedback; and
- the results may serve as an impulse to assess one's own demand for education and training. (p. 70)

Regardless of whether NAPP participants liked the results they received, the CPSM inventory and its feedback report opened up topics for deep professional learning conversations and related coaching, which helped the participants to interrogate their leadership values and vision, actions and next steps.

Conclusion

This report of the New Zealand trial of the CPSM inventory and feedback reports within the PROFLEC study has revealed a somewhat measured yet positive response to its continued use in a leadership programme such as for National Aspiring Principals. Participants and kaiarahi had suggestions for improving the implementation of this tool which would be worth giving serious consideration. Suggestions ranged from including better introductory sessions before the inventory is completed, ideas explaining how to answer the inventory if the questions were outside of one's experience, reducing its length and making the inventory a continuing reference point with more visibility throughout the NAPP programme and through one's continuing leadership career.

The continued use of this CPSM tool, with the related feedback and coaching, may ultimately depend on the ways in which the tool can become a more integrated component of the aspiring principal development, and into principalship, to warrant its continued inclusion. It also needs to be viewed alongside alternative, indigenous self-assessment tools and what information is helpful for understanding one's current leadership strengths and areas for future learning and improvement to meet the long-term policy needs of a unique and bicultural New Zealand education system.

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