

# The characteristics and career trajectories of career assistant/deputy principals in New Zealand secondary schools

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## **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on a largely unrecognised group of educational professional leaders. It seeks to develop an understanding of AP/DPs working in New Zealand secondary schools who considered themselves career AP/DPs. The investigation explored the characteristics and career paths of these leaders who view their position as a vocation and terminal career. Based on findings from a nationwide survey, career AP/DPs, when compared with AP/DPs who aspire to full principalship, experienced a serendipitous and much slower career progression, were less educationally qualified, and were less likely to be employed in larger, high decile schools. It was also found that female career AP/DPs made the decision not to seek principalship at a much earlier age than did males. It is suggested that the education system, in general, and principals, in particular, have important roles to play in ensuring that career AP/DPs receive the support necessary to fulfil their career goals.*

**Keywords:** *Principalship; career AP/DPs; career trajectories; secondary school*

## **Introduction**

The role that assistant/deputy principals (AP/DPs) play in supporting the educational effectiveness of our secondary schools has been subject to ongoing discussion for over 30 years. As part of the senior management team, AP/DPs have close daily contact with the principal and serve a role in supporting the various management and administrative responsibilities that are delegated to the principal by the school board. This close relationship to the principal, coupled with the nature of the work, has served to legitimate the view that the AP/DP position represents a transition stage in a journey towards principalship (Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). Given that understanding, and along with ongoing concerns regarding principal recruitment, much of the research focus involving AP/DPs is within the field of principal succession (see Cardno, 2003; Collins, 2006; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Pounder & Merrill, 2001).

For example, Scoggins and Bishop (1993), among others, view the assistant/deputy principalship as an apprenticeship where one learns the skills and proves oneself in the world of educational leadership. In Scoggins and Bishop's (1993) view, anyone holding the assistant principal position should aspire to attaining principalship. The role is, according to Greenfield (1985), a transition period for those moving from the classroom into an administration position and toward preparation for leading a school. A further explanation offered for an apparent shortage of quality candidates for principalship is that too few AP/DPs are interested in the current model of principalship (Collins, 2006; James & Whiting, 1998). Contemporary leadership policies emphasise the recruiting of strong, assertive individuals capable of fulfilling the wide and complex job demands. Grubb and Flessa (2006) label this perspective of principalship as the super- or hero-principal. Most of the DPs in Farnham's (2009) study could not identify with this perspective, reporting that they were satisfied with their current role. Satisfaction with the role, as James and Whiting (1998) have argued, may also be influenced by reduced mobility, personal circumstances, family responsibilities, the career of a spouse and uncertainty and fear of failure. All these factors contribute to a growing number of AP/DPs not seeking further promotion.

Indeed, studies across a number of different countries consistently highlight the point that 40-60% of Assistant/Deputy Principals (AP/DPs) have no desire to pursue principalship (e.g., d'Arbon, Duignan, &

Duncan, 2002; Douglas, 2007; Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003; James & Whiting, 1998). Many AP/DPs consider their role as a vocation and terminal career and derive a great deal of satisfaction from the role they play in schools. Within the New Zealand context, a report by Douglas (2007) found that only 41 out of 121 AP/DP respondents were considering principalship. Similarly, Graham and Smith's (1999) research into the role of the secondary school AP/DP found that only 30% of respondents expressed an aspiration for the role. These findings correspond with Pounder and Merrill's (2001) study set in the United States which found that less than one third of the respondents identified high school principalship as a career goal. If such a significant group of senior administrators is motivated to remain in their current position, it is crucial that a greater understanding of the group is developed.

The aim of this paper is to develop an understanding of the characteristics and career paths of AP/DPs working in New Zealand secondary schools who considered themselves career AP/DPs. Within the New Zealand educational system, a secondary school has discretion over the leadership structure employed at the school. However, while AP/DPs in secondary schools are always included in the leadership team, their individual duties vary in relation to the needs and priorities of the school. The paper maps out the ways in which the career histories and personal characteristics of career AP/DPs differ significantly from those AP/DPs aspiring towards principalship. These AP/DPs have a strong sense of "contentment in their current role" (James & Whiting, 1998, p. 359) and view the assistant/deputy principalship as a legitimate terminal career. The paper draws on data from a larger investigation focusing on the career AP/DPs' professional experiences and perceived impact on teaching and learning in the schools they serve. If educational leadership is a vital element in developing our capacity to meet the ongoing educational challenges of our time (Fullan, 2009), then a thorough understanding of the AP/DP role and those who serve as AP/DPs in New Zealand secondary schools is imperative.

### **Theoretical framing**

In their study of managerial motivation in business organisations Tausky and Dubin (1965) developed a career anchorage perspective as a key concept in evaluating motivation towards current and future occupational positions. Individuals were either orientated towards a career-long occupational advancement and were focused on attaining highly respected occupational positions. Alternatively, they were orientated towards maintaining their position or making a modest progression within an occupational structure that ensured no loss of self-esteem if their career terminated below a high level position.

Tausky and Dubin (1965) proposed that the models were complementary and not competing as both models incorporate "the same motivational mechanism. The mechanism is the anchoring of career perspective" (Tausky & Dubin, 1965, p. 725). A career perspective, according to the theory, has two features. The first feature was recognising that an individual's occupational history is part of a career, and the second feature was a determination of the point of reference or anchor from which to evaluate present or future occupational positions. Tausky and Dubin (1965, p. 734) argue that some individuals anchor their career orientation and motivation on top-level positions while others anchor their career orientation and achievement by the distance he or she may advance from their occupational starting point.

The insights provided by this model include a recognition that while many individuals strive for the top job it is entirely possible for others to be motivated and satisfied without aspiring to the lofty heights of the 'mountaintop'. These ideas have been substantiated by New Zealand studies, such as that of Douglas (2007) and Graham and Smith (1999), as well as the British research of James and Whiting (1998). In these studies, a large proportion of AP/DPs were shown to be content to remain in their current position and were not considering seeking the principalship. This current study will draw on the career anchorage perspective to identify differences between 'career AP/DPs' and 'principal aspirants'.

## **Methodology**

The overall purpose of the study was to investigate whether career AP/DPs, as a group, were in any way significantly different from those AP/DPs aspiring towards principalship. A survey design required the development of a questionnaire that was able to identify the career anchorage perspective of individual AP/DPs. The questionnaire asked for data on the respondents' age, gender, school decile rating, rural/urban location, current role and years of tenure in senior management, career transitions, and specialist teaching subjects. An email questionnaire that used SurveyMonkey was emailed to AP/DPs based in New Zealand secondary schools. It offered some important advantages over a postal questionnaire: the tool was easy to format, design and then deliver and the issue of non-response could be monitored. Responses to the questionnaire were developed into a dataset that, in turn, served to build a profile of the AP/DPs in the investigation.

Descriptions of the characteristics of the two career anchorage perspectives were identified, using James and Whiting's (1998) typology of five distinct career anchorage categories: active aspirants, potential aspirants, unpredictable, settlers and unavailed aspirants. In this study, settlers and unavailed aspirants were named as career AP/DPs, whereas active aspirants, potential aspirants and unpredictable were categorised as principal aspirants. An important caveat to issue is that since this study was a New Zealand bound study of AP/DPs in the secondary education system, the findings are not intended to apply across the primary education sector nor to other national contexts.

### ***Identifying and accessing participants***

The target population for the study was AP/DPs who were currently working (at the time of the study) in secondary schools in New Zealand. The first researcher approached the national executive panel of the National Association of Secondary Deputy and Assistant Principals (NASDAP) for their support and to gain permission to access email addresses of members included on their database. Since 80% of all AP/DPs in the New Zealand secondary education system are members of the organisation, AP/DPs who are members of NASDAP are, in all probability, representative of the population of AP/DPs in New Zealand.

The email addresses as supplied by NASDAP were stratified into nine geographical regions (Northland, Auckland, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Hawkes Bay, Taranaki/Manawatu, Nelson/Marlborough/West Coast, Canterbury and Otago/Southland) and questionnaires were emailed to the 534 members (excluding the Wellington membership) of NASDAP. Of this group 174 completed the survey. This represented a response rate of approximately 33%. The proportion of AP/DPs in each region of the total NASDAP membership population was calculated and compared to the relative percentages in the sample who responded. Apart from the Otago/Southland area the proportion of respondents from each other area was within 2% of the actual proportions on the NASDAP database.

### ***Questionnaire analysis***

The questionnaire used both closed-ended multiple choice and open-ended short answer questions. The closed-ended questions allowed respondents to select their answers from a range of stipulated options and were used to gain data about the respondent's age, gender, designation, professional history, experiences, decile rating, career tenure, and qualification level. The questions were disaggregated by career category and analysed using simple statistical tools. Through those methods career AP/DPs could be identified and their data compared to that of principal aspirants. Open-ended short answer questions were also used in the questionnaire to allow for more individualised responses from participants. The analysis involved reducing the volume of data, sifting trivia from significance, identifying patterns and developing a framework for representing what the data revealed. Once the data in the questionnaire had been analysed a test of statistical significance was applied, where appropriate. The data were tested for statistical significance between career AP/DPs and principal aspirants using the Chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ).

**The career trajectory of the career AP/DP**

This study revealed a sizeable group of AP/DPs who view the assistant/deputy principalship as a legitimate terminal career. More specifically, 58% of the 171 respondents identified themselves as either a settler or unavailed aspirant. Settlers are AP/DPs who have never applied for principalship and do not envisage doing so in the future, while unavailed aspirants are AP/DPs who have applied for principalship in the past but will not do so in the future. This group was then categorised as career AP/DPs, and that category became the major unit of analysis. The principal aspirant category was used as a way of comparing and contrasting the findings and analysis.

**Gender, age, highest educational qualification, and main teaching subject**

The group of AP/DPs who responded to the questionnaire is gender balanced with 84 (49.7%) males and 83 (49.1%) females (1.2% of the respondents did not provide gender details). Over age bands, a slightly smaller proportional of females relative to males identified themselves as principal aspirants (46% female and 54% male) and a slightly greater proportion identified as career AP/DPs (53% female and 47% male). The pattern of female careers in this study highlighted the point that female AP/DPs in New Zealand were seeking career advancement to principalship in similar proportions to their male counterparts.

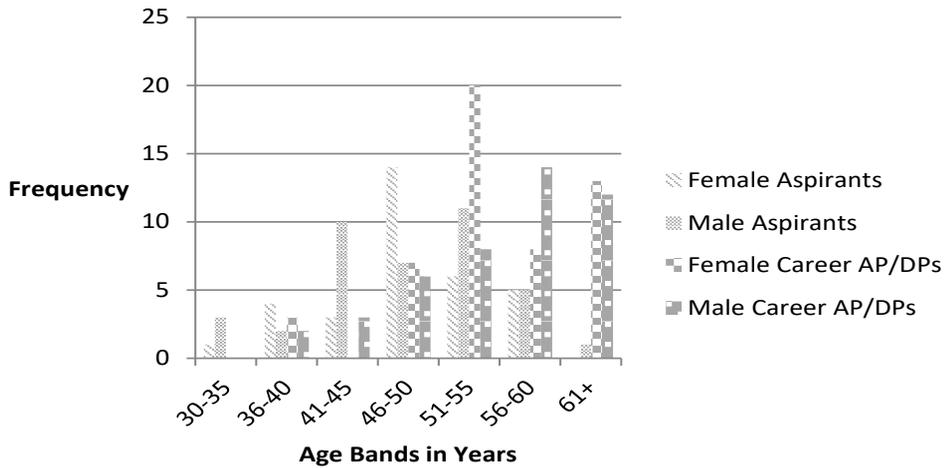


Figure 1. Gender, age and career destination

Figure 1 shows the distribution of career anchorage typology (i.e., the two career anchorage categories, namely career AP/DP and principal aspirant) of AP/DPs according to gender and age. The mean age of the population of AP/DPs in New Zealand at the time of the survey, according to the Ministry of Education (2012), was 47.2 years of age. The sample mean for AP/DPs who responded to this survey was 52.2 years of age. When the data for this study were differentiated by career category the mean ages for both male and female were very similar. The mean age for career AP/DPs (54.4 years) confirmed the expectation, given their intention to remain in this senior leadership position, that this group was slightly older than the principal aspirants. However, the mean age of the principal aspirants (48.3 years) was slightly higher than expected given that the Ministry of Education (2012) data show a mean of age of 47.2 years of age for the total population of secondary AP/DPs.

Figure 1 illustrates some further patterns when gender, age and career category are combined. Both male and female career AP/DPs were clustered in the 46-60+ age bands with very few career AP/DPs in the 30-45 age bands. Many female career AP/DPs were situated in the 51-55 age band whereas males clustered in the 56-60 age

band. This suggests that more female AP/DPs in this study were making the decision not to seek principalship at an earlier stage in their career than were their male counterparts.

Very few principal aspirants and career AP/DPs were below the age of 40 in this study. For male principal aspirants a bimodal pattern was found with a pronounced peak at the 41-45 age band and another at the 51-55 age bands. Female principal aspirants on the other hand had an obvious peak at the 46-50 age band before tailing off dramatically. The data may indicate that female aspirants relinquish their promotion aspirations at an earlier age than male aspirants.

When educational qualification data were factored into career category (see Figure 2) it was revealed that 71% of principal aspirants had obtained a postgraduate diploma or a master's qualification as compared to 55% of career AP/DPs.

**Comparison of Career Typology and Educational Qualification**

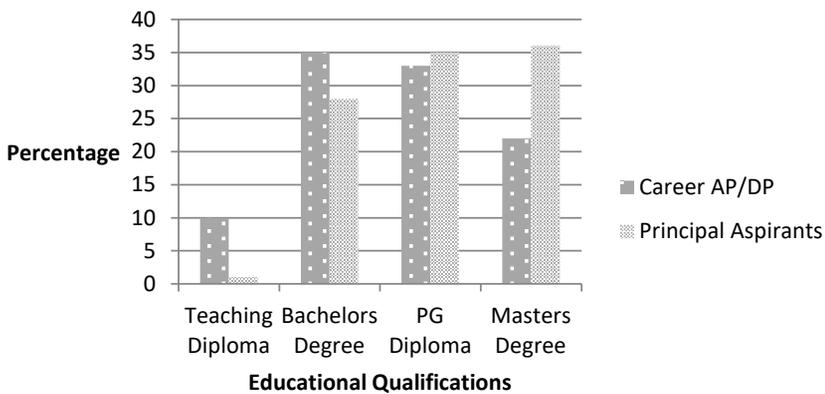


Figure 2. Educational qualifications by career typology

In addition, 45% of career AP/DPs had obtained an undergraduate qualification as their highest educational qualification as compared to 29% of principal aspirants. The differences in educational qualifications of career AP/DPs and principal aspirants were statistically significant ( $\chi^2 (3, N=199) = 12.1548, p=0.006, p \leq 0.01$ ), providing evidence that principal aspirants were more likely to hold a postgraduate qualification than were career AP/DPs.

The most common curriculum areas of expertise of the AP/DPs in this study are detailed in Figure 3. While it is not surprising that the core curriculum areas contribute 90% of AP/DPs, English, the social sciences and mathematics contributed 70% of the AP/DPs' specialist teaching subjects. Less than 10% of the AP/DPs in this study taught in subjects such as technology, languages and arts. This finding was not surprising as fewer teachers, in general, staff those subjects in secondary schools.

***Career transitions and influences***

Respondents were asked to identify their tenure in each of the educational positions they had held prior to, and including, their current senior leadership position. The questions were informed by the typical career pathway of an AP/DP in secondary education in New Zealand, namely, an assistant teacher, head of department and then AP/DP. Only four AP/DPs had never served as a head of department and were promoted directly from a position as a dean in the pastoral team.

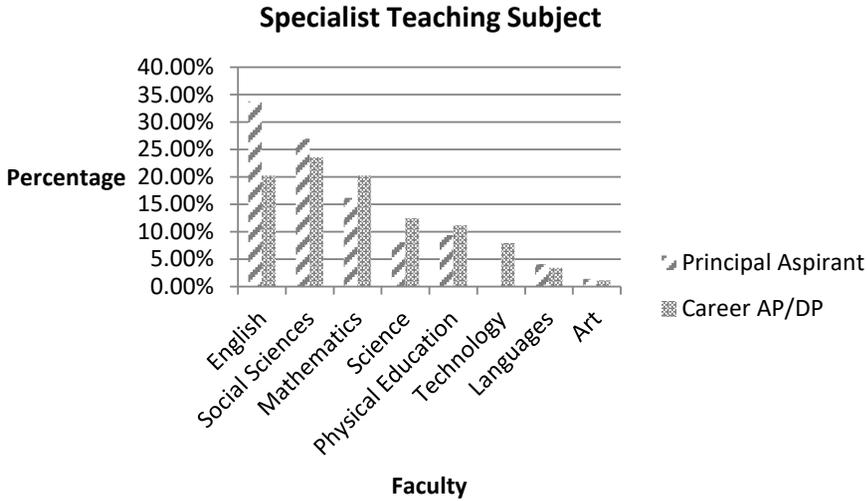


Figure 3. AP/DPs specialist teaching subject

The data (see Figure 4) revealed that the typical pathway for an AP/DP has continued to include time as a head of a department in a school for most of the respondents in this study. The data also suggest that principal aspirants move more quickly than career AP/DPs through the career stages of an assistant teacher and head of a department. Principal aspirants spent on average 8.01 years as an assistant teacher compared with career AP/DPs who spent 9.98 years. Principal aspirants spent on average 7.49 years in the head of department position while career AP/DPs spent 9.20 years in that role.

Statistical analysis revealed that differences between career AP/DPs and principal aspirants with respect to time in the HOD role was significant ( $\chi^2 (4, N=159) = 20.2512, p=0.0005, p \leq 0.01$ ). This pattern was not so apparent, nor statistically significant ( $\chi^2 (4, N=159) = 6.2173, p=0.18, p \geq 0.05$ ), at the assistant teacher stage of their career.

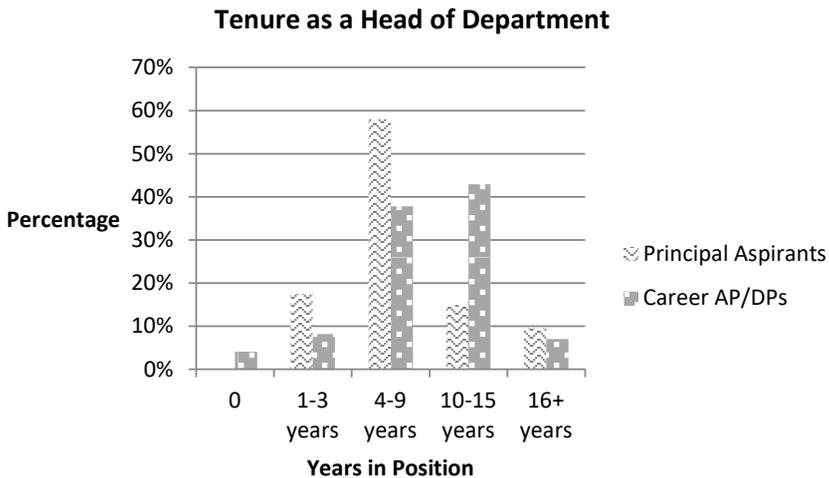


Figure 4. Tenure as a head of department

Respondents were asked to identify how many separate AP/DP positions they had held. Approximately 65 % of the respondents had held only one position with another 30% having held a second AP/DP position. The group as a whole did not appear particularly mobile within the senior management role. Considering that more than 50% of career AP/DPs and 33% of principal aspirants had been in the role for more than 10 years, this finding was rather surprising. It certainly appears that once an individual is appointed to an AP/DP role then there is a strong likelihood that they will remain in the position for some time.

A question concerning explanations for moving into the senior leadership position generated a total of nineteen different themes from respondents. The themes were then differentiated with respect to principal aspirants and career AP/DPs responses. Both principal aspirants and career AP/DPs identified professional challenge as the biggest factor in encouraging them to seek an AP/DP position. A number of respondents stated that they wanted “to see if I could” and test out their personal and professional competencies. The second most common factor identified by both groups was a desire to be in a leadership position in order to influence and “have a say”. Many felt that they had reached a stage in their careers where they believed they had the skills and ability to make a positive contribution to the leadership of a school. In a few cases respondents were motivated by their genuine belief that they could do better than some of the AP/DPs under whom they had served as teachers and heads of department.

In comparing the top six factors identified in the analysis as to why the AP/DPs moved into the senior leadership position, two issues need to be emphasised. First, peer encouragement appeared to be a more important factor for career AP/DPs than it did for principal aspirants in supporting them to apply for an AP/DP position. On the other hand, data from the responses provided evidence that many principal aspirants were strongly focused on promotion and on developing their careers. For these individuals, ambition and promotion was an important career driver. Principal aspirants were also motivated strongly by the thought of being able to make a contribution to improving teaching and learning and believed they had the skills to make a positive contribution in this area. This group also identified strongly with factors that encouraged professional growth.

Perhaps surprisingly, financial rewards, ambition to be a principal, geographical location of the school and the influence of personal relationships did not feature highly in the responses provided by either career AP/DPs or principal aspirants.

### ***School size, type, and decile rating***

The pattern of distribution by school roll was very similar across principal aspirants and career AP/DPs in comparison to the group as a whole. However, over 30% of career AP/DPs worked in smaller schools of between 300-600 students, compared to only 15% of principal aspirants. 26% of principal aspirants and 19% of career AP/DPs were employed in schools in the 601-900 roll range. Notably, 15% of principal aspirants worked in schools with a roll larger than 1800 students, compared to 5.6% of career AP/DPs. It is possible that the particular characteristics of larger schools encourage AP/DPs to actively consider promotion to principalship. However, the level of statistical significance between the differences in both groups by enrolment size was not significant ( $\chi^2 = 8.8823, p=0.26, (P \geq 0.05)$ ).

Similarly, there were no significant differences in the distribution of career AP/DPs and principal aspirants across the four school types of area, rural, urban and large metropolitan. While there were approximately 5% more career AP/DPs working in area schools, this was more likely to have occurred through chance. Of particular interest was the distribution of career category by decile rating of the school. Analysis of the data showed that there were some very clear patterns that point to a possible relationship between the decile rating of the school and AP/DPs career aspirations. Over 47% of career AP/DPs worked in decile 1 to 5 schools compared to 26.3% of principal aspirants. Of the principal aspirants who responded to this question 73.7% worked in decile 6 to 10

schools, compared to 52.7% of career AP/DPs. While career AP/DPs fitted closely to the national profiles for all AP/DPs (Ministry of Education, 2012) in regard to school decile, principal aspirants were clearly skewed towards the higher decile schools. The difference between the distribution of career AP/DPs and principal aspirants can be clearly seen in Figure 5. An explanation for the high number of principal aspirants who work in the higher decile schools can only be conjectured from the data in the survey.

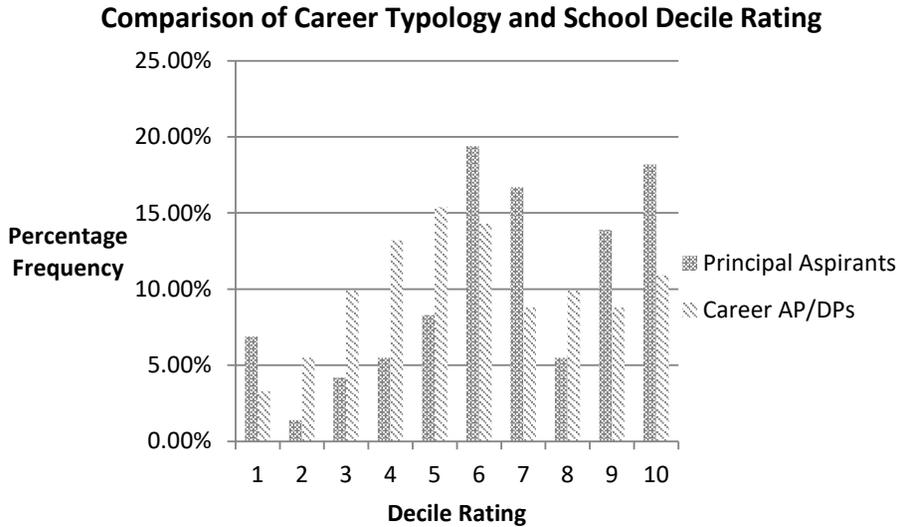


Figure 5. School decile rating

**Discussion**

The study identified career AP/DPs as a unique group with a set of characteristics that differentiate them from principal aspirants. This proportion of current AP/DPs with no aspiration to principalship relative to principal aspirants found in this study is similar to that found in studies in Britain (James & Whiting, 1998), Australia (Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003) and New Zealand (Douglas, 2007). All these studies provide evidence that career AP/DPs are a significant group within the AP/DP cluster of educational leaders. Typically, when compared to the principal aspirant AP/DPs in this study, career AP/DPs experienced a much slower career progression, were less likely to be employed in larger, high decile schools and had little in the way of a clearly thought out career plan. Most of these career AP/DPs were less motivated to work in a position of ultimate leadership responsibility, preferring to lead from a position within a leadership team, rather than from above, as was the case for the principal aspirants. These career AP/DPs had little interest in principalship and found the AP/DP position a highly satisfying and motivating role.

Gender was a significant category in this current study. Females made the decision not to seek principalship at a much earlier age than males. One possible reason for this differential, offered by Donn (1987) and supported in the work of Graham and Smith (1999), centred on women’s perceived limited attainable career choices. In this explanation, a range of interacting factors of discrimination influence a women’s path in attaining top leadership positions in education. These factors include a prevalence of male centred models of leadership and a woman’s perception and experiences of leadership and employment practices that inhibit women’s aspirations as educational leaders. The challenges for women have also been recognised in Scott’s (2008) study of New Zealand AP/DPs in which it was argued that many female AP/DPs are very tentative regarding aspirations towards principalship. Tentative aspirations towards career advancement for this group were also reported in

a study undertaken by Oplatka and Tamir (2009). In both studies, family and the employment situations of husbands and partners were major decision making considerations.

The career AP/DPs in this study moved more slowly through the traditional career transition stages of an assistant teacher and head of department (HOD) in comparison to principal aspirants. The longer length of time in tenure at the HOD stage influenced the age of the career AP/DP at appointment and beyond. The length of time also appeared to have a significant influence on the career orientation of participants in this study. On average, career AP/DPs served for 2 years longer as an HOD before moving to the AP/DP position. Half held the HOD position for more than 10 years compared to around a fifth of principal aspirants. Indeed, career AP/DPs were, on average, considerably older when gaining an AP/DP position than were principal aspirants. The data would support Tauskey and Dubin's (1965) contention that as individuals pass the age of 45, their career orientation increasingly changes to one focused on the AP/DP position as a career.

Given the levels of satisfaction that all the career AP/DPs expressed regarding their time as an HOD, they were more likely to enter a period of maintenance or stability until a significant catalyst for change prompted them to consider other options. Principal aspirants, on the whole, were more likely to be in their earlier years as an AP/DP than career AP/DPs. More than half of the principal aspirants in this study were in their first six years of tenure as an AP/DP, compared to under a third of career AP/DPs with only 18% of all respondent AP/DPs in their first three years in the position. This finding was very low compared to data from earlier studies such as Manchester (1983) and Graham and Smith (1999) where 35-50% of AP/DPs in New Zealand were in their first three years of service as an AP/DP. It suggests that there are currently fewer opportunities for career advancement in the New Zealand education system than in previous decades, and is another possible explanation of why so many career AP/DPs in this study spent a significant period of time as an HOD.

### *The serendipitous nature of career progression*

Both career AP/DPs and principal aspirants rated personal and professional challenge and wanting the opportunity to lead and influence others as the two most important factors in applying for the AP/DP role. However, there were a number of subtle differences in some of the other factors identified by the respondents. Principal aspirants identified career progression and promotion as the next most common factor (10%). In comparison a study of 40 newly appointed AP/DPs by Scott (2008) found that 22% of her respondents identified career progression as a key reason for applying for their current position. While principal aspirants in this study did not rate career promotion and progression as highly as AP/DPs in Scott's (2008) study, their rating was twice as high as for career AP/DPs. It is possible that principal aspirants were more likely to see the AP/DP position as part of a planned, linear progression towards a higher status position (see Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012). Coleman (1996) has argued that in this context the AP/DP position is a means to an end. Career AP/DPs, on the other hand, identified peer encouragement and opportunity knocks as the next most significant factors behind their decision to apply for the AP/DP role.

While they followed the same traditional pathway of a teacher, head of department and then AP/DP, the career pathway of the career AP/DP was more serendipitous. Many applied only on the strength of support from peers, mentors or family members. The same point was made by McCulla (2012) in a small Australian leadership study of teachers' transition to an educational leadership or management position. McCulla argued that "any interest in career progression had been provoked, motivated and supported by 'significant others' in the life of the teacher rather than the teachers themselves" (p. 82).

Similarly, a pilot study of leadership succession issues within the New Zealand education system (Macpherson, 2008) highlights the point that the professional development of senior administrators in New Zealand schools is largely unplanned, serendipitous and experiential in nature. Many of the AP/DPs who responded to Macpherson's study identified uneven and limited access to (a) career path planning, mentoring and

other forms of leader support, (b) role specific skill acquisition through professional development courses, and (c) deeper learning about leadership via post graduate study. This same point was emphasised in the James and Whiting (1998) study. The career AP/DPs in their study felt there was little in the way of a planned, professional growth programme focused on the assistant/deputy principalship as a career. Indeed, the respondents felt that the notion of an individual career was “a neglected aspect of their development” (James & Whiting, 1998, p. 361).

Falling into a senior leadership position is by no means a unique story with regard to studies of AP/DPs in New Zealand (see for example, Farnham, 2009; Scott, 2008). Graham and Smith (1999) refer to the work of Golandra (1991) in contrasting the experiences of New Zealand AP/DPs stumbling into the position with those in a number of overseas countries such as the United States, where anyone seeking an AP position must undertake formal, mandated tertiary leadership programmes before they can be licensed to take up this leadership position (see Glanz, 2004; Oleszewski, Shoho & Barnett, 2012). While not the case in New Zealand, once in the position the career AP/DPs in this study found that this was the job they wanted and that they did have the skills and abilities to undertake it effectively.

### ***The school context of career AP/DPs***

A third of the career AP/DPs worked in small secondary schools with a roll size of 300-600 students as compared to one fifth of principal aspirants. In contrast, the majority of principal aspirants worked in larger schools with higher levels of remuneration, larger senior management teams and a wider range of resources. Approximately half of the career AP/DPs worked in decile 1-5 schools whereas three quarters of principal aspirants worked in decile 6-10 schools. One possible explanation for the finding has been highlighted in previous New Zealand research by Wylie and Bonne (2016). Wylie and Bonne found that principals in schools situated in low socio-economic areas were likely to experience greater stress than those who worked in higher socio-economic areas. It is possible that AP/DPs working in low decile schools are well aware of the stress and difficulties that come with leadership positions in lower decile schools and this knowledge may have influenced their perceptions of principalship promotion.

Principal aspirants were further advantaged as the majority of them worked in higher decile schools with larger rolls and consequently were more likely to have a higher allocation of management units. Other New Zealand studies of AP/DPs including Douglas (2007) and Scott (2008) concluded that the pattern of management unit allocation was linked to the allocation determined by the Ministry of Education (the larger the school roll the more management units the school will receive). It was also a result of the internal decisions made by each school regarding how they allocated these management units and to whom (PPTA, 1996).

### ***The effects of salary on job satisfaction***

Although this study's findings showed that career AP/DPs have a significant disadvantage in terms of salary levels, the findings also showed that salary and remuneration of the AP/DP position had little or no positive influence on job satisfaction for career AP/DPs. This finding was in stark contrast to the Pounder and Merrill (2001) study where principal aspirants in the United States rated the salary and benefits of the principal's position as the second most attractive job attribute. Career AP/DPs in this study were intent on remaining in this position, so the benefits of an increase in salary and other remunerations were possibly not highly relevant. Similarly, they did not strongly identify themselves as being highly motivated by factors such as holidays and employment conditions. Flexible work hours and the joys of a relaxing holiday were an unrealised dream and this had, in all probability, contributed to the ratings provided by career AP/DPs of these factors.

### ***Tenure pattern for AP/DPs***

The majority of the AP/DPs had held only one AP/DP position, with only a quarter of the respondents having held a second or third AP/DP position. This pattern of tenure suggested that once appointed many of the AP/DPs in New Zealand block (albeit unintentionally) the further advancement of others interested in the position

by staying in the role for long periods of time. Given that more than half of career AP/DPs and just under three quarters of the AP/DPs in this study had been AP/DPs for more than 10 years, a bottleneck is created for those HODs aspiring to be an AP/DP and/or principal. The situation is further impacted by the limited number of secondary schools in New Zealand, resulting in only a small number of principal and senior management positions becoming available each year for those seeking promotion.

There were a number of factors identified in the responses that provide some clues to why so many career AP/DPs once appointed remain in their position for such a long period of time. First, the AP/DPs were almost unanimous in expressing their enjoyment of the role and the positive levels of satisfaction gained from it. Second, career AP/DPs enjoyed their strong leadership role without having the ultimate responsibility carried by the principal. This suggested that many of the career AP/DPs felt that they exerted significant leadership influence in their role in schools and did not need a “higher position in order to satisfy that need” (Graham & Smith, 1999, p. 85). A similar argument was made in Kelly’s (1987) study of APs in the United States in claiming that the AP position has sufficient rewards in itself. As a consequence, many of the APs in this study did not feel a need to seek something more or push themselves beyond their current situation given that they enjoyed a strong leadership role that was both satisfying and challenging.

A third explanation behind the lack of mobility of career AP/DPs might be related to family and lifestyle factors. Achieving a work/life balance may be important for many career AP/DPs. While a career is very important it may not be the total driving focus in their lives. In Douglas’ (2007) study a number of AP/DPs rejected further promotion to principalship as the stress and expectations made “it difficult to maintain a work/life balance because of the high workload” (Douglas, 2007, p. 18).

Finally, a number of researchers (e.g., Draper & McMichael, 1996; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013; Ingvarson, Kleinhenz, Beavis, Barwick, Carthy & Wilkinson, 2005; Maclean, 1992; Wylie & Bonne, 2016) have identified the negative impact on principals, deputy principals and their families, created by heavy workloads and school commitments, as a major cause of career dissatisfaction. However, the large majority of career AP/DPs in this study expressed high levels of satisfaction with their AP/DP role, their school and lifestyle and this suggests that they have attained a point in their careers where both professional and personal responsibilities were in harmony. There was little motivation to change knowing that the inevitable increase in workload and stress levels that comes with a new position could put family relationships and their current work/life balance at risk.

## **Recommendations**

AP/DPs play a crucial role within the leadership landscape in the evolving and complex educational setting within New Zealand. The AP/DP position can, and does provide individuals in education with a legitimate and satisfying educational leadership role that is a challenging, rewarding and worthwhile career option. However, many are reliant on colleagues or gilt edged opportunities to provide the necessary encouragement to consider further career progression. Since the findings have highlighted the serendipitous nature of career progression, the education system as a whole and the principal have important roles to play in ensuring that career AP/DPs receive better systems of support than they currently receive. The following specific recommendations are offered:

That schools consider offering HODs and AP/DPs early and sustained career counselling to better enable individuals to take control of their career management and progression. Since the school has discretion over the allocation of funding assigned to the school by the Ministry of Education, the principal should consider allocating a portion of that funding for the professional learning and career counselling of HODs and AP/DPs. Given that so many career AP/DPs were employed for extended periods in both the HOD and AP/DPs positions it is possible that with this type of support, they may have made different career decisions.

That organisations which represent the interests of secondary AP/DPs lobby the Ministry of Education in order to develop a programme of support for newly appointed AP/DPs, particularly aimed at those working in low decile schools. It appears that there is a clear need for a programme of support which may be regionally based, similar to the Aspiring Principal Development Programme (see Cardno & Youngs, 2013; Piggot-Irvine & Youngs, 2011), or the First Time Principals Programme, which is scheduled for imminent discontinuation. A focus on professional growth and support coupled with the inclusion of key elements such as mentoring and professional feedback on performance should provide a much smoother transition phase for AP/DPs.

That schools undertake to encourage and provide support for AP/DPs to enrol in further study. Sabbatical leave would broaden AP/DPs' perspectives of their work. Further, distance student enrolment in a tertiary paper or programme focused on leadership, management or administration would deepen their understanding of and provide a theoretical basis for their work. Clearly, the principal has a significant role to play in developing an infrastructure that will enable the growth of professional competencies and the attainment of advanced educational qualifications.

These recommendations are made for AP/DPs within the New Zealand context. While it is recognised that advanced study is mandatory for AP/DPs in some international contexts, we believe that the benefits of professional learning and established support and mentoring systems for AP/DPs in all contexts are not to be underestimated. Thus, our recommendations, in general, will have wider application across international settings.

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