

## **Abstract**

This study focuses on a largely unrecognised group of secondary school assistant/deputy principals who have no desire to pursue principalship. Findings from the study have shown that these assistant/deputy principals who, for the purpose of this study are called ‘career AP/DPs’, play a significant role in the leadership of New Zealand secondary schools yet there is little research focused on the assistant/deputy principalship as a vocation. Consequently, the intentions of this study are to develop a more complete understanding of this group in order to ensure that career AP/DPs are a recognised group of educational leaders with a distinct mission to support principals in leading our New Zealand secondary schools.

The research design employed a mixed methods approach. It used a survey questionnaire to identify those AP/DPs who identify as career AP/DPs and then focus group interviews with selected groups of career AP/DPs to develop a more complete understanding of the group.

The findings from the study highlight that career AP/DPs have followed a serendipitous career journey where key colleagues have been crucial in championing their leadership aspirations. Career AP/DPs gain satisfaction from the daily contact that they have with students, caregivers and staff and enjoy the psychological rewards that come from making a difference in their schools. However, they are clearly disappointed that they are not able to make a wider contribution to teaching and learning in their schools and advocate for a more significant role in this portfolio. Career AP/DPs are strongly attached to their leadership teams including the principal and acknowledge them as the most significant professional support they have providing the conditions for them to grow and fully enjoy the psychological rewards that come from serving in this position.

## **Acknowledgements**

The completion of this Doctoral study represents the end of a journey at Massey University that started 27 years ago in 1989 when I started a paper towards an undergraduate degree. In the time between 1989 and 2016 I have only had four years where I was not enrolled at Massey University and given the busy professional roles that I have had in education over this time there is a sense of relief from my family that my educational journey is nearing its end.

Given this situation, I wish to thank my wife Heather for her patience and love as I have never been around when she has needed me, however her support has been ever present. My children Aleix, Ben and Kate have also suffered from the lack of a father at times and my modelling of academic endeavour has had absolutely no positive influence on their desire to pursue tertiary study. I would also like to thank my mother and father, Joan and Barry, for supporting me in my educational journey and for providing me with a set of values that have enabled me to complete such a testing programme.

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