Issues in Reinventing School Leadership: Reviewing the OECD report on improving school leadership from an Australian perspective

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ABSTRACT: *Following a decade of concern about an impending crisis in school leadership, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has released a report identifying four policy directions for governments in developing a new generation of school leaders. This paper examines the OECD's findings in light of recent research about the dimensions of a 'crisis' in school leadership in Australia. While much of the published research confirms the OECD's findings, the reinvention of school leadership poses significant challenge to school systems and to the profession. The author identifies the limitations of the OECD report and argues that fundamental change in the managerial expectations placed on school leaders is necessary to reinvent school leadership in Australia. If employing authorities do not take steps to address issues such as devolution, accountability, funding and performance monitoring, initiatives to support and reward principals in their role as instructional leaders are unlikely to succeed.*

Introduction

Governments now recognise the importance of school leadership and have begun to discuss ways to develop and support high quality leaders. A recent OECD review drawing on evidence from 19 countries reaffirms the importance of school leaders in improving student learning outcomes and identifies four policy directions for governments to develop new generations of school leaders (OECD, 2008). These calls for reform follow a decade of concern in Australia and overseas about an impending crisis in school leadership (Australian College of Educators (ACE), 2006; Caldwell, 2000; Department of Education & Training (DET), 2004; Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003; Lacey, 2002).

This paper examines the OECD report's findings in light of recent research about the nature of the principalship and the dimensions of a 'crisis' in school leadership in Australia. The author discusses the reforms proposed by the OECD and the challenges these recommendations pose to Australian employers.

The Principal's Most Important Role

The OECD report confirms more than a decade of research about the significant impact of school leadership on student learning (Creemers & Reezigt, 1996; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). In their review of the research evidence from large-scale quantitative studies, Hallinger and Heck (1996) concluded that the combined direct and indirect effects of school leadership on pupil outcomes are small but educationally significant. While leadership only explains three to five per cent of the variation in student learning across schools, this is actually about one quarter of the total variation (10 to 20 per cent) explained by all school-level variables – after controlling for student intake (Creemers & Reezigt, 1996). Classroom factors (i.e. teaching) explain only a slightly larger proportion (about one third) of the variation in student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004). In sum, leadership is second to teaching as the major school-based influence on student learning.

The *type* of school leadership is also important for influencing student learning outcomes. While many types of educational leadership have been identified in the literature over the past few decades, the three models of instructional, transformational and distributed leadership appear the most resilient (Watson, 2005). The three models are far from mutually exclusive, and a distributed leadership style can co-exist with forms of instructional or transformational leadership (Robinson 2007). In synthesising empirical research evidence about the impact of different types of leadership on student outcomes, Robinson (2007) concluded that the effect of instructional leadership (i.e. leadership in teaching and learning) was significantly higher than the effect of transformational leadership (i.e. use of facilitative powers to construct strong school cultures that empower individuals). Identifying five dimensions of leadership that have moderate to large effects on student outcomes, she found 'the more leaders focus their professional relationships, their work and their learning on the core business of teaching and learning, the greater their influence on student outcomes' (Robinson 2007, p. 12).

A national discussion on professional standards for school principals initiated by Teaching Australia found that leading and influencing student learning is perceived as the most important capability of a school principal, ahead of professional knowledge and organisational leadership (Teaching Australia, 2008b, p. 5). The draft national professional standards for principals identify the key capabilities of authoritative leadership of learning among school principals as:

- Inspiring excellent teaching and learning;
- Building capacity of teachers as effective and influential educators and leaders;
- Growing a dynamic culture of care, respect, high expectations and success;
- Taking responsibility for managing personal and professional growth;
- Empowering parents and families as the first educators of their children; and
- Taking responsibility for the development and renewal of the profession

(Teaching Australia, 2008a, p. 13).

The Stressful Job of School Principal

The OECD (2008) report says, 'the function of school leadership across OECD countries is now increasingly defined by a demanding set of roles which include financial and human resource management and leadership for learning [and] there are concerns across countries that the role of principal as conceived for needs of the past is no longer appropriate' (p. 2). A major concern of the OECD report is that principals' workloads are too heavy and this may be having a negative impact on recruitment. Concern about principals' workloads is widespread and a Victorian government study on principals' workload and its impact on health and well-being found 78 per cent of principals and assistant principals reporting 'high' or 'very high' levels of work-related stress, compared to 55 per cent of white collar workers in comparable occupations. While the respondents reported an almost universal 'love' for their job (90 per cent agreeing with the statement 'my job gives me great satisfaction'), the sheer volume of work was regarded as the biggest source of stress (DET, 2004).

The findings of the Victorian study reinforce the argument put by Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei that school leadership has been reconstructed as a form of 'greedy work' – a form of 'occupational servitude in which the expectations and demands on leaders have become all-consuming' (Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003, p. 181). Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei argue that a new paradigm of governance has infiltrated school leadership that places principals under extreme pressure to perform to meet accountability expectations while having less capacity to lead teaching and learning due to excessive managerial responsibilities.

> For teachers and administrators to submit themselves to the effort norms and expectations of performance enshrined in institutional charters, employment contracts, personal productivity targets etc . . . demands the exertion of previously undreamt of levels of physical, cognitive and emotional energy expenditure. At the same time as these role demands and associated expectations for teachers and school leaders have increased, the scope for institutional level autonomy and discretion, promised by such initiatives as school-level budgeting, has often been severely circumscribed by externally imposed fiscal and resource constraints . . . (Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003, p. 180).

Reinventing School Leadership

The OECD (2008) identifies four main 'policy levers' which would lead to 'improved school leadership practice' if they were adopted by the employers of school principals: redefining school leadership responsibilities; distributing school leadership; professional development for effective school leadership; and increasing the attractiveness of the principalship through greater professionalisation. This section discusses the usefulness of these strategies in an Australian context.

Redefining school leadership responsibilities

The OECD argues that instructional leaders need high degrees of autonomy but must be given the appropriate level of support to enable them to carry out their role of leading teaching and learning. This involves defining and delimiting the core responsibilities of school leaders in terms of leading

teaching and learning. To support leaders in this role, the OECD suggests that policymakers should provide principals with higher degrees of autonomy, particularly in the areas of developing teacher quality, goal-setting, assessment and accountability, human and financial resource management and inter-school collaboration. It recommends that a new school leadership framework could help provide guidance on the main characteristics, tasks and responsibilities of effective school leaders and 'signal the essential character of school leadership as leadership for learning' (OECD, 2008, p. 3).

Viviane Robinson also argues that the job of the school principal should be increasingly focused on the role that school leaders play in improving teaching and learning. She points out that we should be defining the role of school principal in terms of what we know about effective teaching (i.e. teaching that has a positive impact on all students). An agenda for educational leadership should then be developed that *strengthens* the conditions that enable effective teaching and weakens the impact of factors or conditions that inhibit or prevent it (Robinson, 2006).

However Robinson also acknowledges the difficulties involved in reorganising the workload of principals to provide more time for educational leadership and the challenges it poses for employers. While many government employers in Australia are now championing school leadership in instructional terms, they appear reluctant to change the policies which are burdening principals with managerial responsibilities. For example, no government school employer has indicated a willingness to change its position on the devolution of management responsibilities to schools. Yet one factor which has changed the nature of the principalship in recent decades is the tendency of employers to devolve ever-increasing levels of management responsibility to schools without devolving adequate resources to carry out these tasks at the school level.

The Victorian study of school principals' workload identified a clear tension between a personal desire to be an 'educational leader' versus the employer's imperative to be a 'manager'. While over 90 per cent of respondents preferred to think of themselves as 'mainly an educational leader', only 20 per cent said that this was the reality, and that they were 'mainly a manager'. Sixty per cent of principals said that they spent 'too much' time on accountability and 72 per cent agreed that the worst thing about their job was 'the amount of unnecessary paper work' (DET, 2004). Lacey and Gronn's study of Victorian principals who had left the role reinforces this view.

> I was finding more and more that I spent less time educationally, less time with the kids and more time doing administrative and accounting type work that I wasn't really prepared for. I trained to be a teacher, not an accountant. So as that went on, I became less and less satisfied by the work (Former school principal, quoted in Lacey & Gronn, 2007, p. 10).

When the legal responsibility for any activity falls upon the principal's shoulders, the principal *must* oversee the management of that activity, and no amount of high level emphasis on instructional aspects of the principal's role will change this. The only way to reduce the management responsibilities of principals is for employers to review the concept of administrative devolution in terms of the impact it has on the workload of school principals. A national survey of the welfare of primary school principals in Australia identified the six highest scoring stressors on primary school principals as: lack of time to focus on teaching and learning; responding to departmental initiatives and other system demands; multi-tasking; departmental accountability mechanisms; and low levels of funding (Shepherd, 2004, p. 5). But as the author of the survey

pointed out, 'a significant number of the most important stressors appear to be capable of amelioration through system change at little or no cost' (Shepherd, 2004, p. 1).

There are signs that some employers are moving in this direction. The Victorian government responded to its commissioned study of school principals' workload, *The Privilege and the Price* (DET, 2004) with measures to streamline administrative operations and to provide support for instructional leadership and Victoria features as one of five case studies in Volume 2 of the OECD report. The case studies reported by the OECD illustrate the type of systematic reappraisal of employer policies and practices that is necessary to reduce the managerial demands on school principals. Simply emphasising the responsibility of principals for leading teaching and learning will not change the nature of principals' work.

Distributing school leadership

A key strength of the concept of distributed leadership is that it portrays leadership as an organisational *process* rather than a set of qualities possessed by an individual or group. While the concept of distributed leadership is very popular among educational researchers, there is no definitive model of distributed leadership. The concept is generally used to explain various approaches to capacity-building in schools and researchers often add new elements to it in their studies. Michael Copland (2003, pp. 377-379) provides a useful summary of three common understandings within the concept of distributed leadership:

1. Distributed leadership is a *collective* activity, focused on collective goals, which comprises a quality or energy that is greater than the sum of individual actions (i.e. it creates a dynamism that extends beyond simply identifying task responsibility);

2. Distributed leadership involves the *spanning of* task, responsibility, and power *boundaries* between traditionally defined organisational roles (i.e. boundary spanning activities should be cultivated by distributed leadership systems, rather than simple definitions of roles and responsibilities of principals and teachers); and

3. Distributed leadership rests on a base of *expert* rather than hierarchical *authority* (i.e. power and authority should be re-distributed towards those who hold expertise, such as teachers, rather than privileging those who hold formal titles).

The OECD report endorses the concept of distributed leadership as a means of broadening the concept of school leadership, reducing the pressure on school principals, strengthening school management and improving succession planning. The OECD (2008) argues that this can be achieved in formal ways through team structures, or informally by developing *ad hoc* groups based on expertise and current needs.

However, a major challenge in implementing distributed leadership in schools is that the concept contradicts the hierarchical systems of school governance which dominate school education systems. A problem for all public sector organisations, including schools, is that the concept of public accountability is built on a chain of command that begins with an elected parliamentary representative (the Minister) and ends with a school principal. In recent decades, the accountability climate for school education has become so highly politicised that a school principal's 'performance' is judged both internally and externally through standardised tests of

student learning outcomes. As Hargreaves and Fink point out:

> The constructive and compelling idea of standards – that learning comes before teaching and that we should be able to know and demonstrate when learning has occurred – has degenerated into a compulsive obsession with standardization (Hargreaves & Fink, 2005, p. 9).

The OECD report's recommendations that employers should give principals more autonomy over teaching and learning and the freedom to implement models of distributed leadership sits uneasily with the reality of current accountability practices. The authors of the OECD report appear conscious of this contradiction, but the report falls short of making any strong recommendations to address it, suggesting merely that 'policymakers need to reflect on modifying accountability mechanisms to match distributed leadership structures' (OECD, 2008, p. 3).

Skills for effective school leadership

The OECD (2008) suggests that school leaders 'need specific training to respond to broadened roles and responsibilities' (p. 4). The report suggests that employers should promote leadership learning as a continuum, from initial leadership training to organised induction programs through to in-service training according to need and context. It argues for consistency of provision by different institutions and the development of mechanisms to assure quality.

The report reflects recent trends in Australia for employers to focus on the professional development of school principals. Many schools systems now have leadership learning frameworks for school principals and national professional standards for principals are under discussion (Department of Education Victoria, 2007; Teaching Australia, 2008a). However, in the absence of fundamental change in employers' expectations of the principal's role, professional standards could have the effect of imposing yet another demanding set of accountabilities on school principals, particularly if they are linked to performance pay. While there is widespread support for the idea that principals should focus on leading teaching and learning, the research evidence suggests that managerial responsibilities continually distract them from this role (DET, 2004; Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003). Thus without fundamental change in the current accountability regimes within which principals work, efforts to encourage principals to lead teaching and learning through professional standards frameworks are likely to be ineffective. Moreover, if leadership frameworks are used to impose further performance and accountability measures on school principals, they will be counter-productive in terms of improving principals' capacities to lead teaching and learning.

Using the concept of sustainability from the environment movement, Hargreaves and Fink (2005) argue that fundamental cultural change is necessary to reform the institution of school leadership in the 21st Century. They propose that sustainable leadership in education should be a shared responsibility that does not unduly deplete human or financial resources, nor exert damage on the surrounding educational environment and school community. The concept of sustainability 'is basically concerned with developing and preserving what matters, spreads and lasts in ways that create positive connections and development among people and do no harm to others in the present or the future' (Hargreaves & Fink, 2005, p. 17).

Making school leadership an attractive profession

The OECD report challenges education systems to make school leadership an attractive profession, citing 'evidence . . . that potential applicants are deterred by the heavy workload of principals and the fact that the job does not seem to be adequately remunerated or supported' (OECD, 2008, p. 5).

> In many countries, principals have heavy workloads; many are reaching retirement, and it is getting harder to replace them. Potential candidates often hesitate to apply, because of overburdened roles, insufficient preparation and training, limited career prospects and inadequate support and rewards (OECD, 2008, p. 2)

Many Australian commentators endorse this view. Brian Caldwell (2000, p. 1) observed that 'reports from nation after nation refer to the shrinking pool of applicants for the principalship'. More recently the Australian College of Educators said, 'it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract leaders to the principalship' (ACE, 2006, p. 1). A recent qualitative study in Australia reported a senior member of an Australian religious order as saying, 'What are we doing that people are really not interested in this job?' (Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003, p. 173).

The OECD (2008) identifies four sites for action to 'attract, recruit and support high-performing school leaders' (p. 5). The first strategy is to professionalise recruitment procedures to make them 'effective, transparent, and consistent' while acknowledging the importance of 'school-level involvement'. Systems should become involved in succession planning – proactively identifying and developing potential leaders – to boost the future supply of applicants. The OECD recommends broadening eligibility criteria to attract younger candidates and those with different backgrounds, and relying on more than just interviews to select candidates. A second strategy is to monitor the parity of school leaders' salaries with comparable occupations in the public and private sector and ensure they remain competitive. A third strategy is to encourage the role of professional associations of school leaders. The fourth strategy is to explore flexible options to support school leaders' career development such as promoting mobility and variability in the roles available to school principals in the course of their career.

The strategies proposed by the OECD to make school leadership a more attractive profession resonate with debates about school leadership in Australia. A number of Australian employers have initiated capacity-building programs to nurture potential school leaders. The Developmental Learning Framework in Victoria, for example, focuses on capacity-building measures such as: principal performance and development; principal selection processes; an accelerated development program for high potential leaders; mentoring for first-time principals; coaching for experienced principals; and a development program for high-performing principals (Department of Education Victoria, 2007). However one issue that appears more difficult to resolve is the maintenance of wages parity between school principals and other professionals. Principals also work well above the Australian average for comparable occupations. The average working hours for full-time workers in Australia is 44.6 hours per week and the average for full-time managers is slightly higher, but still only 46.1 hours per week, whereas the Victorian survey found that most principals and their deputies worked over 58 hours per week. Not surprisingly, 75 per cent of principals and assistant principals agreed with the statement 'there is so much work to do, I never seem to get on top of it' (DET, 2004).

Discussion

The OECD report focuses on many issues that have been at the forefront of public debate on the nature of school leadership in Australia over the past decade and provides a useful synthesis of strategies to improve the quality of leadership in schools. However the report suffers two limitations: first, its uncritical acceptance of the notion of a declining level of interest in the principalship; and second, its reluctance to question the managerial trends which appear to be the fundamental causes of increased stress for those occupying the role.

The extent to which we are facing a crisis in the future supply of school principals is somewhat contested. It seems logical that if the job of school principal has become more demanding and stressful, this knowledge could be deterring potential applicants from applying for the principalship. While admitting that 'data on the principal aspirant pool, both current and prospective, are often difficult to obtain' (p. 174), Peter Gronn and Karin Rawlings-Sanaei (2003) concluded on the basis of enquiries of Australian state and territory education departments, that there was an 'indicative rather than a definitive, picture of principal shortages' in many jurisdictions (Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003, p. 176). Although anecdotal evidence of a shrinking pool of applicants abounds, it is difficult to obtain hard data on recruitment patterns. Many studies suggest a decline in the number of applications for school principals' positions in Australia and overseas (cited in Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003, p. 175; Lacey, 2002, p. 3), however quantitative evidence to suggest a 'shrinking pool of applicants' for the principalship in Australia is limited. Work by the Catholic Education Commission of New South Wales suggests that fewer people were applying for principals' positions (d'Arbon, Duignan & Duncan, 2002) but these conclusions are contested (Barty et al., 2005).

There is no agreement on what level of interest among potential school leaders constitutes a low level of interest in school leadership applications. The survey conducted among potential school principals within the Catholic Education system in New South Wales found that 52 per cent of all respondents indicated they were not seeking a principal's position and did not intend to apply, 30 per cent said they were willing to apply while 16 per cent were unsure. Moreover, of the 300 assistant principals who responded, only 30 per cent said they were unwilling to apply, 45 per cent were willing to apply and the remaining 25 per cent were unsure (d'Arbon, Duignan & Duncan, 2002, pp. 475-476). In Victoria, a study of leadership aspirations among government school teachers suggested that 24 per cent of teachers had leadership aspirations that extended to the principal class (Lacey, 2002, p. 7).

We have no basis for concluding that a 20 – 30 per cent level of interest in applying for the job of principal (i.e. 30 per cent of Catholic teachers and 24 per cent of State school teachers) constitutes evidence of an impending shortage of applicants. Barty et al. (2005, p. 3) suggest that the results of both surveys 'seemed a little too high to indicate a critical decline in interest in the principalship'. An American study of the attributes and career paths of school principals in New York State came to a similar conclusion. It found that although up to 60 per cent of current principals may retire over the next five years, the number of individuals under the age of 45 and 'certified' to be principals exceeded the number of principalships by more than 50 percent (Papa, Lankford & Wyckoff, 2002, p. 14).

However large-scale quantitative studies may not be adequate to convey the complexity of this issue, as the level of interest in applying for principals' positions appears to differ between schools. A qualitative study of the supply of school principals in South Australia and Victoria concluded that factors such as the location of the school and its student population influence the number of applications for principals' positions, as well as 'local knowledge' about other staff who are applying for particular jobs (Barty et al., 2005). Variation in the level of interest in particular types of school is also evident in other countries. In Austria, the government reports difficulties in attracting applicants to principalships in rural and remote schools (Schratz & Petzold, 2007). An American study measuring the level of interest among assistant principals in applying for different types of schools found that schools with low levels of student achievement were less attractive than more high achieving schools. The authors concluded that low performing schools were 'greatly disadvantaged in recruiting school principals' (Winter & Morgenthal, 2002, p. 319). The research suggests that in considering any 'problems' with the future supply of school leaders, we should take into account variations in the level of interest in the principalship between types of schools. Clearly some types of school, such as rural schools and schools with lower levels of student achievement, are likely to be less attractive to potential applicants than others, and employer recruitment strategies should take this into account.

Reports of a declining level of interest in applying for the position of school principal also tend to imply that there is a decline in the 'quality' of applicants (see Australian Secondary Principals' Association (ASPA), 1999; Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003). However the concept of 'quality' in teaching and school leadership is highly contested and the available measures of 'quality' are quite narrow. For example, using the two measures of years of experience and the status of the college from which principals received their Bachelors degrees, an American study found that the urban schools within New York City were much more likely to have less experienced principals and principals who received their degrees from lower ranked colleges than schools in suburban districts. Within New York City, schools where students performed poorly on standardised exams were also more likely to have less experienced principals and principals who received their degrees from lower ranked colleges (Papa, Lankford & Wyckoff, 2002).

In Australia, factors such as years of experience and the status of one's tertiary institution would not necessarily be legitimate measures of leadership quality. Therefore we rely on the qualitative evidence gathered from educational administrators and members of selection panels on school boards, which suggests a 'diminution of the numbers of candidates deemed worthy of short-listing for interview' (Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003, p. 174). It is possible that evidence of lower levels of interest in the principalship in particular schools does mean less competition for such positions and therefore might imply that the successful applicants do not possess the 'qualities' of those who would have succeeded in a more highly contested process. Equally, there are concerns about the extent to which current selection processes work to identify the best person for the principalship (Blackmore, Thomson & Barty 2006). On balance, we can assume that the quality of applicants, like the number of applicants, is likely to vary according to the characteristics of individual schools with vacant positions (Barty et al., 2005; Papa, Lankford & Wyckoff, 2002; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002).

If there is a potential shortage of applicants for principals' positions, it may be due to factors other than the stresses of the job. One possibility is that principals are retiring at a faster rate, due

to the effect of the post-war baby boom and thereby creating more vacancies. In 2003, more than half the teaching workforce was over 45 years of age and an increasing number of teachers and principals were expected to retire by 2010 (MCEETYA, 2004). Another impetus to early retirement in some jurisdictions was superannuation schemes that provided an incentive to retire at 54 years and 11 months (Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003). Socio-demographic trends should also be taken into account. The rise in two-career families, for example, may influence the rate of applications for principals' positions. Research suggests that adults in dual-career families employ a range of adaptive strategies at different stages of their lifespan to attain work-life balance, that influence both their individual career aspirations and labour market mobility (Becker & Moen, 1999). It has also been pointed out that the aspirations of the new generation of recruits to the teaching profession could be different from those of the previous generation. The cohort of 'Generation Xers' are likely to be more 'outwardly' rather than 'upwardly' mobile, with a preference for keeping their life options open rather than committing themselves to one particular career path (Gronn & Rawlings-Sanaei, 2003).

In summary, the evidence of a declining level of interest in the school principalship is contested, and it is likely that a range of contextual and personal factors come into play when principals' positions are advertised. These complexities should be taken into account by employers who are seeking to build capacity among potential school leaders. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach may not be the most effective way to reinvent school leadership.

A second limitation of the OECD (2008) report is its reluctance to challenge the managerial practices which are a significant cause of stress among school leaders and which continually distract them from their most important role – leading teaching and learning. Several studies of the changing role of school principals in Western countries suggest that the major causes of dissatisfaction and stress among school principals are: increased local site management, including global budgeting in some jurisdictions; increased accountability requirements from employing authorities, particularly in the domain of student achievement; altered relationships with the school community, partly influenced by increased school choice; and a general increase in time allocated to management and paperwork compared to time spent on educational leadership (Gronn, 2003; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003, 2005; Stevenson, 2006; Whitaker, 2003). Gronn describes the impact of these changes as a new form of 'occupational servitude' on the part of school leaders whereby:

> . . the role space occupied by an incumbent expands . . . to such an extent that an incumbent becomes responsible for an amount and quality of work output, and a depth of emotional and cognitive commitment and work engagement that might previously have been demanded of more than one person. Moreover, that same role incumbent's zone of discretion tends to be circumscribed and regulated, less by the need to obey the directives of a supervisory superior than by a framework of target-driven accountability requirements tied in turn to publicly audited performance-related and target-related levels of remuneration (Gronn, 2003, p. 150).

The OECD study endorses the view that there are excessive demands on school principals and suggests employers should make a concerted effort to refocus school leadership in the direction of supporting teaching and learning. However, the report falls short of arguing for a fundamental change in the managerial expectations placed on school leaders. Yet fundamental reforms are necessary to reverse the tidal wave of managerialism that has swamped school principals over the past two decades.

If school principals are to be reinvented as leaders of teaching and learning, their employers – particularly large education systems – should review some of the managerial policy reforms of the past two decades. Issues to be addressed include: the devolution of administrative functions to schools; the financial and educational accountability requirements imposed on schools; the way in which schools are funded; and how school performance is measured and reported. If these issues are addressed with the explicit purpose of reducing the volume of managerial work undertaken by principals, the quality of education in schools is likely to improve. If principals can be given more time to devote to leading teaching and learning, the initiatives proposed by the OECD to reinvent school leadership will have the most chance of success.

Conclusion

Over the past decade in Australia, many research papers and reports have documented negative aspects of the principalship that revolve around high levels of work-related stress. The stress appears to be caused by too much work, tension between types of work, such as educational leadership versus management, and the stress of working in a 'fishbowl' under the critical eye of parents and the media. The resultant stress and long hours of work endured by school principals provide 'extrinsic and visible' evidence to school staff of the negative aspects of principals' work and may thereby contribute to their negative leadership aspirations among potential future leaders (Lacey, 2002, p. 11). Some researchers point to an impending crisis in school leadership due to a decline in the number of interested and suitable applicants for principals' positions. While the evidence for this is contested, the level of stress reported by principals and assistant principals could be a deterrent to the pool of potential applicants for leadership positions, and may be influencing the level of interest in principals' jobs, particularly in some types of schools.

The nature of the school principal's role in Australia remains focused on management at the expense of leadership in teaching and learning. The resultant tension between the roles of manager and instructional leader is a major source of occupational stress for Australian school leaders. There is compelling evidence that the role of school principals has changed due to increased expectations of management at the expense of educational leadership. As the OECD (2008) points out, educational research demonstrates the critical importance of school leaders in improving student learning and their role needs to be re-defined in terms of having an explicit and direct effect on the quality of teaching and learning in their schools. But such a re-definition will not be effective in the absence of fundamental policy reform to reduce the managerial responsibilities which now occupy increasing proportions of school leaders' time. Australia's main employers of school leaders – state and territory governments – will need to address issues relating to devolution, accountability, funding and performance measurement and reporting, before we can reinvent school leadership and restore it to its rightful position as a driver of high quality teaching and learning.

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