

Secondary Principals' Perspectives on the Impact of Work Intensification on the Secondary Vice-Principal Role

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ABSTRACT: Principals' work intensification has increased the volume and complexity of their daily tasks. This exploratory study was conducted to determine how secondary principals' work intensification has influenced their understanding of the secondary vice-principal role. Thirteen secondary principals from Ontario, Canada participated in one-time semi-structured interviews for this qualitative study. Findings indicate that secondary principals expect their vice-principals to perform both operational and instructional tasks, although the work completed by secondary vice-principals remains predominantly school operations. Duties are determined collaboratively as a school administrative team. Three tensions emerged regarding how secondary principals perceive the secondary vice-principal role: They believe their vice-principals (i) experience role conflict and role ambiguity, (ii) have difficulty prioritising operational and instructional duties, and (iii) have difficulty achieving work-life balance. Recommendations to professional practice, educational policy, and research in educational leadership are included.

Introduction

'Work intensification' has made the changing nature of the principal role more complex with increased workload. Principals' long work hours extend into evenings and weekends with being accessible via e-mail and cell phone, they have difficulty prioritising numerous urgent operational and important instructional tasks, and they have limited autonomy implementing the increasingly and seemingly disconnected Ministry of Education policies to meet the diverse needs of students (Canadian Association of Principals, 2014; Cattonar et al., 2007; Leithwood et al., 2014; Ontario Principals' Council, 2017; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015; Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2014, 2017). It is important to note that there is no standard list of duties for vice-

principals, due to school context as well as social, political, and legal factors (Armstrong, 2009; Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nieuwenhuizen, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990). In Ontario, the Ontario Education Act lists two duties for vice-principals: (i) duties assigned by the principal, and (ii) perform duties of the principal when the principal is absent from the school (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990). Given that vice-principals are assigned to support principals, and because there is comparatively little research on the vice-principalship, we (the authors of the present article) conducted a study to examine how secondary principals' work intensification has influenced the secondary vice-principal role.

A study conducted in Ontario, Canada found that principals work an average of 58.7 hours per week, preoccupied by operational tasks, with only five hours spent on curriculum and instruction (Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2014). Another Ontario study found that principals' and vice-principals' workloads have increased as a result of Ministry of Education policies, emphasis on school improvement planning, and expectations from the school board (Leithwood et al., 2014). Work intensification has also been explored in other studies in Canada (e.g. Canadian Association of Principals, 2014; Cattonar et al., 2007; Ontario Principals' Council, 2017), in Australia (e.g. Cranston, Ehrich & Billot, 2003; Riley, 2014), and in the United States (e.g. Horng & Loeb, 2010; Sebastian, Camburn & Spillane, 2018). A consistent finding is the increased workload due to emphasis on instructional leadership, proliferation in and complexity of operational tasks, and the growing challenge to meet students' social, emotional, and academic needs.

Vice-principals are assigned to schools to support principals, based on student enrolment and school needs. Vice-principals are also known as 'assistant principals' in the United States and as 'deputy principals' in Australia (Cranston, Tromans & Reugebrink, 2004). With increased complexity of operational tasks and the added emphasis of instructional leadership, principals expect their vice-principals to share in the responsibilities of leading and managing the school (Celikten, 2001; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Owen-Fitzgerald, 2010; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno & Wang, 2017).

Thus far, scholars have conducted limited research on the vice-principal role (Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Celikten, 2001; Cranston, Tromans & Reugebrink, 2004; Glanz, 1994; Hausman et al., 2002; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017; Weller & Weller, 2002). The present article adds to the existing literature on the vice-principal role, which certain scholars have described as 'poorly defined' (Melton et al., 2012), and to the lack of research on how principals perceive the vice-principal role (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017; Marcoulides & Heck, 1993; Vladika, 2010). In this article, we present our findings on the connection between secondary principals' work intensification and the secondary vice-principal role. We interviewed secondary principals rather than secondary vice-principals because we wanted principals' unique perspective on a nuanced issue. In other words, we wanted to understand, on the micro level, how principals think their work intensification has impacted their vice-principals, and on the macro level, how principals' work intensification has impacted the vice-principal role. Our three research questions were:

1. What do secondary principals believe the secondary vice-principal role to be?
2. How do secondary principals determine the secondary vice-principal role?

3. According to secondary principals, what challenges do their vice-principals face?

Below, we present our literature review and conceptual framework.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

We have organised our literature review around three themes pertaining to our research questions: i) vice-principals' duties and responsibilities, ii) how principals determine the vice-principal role, and iii) challenges of the vice-principal role. Following our review of the existing literature, we describe our conceptual framework, based on the notions of 'role' and 'work'.

Vice-principals' duties and responsibilities

The vice-principal role is predominantly managerial and operational. Scholars have described vice-principals as 'chief disciplinarians' (Bartholomew et al., 2005), since student discipline is consistently the top, or a major, duty vice-principals perform (Austin & Brown, 1970; Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Celikten, 2001; Chan, Webb & Bowen, 2003; Cranston, Tromans & Reugebrink, 2004; Glanz, 1994; Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003; Hausman et al., 2002; Melton et al., 2012; Mertz, 2000; Militello et al., 2015; Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017; Scott, 2011; Sun, 2012; Weller & Weller, 2002). Vice-principals also manage conflict resolution between parents/students and staff, and perform other managerial and operational duties, such as completing paperwork and reports, responding to e-mail and phone messages, attending meetings, and addressing occupational health and safety concerns (Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Hausman et al., 2002; Scott, 2011). They are also responsible for being visible in the hallways, cafeteria, and school parking lot; serving on the emergency response team; organising and supervising school activities; and assuming the role of principal when the principal is away (Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Chan, Webb & Bowen, 2003; Grate, 2005; Hausman et al., 2002; Nieuwenhuizen, 2011).

Vice-principals are also expected to demonstrate instructional leadership. The Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF), a research-based policy document outlining the provision of public education in the province, describes instructional leadership as a combination of five leadership domains: i) setting directions, ii) building relationships and developing people, iii) developing the organisation to support desired practices, iv) improving the instructional program, and v) securing accountability (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). Instructional leadership has shifted from principals (and, as principals-in-training, vice-principals) *directly* influencing teaching and learning as 'an inspector of teacher competence' to *indirectly* influencing teaching and learning as a 'facilitator of teacher growth' (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 374). Two recent Australian studies on high-performing schools explored the impact of principals' (Drysdale, Gurr & Goode, 2016) and vice-principals' (Leaf & Odhiambo, 2017) use of instructional leadership on improving student learning and achievement. Although principals and vice-principals can still lead professional learning, instructional leadership has broadened to include facilitation of professional learning by building teacher leadership capacity and providing teachers with the time, support, resources, and opportunities necessary to collaborate (i.e. work

together towards a common goal) in professional learning communities (Fullan, 2014; Horng & Loeb, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008).

Principals determine the vice-principal role

Principals assign their vice-principals' duties. As such, vice-principals' duties are determined by their principals' specific needs, based on school context, and what their principals are willing to delegate (Armstrong, 2012; Kwan & Walker, 2012; Melton et al., 2012; Mertz, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002). Often, assigned duties are transferred identically from the outgoing vice-principal to the incoming vice-principal (Nieuwenhuizen, 2011). Further, vice-principals may be assigned duties that their principals do not want to perform (Chirichello, 2003). Vice-principals fulfill their responsibilities in isolation from other school administrators, and complete obligations with varying levels of autonomy based on each principal's leadership style (Mertz, 2000, 2006).

Challenges of the vice-principal role

According to the existing research, three of the challenges affecting the vice-principal role are: i) increased workload, ii) mandatory compliance to Ministry of Education policies, and iii) frequent changeover of school administrative teams.

Increased workload

Ontario vice-principals work an average of 54.5 hours per week (Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017). The vice-principal participants described their workload as intense, unmanageable, and unpredictable (Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017). As school administrators tend to work long hours during the school day, a concern of the vice-principal participants is the lack of taking breaks (Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017).

Compliance to Ministry of Education policies

In a 2014 study, Ontario secondary principals and vice-principals expressed concern with the number of new Ministry of Education policies the government expected them to implement and follow, as they believe these policies lacked connection (Leithwood et al., 2014). Compliance requires a high degree of responsibility and limited autonomy (Canadian Association of Principals, 2014; Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2014, 2017); according to Haiyan and Walker (2014), 'This lack of autonomy and concomitant dependence on the government regulates principals to a subordinate role to government officials rather than allowing them to be – and be seen as – independent professionals' (p. 69).

Frequent changeover of the school administrative team

School administrative transfers, which scholars have referred to as 'revolving-door syndrome' (Sarason, 1996) and described as 'passing presence in the school [rather] than a lasting influence on its development' (Fink & Brayman, 2006, p. 86), allow school administrators to grow professionally by working with different administrators, staff, and school communities (Beteille, Kalogrides & Loeb, 2012). As stated earlier, vice-principals' duties are assigned by the principal,

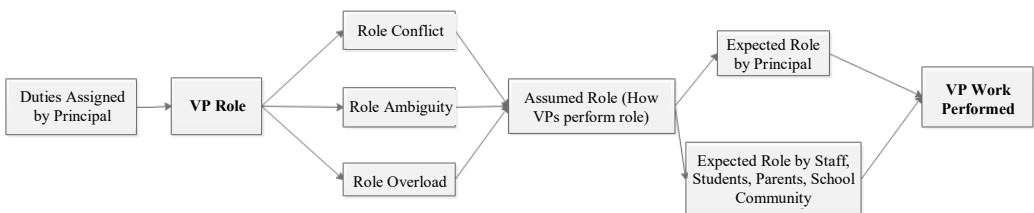
so working with a different principal may result in unfamiliar assigned duties (Armstrong, 2009; Mitchell, Armstrong & Hands, 2017). Because the incoming school administrators require time to build relationships, these opportunities for professional growth come at the expense of deep implementation of change initiatives, which can take between seven and 10 years to become fully realised (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Sarason, 1996).

Conceptual framework

Our conceptual framework is based on the notions of ‘role’ and ‘work’. We define ‘role’ as the expected behaviour in a position. The vice-principal role continues to be dominated by ‘duties assigned by the principal’ (Armstrong, 2009; Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nieuwenhuizen, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990), which can lead to role conflict (i.e. incompatible/contradictory expectations), role ambiguity (i.e. vague/incomplete expectations), and role overload (i.e. endless expectations) (Beycioglu, Ozer & Ugurlu, 2012; Getzels & Guba, 1957; Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003; Owens & Valesky, 2011). As people with the same role do not perform their duties in an identical manner (Owens & Valesky, 2011; Ryan, 2007), we cannot assume that vice-principals who have the same role perform the exact same work. In our study, we define ‘work’ as ‘the practices and actions in which principals engage to fulfill their responsibilities as school principals’ (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015, p. 7).

Our conceptual framework is summarised in Figure 1: As mentioned, the vice-principal role is defined as ‘duties assigned by the principal’ (Armstrong, 2009; Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nieuwenhuizen, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990). Without a standard and prescriptive duties list, ‘the vice-principal role’ leads to ‘the assumed role’ (i.e. how vice-principals perform their role) through role conflict (i.e. incompatible/contradictory expectations), role ambiguity (i.e. vague/incomplete expectations), and role overload (i.e. endless expectations) (Beycioglu, Ozer & Ugurlu, 2012; Getzels & Guba, 1957; Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003; Owens & Valesky, 2011). The actual work that vice-principals perform is based on the expectations of the principal, staff, students, parents, and the school community. In the next section, we discuss our methodology.

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: NOTIONS OF ROLE AND WORK



Methodology

As Creswell (2007) noted, 'Individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work ... These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views' (p. 20). In this study, we employed an interpretive qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how secondary principals perceive the secondary vice-principal role, and to explore how principals' work intensification has influenced the vice-principal role. Qualitative research centres on gathering descriptive – rich and detailed – data on the process, meaning, and understanding of the participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009).

We collected data using semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews involve both prepared, open questions (structured) as well as questions that arise during the interview (unstructured) (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012). Each participant was interviewed individually, asked the same set of prepared questions, and probed or asked follow-up questions to dig deeper and/or clarify participants' perspectives. Each interview was a one-time, 60- to 90-minute session.

A total of 13 secondary principals from four district school boards in Ontario, Canada participated in this exploratory study. The participants' experience in the principal role ranged from two to 16 years, came from both rural and urban settings, from both public and Catholic high schools, and had from one to three vice-principals working with them. There was a similar number of male and female participants. We sought secondary principals who had been in the role for at least one year and had been assigned at least one full-time vice-principal at their school; we did so because we wanted participants to speak reflectively on the influence of principals' work intensification on the secondary vice-principal role. We used snowball sampling, a specific type of purposeful sampling, to identify additional participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). In particular, recruitment occurred through our pilot secondary principal, who identified potential participants. We also used convenience sampling, as we asked our faculty of education colleagues to identify participants at different school boards. We gave each participant a pseudonym to protect their identity.

We continually analysed our data during the collection process. After each interview, we performed a 'vertical analysis', otherwise known as the first phase of the inductive approach: We transcribed the interview verbatim, conducted a two-stage data analysis of reading/memoing (i.e. write key words and phrases in the margin), and assigned codes (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Patton, 2015). We organised the data in a summary table for each research question, and shared the summaries with each participant as a part of 'member checking' (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015). After six interviews, we conducted a 'horizontal analysis', or the second phase of the inductive approach: We grouped and combined similar codes into themes, and introduced sub-themes (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Patton, 2015). For interviews seven to 11, we conducted both vertical and horizontal analyses to compare the codes from the current interview with the emerging themes from prior interviews, which may lead to revising existing themes (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2012; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014; Patton, 2015). We conducted

intensive data analysis after 11 interviews to solidify the themes and sub-themes. Two additional participants were interviewed using a totally deductive process to clarify previous participants' responses and to strengthen emerging themes (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We then organised themes and sub-themes into an intensive analysis chart, which consisted of participants' collective views with quotations (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). We reached data saturation after six interviews; however, we continued to interview as we sought varied experiences based on gender, urban/rural/suburban settings, public and Catholic systems, and school population. In the next section, we share our findings.

Findings

In this section, we share our findings on how secondary principals' work intensification has influenced their perceptions of the secondary vice-principal role, how they determine the vice-principal role, and what they perceive to be challenges their vice-principals face. We also compare our findings with existing literature.

Secondary principals' perspectives on the secondary vice-principal role

According to the majority of the secondary principals in this study, vice-principals spend a large part of the day managing the daily operations of the school. In the interviews, principals were asked how much of the day their vice-principals spend reacting and responding to student discipline, conflict, and attendance issues; these percentages were estimates and ranged from 20% to 100%. As Victor stated, 'You could go two weeks and just deal with discipline and with supporting teachers to understand how to support students related to discipline'. It should be noted that the discrepancy in these percentages largely has to do with the school site. For instance, all of the participants highlighted that the amount of time vice-principals spend on student discipline is dependent on the extent of students' needs and how often teachers require vice-principal support with student behaviour.

Large secondary schools tend to have multiple vice-principals with the duties distributed among the vice-principals. In a small secondary school, there may be only one principal and vice-principal; in this case, the vice-principal is assigned multiple duties – this speaks to the argument that vice-principal duties can look extremely different depending on the local school site. The participants explained that their vice-principals can proactively deter inappropriate student behaviour from occurring or escalating by being visible in the school. Steven elaborated:

When the bell goes, [the vice-principal] and I are in the hallways. During lunch, we have two lunch periods; our time is devoted in being with the kids. You spend 15 minutes in the yard and you save two hours in the afternoon.

Urgent matters that involve school safety take priority; as Olivia noted, if students are in conflict with other students or staff, her vice-principals resolve the conflict in a meeting to restore the damaged relationships.

All of the interviewed secondary principals also stated that their vice-principals spend time building relationships with students, staff, and parents. Specifically, Daniel shared, 'We are an

organization that supports people ... That's the majority of how [a vice-principal's] day is spent'. Denise emphasised that vice-principals' top three duties are proactively developing strong working relationships with students, staff, and parents: 'If you're not respected by any one of those groups you won't be effective. What creates respect is it goes back to trust, it goes back to a sense of fairness, consistency, and reasonableness'. Denise added that she believes vice-principals enhance their effectiveness by modelling positive, respectful, and supportive interactions.

Our finding that vice-principals' top or main duty is student discipline confirms findings from the existing literature, from Austin and Brown (1970) through to the present day (Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Celikten, 2001; Chan, Webb & Bowen, 2003; Cranston, Tromans & Reugebrink, 2004; Glanz, 1994; Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003; Hausman et al., 2002; Melton et al., 2012; Mertz, 2000; Militello et al., 2015; Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017; Scott, 2011; Sun, 2012; Weller & Weller, 2002). Moreover, our finding that the vice-principal role primarily involves supporting staff, students, and parents highlights the importance of 'building relationships and developing people', which the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) identifies as one of the five domains for effective instructional leadership practices (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013), and supports our assumption that the 'personal leadership resources' named in the OLF, especially social and psychological resources, are important when building trusting relationships.

All of the interviewed secondary principals also explained that, due to their work intensification, they expect their vice-principals to share in the instructional leadership responsibilities. Daniel stated that his vice-principals lead 'professional learning at staff meetings, department meetings, and on professional training days ... physically in front of the group directing activities, supporting activities, and sharing best practices'. Most of the secondary principals in this study preferred, however, that their vice-principals facilitate teacher leaders delivering professional learning, as doing so builds teacher capacity and increases the sustainability of change initiatives. Some of the participants also articulated that their secondary vice-principals can demonstrate instructional leadership by conducting classroom walkthroughs to monitor the implementation of professional learning and following up with teachers by providing descriptive feedback and asking questions about their instructional or assessment practices. Some of the participants also articulated that vice-principals can demonstrate instructional leadership when formally appraising their teachers.

Given that vice-principals spend a large part of their day performing operational tasks, the majority of the interviewed secondary principals felt that operational duties can and should be performed through an instructional lens. For instance, the participants shared how student discipline, conflict resolution, and attendance can be made instructional by changing student behaviour and supporting staff with instructional and assessment practices. Some of the participants also explained that creating a school's master timetable can be instructional. Specifically, Marla provided an example of how her vice-principal strategically creates the school master timetable to promote student success:

Research has indicated when students are physically active, when their heart rate achieves a certain level for 20 uninterrupted minutes ... they are better

presented with curriculum that their success rate improves. Things like timetabling physical education Period 1 are particularly good for students at the applied level. Timetabling some of the core subjects like science, math, English right after can help improve student success.

Some of the principals also described how their vice-principals can make preparing for provincial large-scale assessments instructional. Olivia shared that her vice-principals lead and facilitate professional learning on research-based instructional and assessment strategies: ‘Lead analyzers of data ... will help us set goals around achievement ... help us plan professional learning for our staff’, which informs professional practice. This finding – that principals expect their vice-principals to be instructional leaders – also aligns with the existing literature.

Due to increased emphasis on accountability and student achievement, vice-principals support their principals with a large number of complex operational and instructional duties (Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003; Militello et al., 2015; Scott, 2011; Searby, Browne-Ferrigno & Wang, 2017). Hallinger and Murphy (2012) suggested thinking of instructional leadership as ‘leadership for learning’, as everything principals (and vice-principals) do, including operational duties, can be viewed as supporting student learning and achievement. The OLF identified ‘developing the organization to support desired practices’ and ‘improving the instructional program’ as two of the five domains for effective instructional leadership, which emphasises empowering staff to lead professional learning, supporting teachers with resources to implement the school improvement plan, monitoring student learning, and providing instructional support to teachers (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013).

Overall, all of the secondary principals in the study described their vice-principals as both operational managers and instructional leaders. As a result of work intensification, however, the participants believe vice-principals continue to predominantly spend their days on operations management – at the expense of instructional leadership. Nevertheless, the majority of the secondary principals interviewed felt that vice-principals can perform operational duties through an instructional lens to indirectly support student learning and achievement. In the next section, we describe how the secondary principals in this study determine the secondary vice-principal role within the context of their own work intensification.

Secondary principals’ perspectives on determining the vice-principal role

All of the secondary principals in our study reported that their school administrative team collaboratively determines the vice-principal duties. The team discusses who will be the lead for each duty, with each administrator articulating their interests and desired areas of growth. For example, Melanie shared that her team determines the vice-principal’s duties based on strengths and interests, professional growth, and which duties are non-negotiable. The participants also indicated that they finalise each vice-principal’s portfolio to ensure that both operational and instructional duties are represented, as there are now too many operational and instructional duties for a principal to fulfill alone. All of the participants also indicated that they consider workload fluctuation during various times of the school year to ensure vice-principals do not perform several time-consuming tasks simultaneously. For example, Victor explained that a vice-

principal should not be responsible for both timetabling and graduation given that they occur concurrently from March to June and both are very time-consuming.

Our finding that secondary principals take a collaborative approach when assigning their vice-principals' duties contradicts existing research. All participants stated that they finalise the duties list to ensure there are varied operational and instructional duties and comparable workload. Research from the past 15 years has found that principals assign their vice-principals' duties based on school needs and what the principal is willing to delegate (Armstrong, 2012; Kwan & Walker, 2012; Melton et al., 2012; Mertz, 2006; Weller & Weller, 2002), that assigned duties are transferred identically from the outgoing vice-principal to incoming vice-principal (Nieuwenhuizen, 2011), and that vice-principals are assigned duties that the principal does not want to perform (Chirichello, 2003). An explanation for the discrepancy between the literature and our study is the emergence of distributive leadership. The majority of the secondary principals in this study stated that they share and delegate tasks traditionally performed by principals (such as instructional leadership) to their vice-principal(s), given that the number of school operations and instructional duties have increased. Principals also use distributive leadership to ensure that vice-principals and teacher leaders can support teachers in implementing professional learning in classrooms to improve student learning and achievement (Castle & Mitchell, 2001; Kaplan & Owings, 1999).

The majority of the participating secondary principals also highlighted that, because of the increasing complexity of their duties and responsibilities, there is fluidity and overlap between the principal and vice-principal roles at their schools. Gavin shared, 'When we're working with a difficult student, or a difficult parent, or a difficult staff member, it's wise not to approach those particular tasks by oneself, so there is overlap'. However, a few of the secondary principals in the study emphasised that they ultimately remain in charge because they delegate the tasks, not the responsibility.

Moreover, our finding that vice-principals perform their duties in collaboration with other administrators is also inconsistent with the existing literature (Mertz, 2000, 2006); this inconsistency signals the contemporary influence of principals' work intensification. When the principal and vice-principal roles are not clearly distinguishable – especially as there is not a standard list of vice-principal duties due to school context and social, political, and legal factors (Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006) – tensions can occur: Vice-principals can experience role conflict (i.e. incompatible/contradictory expectations) and role ambiguity (i.e. vague/incomplete expectations) (Beycioglu, Ozer & Ugurlu, 2012; Getzels & Guba, 1957; Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003; Owens & Valesky, 2011). These tensions can also occur when secondary vice-principals work with a different principal (i.e. transferred to another high school or new incoming principal), as principals' leadership styles, approaches, and expectations vary – there is no standardisation to how principals view the vice-principal role.

Overall, all of the secondary principals who participated in this study assign their vice-principals' duties collaboratively based on interests and areas of growth. The principals ensure that both operational and instructional duties are represented, and they consider the time of school year when assigning time-consuming tasks. Due to the increased complexity of the work, administrative responsibilities are performed collaboratively, resulting in similarities between the

principal and vice-principal roles; these similarities can lead to role conflict and role ambiguity. As the vice-principal role is determined by the principal, role conflict and ambiguity can be further exacerbated by a change in principal. In the next section, we describe how our participants perceived the challenges they believe their vice-principals face.

Secondary principals' perspectives on their vice-principals' challenges

The secondary principals identified two challenges they think their vice-principals face: i) constant changeover of the school administrative team, and ii) increased workload.

Constant changeover

Some of the secondary principals in our study stated that a challenge for both them and their vice-principals is the constant changeover of school administrators. As Victor noted, frequent administrative changes mean that school administrators need to spend time developing relationships and trust. Wayne remarked, 'Should we not be looking for more continuity in terms of leadership teams in schools so that it can start to have more prolonged and deeper effect for improvement and change?' Vice-principals, who tend to move more often than principals, can work toward gaining confidence in their role at that particular school site only to find themselves transferred shortly afterwards. The transfer may require them to perform different duties that require different skill sets and knowledge that the vice-principal may not have previously prioritised. The change in work site and duties can reduce confidence and increase stress – until they have mastered these new skills, gained new understanding, and have become familiar with the leadership style, approach, and expectations of the new principal.

Concern about the constant changeover of school administrators is consistent with the existing literature. Frequent changeover in an administrative team, referred to as 'revolving-door syndrome' (Sarason, 1996), can be disruptive to the school, as lasting change can take seven to 10 years (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Sarason, 1996). When school administrators frequently change, vice-principals must spend time developing relationships with their new administrative team and school community, and fulfill their assigned duties to the satisfaction of the new principal; despite the potential this change has for administrators' professional growth, it comes at the cost of long-term school initiatives.

Increased workload

All of the secondary principals explicitly discussed the influence of work intensification: Work intensification has increased the volume and complexity of principals' tasks, which means they delegate more tasks to their vice-principals. The participants spoke of the numerous Ministry of Education policies to implement, the increased responsibilities and demands, and decreased autonomy to influence school needs. Wayne reflected on how the secondary vice-principal role has intensified since the beginning of the 21st century: 'There are more operational pieces that have been added ... in addition to greater emphasis and expectations for instructional leadership ... things have not been taken off the plate'. Geoff expressed that vice-principals' work is never complete: 'You could work 24 hours a day if you could at this job ... are you ever

really done? I would say probably not'. Geoff felt that vice-principals need to realise that they are making a difference even though they lack the time to completely fulfill their responsibilities.

All of the participants felt that their own work intensification has influenced their vice-principals' workload, given that their vice-principals struggle to prioritise operational and instructional duties. Olivia explained: 'It's the urgent versus the important. Planning for achievement in mathematics is important. However, if there is a student in a fist fight and is injured that is an urgent operational matter that takes over'. The majority of the principals also expressed that, with an increased workload, they believe vice-principals struggle to find balance in their professional and personal lives. For instance, Kyle explained that, because the hours are long and vice-principals cannot leave work until they have fulfilled urgent responsibilities, work often takes time away from vice-principals' personal lives.

Our finding that increased workload is influencing the vice-principal role is supported by the existing literature. Vice-principals have difficulty prioritising operational and instructional duties: Operational tasks take time away from instructional leadership, and performing instructional tasks minimises time that can be spent on the daily operations and management of the school (Castle & Mitchell, 2001; Colwell 2015). Vice-principals are also having difficulty balancing their professional and personal lives (Cattonar et al., 2007; Cranston, Tromans & Reugebrink, 2004; Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017). In particular, Pollock, Wang and Hauseman (2017) found that only 15.6% of Ontario vice-principals indicated having work-life balance 'often' or 'all of the time', whereas 12.5% indicated having work-life balance 'never', 30.4% have it 'rarely', and 41.5% have it 'sometimes'.

In summary, some of the secondary principals in this study felt their vice-principals are challenged by the constant change of school administrators, which places focus on building relationships rather than implementing long-term change initiatives. Also, numerous Ministry of Education policies have contributed to increased workloads, as a result of emphasis on student achievement – The Ontario Leadership Framework has identified 'securing accountability' as a domain of effective instructional leadership practices (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). The majority of the principals also believe their vice-principals experience difficulty with work-life balance due to the increased workload and complexity of tasks. Having described the findings of this exploratory study, the next section discusses three tensions we believe are occurring as a result of work intensification.

Discussion

We identified three tensions that emerged as a result of secondary principals' work intensification, based on the interviewed principals' perspectives on the secondary vice-principal role: i) vice-principals experience role conflict and role ambiguity, ii) vice-principals find it challenging to prioritise their operational and instructional duties, and iii) vice-principals struggle to achieve work-life balance.

Tension one: Vice-principal role conflict and role ambiguity

Vice-principals can experience role ambiguity (i.e. vague/incomplete expectations) (Beycioglu, Ozer & Ugurlu, 2012; Getzels & Guba, 1957; Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003; Mitchell, Armstrong & Hands, 2017; Owens & Valesky, 2011) due to varying expectations from the principal, and the absence of a standard list of vice-principal duties (Armstrong, 2009; Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Nieuwenhuizen, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1990). As vice-principals are transferred to another school every few years, their duties vary based on the expectations of the new principal. Vice-principals experience role ambiguity due to their changing role, as there is no standardisation of how principals view the vice-principal role, which has resulted in the vice-principal role being described as *poorly defined* (Melton et al., 2012).

Role conflict (i.e. incompatible/contradictory expectations) (Beycioglu, Ozer & Ugurlu, 2012; Getzels & Guba, 1957; Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003; Owens & Valesky, 2011) can occur when vice-principals spend the entire school day on student discipline, attendance, and conflict resolution, but their principals also expect them to lead and facilitate professional learning. The Ontario Leadership Framework has identified ‘improving the instructional program’ as effective instructional leadership practice (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013), but the secondary principals in this study felt the vice-principal role is dominated by operational and managerial duties.

Tension two: Secondary vice-principals have trouble prioritising their operational and instructional duties

The second tension involves prioritisation: The interviewed secondary principals felt their vice-principals have difficulty prioritising their operational and instructional duties within the context of work intensification. School administrators need to spend their days supporting teachers’ instructional and assessment practices to improve student learning and achievement (Fullan, 2014; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). They also need to be strong operational managers who can create the safe and supportive working conditions required to support student learning and achievement (Colwell, 2015; Fullan, 2014; Horng & Loeb, 2010). Vice-principals want to demonstrate instructional leadership by leading and facilitating professional learning because it positively influences their level of job satisfaction (Cattonar et al., 2007; Cranston, Tromans & Reugebrink, 2004; Kaplan & Owings, 1999; Kwan, 2011; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Melton et al., 2012; Militello et al., 2015; Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017), however work intensification is making it difficult for them to prioritise instructional leadership. For instance, Pollock, Wang and Hauseman (2017) found that Ontario vice-principals spend 2.7 hours (out of an average 54.5 hours work week) on curriculum and instructional leadership, with 88.1% of the vice-principals surveyed wanting to spend more time on instructional leadership.

Tension three: Vice-principals struggle for work–life balance

As the secondary principals in this study revealed, their vice-principals work long hours. This is consistent with recent research, as vice-principals work an average of 54.5 hours a week in

Ontario (Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017). As stated earlier, vice-principals struggle to achieve work–life balance; for instance, Pollock, Wang and Hauseman (2017) found that 12.5% of vice-principals ‘never’ and 30.4% ‘rarely’ balance their work and personal lives. As scholars have argued, vice-principals feel frustrated, pressured, and inadequate in their role as a result of work intensification (Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012; Cattonar et al., 2007; Cranston, Tromans & Reugebrink, 2004; Harris, Muijs & Crawford, 2003; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017).

One concern associated with increased workload is the sustainability of the secondary vice-principal position. The increased complexity and volume of the vice-principal role has discouraged teachers from pursuing school administrative positions (Leithwood et al., 2014). Aspiring teachers would likely be disheartened to discover that 25.4% of the surveyed Ontario vice-principals were dissatisfied and 24.5% regretted becoming vice-principals (Pollock, Wang & Hauseman, 2017).

Implications

Our study has implications for professional practice, educational policy, and research in educational leadership. We discuss these implications below.

Professional practice

Current secondary principals and secondary vice-principals can reflect on how secondary principals’ work intensification has influenced the secondary vice-principal role. Aspiring secondary vice-principals can learn about the changing nature of the role, which can help them choose whether or not to pursue the vice-principalship.

We recommend that vice-principals continue to develop their skills as operational and instructional leaders. Specific to school operations, we suggest that vice-principals enhance their skills in conflict resolution using restorative approaches, develop emotional intelligence and effective questioning skills, and learn how to support students who experience mental health challenges. Specific to instructional leadership, we suggest that vice-principals enhance their ability to lead professional learning, learn how to help teacher leaders deliver the professional learning, strengthen their ability to support teachers to meet the needs of all students, and learn how to gather valid evidence during classroom walkthroughs to monitor student learning and achievement.

In the context of work intensification, we recommend that vice-principals strive for work–life balance and take care of their own well-being. Vice-principals will burn out if they believe or are led to believe they should be accessible 24-7. They need to learn how to prioritise their duties and manage their time, with the knowledge that their work is never complete.

A recommendation to school boards is to question the constant changeover of school administrators. We appreciate that principals and vice-principals need to work in different school communities. However, the frequent changeover results in time being spent to develop the team at the expense of deeper implementation of school improvement. Also, we recommend that

principals provide input into their vice-principal needs and possible vice-principal names as school administrative teams need to collaborate and function as a team.

Educational policy

Our study found that, through secondary principals' perspectives, the secondary vice-principals' role is primarily reactive: they deal with urgent student, staff, and parent issues throughout the day with the added responsibility of performing instructional leadership. We believe that the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) should emphasise operations management, as instructional leadership cannot occur without creating and maintaining a safe and caring learning environment. The intent of the OLF is to provide school leaders with effective instructional leadership practices, yet principals and vice-principals do not use the OLF to guide their daily work because the policy document does not resonate with their reactive operational duties; rather, the OLF is used for promotion and appraisal purposes (McCarthy, 2016; Riveros, Verret & Wei, 2016). It is important to note, at the time of writing this article, the OLF is being revised.

From a policy perspective, our study highlights the need to revisit the number of secondary vice-principals assigned to schools. Adding more vice-principals into the system would allow them to disperse the tasks among more people, increase the time they devote to leading and facilitating professional learning, and lighten their workload so they could better balance their professional and personal lives. Moreover, adding administrative periods for aspiring administrators to work in the main office will free up time for vice-principals to help with instructional leadership. We also concur with the Ontario Principals' Council (2017) that the number of new policies need to be manageable for school administrators to implement.

We also suggest, based on the perspectives of the secondary principals interviewed in our study, that vice-principal role conflict and role ambiguity be addressed at the policy level. We believe the Education Act needs to define the vice-principal role as more than duties assigned by the principal. Although a one-size-fits-all duties list cannot reasonably accommodate individual school contexts and needs, we suggest a broad duties list (not exhaustive) that school administrative teams can select from that are applicable to their school context.

Research in educational leadership

This exploratory study adds to the growing literature on the changing nature of the secondary vice-principal role. The secondary principals indicated that both their role and the vice-principal role are growing increasingly complex as a result of work intensification. A potential outcome of continued research is a more concerted effort on the part of academics, practitioners, and policy-makers to address work-life balance for school administrators. A future research opportunity beyond the scope of this study would be to interview secondary vice-principals about their perspectives on how work intensification and their principals' expectations of them have impacted their role.

Conclusion

This exploratory study investigated how secondary principals understand the secondary vice-principal role. As work intensification has made both the principal and vice-principal roles increasingly complex, we sought to understand how the two roles are related. Using an interpretive qualitative study approach, 13 secondary principals from four school boards in Ontario, Canada participated in one-time semi-structured interviews. Our findings indicate that secondary principals expect their vice-principals to perform both operational and instructional tasks, although vice-principals' school days remain dominated by operational duties related to supporting students and staff. School administrative teams collaboratively determine vice-principals' duties based on strengths, interests, and areas of growth. We identified three challenges, based on the secondary principals' perspectives, that vice-principals face as a result of principals' work intensification: i) they experience role conflict and role ambiguity, ii) they find it difficult to prioritise operational and instructional duties, and iii) they find it challenging to balance their professional and personal lives. Our recommendation includes adding more secondary vice-principals into the system so they can achieve better work–life balance and have increased time for instructional leadership to lead and facilitate professional learning. Another recommendation is to revisit the number of Ministry of Education initiatives, so change is implementable and sustainable. A third recommendation is to define the vice-principal role more than just 'duties as assigned by the principal' so vice-principals do not experience role conflict and ambiguity. We hope our study encourages school boards and schools, Ministries of Education, and the educational leadership community to discuss how to better support principals and vice-principals in their increasingly complex and demanding role, and how to help them better achieve work–life balance in the context of work intensification.

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