

*“We teach and lead from where we are as a human being. Therefore it is essential to know who we are.”*  
(Celestine<sup>1</sup>)

## Leaders on the line

### Principals Explore the Emotions of School Leadership

by Brenda Beatty



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It was only a matter of time before someone was going to break the silence on the emotions of leadership (Beatty, 2000a). Now it is becoming increasingly clear that leadership sustainability and principal well-being depend upon it. In this article I reflect upon principal experiences of their work as they were discussed for seven months in a private, anonymous, asynchronous online forum. Participants used pseudonyms throughout the process. Located on a university server, this method supported principals from six countries – England, Ireland, Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia – to commune with each other for the express purpose of considering the emotions of leadership. While aspects of their discussions have been reported elsewhere (eg. Beatty, 2002; 2005), the main focus here is on leaders’ images of themselves and their work. Issues of gender emerged clearly, and as women were the most highly participative in this part of the discussion, the achievement of some interesting insights into women’s ways of leading became possible.

#### Discovering Emotional Common Ground

From various places around the world, be they urban, rural, large, small, public, private, high or low SES contexts, many of the 25 online principals remarked upon the emotional comparability of their work. Early in the conversation, a male principal from Canada shared that he was *surprised at how much of the emotional experiences outlined are similar to those I know* (Manson). Another male from Ireland said, *I can identify with much of what I read here* (Bogman); from Canada, PWA seemed to put her finger on what others were trying to say. They echoed her notion that *It seems like we are all in the same building, experiencing the same sorts of things... across the world we all have the same kinds of difficulties and*

1 Participant in the study.

*problems – some to different degrees. I like to see that the same things make us tick as well. Is that what keeps us going as leaders?* (TGA). By sharing them with each other, they had discovered something new: the emotional realities of principals are surprisingly similar.

## Emotional Labour and The self under siege

From their use of imagery it is clear that the leaders' self is under siege. Principals soldier on tirelessly managing incredible complexities under enormous time pressure. Additionally the notion of separateness, expressed as *One of them and yet alone* provided insight into the vulnerability of the professional self that has little support, being so little known by others. Indeed they positioned the emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) of outwardly masking and generating emotions that are distinct from what they were actually feeling (as they were attending to everyone else's needs with *every ounce of their energy and every minute of their time*) to be synonymous with leadership itself! Sometimes, they wished people would not see them merely as a 'position'. As one principal remarked, too often people *forget that I'm a person too*. Some realised deep down that they *can't be all things to all people all the time*, but from their descriptions it would seem that they were certainly trying.

A recurring theme of isolation and loneliness was paired with a critical insulation factor, achieved through much appreciated support from family and administrative partners at school. While these were depicted as strong functional relationships and critical for their survival, this deep reflection with professional partners was a definite departure. *Whilst I have colleagues with whom I can discuss, freely and honestly, inevitably we operate a shorthand style of thinking, because of shared perceptions*. In the forum they could talk in depth about some of their otherwise hidden feelings. Looking back a year later, curiously one principal mused, *Outlining issues, thoughts and emotions more full for 'strangers' made me consider more deeply* (Harriet).

The online forum, far from the culture of isolation and even loneliness to which these leaders were accustomed, was intensely personal and even intimate. Many found that the 'virtual world' was *more powerful than the real version* as for the first time they

were truly *feeling known*. For these school principals, the personal self had been *buried* under other roles and expectations and emotional honesty had been a *luxury* they simply could not afford, not even with themselves. Online however, this was beginning to change as they discovered the deeply transformational power of sharing their stories with peers.

## Exploring images of self

Among the most revealing segments of our seven-month online conversation was a discussion of metaphors that leaders chose to represent their professional selves. The use of image and metaphor in speech and self-description is evocative and emotionally revealing of attitudes and understandings (Beck, 2000; Gabriel, 1996). They shape and reflect 'mindscapes' (Sergiovanni, 2000) and professional knowledge landscapes (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995a; 1995b) of situated selves (Denzin, 1984) that are inherently emotional (Lupton, 1998). In this discussion of emotional experiences, they were not only connecting with each other, but also with themselves.

As the online facilitator I would often prompt the discussion and probe for more depth. Sometimes, however, the leaders would set their own agenda, seeking ways to know each other better. One day, from England, 'Nan Toms' suggested her online colleagues try to use a metaphor to describe themselves in their work. PWA, replied she felt often like the 'Energiser Bunny'. An icon in Canadian advertising, the little pink drum-banging character drops in and marches cheerfully through other ads and television programming representing the image of unfailing energy and reliability in batteries. In this metaphor the principal may be imagined as the back beat of the organisation, embodying the steady rhythm of constant demands on everyone in the parade. The leader is *not hiding anything but moving ahead* expending and sacrificing her/his seemingly boundless energy. Australian, Firststart, had *never heard of the energiser bunny* and in the context of sharing some of her images for her own leadership, asked for clarification. For herself, she couldn't initially, *...think of one metaphor. There may be an element of front porch, but if I'm going to be honest, something to do with whirlwinds and frenetic activity may be closer to the truth*. (Firststart)

Preferring to imagine herself as a provider of solace, and her office as a calm and quiet place to relax with others as if they were sitting out on her front porch, she had to admit that her busyness often kept others at a distance.

*It's not a good thing because staff often preface their questions or comments with 'I know you're really busy but...'. I hope I don't give the impression I'm too busy for anyone – as I feel being able to give people time is one of the most important things I can do.*

Accepting the necessity of overwork, her inner desire to slow down and contemplate in a leisurely way had had to remain a dream. Consistent with others, who could only imagine what it might be like to do what they really desired, Firststart's actual work life was a dichotomous combination of imagined desire and chaotic actuality. Still she could envision the way she would like things to be if she could only yield to her inner yearnings. By way of further explanation, PWA offered the following:

*Well, Firststart, although you may not have heard about the Energiser Bunny, through your description you too are the Energiser Bunny. You just keep on going and going... I describe myself as the Energiser Bunny because just as one project is finishing, another is beginning and I'm attempting to juggle everything in between. One idea triggers another and then something is dropped in your lap. Problems arise and you must deal with them, no time to put them aside but meet them head on. Seemingly tireless you proceed to do all the things you do at once. And keep on going and showing up for school the next day! I too experience the whirlwinds, sometimes killer storms but I still see my office as the place to gather. For many it is comfort (kids and grownups) and discussion is always encouraged. Personally, my front porch is comfort, so a little of that must be with me at work. (PWA)*

The emphasis in PWA's imagery above is on support, endurance and perseverance. For many of these leaders who spoke in glowing terms of their love of the job, the satisfactions and storms in their lives were not incompatible. Arguably, they may be one and the same, as principals experience themselves as the

protectors, defenders and maintainers of the whole.

While other leaders' descriptions of themselves in their work resonated with the role of pace setter, even so, it would seem they felt anything but powerful and in control. While they longed to realise their vision for their schools, most of these leaders were constantly adjusting their schedules to others' demands, making their work far more a reactive than a proactive endeavour. Yet there was pleasure in all of this too.

*I love most of what I do, especially the incredible range of issues/people/problems that come from every direction every day (so often from left field!). (Firststart)*

## All the Responsibility and Not Enough Power

From the United States, 'Sunshine' offered:

*It seems I am busier with every year. Maybe because we continue to add things and never delete anything. For the most part, I seem to thrive on this continuous treadmill. I work long hours but I really try to plan around the schedule for family things and stick with it. With my children grown, I have time to devote extra hours, but I have to admit I would never have been able to do this when they were younger. Now, I think it does fill some empty need maybe? I like to be busy. I do crave some quiet time alone and I don't get enough of that.*

Sunshine acknowledges the combination of thriving and suffering on a continuous treadmill and suggests there is a deeper level to her satisfaction. As she says, maybe it is a need. But when one's work becomes a need, it can be a sign of workaholism (Killingier, 1991).

A 'storying' of the figurative language the leaders used to depict their lives provides a vision of them as a collectivity fully engaged in the emotional headlines associated with the fast pace of this work. Making decisions on the run about wide ranging issues from the mundane to the most urgent, was the normal fare, all the while endeavouring to stay calm and in control. These leaders were *fluctuating* emotionally in an endless *balancing act*, *juggling* for time, while trying to remember that *real power draws on harmony with creation*. Examining other figurative language in these

data, I found a pattern of hyper-activity coupled with a kind of victimisation as leaders had things *land in their lap*, were put *through the wringer*, felt *weak, vulnerable and out of control, battered* and accountable to *too many audiences* who were judging their every move as things were *running amok*. Yet they had to remain *calm and creative* with *hoisted chin*, struggling to maintain a *clear head* all the while retaining a *hard neck and thick skin* to withstand the *knocks*. With *eyes crossed and sore* from entering marks on computerised reports, the following morning one would *bump chests* with an angry student, and another feel her *blood boil* when a teacher asked for more time to complete report card comments. They would *navigate through rough spots*, often *getting it wrong* and lament their imperfections as they sorted through the *rotten apples* and got accused of being an *ambitious* and a *career-chasing bitch*. They appreciated their *perfect partners* at home while remaining *on our toes* at work, trying to accomplish a *nice levelling* with *shared power*. Sometimes they would feel themselves *going hot and cold, insides churning and feeling sick, absolutely terrified* as a threatening and violent parent would invade the office. Learning to *face anger with calm* they would sigh with relief when their deputies supported them, making them *feel like the cavalry had arrived*.

The emotional demands of having to seem powerful and certain while often feeling anything but, were pervasive. In all it was *not a good scene for any dictator*. The *responsibility without ultimate power* could be *deadening* as they regularly *felt small and vulnerable (totally without power)*. They were funnelling policy as *somewhat of a gatekeeper* who *implements power to manage*, while trying to *ensure they don't drown in the policy shift*. Like parents and other stakeholders they often found themselves *jockeying for a piece of a smaller pie*. Caught in the squeeze of various policies, such as one which prevented them from removing violent children from their schools, they regularly felt *powerless rather than powerful* and even *powerless to educate*. Faced with the fact that *the school community is not rich enough to raise money or poor enough to receive extra funds*, one leader said simply, *I could scream!*

Despite this keen sense of a lack of power per se, they were concerned about the influence they could have on others through their style of leadership. Recollections of the *demoralisation* of staff caused by

the *bastard leader* whose *motivations* reflected core *stupidity and aggrandisement need*, one hoped she had not become an *I'll show you leader*. Working for such a *bully*, any one of whom could be described as a *power motivated fool* who *inspires revolution or systematic destruction of philosophy in practice*, they knew they had been exposed to the risk of the *modelling* influence of these coercive leadership styles.

## Gendered selves and the balancing act: 'Captain Kirk and The good mother'

From these leaders' metaphors of themselves a pattern of paired processes emerged. They characterised themselves as captains, mothers, deciders, navigators, protectors, empathisers, encouragers and gardeners who were pushing people to grow. Their imagery evoked notions of androgyny (Bern, Martyna & Watson, 1976; Regan & Brooks, 1995). For instance, in the image of 'Kirk and the good mother', 'Taylor Ding' offered:

*The motherly part empathetically pushes people toward development and independence providing support by encouraging comments and observations. The Captain Kirk part makes flash decisions and adjustments that help us navigate the rough spots and pitfalls. Confident, creative and calm.*

Like those of her online colleagues, Taylor Ding's description suggests her value of both influence and support in leadership (Greenfield, 1999). Echoing Regan and Brooks' (1995) double helix of dynamically vacillating alternations between 'masculine' and 'feminine' modalities, leaders used gendered constructions for distinct and distinguishable elements of their work. In early studies Bern and her colleagues (1976) discovered a number of associations with highly androgynous personalities. Regardless of gender, people whose personalities were characterised by high levels of both receptivity and instrumentality reported high levels of achievement, satisfaction and happiness.

## The Leader as Part of the Whole

Characterisations these leaders offered of themselves relative to their whole school communities, were

consistent with Sergiovanni's (1992) explorations of moral leadership and community building that reflect a preference for notions of generative – *Gemeinschaft* – embedded openness to transformativity (Tonnies, 1957). Reflected in these women leaders' self-descriptions, there was a sense of connectedness to the ever-changing whole.

#### **From Ireland, TGA:**

Male conductor – inspiring, co-ordinating and enjoying the interdependent whole but always *separate*.

#### **From the United States, Taylor Ding:**

*Captain Kirk*, the flash decision maker, navigator and trouble shooter, *the good mother* supporting and encouraging people to move out of their comfort zones.

#### **From Canada, PWA:**

The cute robotic relentless bunny with the back beat, supporting by embodying the rhythm of the band; one who also values the peaceful porch for contemplation with others.

#### **From New Zealand, Celestine:**

The *female (not black widow) spider* who generates her contribution to the whole – like the others – *from within*.

#### **From England, Harriet:**

The *drama queen* with an open door, benevolent co-ordinator and despot – still benevolent as well as the *Fat Controller* (from *Thomas the Tank Engine*).

#### **From England, Nan Toms:**

Chameleon, gardener, conductor and captain.

These leaders were managing the either/or dichotomy by trying to be both. Perhaps theirs were among the 'new stories' that Davies has advocated. In considering the binary pairs, male/female, mind/body, reason/emotion, light/darkness, fact/fantasy (Davies, 1989: 41), she suggests:

*Our new stories must rework the element of these dualisms, such that both sides are equally valued, their meaning is no longer part of any oppositional binary form of thought, and both become necessary elements of each person's subjectivity.* (Davies, 1989: 67)

For the women in this study, at the outset of our

discussion, there seemed to be little apparent dissonance between their leadership self-image as commanders and that of supporters. Like single parents they had learned to be both. In deference to their former definitions of professionalism, however, they had remained highly controlled and consistently emotionally hidden from others. By default, this constant state of hiddenness and emotional self-denial had compromised the quality of support they had been able to offer. Online they were discovering how to revisit this primary purpose in their leadership.

### **Emergence of the Relational Role of Emotions**

While they were in one sense stalwartly supportive of their schools at all times, being so carefully masked, there was a certain inability to feel emotionally connected or empathic toward particular individuals. Online they examined what I call the paradox of emotion and leadership, the dichotomy between the way leaders and teachers believe they must seem, and the ways, as highly functional fully dimensional people, they need to be. Emotional control is one thing. Emotional numbness is quite another (Beatty, 2000b). The powerful discovery of their emotional common ground was helping them transcend distance and traditional disconnection. Collaborative reflection through the lens of emotion *allows for some thoughts to rise to the surface that I usually don't reveal or even know they're there*. Increased self-awareness was joined by a fuller appreciation of emotional ways of knowing. Correspondingly, their deepened emotional epistemologies (Boler, 1999; Beatty 2002) were improving their leadership practice.

*It has made me reflect more on my practice as a leader. My effects on other people... I am far more reflective as a leader now as a result of this conversation than I was before having this kind of access to so many other colleagues. Headship is such a lonely position at times; it is also so busy that you don't necessarily have time to talk to colleagues down the road, but this makes that in depth discussion accessible and possible away from the work place giving you time to reflect on issues. I realise now I need to give myself more breathing space before resolving issues, to stop jumping in and dealing with things in a 'fire-fighting' way. I'm thinking much more about the emotional*

*aspects of leadership – mainly the effects of my decisions on other people working with me. Before doing this I tended to think of headship in the UK in isolation. This has widened my perspective not just of leadership, but of education in general. It has been so valuable to be in conversation with other heads/principals in other parts of the world and to realise that their day-to-day issues are no different to my own. The context may be slightly different and the education system operated slightly differently but at the end of the day we are all dealing with young people's lives and our effects on them – that's the most awesome and powerful part of leadership.*

The more they considered their emotions online together, the more they discovered the potential synergy between school and individual levels of support. In other words, they were finding that they could be more robustly reasoned by considering their own and others' emotions; more emotionally connected by examining 'reasoning' for its inner logic, which they began to appreciate inevitably involved a wide range of emotional underpinnings. Reflecting upon occasions when their own emotions had disturbed professional relationships through misplaced anger, they began to challenge their earlier assumptions that revealing their own feelings would make them seem *weak, vulnerable or out of control*. Applying their discoveries, they turned to the possibility of repair and new growth in relationships with staff at school and it was working!

### The need for emotional support

In reflecting together about the process of masking themselves from others, their actual emotions were becoming more accessible as they began to experience integrative ways of seeing and being. Contrary to the 'masculinist' notion of leadership as the highly managed projection of certainty and pseudo-objectivity, online both women and men were beginning to discover and validate their inner emotional realities. Taumata noted however, *women probably need other women in a similar school who understand the issues*. PWA (9) agreed:

*I would agree that emotional support for women in leadership positions is usually sought from their female peers. As a female*

*administrator, there are one or two very close colleagues I share my thoughts, experiences and problems with. That sounding board is required from someone who experiences the emotions as I do. That is not to say I do not seek guidance and advice from my male colleagues but truthfully, I am selective.*

Yet as Blackmore (1996) discovered, for a group of women principals in Australia, the much appreciated support they had enjoyed from disclosing their worries and fears to their local female principal peers had become impossible under a new competitive enrolment funding formula. They felt they could no longer afford to expose their weaknesses for fear of losing the market edge in the management of their respective school's image. In that setting a culture of silence had replaced a culture of candour and mutual support. The women principals online noted that: *Men in our region network differently through their clubs. As a mum, I just don't have social time to spend like that*. Here we see evidence of isolation, intensified by gendered differences in their social interactions. Comparing the kind of domestic support male principals might enjoy from their wives, from New Zealand, Anna noted: *Some principals' wives lay out their husbands' clothes each day for them – did you know that?* (Anna). Firststart said, *What I need is a 'wife'!* Enrolment competition policies in combination with traditions of social practice may create a double disadvantage for women leaders.

### Struggles with Authority: Curses and Blessings

Images of authority as inherently masculine were part of the emotional picture, with the female principals stating their keen awareness of an onus upon them to make up for their non-masculinity somehow. While a female principal suggested that *gender is less important than heart*, it soon became clear that being a woman can be complicated and involved when you're also the principal.

*I often feel the gender difference in my job as a principal. Of course there are exceptions, but they confirm the rule as often as not. Parents are more likely to accept from a male principal, what they question from a female. Class placements are a classic example.*

*...I am amazed at what lengths some 'disappointed' parents will go to in getting their demands met. Professional considerations go right out the door. I have felt at those times that if I was one of the 'strong males' then they wouldn't be so stropic. They might even be pleased at having the chance to have their considerations taken into account in the first place. (Taumata)*

Gendered patterns of social interaction can play havoc with the female principal's ability to exude authority while trying to involve and empower. When empowerment of others feels like erosion of one's own authority, especially if it is uniquely difficult to achieve in the first place, it may take even more courage for female principals to practise distributed leadership. However Taylor Ding saw benefits to her gendered challenge despite her frustrations at the inherent inequity:

*I agree with some of the points Taumata makes. People accept the authority of males easier than females (and big males easier than small males). I don't know why... I used to think it was the threat implied by size or strength. Still, as a female it is something to be aware of. I have responded by being very collaborative and now that I have a little more gray hair (symbol of authority) I can get away with being more directive. I have had to find ways to make my decisions more palatable to everyone (not just the men) so I do a lot of lobbying that my male colleagues do not have to fool with, or so they think. I believe my need to convince has been helpful in making good decisions and in keeping teachers happy! So, the disadvantage is an advantage. Men around me could raise their voices, ask people to accept their ideas without proof, and stare angry fathers down where I had to negotiate, use skills! So, now I have honed my skills and my reputation for follow-through precedes me. It has been a hard road, but worth it! (Taylor Ding)*

According to Gilligan (1993) and Belenky et al. (1986), women prefer to connect and develop relationships, making meaning together with others. Taumata had observed a pattern consistent with this notion:

*The females are more likely to voice their strong*

*disapproval. Yet the same women trust you to deal fairly and confidentially with them. I cannot imagine those same women pressing aggressively with some of my male colleagues. I try to put myself in their shoes, and appreciate that this is the cost of empowerment. You can't give people full say over their working lives 90% of the time and expect them to accept 10% of handed-down decisions. Or can you? (Taumata)*

Notably, Libby experienced a distinct advantage in being female. When the violent parent who had *flattened* her predecessor came in, instead of attacking her physically he was willing to listen as she took charge with words and *sorted his child* and got him *signed up for a computer course*. Not only parents and teachers but general staff too, retain outdated images of gender and leadership; for instance an admin assistant, who was stuck with the image of *masculine* as synonymous with *administrator*, had been inadvertently routing all calls to the Vice Principal through to the male VP without realising she was doing this. Women principals in this group lived with the perception that parents too see authority residing in the image of masculinity. A problematic male teacher was seen as a *messiah* by parents who lobbied, *not wanting him to leave*. Libby added, *Oh to be a tall male and command an air of respect*. Yet at the same time, one female leader wanted to *feel like a dainty little thing* suggesting the possibility that *self-image is a larger factor in day-to-day success* for female educational administrators.

Overall the female principals said that to accomplish their work, they had had to be less directive and more collaborative, more relational, engaged in full consultation and sometimes even manipulative. Consistent with Gilligan's (1993) views on women's ways of knowing they sought connection and suffered for its lack in their working lives. In contrast these female principals noticed that the authority of males was accepted with less question and conversation, in effect, with less effort. For these women, there was a lot of lobbying which their male colleagues don't have to do. *Parents are quick to confront and male teachers get away with being confrontational right back when they raise their voices and stare down angry fathers*. Instead, women have to *negotiate, use skills, a hard road but worth it*. In addition to the other pressures they had to endure, the female principals

were battling the impression that their gender was not preferred either by the parents or the teachers. As Shakeshaft (1989) cautions, female administrators have the burden of being leaders in a world of which they do not feel a part. Typically, until their transformational experience in the online forum, emotional self-awareness on the job had presented dangerous depths that were better left unexplored.

## I love my job!

*I get enormous satisfaction from being involved in education, and being in a position where I can influence things for students... it's an intergenerational gift. (Anna)*

The privilege of being able to *make a difference to their lives* created an *immense sense of pride and joy and privilege to be able to do that, and to the working lives of all the people that work in our place too* (Nan Toms); *like Nan, I get the biggest buzz from making a difference* (Harriet). Anna further elaborated:

*I can in all sincerity say my life has never been happier or more satisfying and fulfilling... Being a principal who teaches increases my enjoyment in the job. The day I begin to feel gloomy about this school will be the day for me to think seriously about getting out of the way. Optimism is the greatest gift we can pass on to the next generation, and words alone don't do it of course.*

Harriet put it simply, *However frustrating some parts of some days can be, I've never yet felt I wanted to do anything else*, while Deevine said:

*I truly enjoy my work. I cannot think of any other job I'd rather do. I cannot think of any other place I would have the opportunity to be so many things to so many people. There is great joy and pleasure in seeing a child succeed. Yes there is no greater pleasure than seeing a teacher succeed.*

## The transformational power of emotionally safe places

*Each of the schools I have loved and left I have felt that I will never have the same feelings about the next school. I've felt there will never*

*be the same quality of friendships; the same relationships with students. There has been a real sense of loss. Each time it has taken about a year to 'let go' the previous school and start getting emotionally involved in the life of the new one. The year in between has been a type of recharging time, without the intense emotional involvement there is time to reflect on what has been left behind, and what has replaced it. (Firststart)*

Speaking in terms of love and loss, Firststart described the leaving of her school as one might describe the leaving of an intimate. The breaking of such a powerful bond takes a long time to heal, and the transference of love onto the next object, the new school, a matter of first becoming less emotionally involved with the one gone by. As another leader said about a school she had left, *I would have died for that school. A deep burning desire to be in that place at that time* (Deevine). Clearly, part of the wrench that these leaders feel suggests that they are leaving behind a critical part of themselves. But there is an emotional cost to such intensity. As David Loader (1997, p. 147) has noted, *Criticisms of my school were taken personally, as criticisms of me. With this mind set it became very hard to have a private life... My personal failure was that I had no sense of myself as separate from the institution.*

*Through all this one attempts to maintain composure, sift through the information to identify the immediate needs and basically juggle the rest. At all times maintaining composure and not saying what you would like to say. (PWA)*

## Concluding Remarks

The emotionally silenced self of the school principal might not be so serious if connecting with self and others were not so important for personal survival, complex levels of thinking (Belenky et al., 1986; Baxter Magolda, 1992) and collaborative culture building (Beatty & Brew, 2004; Beatty, 2005). Teachers and leaders need respect, care and professional support (Beatty, forthcoming). Going through the motions of respect is not enough. Engrossment with the other is essential to achieve a genuine ethic of care (Noddings, 1984). Without a commitment to full dimensionality, it is easy to objectify self and others –



reconstructing them as positions and not persons. Emotional understanding (Denzin, 1984) depends upon emotional connectedness with self (Lupton, 1998). Both are critical for adaptation, healthy survival (Greenberg & Paivio, 1997), and attunement to the subtleties of subjectivity and power, ethics and morality (Margolis, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1992; 2005). Organisational change requires the safety to speak of the things we feel most strongly (Fineman, 1996). Successful community building is the secret to success in schools and it all starts with the notion of emotion.

Leaders deal with highly charged situations every day. The pressures of the job add up to an emotional load that is always present. Preparedness for the emotional work of the principalship is foundational to successful schools (Beatty & Brew, 2004), the ones with healthy resilient relationships that respond bravely and creatively to inevitable conflicts. Conflict, when responded to transformatively by empowering and recognising people's actual inner experiences (Bush & Folger, 2005; Goodhardt et al., 2005; Fenton, 2005) can be healthy and renewing. Correspondingly, leaders who engender a sense of safety and trust have higher student outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). School communities built upon respect, care and emotional support for all, including the principal, are the basis of a new beginning.

*I've been thinking too about why I've enjoyed working (though it doesn't feel like work) in this forum. I think it's because of what Nan has said. ...what we give is, increasingly as time has gone by, straight from the heart. All I know is that however difficult this is in terms of time some weeks, I don't want it to stop. I've plenty of professional colleagues and friends, emotional and social supports, but I don't anywhere else get the chance to do this kind of discussion, over extended topics and really 'listen' to the conversations. (Harriet)*

The experience of work that doesn't feel like work is

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what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) calls 'flow'. This zone is experienced when there is confluence among personal needs, professional interests and organisational goals and you don't have to be in an online forum to experience this (Beatty, 2000c). Through their open sharing with each other, these leaders' reflective processes were deepening. Emotional self-awareness fostered a greater sense of entitlement to actual feelings – of uncertainty and even fear and correspondingly the feeling that there was more room and more time in their lives. With more appreciation for their own emotional meaning making processes they began to engage in validating and actively respecting others' inner worlds. Becoming aware of their own emotions was the critical first step; becoming curious about others' emotions followed. From this, leading in the creation of safe spaces of connectedness that could support more 'frankness' was beginning to happen.

It is critical that we go beyond empathising, and imagining what others might be feeling, and into emotionally grounded explicitly acknowledging dialogues where we empower ourselves by declaring our vulnerability and learn from others just what is going on for them. In this way we can create new relational realities together.

Throughout their time together online, these leaders rediscovered something they had all but lost in the line of duty, a clear sense of entitlement to an integrated fully dimensional self. School leaders need more than the usually efficient team-working relationships they have with their deputies and assistant principals. In the face of the isolation and emotional labour inherent in principals' work, they need the regular opportunity to re-integrate with peers, so that they don't literally and figuratively dis-integrate. The expectations upon today's schools demands transformational leadership and nothing less and you just can't accomplish this evolutionary leap without facing your feelings first.

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