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The Time is Ripe for Leadership Development: New Brunswick Vice-Principals Strive and Thrive Through Saturday Morning Participatory Action Research Seminars

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Résumé de l'article

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THE TIME IS RIPE FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: NEW BRUNSWICK VICE-PRINCIPALS STRIVE AND THRIVE THROUGH SATURDAY MORNING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH SEMINARS

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a participatory action research project that was delivered on Saturday mornings to vice-principals (VPs) in two Anglophone school districts in the province of New Brunswick, Canada, in 2022 and 2023. The project was set up as an invitational five-part seminar series that was grounded in educational theory and leadership standards in Atlantic Canada. Forty-three VPs participated in the seminars offering the researcher/seminar leaders a deep look into their complex working lives. Data was gathered through a World Café activity, seminar observations, pre- and post- surveys, and exit interviews. Several themes were constructed by the research team and given back to the VPs for their consideration and reflection. Final seminars focused on topics and strategies that supported the VPs in their leadership development.

KEY WORDS: Educational leadership; New Brunswick; Participatory Action Research (PAR); Professional learning; Vice principals

INTRODUCTION

The mere mention of a vice-principal (VP) may conjure images of the frustrated and strict disciplinarian Richard Vernon in John Hughes' 1985 film *The Breakfast Club*, or the firm champion of students, like the workhorse VP Yvonne Teasley in the TV show *Beverly Hills*

90210 (Star, 1990). Modern entertainment tropes even cast VPs as bumbling fools such as Richard Creeley in the popular Canadian sitcom *Mr. D*, created by Gerry Dee and Michael Volpe (2012-2018). Comedic or hostile characterizations of VPs such as these undermine the actual work VPs perform, impacting how VPs may be viewed by the public. Whatever the perception people have about them, VPs are considered to be secondary school leaders walking the halls to establish order, working under the direction of a principal, and often without acknowledgement (Hamm, 2017; Hamm et al., 2023).

Although we know that most schools have VPs or the equivalent, principals remain the primary focus of educational researchers and policymakers in school leadership and administration studies in the post-pandemic era (Falloon, et al., 2024; Hayes & Derrington, 2023). Yet, effective leadership in Canadian schools is a multi-dimensional endeavor and requires many leaders at the ground level such as teachers, students, support staff, and community members. Leadership within any organization can never be a one person administrative show. Caring and thoughtful leadership teams working collaboratively throughout the organization are much more effective when they are encouraged to lead by the principal and their administration team (Deal & Peterson, 2016; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Passionate principals who attempt to lead a school by themselves are potentially inviting burnout into their lives that can ultimately leave them scarred (Horwood et al., 2021).

In a post-pandemic world, principals need to lean on their VPs and teacher leaders for support as much as the people they lead lean on them. For VPs, their relationships with their principals and teacher colleagues often puts them in challenging situations where they must navigate their educational landscape with caution. This reality is especially apparent if their principal is invested in the fallacy of the one-human-being administrative show and requires that every school decision to be run through them. The distinctive and challenging journey of VPs inspired our leadership and research team to create and implement a five-part leadership development seminar series for VPs in the province of New Brunswick. We wanted to learn more about the everyday experiences of VPs and what their relationships were like with the colleagues they work with, especially with their principal.

COMPARING THE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

At the time of writing, searching 'vice principal' (VP) on Google Scholar yielded 780,000 online publications. However, after about 100 entries, the academic literature became thin, giving way to online commentaries, blogs, and contemporary portraits about VPs, which were often shrouded in criticism. In most cases, these sources grouped VPs alongside principals, which our research team was trying to avoid in our literature search as grouping the two jobs together would not enable us to examine and understand the VP position fully.

Comparatively, when searching the term 'principal' on Google Scholar, 4,690,000 online publications are suggested, including academic and additional documentation. Despite the stark contrast in the amount of available literature, our research team holds the position that the role of the vice-principal is as important as that of the principal. For instance, in our earlier research, we found that VPs are the ones who deal directly with conflicts arising in

interactions with students, teachers, and parents in their school more often than principals (Hamm et al, 2023). The themes of complexity and conflict were common through much of the research literature that guided our study (Celik, 2013; Karpinski, 2008; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Examining educational leadership policy documents from across Canada, only British Columbia explicitly states that its leadership standards are for both principals and vice-principals (BCPVPA Leadership Standards Review Committee, 2019). Manitoba mentions VPs in their introduction stating, "Research continues to highlight the substantial impact that school principals and vice-principals have on the culture of a school and the role of school leaders in creating engaging learning environments that support the learning and well-being of all students" (Government of Manitoba, 2024, p. 1). The report goes on to conflate the positions under the term 'school leaders' without clear role definition for either position. Ontario's report notes, "research suggests that leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on student outcomes. Principals and vice-principals play a critical role as school leaders to achieve this impact" (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2013, p. 4).

An argument can be put forward that, implicit in each school leadership report across Canada, VPs are a big part of the leadership equation in each province and territory. We believe that this should be explicitly stated, as it is in the B.C. leadership standards. If the vice-principal position is an administrative passageway toward the principalship (and possibly into district leadership and political leadership) as Armstrong (2009) argues, should it not make sense that educational research scholarship and school leadership policy development be focused on these individuals who are working hard to develop their leadership skill sets so they are better prepared for the day when they will potentially be leading a school in a principal role? It is with this pressing question that our research team found passion and purpose in working with New Brunswick VPs in a participatory action research project in 2022 and 2023 to uncover, discover, and share widely about their professional roles and service in their schools.

THE BACK STORY

In 2016, several vice-principals were part of a large single site case study in New Brunswick (Hamm et al., 2017). This study began with an afternoon focus group composed of the VPs, their principal, and the researchers. All the VPs in the focus group were invited to be part of a future individual interview. Only one VP volunteered. He shared a story filled with leadership wisdom that outlined the complexity of his role and how he strived daily to manage his work and family life – a balance that he, admittedly, had not yet achieved. He offered advice garnered from his own experience that would be helpful for all VPs to hear. Things like, *"You've gotta take time for yourself … when you go home, don't try to get everything done because you get to the point where it burns you out … Do the best you can with what you have … Do not get wound up about stuff that you cannot control … Pace yourself. It's a marathon, not a sprint."*

The most profound thing about the interaction between the researchers and the VP was that he invited us back for a second interview where he could continue to share his experiences.

It was an unplanned event that we took as a research gift. The second conversation was just as illuminating as the first one and sent us down an unexpected research trajectory with vice-principals in New Brunswick resulting in two additional studies focused solely on VPs and their work lives (Hamm, 2017; Hamm et al., 2023). Some of the research questions that were posed in both studies focused on mentoring, including what type of mentoring do VPs require and who is best positioned to provide that mentoring? The learning from both studies motivated our research team to create the five-part seminar series, embedded within a critical participatory action research framework (Fine & Torre, 2006; Kemmis, 2008; Tuck, 2009).

LITERATURE PAINTS A BLURRY PICTURE FOR VPS

New Brunswick is a province that is consistently experiencing rapid change that directly impacts the individual and collective realities of VPs. For example, there has been a dramatic increase in newcomers in schools, changes in policy, proposed changes to French Immersion, a high school renewal, and multiple pilots for pedagogical changes. Given these new social realities, VP roles are constantly changing as educational contexts, schools, district policies, government mandates, and students continuously evolve. Researchers argue that VPs are most responsible in their schools for dealing with students, teachers, and parents and often struggle to adjust to their new professional identity (Carpenter et al., 2017; Oplatka & Tamir, 2009). VPs have also been described as the forgotten or lost leaders in their schools (Cranston, et al., 2004; Cohen & Schechter, 2019) and yet they are usually the first ones to handle some of the most difficult challenges confronting educators (Erol & Karsantik, 2021; Wang, 2022). They must strive to become skilled communicators as they often serve as mediators between the principal and the classroom teachers and para-professional staff such as teaching assistants, school counsellors. The VP position can be considered a tight-rope circus act as it is fraught with conflict and ambiguity; educators who ambitiously aspire to lead their schools as VPs must be mindful of the dilemmas and challenges they will encounter in their career trajectories.

Mentoring and Professional Development

Often, VPs are left alone to handle serious critical incidents in their schools, like incidents of violence (Kerry, 2005). In-depth professional development and mentoring for VPs can help disrupt the focus strictly on administrative and managerial tasks and help them become better instructional leaders, communicators, and negotiators for their schools. VPs require the support of caring mentors as they navigate and work through their daily tasks and challenges (Daresh, 2016; Hartnett et al.; Searby, 2014). Robinson et al. (2009) argue that the best chance for VPs to expand their competencies lies in creating a mentoring/coaching culture in their schools. Providing support and mentoring, for individuals working toward VP positions, can facilitate effective succession planning and disrupt the "cycle of leadership failure" in schools (Peters-Hawkins et al., 2017, p. 49).

Leadership Preparation Programs

Bravender and Staub (2018) report how interactive, problem-based simulations in leadership preparation programs and seminars helped aspiring leaders gain more confidence and competence while working with trusted mentors. Simulation through

creative and constructive roleplay scenarios can challenge participants to freely work through dilemmas with their mentors in a safe environment. One model of mentoring and professional development was proposed by Hayes and Burkett (2021), who found that a partnership between a school district and a leadership program embedded within a university supported the leadership development of VPs and assistant principals (AP) who strived to become school principals. The program implemented a structure where they received ongoing support, mentoring, and networking from university educators and district leaders, which helped them achieve their professional goals and build their leadership capacities further. There is not an abundance of research that indicates that partnerships exist between universities and second-chair leadership development (James, 2017). "Because of this void, individuals assuming the position of assistant principal (or vice principal) do so with little formal training specifically focused on their position" (Mercer, 2016, p. 89).

METHODOLOGY: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (PAR)
Inviting Vice Principals Through District Channels
In September 2022, an invitational poster was emailed to the three Directors of Schools, a leadership position within each region, of a large school district in New Brunswick (referred to as ASD-A). The Director of Schools distributed it to the VPs through their district listserv. A similar poster was sent to the leaders of another NB school district (referred to as ASD-B) in late November 2022. An invitational leadership approach (Novak, 2009) was adopted in the project primarily due to the reality of the seminars being held on Saturday mornings. A core principle embedded within the invitational leadership philosophy is that "it is built on the idea that educating in and for a democratic society ought to be based on a doing-with rather than a doing-to relationship" (Novak, 2009, p. 56). Therefore, VPs were not required by their senior district leaders or their principals to attend the seminars; the decision to participate in the project was theirs alone. In preparation, our team completed a University Ethics Review of our project. This was to safeguard the participating VPs anonymity and consider ways we could ensure their confidentiality, as they would be sharing their challenges and creating strategies collaboratively with their colleagues as they moved forward.

Immediately after the invitation was sent, VPs began to respond. Several VPs committed to all the seminars, while others asked whether they could miss one due to previous commitments. To accommodate for this, we informed them that it was important for them to attend the first seminar in October (ASD-A) and January (ASD-B) to meet their colleagues from around their district and to contribute to collective and positive culture-building that would help us grow the strengths of each VP team. 22 VPs attended the first seminar in ASD-A in October, and 18 VPs from ASD-B attended their first seminar in January. Over the course of the workshops there was some attrition. There were also VPs who joined later, which our team welcomed. In all, 43 VPs from the two districts participated in the project.

The seminar series was aligned with the seven dimensions from the Atlantic Provinces Leadership Standards of Practice for School-based Administrators (Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training, 2020; See Figure 1). Additionally, one more dimension

was adopted from the Alberta Education Leadership Quality Standards that focused on Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (Alberta Education Leadership Quality Standards, 2023). By grounding the seminars in leadership dimensions that were developed by scholars and practitioners based on current leadership theories, our team believed VP participants would gain a deeper understanding of their leadership strengths and aspects of their growth that could be focussed on during our time together.
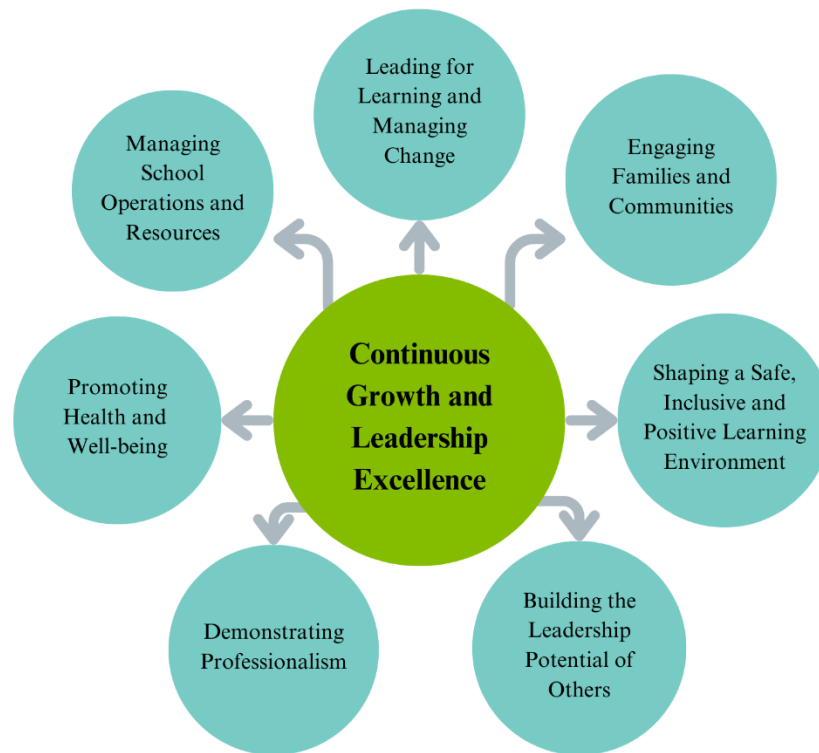

Figure 1. The Seven Dimensions of Atlantic Provinces Standards of Practice for School-based Administrators

Participatory Action Research (PAR) aligns with the interpretive constructivist theoretical position (Bush, 2003). Epistemologically, this dual model encourages researchers to centre the participants in their study, while working alongside them in meaningful activities, such as in leadership seminars or workshops. Our team believed it was crucial to be embedded within the interpretive tradition to learn about the diverse social worlds of the VPs who participated in the project to unearth the "multiple realities interacting in a school environment," (Hamm et al., 2020, p. 16). van der Walt (2020) crystalizes this constructivist idea when he explains that,

> Things appear differently to the same perceiver at different times and under different conditions, and differently to different perceivers, so that no appearance can be regarded as definitely representing how anything really is. Some people differ from one another, they experience and judge differently. People's different sensory modalities – vision, hearing, touch, taste, smell – and the complexity of

the things the different interpretivists take themselves to perceive, make it impossible to claim that any interpreter can arrive at definite knowledge about anything. (p. 62)

Accepting this philosophical stance, our team implemented the World Café participant engagement activity to facilitate the VPs working together with their colleagues in their first seminar to share and describe the challenges they were confronting in their schools and some of the strategies they used to work through them. The VPs were asked the following research questions: *What are the challenges that VPs are confronting in 2022-2023 in their schools and communities? What are strategies you are using to address your challenges and complexities?*

Once the World Café 'Rules of Engagement' were explained, each of the five tables of VPs collaborated to identify and think critically about their school leadership experiences. Each Café rotation was scheduled to be approximately seven (7) minutes long. One VP in each group recorded key points of the conversation. The recorders at each table were reminded, throughout each rotation, to capture everything they could in way of text, symbols, utterances, and creative storying. The collective group responses charted by the recorder on poster-sized paper were the raw data.

After the first round, the recorder remained at their table while everyone else in the group moved to another table to work with new colleagues. With adequate numbers, we encouraged each member at each table to find a new group of colleagues to work with in the second rotation. The second rotation was critical as the recorder shared the first rotation data. Each member could then add commentary to stretch the ideas to respond deeply to the research questions. By considering the recorded data, new ideas emerged from the participants which further expanded the data content.

Project facilitators listened to the conversations and participated in them when opportunities arose for their contribution. In doing so, leaders and participants were sealing their dialogic relationships (Freire, 1970; Shields 2004) through sharing descriptions and understandings of the complexities in their schools. Witnessing the abundant energy in the room, the facilitators invited the group into a third rotation with some additional guidelines for them to consider. The VPs were asked to read and reflect on the gathered data, identify key ideas and patterns in the data by circling or underlining them, and to add their analysis notes. Following this rotation, the groups shared what they had constructed through the World Café as well as what they had learned about themselves, their schools, and their colleagues. Figure 2 provides an example of the data gathered during one World Café.
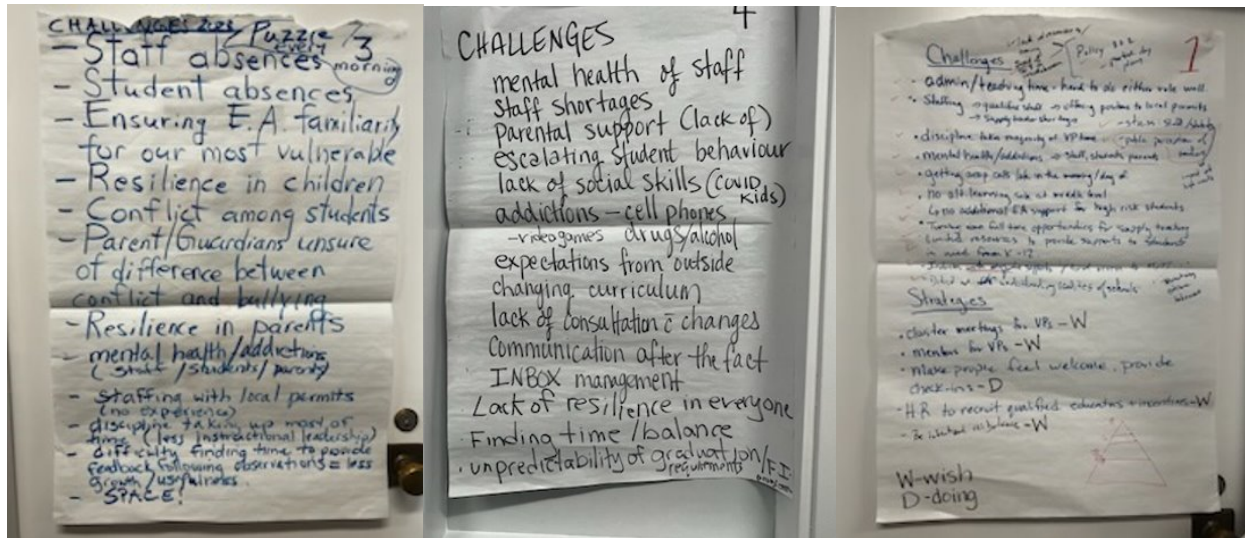
Figure 2. World Café Data

This activity is directly associated to the epistemological positions that many researchers follow to ground their PAR protocols within their projects (Bradbury et al., 2008; Mackewn, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). For instance, the World Café was not a passive activity; it was intentionally designed within the safely constructed learning and sharing context that the project leaders framed and implemented. It was not research on people but rather research with people. In the World Café,

> …everyone is engaged in the design and management of the inquiry; everyone gets into the experience and action that is being explored; everyone is involved in making sense and drawing conclusions; thus, everyone involved can take initiative and exert influence on the process. (Heron & Reason, 2008, p. 366)

The project leaders analyzed the collected data. Themes were arrived at through constant comparative analysis and were returned for member-checking to the second seminar's VP participants for further discussion, elaboration, and clarification. Constant comparative analysis "is an iterative and inductive process of reducing the data through constant recoding" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Fram, 2013, p. 3). Hence, data analysis is never a one-way interpretative process. As van der Walt (2020) argues,

> Interpretivism entails a two-directional activity, all the way up, until we reach a point where the researcher feels informed enough (on the basis of his or her interpretation of the data) to construct their own (new) picture or story based on the research data, and all the way down to the researcher's "last stand", as it were, to a final position or stance provided by some tradition, traditions or so-called bedrock beliefs. (p. 62)

The final stance moment arrives when the research team has reached a consensus of what they have found or what they believe they have discovered as new knowledge within the social environment or unit of study under examination. At this point in the process, the

research team constructs and stations their ideas into agreed-upon and often creative descriptive thematic social realities. This new knowledge is tested by giving it back to the social actors who work in the organization(s) under study. In the research realm, this is called member-checking (Creswell, 2003), and it is a key step in confirming the social realities within a given time and space operating within a human social culture that exists "in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) world [where] there are no prescriptions and no right answers (good for all times and places) – simply an engaged messiness" (Shields, 2018, 11).

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

It was evident that the social realities VPs had described in their first seminars required additional investigation that transcended the typical educational professional development environment. Given what our team had learned, our project began taking a new and unanticipated path, a common characteristic of action research (Patthey & Thomas-Spiegel, 2013). Rather than simply building stand-alone seminars aligned with the Atlantic Leadership Standards, as was first proposed, our team pivoted to create tailor-made workshops for the VPs based on the World Café data and the discussions that ensued. The seminars remained aligned with the Atlantic Leadership standards but were intentionally focused on the contexts and specific needs identified by the VPs. Figure 3 shares ASD-A's first seminar data sorted into eight categories.

Lack of Training	Lack of Whole Pic	Top-down	Change of role (Competing demands)
• Tools training • Roles-blurring • Working with parents • French • Time with Principal, leading • How to for the role • Teaching outside areas	• Missing information • Expectations to solve • Tools and process • Communication/ lack of transparency	• Department changes • New initiatives • Tech/laptops • FI/Core classes • PIF • District Monthly requirement • Schedule conflicts	• Principal changes • From teacher to VP • Covering vacancies, lack of supply teachers • Covering principal • Lack of trained teachers • Admin turnover
Priorities	**Student**	**Positive mental health**	**Culture**
• Teaching feels second fiddle • No time for leadership • No time for proactive • No time for team communication • Staff all access • Paperwork/ emails • No time for coaching/ walkthroughs/ mentoring • Planning, report cards • "We need to eat too"	• Composition of classes • Newcomers/ EAL • Large classes • Behaviour issues • vaping • Cell phones/ social media/ bullying • Fighting/ pack mentality	• Wellbeing/ health, stress, trauma • Balance • Workload expectations • Volume of needs/ how to meet	• Lack of trust: physical, time • Scope of role

Figure 3. Challenges in the VP role in ASD-A

From these categories, four primary thematic social realities that ASD-A VPs confronted in their jobs were constructed.

1. VPs were struggling with setting personal and organizational priorities,
2. VPs felt the absence of time and preparedness that would allow them to respond to the immediate and longer-term situational events more effectively.
3. VPs sensed they were caught in a constant contextual organizational flux, making their roles and lives blurry.
4. VPs felt they were often in the dark due to the absence of important information being shared with them.

These findings were presented to the ASD-A VPs (See Figure 4) in the second seminar. At this time, we asked them to reflect on the team's analysis and findings to provide additional clarity for our own and mutual understandings of the social realities in their schools that were affecting their leadership roles and abilities to perform under the pressures they described. Once the themes were established, the work began to address them.

The lack of agency in setting PRIORITIES, these include personal and organizational priorities.	The absence of time and PREPAREDNESS for immediate and long term situations/ events that will occur within the parameters of the role.
Being in a constant contextual state of organizational FLUX and blurriness.	The absences of sharing necessary information to provide CLARITY to effectively fulfill the role.

Figure 4. Thematic Social Realities for VP Participants in ASD-A

The VP seminar series began in ASD-B in January of 2023, which gave our team some time to understand the nature of how the action research was proceeding in ASD-A. The NB VP project was now being delivered simultaneously in two districts. When the geographical nature of both districts was considered and put into interpretive play, community and regional cultural factors that impact the work and performance of VPs became illuminating. This was one of the insights gleaned from having two data sets to learn with.

As in ASD-A, the first activity conducted in ASD-B was the World Café. Using the same guidelines and procedures as described above, we delivered the findings during the second seminar on January 28, 2023, to ASD-B VPs (See Figure 5).
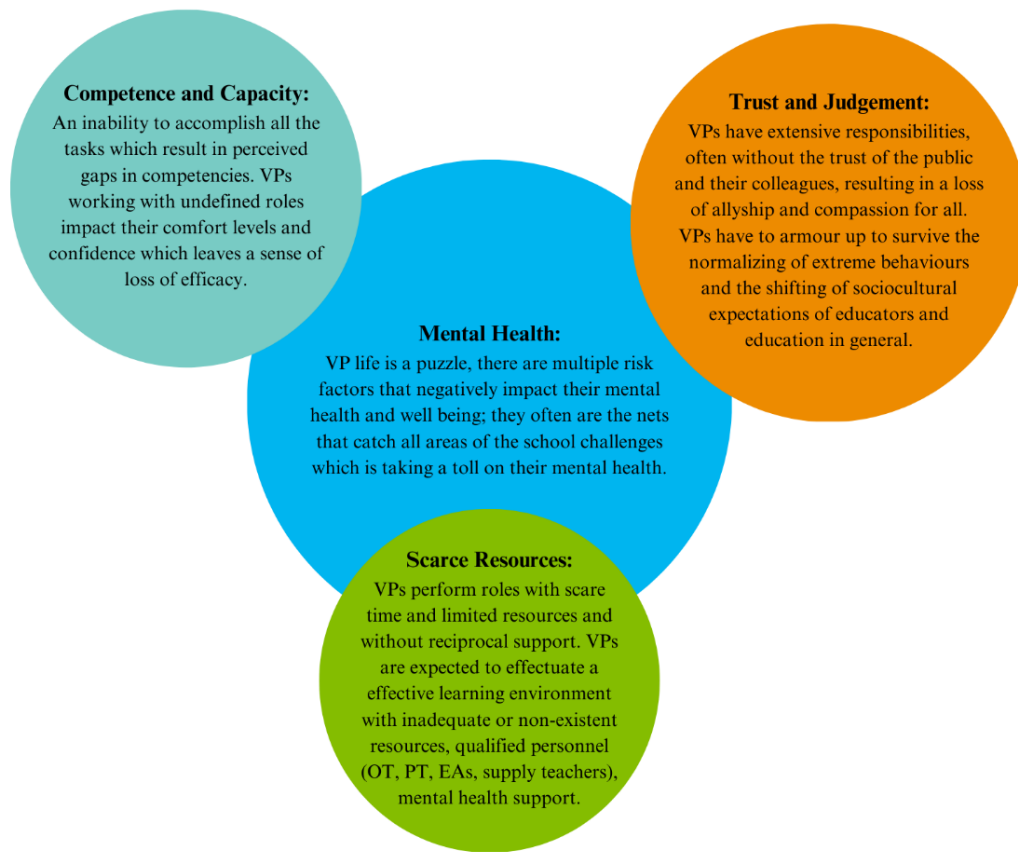
Competence and Capacity:
An inability to accomplish all the tasks which result in perceived gaps in competencies. VPs working with undefined roles impact their comfort levels and confidence which leaves a sense of loss of efficacy.

Trust and Judgement:
VPs have extensive responsibilities, often without the trust of the public and their colleagues, resulting in a loss of allyship and compassion for all. VPs have to armour up to survive the normalizing of extreme behaviours and the shifting of sociocultural expectations of educators and education in general.

Mental Health:
VP life is a puzzle, there are multiple risk factors that negatively impact their mental health and well being; they often are the nets that catch all areas of the school challenges which is taking a toll on their mental health.

Scarce Resources:
VPs perform roles with scare time and limited resources and without reciprocal support. VPs are expected to effectuate a effective learning environment with inadequate or non-existent resources, qualified personnel (OT, PT, EAs, supply teachers), mental health support.

Figure 5. Thematic Social Realities of ASD-B Vice principals – January 28, 2023

This set of social realities was more defined than when our team presented to the ASD-A VPs earlier in the project. One interpretation might be that we enjoyed two seminars with ASD-A VPs, and the group readily welcomed and accepted our findings with no adjustments. By the time we entered the analysis stage with the ASD-B data from the World Café, we felt we could truly touch on the current realities as the VPs were experiencing them, based on our information. This time, there was pushback from ASD-B VPs on our findings, especially in the mental health domain. Several VPs had concerns that we were describing the social realities in a deficit manner, which had perceived implications that if people were experiencing poor mental health, the VPs could not effectively do their jobs. This was not the case at all. Therefore, the team adjusted the title of that social reality to 'Wellness' and returned the design of the model back to the participants in the third seminar (See Figure 6).
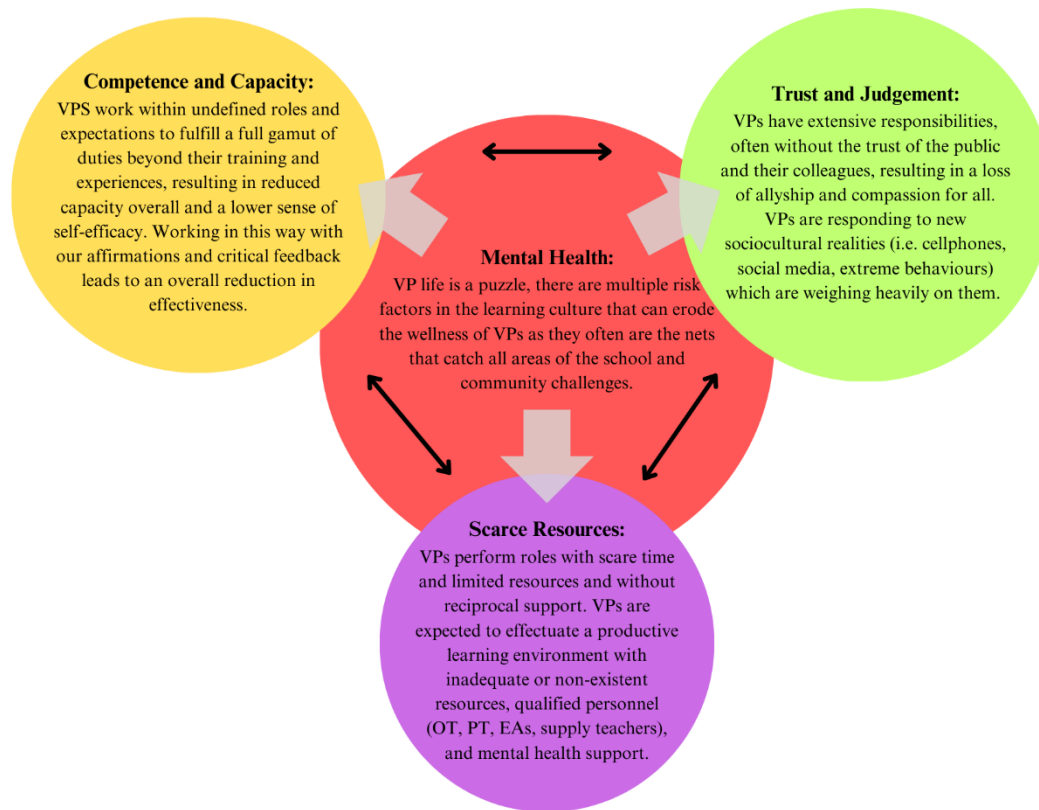
Competence and Capacity:
VPS work within undefined roles and expectations to fulfill a full gamut of duties beyond their training and experiences, resulting in reduced capacity overall and a lower sense of self-efficacy. Working in this way with our affirmations and critical feedback leads to an overall reduction in effectiveness.

Trust and Judgement:
VPs have extensive responsibilities, often without the trust of the public and their colleagues, resulting in a loss of allyship and compassion for all. VPs are responding to new sociocultural realities (i.e. cellphones, social media, extreme behaviours) which are weighing heavily on them.

Mental Health:
VP life is a puzzle, there are multiple risk factors in the learning culture that can erode the wellness of VPs as they often are the nets that catch all areas of the school and community challenges.

Scarce Resources:
VPs perform roles with scare time and limited resources and without reciprocal support. VPs are expected to effectuate a productive learning environment with inadequate or non-existent resources, qualified personnel (OT, PT, EAs, supply teachers), and mental health support.

Figure 6. Thematic Social Realities of ASD-B Vice principals – February 13, 2023

VP PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSE TO THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

The role of the VP is complex (Celek, 2013; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The participants amplified that fact throughout the seminars. As the seminars progressed, the VPs became more hopeful and looked forward to meeting their colleagues from across their school districts. They interacted more with each other as time went on and shared more of their experiences in a safe setting. This is a key aspect of the action research cycle and one that facilitators look for when involved in action research projects (Heron & Reason, 2008). One activity in the final April seminar invited and encouraged participants to imagine and create a visual of "how they glow" in their VP roles within their schools. The VPs were asked to draw, write, or represent what they were passionate about and what they perceived they were doing well as an educational leader at their school. Then, they were invited to post their "glows" around the room near a social thematic reality to show their colleagues how they had positively impacted their learning culture and school community. A gallery walk was then held to see where their colleagues felt they were positively impacting and contributing to the learning culture in their school.

From the "glow" activity, VPs identified that even if they question their competencies at times, they are working tirelessly to improve their school and positively impact the lives of students while thinking outside the box. In fact, the VPs in both districts were constantly and critically examining the work they were performing in their schools. The participatory action research project was providing them the opportunity to engage deeply in critical theoretical

constructs (Kemmis, 2008) such as transformative leadership perspectives (Hamm, 2017; Shields, 2018). It was clear that they were a leading figure in school improvement planning in their buildings while supporting their colleagues. There were many glows positioned around the theme of Flux and Preparedness that indicated that VPs in ASD-A and ASD-B support procedures and processes, make connections, bring organization to their school, and build communication while being supportive and collaborative (Karpinski, 2008). In the Trust and Judgement (ASD-B) and Priorities (ASD-A) themes, the VPs echoed that they were building connections, leading teams, creating community connections, fostering relationships, supporting belonging in their school, and modelling calmness (Bravender & Staub, 2018). VPs also recognized they were meeting students' needs and that their positive mental fitness was improving as they teamed up with school members to counterbalance the thematic reality of Scarce Resources.

This final activity for the seminar series was encouraging. It reinforced that VPs are not invisible and lost leaders in their schools, as Cohen and Schechter (2019) suggested. At least, not in the context of ASD-A and ASD-B. It became clear, during the gallery walk, that the VPs in the seminars were confronting their challenges while bringing their unique strengths to their school; they *are* making a difference for the students, staff, and families they work with. During the gallery walk, VPs could see what their colleagues were doing well at their school, leaving with additional ideas they could bring back to their own schools. Figures 7-10 below are a selection of the glows that were created and shared during the final seminar.
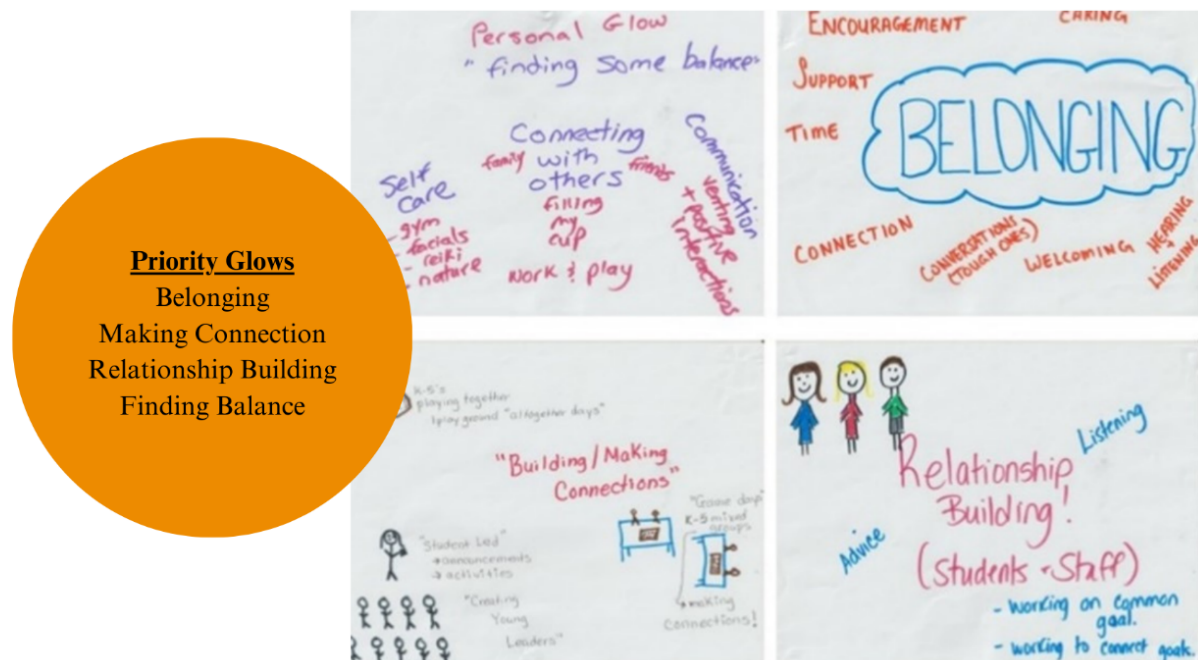

Figure 7. Example of "glows" shared by ASD-A and ASD-B Vice principals
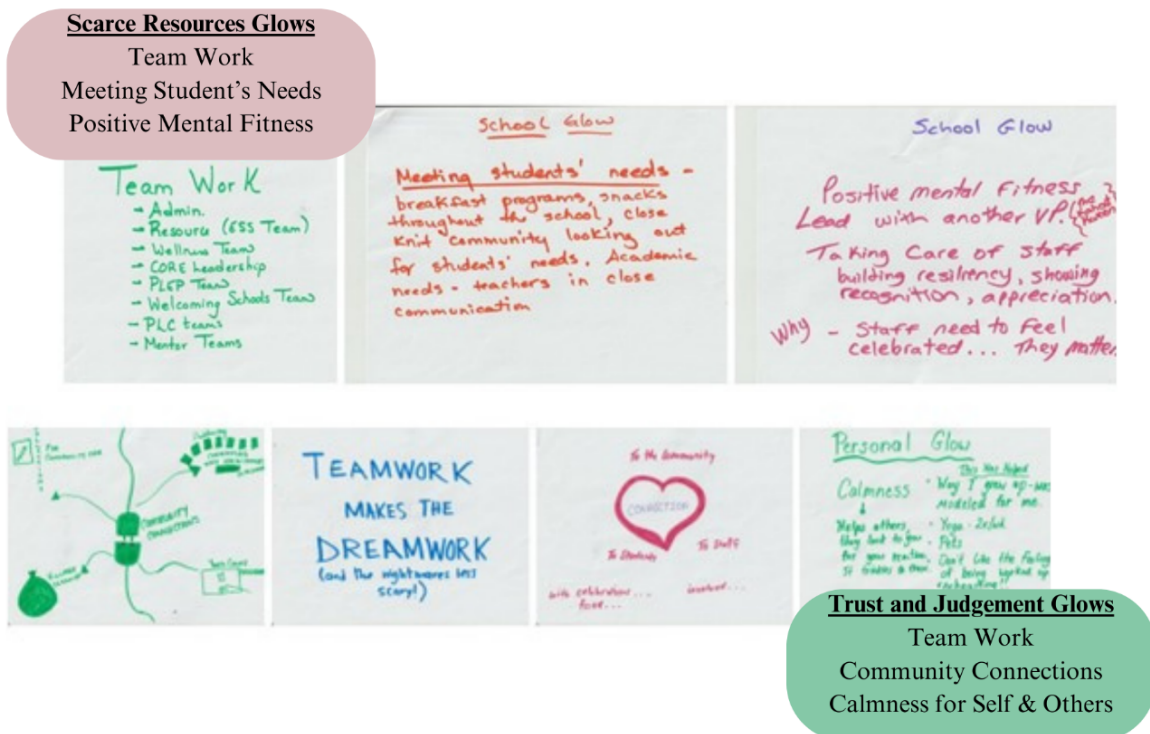
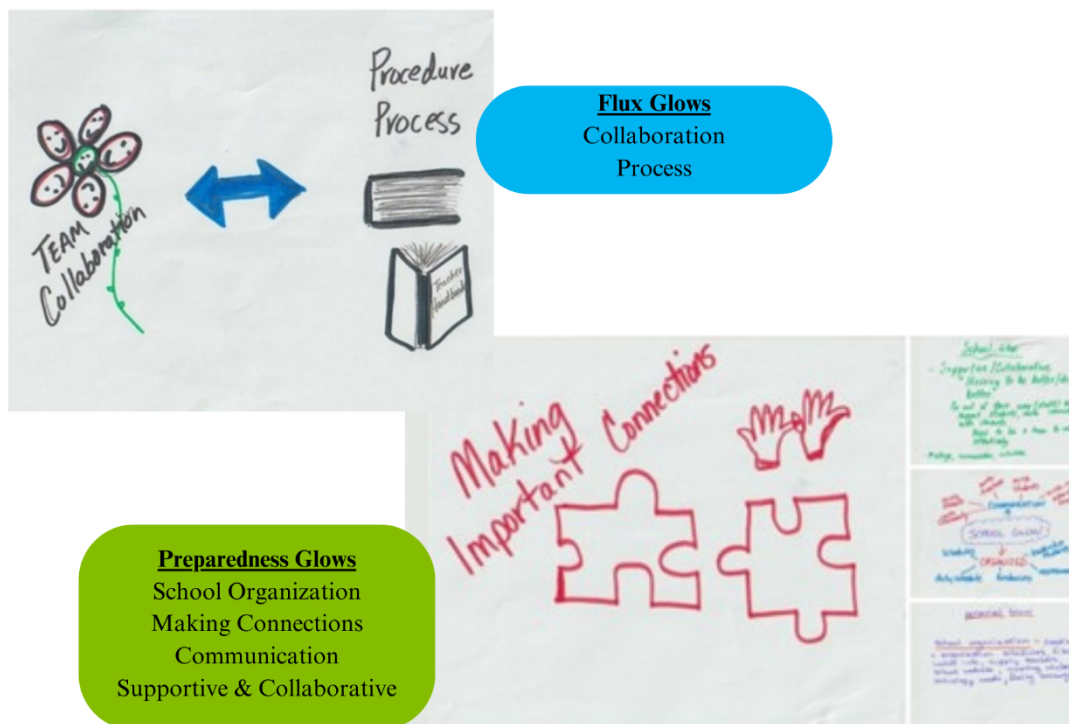*Figure 8.* Example of "glows" shared by ASD-A and ASD-B Vice principals

Figure 9. Example of "glows" shared by ASD-A and ASD-B Vice principals
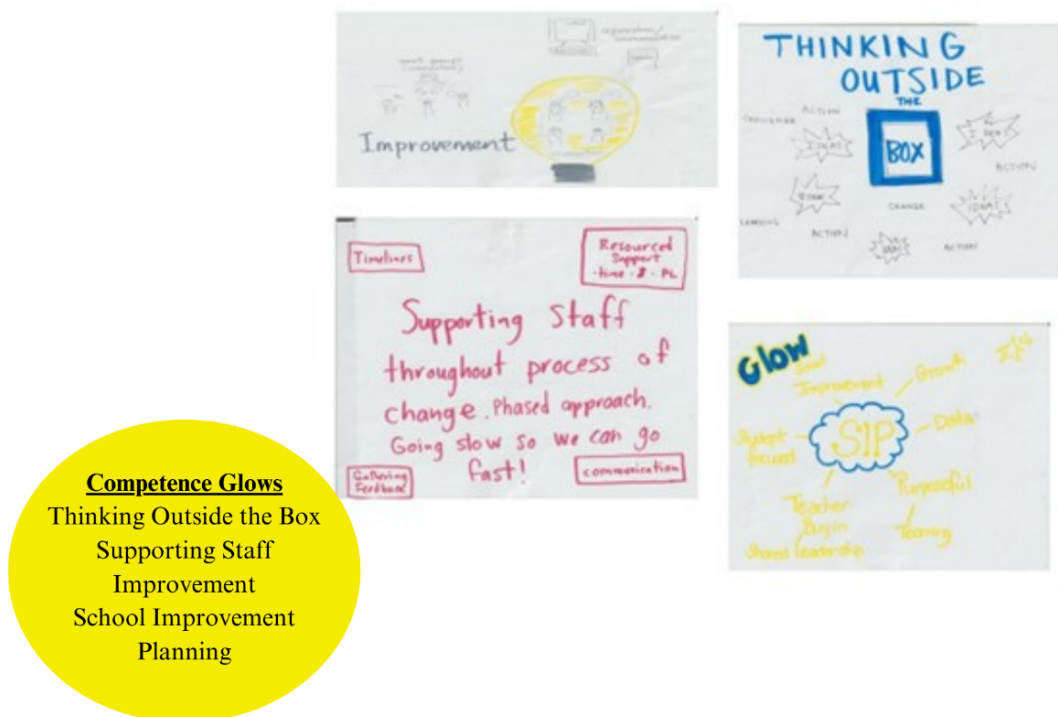
Figure 10. Example of "glows" shared by ASD-A and ASD-B Vice principals

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN NEW BRUNSWICK

Our work with VPs in ASD-A and ASD-B confirmed that they are navigating the lion's share of moral distress and this needs to be considered when making suggestions for supporting New Brunswick VPs now and in the future. The phenomenon of moral distress (initially studied in the nursing industry) is abundant in education and, according to the nursing research, it contributes to diminished workplace satisfaction, physical and emotional illness, burnout, and staff turnover (Burston, & Tuckett, 2012). Moral distress differs from stress and moral dilemma because the afflicted person is unable to control the circumstance – the stress stems from a system that cannot or will not provide the timely resources that are required.

Considering the social realities generated from the data sets in this project, many relate directly to systemic drivers. An extension of this woeful reality is that VPs are the "middle person" to whom many teachers are regularly directed to for the support they require (Hamm et al., 2023). VPs are navigating the moral distress that pertains to themselves and their professional/leadership role as well as that of every teacher who crosses their threshold seeking support or answers. Therefore, it is essential for VPs to be supported in their complex roles throughout their tenure in the position. That could mean intentionally creating mentoring protocols that each VP belongs to. Leadership thinkers such as Armstrong (2009), Daresh (2016), and Searby (2014) argue that mentoring should never be happen-stance, but should be creatively cultured within the organization so leaders such as VPs get the support they require from Day 1. If VPs are not supported, then they may be the unfortunate victim leadership failure (Peter-Hawkins et al., 2017).

Like early career teachers (or early career school leaders), VPs are often left to learn alone (Kerry, 2005). Many of the VPs in both districts indicated this during the seminars. In post seminar surveys and exit interviews, VPs expressed that they enjoyed learning and collaborating with professionals in the same position. And though the role can sometimes be lonely and isolating, with VPs caught between the principal and the teaching staff, one VP explained that growth over time is important to be mindful of: "You continue to grow because like I said, I do appreciate the learning piece of this … you know you can say well, you need to network with other VPs" (VP1). VPs are valuable members of school communities and deserve to build their leadership capacities, as one VP recognized, "if we don't take care of the [Educators and Leaders], the little people will suffer" (VP 2). It is critical to take care of all people in supporting their wellness and professionalism.

Currently, New Brunswick lacks both an intentional onboarding process for new leaders and a structured easily accessed portal of relevant professional learning. This coupled with the busyness of the VP role limits any robust opportunity for VPs to develop mentorship relations among their colleagues. One should wonder what opportunities to foster leadership efficacy are we losing and what does this mean for the quality of educational leadership if attention is not paid intentionally to leadership development (Armstrong, 2009). Further, when we consider that VPs indicated a lack of information (left in the dark) and agency, it might be beneficial to examine the extent to which they are acknowledged and included by higher leadership levels (i.e., District/Department). One positive step in recent times has been a professional development day devoted just to VPs in New Brunswick. This was held in the city of Moncton in October 2024. The challenge for senior educational leaders will be to sustain such PD for VPs into the future.

If VPs are only invited to attend principal meetings, with limited opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, the question may become, how much trust-building and mentorship opportunity is lost? Once a VP begins their journey on the school and district leadership track, they must be included in the decision-making process that underpins educational activities, planning, and major events that they are responsible for. Thus, the VP must be effectively prepared for every potential challenging situation. They are a formal school leader (though second in charge if leadership is observed that way) and must be identified as one right from the get-go if they are not already within their learning culture. If what we learned from our VP colleagues during the project is an absolute reality, that is, VPs are key players in their schools without role clarity (Hartnett et al., 2023), then additional steps need to be taken by senior officials to ensure that they are accurately identified within their roles, and not just there to support whatever the principal demands of them. A collective leadership mindset must be encouraged and developed by principals, VPs, superintendents, and directors of education (Hamm, 2021).

Considering the findings in the seminar series project, if VPs are simply "handed" the managerial tasks in their schools, stronger and more supportive policy and/or systemic leadership development at the District and Department levels may reduce the amount of time required for such duties, freeing up more time for VPs to support their colleagues who

need them. And more importantly, VPs will be able to balance their lives better and maintain their wellbeing. It is time to clarify and coherently recognize the complex roles of VPs in New Brunswick. They are not just there to support the principal and their mandate. They are passionate leaders who, when given the support to grow and glow, positively impact the learning culture, and school community.

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