

Lessons from Australasian principals' experiences with crises: adapting, learning and transforming

Michelle Striepe^a Christine Cunningham^a Mohini Devi^b David Gurr^c
Fiona Longmuir^d Sylvia Robertson^e Adam Taylor^c and
Pauline Thompson^c

^aSchool of Education, Edith Cowan University, Mt Lawley, Western Australia, Australia; ^bUniversity of Fiji, Samabula, Fiji; ^cFaculty of Education, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia; ^dSchool of Education, Culture and Society, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Chelsea, Victoria, Australia; ^eCollege of Education, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand

ABSTRACT

This paper offers a comparative analysis of how Australasian principals navigated a period of compounding crises. Building on our previous research, this study examines the longer-term impacts and lessons learned from crises experiences. Analysis of interviews with principals from Australia, Fiji and New Zealand revealed a balance of directive and collaborative approaches as they adapted to meet changing community needs. A common theme was a focus on wellbeing and relationship-building although context-specific differences emerged. These differences related to the type of crisis, school characteristics, and location. As the crises subsided, the principals' experiences transformed their perspectives on their role and work, fostering personal and professional growth. The data also revealed valuable lessons principals learned about relationships, community, and wellbeing. The study adds an important comparative perspective on crisis leadership and how principals deal compounding crises from a regional perspective. The findings illustrate critical lessons that can come from crises experiences, contributing to the evolving understandings of crisis leadership and the impact of crises on principals. By highlighting both similarities and differences in factors which influenced their practice, this research offers insights into school leadership during turbulent times.

KEYWORDS

Crises; schools; principals; Australasia; learning

Background

The landscape of educational leadership research on the topic of crisis shifted dramatically in 2020 (Harris and Jones 2025). Prior to this, empirical studies on leading schools during crisis were limited with a notable absence of

© 2025 The Author(s).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

broad-scale research (Hemmer and Elliff 2020; Mutch 2015; Striepe and Kafa 2025). However, empirical studies offered valuable insights into how principals led during different types of natural disasters (e.g. Akbaba-Altun 2005; Goswick et al. 2018; Mutch 2015; Nye 2016; O'Connor and Takahashi 2014) and human-made crisis (e.g. Brown 2018; Sutherland 2017). Such studies illustrated the significance of providing care, quick decision making, clear communication, collaboration, and trust during the crisis. Prior to the pandemic, other work developed conceptions and frameworks for leadership during a crisis. Smith and Riley (2012) identified nine attributes of crisis leadership and Mutch (2015) formulated a framework of the dispositional, relational, and situational factors influencing leaders' responses during crisis. Several authors offered insights on using specific leadership models for managing crises, like servant leadership (Garran 2013), moral leadership (Doscher and Normore 2008), and transformational leadership (Fletcher and Nicholas 2016). Others argued that leading during a crisis requires a distinct approach, different from traditional models (Hemmer and Elliff 2020).

The insights gained from this body of research became very relevant with the emergence of COVID-19, which from its beginning in China in November 2019 and its subsequent global spread by the end of 2020 presented not a singular crisis but compounding crises. The unprecedented combination of public health and economic crises caused a surge of attention from scholars who envisioned changes to education and school leadership. For example: Zhao (2020) and Azorín (2020) suggested the pandemic might lead to a reimagining of schools and education; and Harris and Jones (2020) proposed COVID-19 might result in more distributed, collaborative, and networked leadership. As the pandemic wore on, Rincones, Peña, and Canaba (2021) argued that the nature of leaders' role and leader preparation needed reconsideration. Similarly, Gurr (2022) argued the COVID-19 crisis might change school operations and leadership preparation, requiring leaders who could adjust to sudden changes, demonstrate moral purpose, instil trust, and adopt a collaborative approach.

Empirical work on school leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic has been prolific. Special journal issues like *International Studies in Educational Administration* dedicated four issues to research from 29 countries, and international projects such as the International School Leadership Development Network explored experiences of 43 principals across seven societies (Hardie, Goode, and Gurr 2024). A significant portion of the empirical work comprised small-scale and qualitative studies, focussed on the principal within one context (Striepe and Kafa 2025). The prevalence of such research is understandable given the inherent difficulties of gaining access to schools during crises (Striepe and Cunningham, 2022a). This body of research primarily explored principals' approaches during the COVID-19 crisis, consistently finding a focus on providing care, acting with empathy, and delivering clear communication (e.g. Beauchamp et al. 2021; Goode, Gurr, and Hardy 2024; McLeod and

Dulsky 2021). Research also illustrated how leaders had to be decisive, demonstrate resilience and leverage the expertise of staff and the wider community to manage the crisis demands (e.g. Anderson and Weiner 2023; Barakat et al. 2024). Building on these themes, research from Australia and New Zealand revealed how school leaders prioritised community wellbeing, clear communication and rapid decision making (Brown and Jones 2025; Highfield, Webber, and Woods 2023; Longmuir 2021; Striepe et al. 2023; Sum 2022). Several literature reviews synthesised this growing body of research, illustrating the approaches and strategies school leaders used to manage this crisis and the challenges they faced (Brown et al. 2023; Chatzipanagiotou and Katsarou 2023; Parveen et al. 2022; Striepe and Kafa 2025). Beyond understanding leaders' practice, some studies investigated the lessons principals learned from the COVID-19 crisis. For instance, Reid (2023) highlighted how the pandemic prompted principals' learning about using technology for remote learning and fostering new ways of working and connecting, as well as reflecting on their role and commitment to staying in the profession.

While most empirical studies on the pandemic crisis were set in one context, a few comparative studies have been completed. Arar et al. (2021) researched five Arab countries and found strategies among the principals, such as caring for the school community's wellbeing and engaging with stakeholders. This research also found how the type of school, government directives and system-level control resulted in different levels of autonomy for these principals and affected their leadership during the crisis. Ahtiainen et al.'s (2024) comparison of Estonian and Finnish school leaders showed similar approaches to Arar et al. (2021), such as constant communication, providing support and the importance of self-care. While research on school leadership during this crisis has developed the field's understanding, more work is needed to understand principals' experiences through a comparative approach. As leaders continue to navigate periods of continued disruption, there is also a need to better understand the lessons learned from leading through compounding crises.

Australasian school leaders navigated an extraordinary period of compounding crises between 2020 and 2023. Leaders in this region dealt with COVID-19 alongside cyclones, bush fires, and other natural disasters. While Australian principals managed lockdowns and remote learning, alongside bushfires, floods, or cyclones in some areas, principals in Fiji faced the dual challenges of COVID-19 and Cyclones Harold and Yasa. Fijian principals faced difficulties with remote learning due to limited internet access, relying on radio or television broadcasts and take-home packages to maintain learning amid extensive damage. New Zealand's (NZ) 'go hard, go early' strategy (Jamieson 2020) required a swift shift to online learning and teaching, while addressing student wellbeing during isolation. Overall, these compounding crises had consequences for the region's economies impacting families. The crises also affected school resourcing and strained staffing. As principals emerged from this period, there was

a need to explore the experiences of principals from these Australasian countries and the lessons they learned from this turbulent time.

In a previous paper (Striepe et al. 2023) we reanalysed data from our early pandemic studies conducted in Australia, Fiji and New Zealand. We found that schools played a vital role in supporting their communities, that principals responded and adapted quickly, and focused on providing clear communication and prioritising student, family and staff welfare. We also found nuanced differences in their responses, due to community needs, crisis duration and government requirements. In the current study, we wanted to further explore the work of principals in both leading through and leading out of crisis, how the crisis impacted their beliefs and practices, and the extent to which it led to long-term changes in their schools. To this end we constructed a comparative within and across country study with 17 principals from a variety of contexts within Australia, Fiji and New Zealand.

Methodology

To address this aim, an interpretivist perspective was adopted for the study. This research perspective informed the research question: how have school leaders' experiences with crises changed their leadership understandings and practice? Participants were identified through purposive sampling to select principals from various schools serving different locations and populations. This allowed for a diverse sample representing various school contexts and experience levels. Seventeen school principals across Australia, Fiji, and New Zealand participated. The sample included principals from urban, regional, and rural schools with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Table 1 describing the participants' background is below. Some findings have also been reported elsewhere (Gurr, McKay, and Reed 2024).

Table 1. Participants.

Code	Country in Australasia	Location of school	Years of experience
P1	Australia (AUS)	Victoria (VIC) Urban	15+
P2	Australia	VIC Urban	15+
P3	Australia	VIC Urban	15+
P4	Australia	Western Australia (WA) Remote	15+
P5	Australia	WA Remote	15+
P6	Australia	New South Wales (NSW) Rural	15
P7	Australia	VIC Urban	12
P8	Australia	Northern Territory (NT); South Australia (SA), WA	12
P9	New Zealand (NZ)	Rural	10+
P10	Australia	NSW Regional	10
P11	Fiji	Urban	10
P12	Australia	VIC Urban	8
P13	Fiji	Rural	5+
P14	New Zealand	Urban	Less than 5
P15	New Zealand	Urban	Less than 5
P16	Australia	Queensland (QLD) Regional	2
P17	Australia	WA Rural	2

Semi-structured interviews were used to uncover school leaders' experiences and lessons learned. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide which allowed for a flexible approach. It incorporated a set of pre-determined questions for comparison, allowing us to probe themes or insights that arose during the interviews. The interview guide was informed by the following set of guiding questions related to the central research question:

- To what extent have experiences with crises resulted in changes to beliefs and/or their identity as a leader?
- To what extent has experience with crises changed or re-invented practice?
- What have leaders learned from leading during crises?
- To what extent has experience with crises fostered changes within the school environment?

This method provided rich data while consistently addressing the research question across all participants. The interviews lasted 60–90 minutes and were conducted face-to-face or via Teams or Zoom as some schools were in remote settings making face-to-face interviews impractical. Afterward, the interviews were transcribed, and member-checked for trustworthiness.

To make sense of the participants' insights a process which combined thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), and critical reflection (Rolfe, Freshwater, and Jasper 2001) was applied. The thematic analysis allowed for the emergence of unexpected insights while critical reflection provided a structured way to interpret these insights and consider the implications for theory and practice. The combination of these two approaches allowed the team to uncover practice as well as the lessons learned that occurred over time which was appropriate for the study's aim.

To ensure a rigorous and trustworthy analysis, each researcher independently coded their data and generated initial themes. Next, the research members were paired to member-check the individual analyses, enhancing reliability. Following this, one team member analysed the themes to identify overarching themes, capturing commonalities and variances among the leaders' perspectives. The entire research team individually checked the analysis and as a group we discussed these combined results, ensuring consensus and addressing any discrepancies. Next, Rolfe, Freshwater, and Jasper's (2001) model of critical reflection was used to frame the generated themes. The model poses three key questions: What? So What? Now What? We used 'What?' to describe the generated themes on the leaders' experience and lessons learned and these are reported in the results section by considering 'What changed?' and 'What did they learn?'. For the discussion section, the question of 'So What' was used to further analyse and interpret those themes and the question of 'Now What' was used to generate insights for future action.

Results

The crises experienced by these Australasian principals significantly transformed their practice, self-perception, and priorities. Their practice adapted to meet changing needs and demands, formulating a three-pronged approach. Increased responsibilities fostered deeper awareness of care and wellbeing and a richer understanding of their role, contributing to evolving self-perceptions. As the demands diminished, the principals shared how their professional identity changed, and some reconsidered their priorities for the school.

What changed?

Dealing with crises compelled the principals to adopt a three-pronged leadership approach that was used by these leaders across all contexts. At first, these principals embraced a directive approach. Then, they recognised the need to balance that with a collaborative approach that used the expertise of staff and community members. At the same time, the principals found that they needed to support the wellbeing of students, staff, and families.

Taking command: adopting a directive approach

The principals felt compelled to adopt a more directive approach, illustrated by comments that they needed to ‘decide’ (P11 Fiji; P14 NZ), ‘call the shots’ (P13 Fiji) or ‘tell [staff] exactly what to do’ (P4 AUS; P7 AUS). They shared how staff wanted structure and only accepted instructions or directives from them, even for trivial matters (P4 AUS; P7 AUS; P11 Fiji; P13 Fiji; P14 NZ; P16 AUS). Whether they were an experienced or novice leader, principals shared that the staff and community looked to them as a ‘source of truth’ (P10 AUS) and expected a clear and unified message (P2 AUS; P3 AUS; P7 AUS; P9 NZ; P10 AUS; P13 Fiji). This experienced Fijian principal’s reflection captures this common sentiment:

I had to decide on everything ... Everyone depended on the school principal for the nitty and gritty ... I would receive phone calls at any time of the day or night for advice, clarification, or what’s coming next ... I felt the importance of my role as the school head ... (P11 Fiji)

Despite the need for a decisive approach early on, these principals realised they needed the community’s help and expertise to manage the demands.

Embracing community: leveraging expertise and relationships

There was a common realisation among the principals that ‘without any help,’ navigating the crisis ‘would have been a disaster’ (P14 NZ). All principals relied on community support to manage the pressures. They recognised the crucial roles certain stakeholders could play, such as young and beginning teachers

(P10 AUS), the established community emergency teams (P5 AUS) and religious leaders and village heads (Turaga-ni koro) to get 'things done without any hiccups' (P13 Fiji). As one leader remarked: '... the old scholars, parents, and business community organised everything ... stationery, uniforms, bags to assist students who lost everything during the cyclone and flooding and families who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic' (P11 Fiji). Especially in Fiji and rural areas of Australia and New Zealand, the principals showed that when dealing with crises, working with community members resulted in creating strong bonds between the school and the community and developed a mindset that they could depend on one another for support (P4 AUS; P5 AUS; P13 Fiji; P17 AUS).

Fostering care and prioritising wellbeing

The third part of the approach, fostering care and prioritising wellbeing, was closely linked to embracing the community. All principals shifted their focus from academic achievement and student behaviour to prioritising wellbeing and safety of staff, students, and families. This shift was particularly strong in principals from rural or remote areas who felt the need to be available to care for everyone (P4 AUS; P5 AUS; P6 AUS; P11 Fiji; P13 Fiji; P17 AUS). A principal's comments confirm this shift: 'no man is an island and as leaders, we must ensure that no one is left behind ... it is my duty to create a healthy team and keep up the spirit no matter the circumstances ...' (P11 Fiji). Across the contexts, these principals' insights emphasised how they used communication as a way to understand what was happening with staff, students, and families and easing fears within the school community.

Principals played a vital role in providing emotional support to staff, students, and families through emails, online meetings, and calls. This kind of support was especially important, as principals characterised navigating the new online learning environment as challenging and as a result, they realised the need to maintain health and resilience of staff and students. For instance, an Australian urban principal 'organised discussions with the whole staff about challenges and opportunities', often directed teachers 'to take a break and go for a walk' and sometimes had to 'ban staff from emailing' after a certain time to ensure their wellbeing (P3 AUS). As another Australian principal commented: 'It was all just one after the other and from a leadership perspective we found that we spent way more time than we had previously on student wellbeing' (P10 AUS). In some cases, principals also had to focus on meeting basic needs like shelter, food, and clean water (P11 Fiji; P13 Fiji; P17 AUS). Regardless of the type of crisis or school location, caring for the school community's physical health and mental wellbeing was a clear priority to ensure the community felt supported and understood that they would 'get through this together' (P17 AUS).

What did they learn?

Principals formed new understandings about their role and themselves. For some, their experiences enhanced their confidence and improved their understanding of their own professional identity. For others, it prompted critical reflection; they questioned why they were in the role and their capacity to handle unprecedented stress and difficulties. These principals also gained new insights into the importance of care and wellbeing, recognising how crises fundamentally changed their roles in how they viewed and provided support for their community.

New insights into providing care and wellbeing

Staff and student vulnerabilities exposed by crises led these principals to learn about the responsibility of caring and supporting wellbeing. They learned to be more personal in how they communicated with the community, as a principal commented, they became 'really good at talking about our feelings and our stresses' (P14 NZ). These principals' insights illustrated a common belief that it was their job to help staff and students with stress, anxiety, and mental health issues during crises. However, it was also clear that they learned that taking on such roles was not easy. They reflected on how they did not see themselves as a 'counsellor' (P11 Fiji), a 'doctor' (P7 AUS; P15 NZ), or a 'psychologist' (P14 NZ) or a 'life coach' (P3 AUS). Some worried that trying to support staff in these ways might have 'exacerbated' (P14 NZ) mental health challenges or 'done more damage' (P11 Fiji).

Beyond the impact on staff and students, the principals learned how crises affected their own wellbeing. Some felt proud of how they supported their wellbeing while managing the crises and the day-to-day tasks. However, the majority reflected on the stress, burnout, and exhaustion they felt. As one principal observed, 'I believe a lot of principals have become overwhelmed by feeling responsible 'for' staff. When we are responsible 'for' staff, we take this weight home' (P3AUS). The toll was further evidenced in reflections of novice principals from Australia and NZ as this following quote exemplifies:

I read the definition for burnout, and I think I was there ... It took all of my physical, emotional, mental resolve to get through ... at the end of that I was just broken and worn out, burnt out. Especially when you are dealing with all the things that naturally happen in school anyway ... but I was also trying to unpack and help and assist all the people who were impacted (P17 AUS).

To cope with this responsibility, some leaders learned to set boundaries to prioritise their mental health (P7 AUS). Such findings illustrate how principals learned to handle multiple pressures: ensuring learning continued, supporting the school community and maintaining their own resilience and wellbeing.

New discoveries about roles, work, self, and purpose

When reflecting on their experiences the principals shared new realisations about their roles, work, self and purpose. Others shared how their experiences resulted in a return to aspects of their work or role they had neglected. An Australian principal's comments showed how crises changed their perceptions of their role: it 'was interesting ... how the Health Department and the Government relied on schools ... your community turned to you, probably before the Health Department ... we were the Health Department ...' (P1 AUS). Another discovery was how crises result in high community expectations for schools and school leaders: 'as a principal, I am now more acutely aware of the role schools play in society and the positive impact they have' (P3 AUS). On the other hand, leaders discovered the pressure that comes with such expectations: 'no one knew the struggle that we had to go through to ensure that schools run smoothly' ... we had 'to do everything under this sun ...' (P11 Fiji). This pressure took its toll. One principal left the profession (P6 AUS), and a novice leader left their school for another principalship after dealing with crises. This novice leader shared:

I questioned whether I could do the job longer term and whether I could maintain it ... That was one of the reasons why at the end of last year ... post the second crisis ... I didn't know if I could do it again. I felt like it was time for me to go (P17 AUS).

These realisations related to the new roles and new approaches required of the principals. An experienced leader commented: 'as a leader you attend to the tasks that needed to be done when they need to be done' but during the pandemic it became 'especially important' (P2 AUS). Another new insight was that dealing with crises demanded collaboration and reliance on the assistance of others, particularly other leaders or community members (P2 AUS; P5 AUS; P11 Fiji; P14 NZ; P17 AUS). A NZ novice leader commented that they 'couldn't have been done' without help: 'if I had been sitting here making decision by myself, I would've made mistakes' (P14 NZ).

These experiences fostered new ways of understanding their professional identities. The same novice leader commented on their directive approach and how they: 'didn't like having to ... decide ... but sometimes you've got to do that. I didn't enjoy that part, but I understood that's what was needed and that's what the staff actually wanted at the time' (P14 NZ). Another insight was from an experienced principal who commented on their 'identity as being across everything and knowing everything had to shift' (P7 AUS). Such comments related to what leaders learned about coping with the pressures stemming from crises. Some learned to reconsider the amount of work they did at home and adopted a more professional distance with staff:

Before I was "how are the kids going? How's everything going?" – really developing these relationships ... I definitely have become less relational with people ... I've definitely developed a bit more of a shell ... "this is my role, and this is what I have

to do as part of my role" ... People were so anxious ... and constancy of people needing or wanting something from me ... I risked taking that on if I didn't just sort of put some boundaries around that ... (P7 AUS).

Insights from both novice and experienced principals showed how experiences with crises resulted in gaining confidence in themselves as a leader. A novice principal shared how they had dealt with 'imposter syndrome a lot because I came into leadership quite young' but dealing with crises had given them 'confidence'. Another experienced principal commented that: 'I didn't know if I was going to be good leader ... but I think I did a good job ... I think I got the right balance of collaboration and instruction of 'this is what we're going to' (P9 NZ). This is a sentiment shared by a Fijian principal who commented that when 'the next hurricane or pandemic [comes], I know what to do because we experienced multiple crises at the same times ... the crises made me strong and confident ... in how to handle those situations' (P13 Fiji). Experiences with this period of crises made the principals more comfortable with being seen as a person who can provide support and guidance to others. As noted by this principal: 'you realise that the people that you are surrounded with are actually less experienced than you or having the same struggles ... I see it as a responsibility, as a more experienced campaigner, to be reaching out' (P9 NZ). This evidence of professional and personal growth is a silver lining amid all the turbulence.

New directions school priorities and operations

Another silver lining is how principals reassessed their school priorities and operational processes. This reassessment of course varied; some discussed temporary adjustments and others shared plans for long-term innovations. Some tried to continue innovation. For example, an Australian principal continued work around the use of new technologies and re-engaging teachers and students and, indeed, used the post-pandemic period as a way of stimulating new uses of technologies (P3 AUS). This relates to how the three NZ principals seemed to expect that the use of technology would drive innovation upon returning to school. One noted: 'I thought that the way we were going to do things was going to change dramatically and we were going to have some amazing initiatives going on' (P9 NZ). But these visions did not materialise, mainly because the teachers were not ready for major change. There were also other issues however, with an Australian principal (P1 AUS) noting that teacher shortages and staff turnover made sustaining transformations difficult.

However, the findings showed how crises resulted in shifting priorities and changing school operations. The same Australian principal above who commented that it was difficult to sustain change, also talked about how their experiences with crises had allowed them to see things from a 'different point of view' and they were 'more willing to ... give new ideas a try, whereas before

we probably said ‘no, it’s going to be too hard’ (P1 AUS). This notion of giving things a try was also evident in how an Australian principal described the crisis as ‘a catalyst’ and how they ‘developed a completely new way of operating’ (P7 AUS). This leader emphasised that ‘education needs to think more broadly about how we offer education to young people’ (P7 AUS). Leaders also learned to re-prioritise school and community needs, sometimes over system-wide directives. An Australian principal from a large regional primary school (P10 AUS) illustrates this perspective:

I think this has taught me to slow down and to work out what is important for our community and what is important for our kids ... it has given me the freedom to sort of ‘flick’ things that the department might want us to implement. I can prioritise what is important for my staff and what is important for my kids ...

This quote connected to how priorities focussed more on building relationships, engaging families and supporting the wellbeing of staff and students. The results showed that dealing with crises confirmed, for many of these principals, that ‘relationships are the key ingredient of any school’ (P9 NZ). They talked about how they gained greater respect for and understanding of their communities (P1 AUS). Some discussed the changes in approaches to parent engagement through regular family events and ensuring time in teacher workloads for communication with parents (P9 NZ; P10 AUS; P14 NZ). For a NZ principal, building relationships with staff and fostering a sense that they are valued was a focus. The leader made tangible improvements to the staff’s working environment; they felt this was a visible way to ‘give back to staff’ for all the work they did (P9 NZ). Others shared they were supporting students and building those relationships through new actions to increase student attendance (P7 NZ) and student agency (P4 AUS; P14 NZ). An Australian principal shared how crises prompted them to take a ‘Maslow before Bloom’ approach to ensure student wellbeing (P7 AUS). This view was reflected in how a NZ leader felt that ‘the work that needs to be done is focusing on the wellbeing of those children ... in order to achieve the vision ... we’ve got to look at the wellbeing of the child in order to achieve the academics’ (P9 NZ).

Such reflections related to how principals realised that staff needed more support. A New Zealand principal commented that ‘what we need to be doing is being more realistic about the amount of initiatives and work that we put on top of people without support’ (P9 NZ). This idea of support was also evident when an Australian principal observed: ‘I have seen that many teachers need greater support than I have ever understood ... even experienced teachers have needed support’ (P3 AUS). A Fijian principal learned that incorporating flexibility into processes was important moving forward, especially when students and staff may be dealing with personal challenges and stress. The principal said, ‘I am very accommodating when

it comes to academics and work, such as extending deadlines, offering alternative assignments, or providing remote work options ...' (P11 Fiji). It was clear that their experiences sparked new ideas about wellbeing and engagement and their connection to learning.

Discussion

So what?

This study illustrates the adaptive capacity and deep learning of principals in Australasia as they navigated unprecedented and prolonged crises. Despite differences in location, type of school and crisis, this study reveals compelling commonalities in how leaders adapted their approaches and roles and focussed on relationships and wellbeing. Additionally, the results show how crises can foster personal and professional growth, prompting shifts in principals' thinking about their practice, priorities, and roles.

The findings affirm past and more recent conclusions about how leadership changes to meet the demands of crisis (Brown et al. 2023; Goode, Gurr, and Hardy 2024; Hemmer and Elliff 2020; Longmuir 2021; O'Connor and Takahashi 2014; Schechter, Da'as, and Qadach 2022; Striepe and Cunningham, 2022b; Striepe et al. 2023). This includes acknowledging the critical role of leaders in providing a heightened level of care as identified in these findings (e.g. Goswick et al. 2018; Reyes-Guerra et al. 2021; Striepe and Cunningham 2022b). This was particularly evident in how leaders in rural or remote locations prioritised compassion and care (Lasater et al. 2022). The results also support the idea that during crisis leaders need to use expertise from a wide variety of stakeholders (e.g. Anderson and Weiner 2023; Brown 2018); particularly when basic needs had to be met (Thornton 2021; Virella 2023). It was also clear that during crises, leaders need to be decisive in their decision-making (e.g. O'Connor and Takahashi 2014; Szempruch et al. 2023). Furthermore, the results contribute to the more recent idea that during crisis a key role of principals is acting as an influencer; as crisis requires a leader that provides calmness, guidance and direction to manage the situation (Williams and Liou 2024).

The findings offer insight into the type of leadership needed during crisis in that these leaders adopted a common approach, one that balanced directive and collaborative leadership styles. This result challenges the adequacy of relying on a single model or approach, instead, it supports literature advocating for flexible and adaptable leadership (e.g. Adams et al. 2024; Beauchamp et al. 2021; Fernandes, Wong, and Noonan 2023); a leader has to have the repertoire of skills to be responsive, and/or the ability to quickly develop the skills needed. The study also affirms the argument that crisis leadership is about balancing decisiveness with the use of community expertise (Chatzipanagiotou and Katsarou 2023). The ways in which the leaders created that balance reinforces the argument that leading through crises affecting schools requires a

nanced approach tailored to the crisis and the school's context (Schechter, Da'as, and Qadach 2022; Striepe and Cunningham 2022b; Striepe et al. 2023).

Another key contribution this study shows is that the duration of a crisis can influence leaders' approaches, an idea that has received limited attention in educational leadership research to date (Striepe and Cunningham 2022b). These results show how leaders recalibrated their leadership to fit the school's needs and needs of their staff and students as a prolonged period of crises wore on (Hulme et al. 2023). This adaptive approach supports the organic nature of leading during crisis (Liou 2015), highlighting the need for responsiveness to changing demands (Hulme et al. 2023). It also demonstrates the need to understand how leadership during crisis changes as it is driven by the interactions they have with others (Vanlommel, van den Boom-Muilenburg, and Kikken 2024). The results support the notion that there is a distinction between leading in an acute, short-term crisis and navigating the complexities of compounding crises (Chatzipanagiotou and Katsarou 2023), when other types of knowledge, skills and dispositions become important (Reyes-Guerra et al. 2021).

The study provides insights into how crises have a distinct and pervasive impact on school leaders personally and professionally. It was evident that years of experience did not always help them deal with the demands of these crises, and instead, in some ways crises level the playing field. For example, years of experience did not determine a leader's ability to handle the unprecedented pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ramos-Pla, Tintoré, and del Arco 2021). While the changing nature and intensification of a principals' role, particularly in the context of Australia and New Zealand, has been established (Niesche et al. 2023; Wylie 2020), these results demonstrate that levels of stress and burnout during crisis go beyond typical general work intensification (Reid 2021). Additionally, and importantly, this study highlights that the impact of these crises was amplified by location, with leaders in rural and remote areas facing particularly severe challenges that escalated workload, leading to burnout and diminished wellbeing (Lasater et al. 2022).

What these results also show is the transformative power of crises for changing leaders' understanding of their role and practice and causing personal and professional growth, in both positive and negative ways. Such results align with the ideas of learning, unlearning, and relearning (Briscoe and Nyereyemhuka 2022). The principals learned how to best respond and manage community demands. The intense and, sometimes, high-stakes nature of crises fostered profound learning about their roles and identities. The findings demonstrate how principals served as anchors for their communities, as they consistently stepped up when their communities needed stability the most (Mutch 2015). Whether urban or rural, experienced or novice, across the different countries, they demonstrated remarkable dependability during this time of prolonged, overlapping crises (Reyes-Guerra et al. 2021). While research occasionally

documents leadership failures during crisis (e.g. Edling, Nihlfors, and Williams 2021), our study reveals how principals become what their school communities depend on during ongoing uncertainty (O'Connor and Takahashi 2014; Striepe et al. 2023). The actions principals took show they adapted to and learned what their fundamental responsibilities were during sustained crises (Briscoe and Nyereyemhuka 2022).

In terms of learning, it is evident that experience with crises reaffirmed how important principals are during crises (Mutch 2015; Robertson 2024). Such discoveries relate to the principals' new realisations about the intensity and range of work required during crises which in turn resulted in learning about their own professional and personal capacities and limits. Importantly, crises served as a catalyst for relearning, as leaders reassessed their role, leadership approach, and their priorities for the school. A significant outcome of this relearning was how their experiences with crisis reinforced understandings about the criticality of care, support, and relationships in schools.

But as these demands decreased, the results point to pre-crisis routines and in some cases, suggest a degree of unlearning. Sharma and Lenka (2019) describe unlearning as a process where new knowledge is prevented from being acquired. Our results suggest that unlearning occurred because of prolonged stress. This was very clear in how NZ leaders were not able to apply their new insights into the use of technology because teachers were not ready for new routines and wanted to revert to previous norms. Ultimately, while the COVID-19 crisis sparked widespread predictions of fundamental shifts in education and educational leadership, our study shows such shifts are far from straightforward. The results point to a cycle of learning, relearning, and importantly, unlearning. While learning did occur for leaders, the true impact of the lessons they learned about their practice and leading schools during crises is still unfolding. Specifically, the leaders' capacity to embed new practices or knowledge appears to be constrained by ingrained routines or the readiness of the wider school community to engage with innovation and change. This reveals a more complex reality of crisis-driven transformation than initially anticipated.

Now What?

The last question of the critical reflective framework, Now What? builds on the insights from the question of So What? to explore implications for theory and practice. The experiences and lessons learned by these principals in Australia, Fiji and New Zealand during compounding crises offer insights into how crisis leadership is conceptualised and how school leaders can be better supported during times of compounding crises.

For school leaders, these results show the necessity of a dynamic leadership approach during crises, skilfully balancing directive action with collaborative

engagement (e.g. Hulme et al. 2023); something we found in our early COVID-focussed school leadership research (Striepe et al. 2023). Importantly, these results highlight the consistent prioritisation of care and wellbeing of their school communities as a non-negotiable (e.g. Reyes-Guerra et al. 2021). Another practical implication comes from the unease principals experienced in taking on a counsellor-like role. There is an urgent need for system-level support that leverages partnerships with school psychologists and other mental health professionals to support school leaders and the school community during times of crises (Geer and Coleman 2014; Goswick et al. 2018; Reid 2021; Urick, Carpenter, and Eckert 2021).

Adding to this, is how the self-reported low self-efficacy emphasises the need for increased investment preparing leaders (Reid 2021; Urick, Carpenter, and Eckert 2021). This includes proactive crisis preparation, as well as robust support for leaders during and after crises (Reid 2021). New and experienced leaders require accessible strategies for managing their own wellbeing and clear pathways to support services (Reid 2021; Urick, Carpenter, and Eckert 2021). Another key implication is how the results support other research which has discussed the need for providing tailored professional development and dedicated crisis support teams to ensure leaders are equipped to understand and effectively manage their expanded roles during crises (Goswick et al. 2018; Reid 2021). To better prepare both current and future leaders, higher education and professional development programmes must examine their curricula to address crisis leadership and management effectively (Goode, Gurr, and Hardy 2024; Reid 2021; Torrance et al. 2023). This involves cultivating essential skills needed during crises, such as constant communication, community engagement, care, and resilience, alongside personal attributes like empathy (Rincones, Peña, and Canaba 2021).

Regarding implications for theory, this study's comparative approach offers a novel contribution by revealing common leadership strategies that transcend cultural differences, namely being directive in the early stages of crisis, and collaborative, caring and resilient moving through the crisis. It also stresses the crucial influence of contextual factors, such as the nature of the crisis, location and type of school, in shaping variations in their approaches (Mutch 2015; Schechter, Da'as, and Qadach 2022; Striepe et al. 2023; Striepe and Kafa 2025). Future research should specifically investigate how different contextual factors shape leaders' behaviours and approaches during crises, with particular attention to location of the school or the role of experience in navigating prolonged and compounding crises.

Building on this idea is the implication about the impact of crises on leaders' wellbeing and professional identities. The results indicate that the impact of crises on leaders' wellbeing and professional identities transcends typical work intensification. This is due to the unpredictable nature of crisis and the

significant emotional burden that comes with supporting a distressed community (Goswick et al. 2018). There is a need to better understand the impact of crises on leaders' wellbeing, particularly when considering how levels of experience did not seem to be a factor on these principals' capacity to manage compounding crises. Research has shown how crisis impacts on wellbeing and stress of principals (Reid 2021) and specifically on how novice leaders' wellbeing can be affected (Fernandes, Wong, and Noonan 2023; Virella 2023), but more research in this area is required to ensure a more comprehensive picture.

Regarding developing the field's understandings, the results provide evidence that future conceptions of crisis leadership should move beyond simple models and adopt a more dynamic, contextual-based perspective (Dunn 2020; Goode, McGenniken, and Rutherford 2021). This would account for how leaders need to adapt and shift their approaches over the course of crises, rather than relying on a one-size fits all approach (Striepe et al. 2023). Furthermore, future conceptions need to distinguish between the kind of leadership needed to meet the demands of acute versus sustained or compounding crises (Chatzipanagiotou and Katsarou 2023; Reyes-Guerra et al. 2021). Considering these distinctions will provide more precise and actionable direction for leaders navigating crises.

While the study offers valuable insights, it has limitations. The study's small sample size and qualitative approach limit the generalisability of the findings. Future research that employs larger, more diverse range of participants or employs mixed methods can enhance generalisability. In addition, further intentionally designed comparative studies like this across countries, regions, and school systems could identify common and context-specific aspects of crisis leadership in schools. Longitudinal studies into the long-term impact of crises on school leaders' wellbeing, work, and career trajectories would also be valuable. As would studies on how crises change school operations over the longer term. Such studies are essential for a more comprehensive understanding of this topic.

Conclusion

This prolonged period of compounding crises has brought into sharp relief new realisations about the principal's work and role during crises. This research shows that despite the various contexts, types of schools and level of experience there are foundational aspects of crisis leadership that are required for school leaders. This research also indicates that as school leaders continue to move forward, their work and practices are different from pre-2020 approaches and traditional models. However, this new path appears to be following a more gradual, evolving route rather than a revolutionary road. This new direction prioritises a more holistic approach, intentionally balancing academic outcomes with a heightening focus on wellbeing, cultivating strong relationships, and meaningful community engagement. This shift is powerfully echoed in the

words of one Fijian participant who noted, 'we, as leaders, should change the way we lead schools and have an open mind to accept new changes in this century ... because anything is possible now.'

As crises are increasingly recognised as a recurring feature of our landscape, the insights are important for understanding effective educational leadership during crises. We are learning that leadership which prioritises flexibility, care, and strong relationships is essential for building more resilient students, staff, schools, communities and educational systems. Moving forward, future paradigms of leadership should integrate the lessons learned from crises to not only better navigate future crises but also to emerge as stronger, more adaptive school leaders and educational systems. For school leaders navigating an uncertain future, understanding the 'what,' the 'how,' and the 'why' of effective educational leadership during these turbulent times has never been more important.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Dr. Michelle Striepe is a Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership at Edith Cowan University. Her experience also includes being an educator in New Zealand, Japan and the United States. Currently, Michelle oversees the Educational Leadership specialisation and teaches a unit on leading through challenging circumstances and crises. She also supervises graduate students on this topic and leads international research on K-12 school leaders' COVID-19 responses. Her other research interests include middle-level leadership, teacher leadership and visual methodologies. Dr. Striepe collaborates with various national and international scholars and networks, including the Australian Association for Research in Education and the International School Leadership Development Network.

Dr Christine Cunningham currently works at Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia. She is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education, and elected to two three-year positions as the Academic Staff Member on the University Council and Branch President of the National Tertiary Education Union. Over a 30-year career, she has been a teacher, school principal, deputy mayor and academic. Dr Cunningham's PhD examined educational leadership in an international context using a critical and comparative methodology. Today, her research interests include leading and managing in K-12 schools, principal preparedness and leading during times of crises.

Dr. Mohini Devi is a lecturer in the Department of Education at the University of Fiji. She joined the University of Fiji in 2012 as an Assistant Lecturer. She coordinates the Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership and the Master of Teaching, and Diploma in Graduate Diploma in Teaching at the University of Fiji. Dr. Devi has a vast teaching and learning experience and brings with her years of knowledge and expertise in issues affecting schools in the Pacific Islands, mainly, Fiji. Her research interest lies in the areas of educational leadership, teacher education and teaching and learning.

David Gurr is a Professor of Educational Leadership in the Faculty of Education at the University of Melbourne. In a 45-year educational career, he has been a teacher, school counsellor,

middle leader and academic. David is a prolific writer and presenter, focused on all aspects of educational leadership and especially on successful school leadership and middle leadership. He is a founding member and leader of the International Successful School Principalship Project and the International Leadership Development Network. A former Vice-President of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders, he was awarded the ACEL's most prestigious award, the Gold Medal, in 2014.

Dr Fiona Longmuir is a senior lecturer in educational leadership in the School of Education, Culture and Society, Monash University. Fiona's research interests include advancing understanding of just and equitable schooling arrangements by examining the relational and performative intersections that emerge in policy and practice. Fiona has undertaken studies of the experiences and practices of school leaders and currently leads a national study examining retention issues in the Australian education workforce. She teaches in the Master's of Educational Leadership and co-leads the Education Workforce for the Future Impact Lab. See more about Fiona's work here.

Dr Sylvia Robertson is Director of the Centre for Educational Leadership and Administration at the University of Otago (NZ) and Co-director of the UCEA Centre for the International Study of School Leadership (USA). An accomplished primary practitioner with teaching and leading experience across New Zealand, Australia and England, Sylvia now lectures in Education Studies and Educational Leadership. Her research interests include school leadership and principal preparation, leading through change and crisis, leading in high-needs contexts and negotiation and transformation of leadership identity. Sylvia focuses on privileging practitioner voice and the importance of intra-personal and interpersonal skills in principal practice.

Dr Adam Taylor has over 25 years' experience in secondary school and school system leadership, including work as a national director with a non-government network of more than 50 schools, working across every Australian state and territory. Dr Taylor currently teaches and researches in educational leadership in the Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne. He holds leadership positions in the Faculty as Course Coordinator for the Master of Teaching (Secondary) Internship programme and is the Deputy Director for Academic Integrity. His research interests include the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, leadership in alternative schools, mentoring, and school governance <https://findanexpert.unimelb.edu.au/profile/849544-adam-taylor>.

Dr Pauline Thompson is a lecturer in Educational Leadership at MGSE. Pauline's research interests include investigating the complex link between school leadership and student learning. Her doctoral research is focused on identifying and describing factors that contribute to sustained improvement in teaching practice in response to professional learning. Pauline is also very interested in the role of dialogue to support learning in the classroom. Pauline has extensive school experience, having worked as an English teacher and an Assistant Principal in secondary schools for many years.

References

- Adams, Donnie, Kenny S.L. Cheah, Lei Mee Thien, and Noni Nadiana Md Yusoff. 2024. "Leading Schools through the COVID-19 Crisis in a South-East Asian Country." *Management in Education* 38 (2): 72–78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08920206211037738>.
- Ahtiainen, Raisa, Eve Eisenschmidt, Lauri Heikonen, and Merilyn Meristo. 2024. "Leading Schools during the COVID-19 School Closures in Estonia and Finland." *European Educational Research Journal* 23 (2): 287–304. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14749041221138989>.
- Akbaba-Altun Sadegul. 2005. "Turkish School Principals' Earthquake Experiences and Reactions." *International Journal of Educational Management* 19 (4): 307–317. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540510599635>.
- Anderson, Elizabeth, and Jennie Weiner. 2023. "Managing Up, Down, and Outwards: Principals as Boundary Spanners during the COVID-19 Crisis." *School Leadership and Management* 43 (4): 411–429. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2171006>.
- Arar, Khalid, Rania Sawalhi, Youmen Chaaban, Abdelaziz Zohri, and Ibrahim Alhouti. 2021. "School Leaders' Perspectives towards Leading during Crisis through an Ecological Lens: A Comparison of Five Arab Countries." *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 54 (2): 123–142. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2021.1957793>.
- Azorín, Cecilia. 2020. "Beyond COVID-19 Supernova. Is Another Education Coming?" *Journal of Professional Capital and Community* 5 (3/4): 381–390. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPC-05-2020-0019>.
- Barakat, Maysaa, Daniel Reyes-Guerra, Pat Maslin-Ostrowski, and John E. Critelli. 2024. "The Year of Letting Go and Holding On: School-Leaders' Role during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Leadership and Policy in Schools*. Advance online publication. 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2024.2359038>
- Beauchamp, Gary, Moira Hulme, Linda Clarke, Lorna Hamilton, and Janet A. Harvey. 2021. "People Miss People': A Study of School Leadership and Management in the Four Nations of the United Kingdom in the Early Stage of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* 49 (3): 375–392. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220987841>.
- Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Briscoe, Patricia, and Nyasha Nyereyemhuka. 2022. "Turning Leadership Upside-Down and Outside-In during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* 200:104–114. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1092711ar>.
- Brown, C. H. 2018. "The Role of Leadership in Surviving a School Shooting." *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership* 21 (2): 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.
- Brown, B., and C. Jones. 2025. "Adaptive Leadership of Schools in Australia during the Covid-19 Pandemic: Lessons for Future Crises." *School Leadership & Management* 45 (2): 153–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2025.2473890>.
- Brown, B., T. Wang, M. Lee, and A. Childs. 2023. "Surviving, Navigating and Innovating through a Pandemic: A Review of Research on School Leadership during COVID-19, 2020-2021." *International Journal of Educational Development* 100: 102804. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102804>.
- Chatzipanagiotou, Paraskevi, and Eirene Katsarou. 2023. "Crisis Management, School Leadership in Disruptive Times and the Recovery of Schools in the Post COVID-19 Era: A Systematic Literature Review." *Education Sciences* 13 (2): 118. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13020118>.
- Doscher, Stephanie Paul, and Anthony H. Normore. 2008. "The Moral Agency of the Educational Leader in Times of National Crisis and Conflict." *Journal of School Leadership* 18 (1): 8–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/105268460801800102>.

- Dunn, Ryan. 2020. "Adaptive Leadership: Leading through Complexity." *International Studies in Educational Administration* 48 (1): 31–38.
- Edling, Silvia, Elisabet Nihlfors, and Pia Williams. 2021. "School Violence and Leaders' Task Perceptions: A Policy-Practice Dialectic." *International Studies in Educational Administration* 49 (2): 120–147.
- Fernandes, Venesser, Wilson Wong, and Meghan Noonan. 2023. "Developing Adaptability and Agility in Leadership amidst the COVID-19 Crisis: Experiences of Early-Career School Principals." *International Journal of Educational Management* 37 (2): 483–506. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-02-2022-0076>.
- Fletcher, Jo, and Karen Nicholas. 2016. "What Can School Principals Do to Support Students and Their Learning during and after Natural Disasters?" *Educational Review* 68 (3): 358–374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2015.1114467>.
- Garran, Christopher. 2013. "A Death at School: What School Leaders Should Do." *Phi Delta Kappan* 95 (4): 18–22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171309500405>.
- Geer, G., and H. V. Coleman. 2014. "Servant Leadership and School Crisis Management." In *In Servant Leadership: Research and Practice*, edited by R. Selladurai, and S. Carraher, 114–133. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- Goode, Helen, David Gurr, and Suzy. Hardy. 2024. "Reflections on Leading Schools through and beyond the Pandemic." In *Leading Schools through and beyond the Pandemic*, edited by S. Hardie, H. Goode, and D. Gurr, 215–228. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing).
- Goode, Helen, Rachel McGennisken, and Emma Rutherford. 2021. "An Adaptive Leadership Response to Unprecedented Change." *International Studies in Educational Administration* 49 (1): 36–42.
- Goswick, Jeri, Cynthia J. MacGregor, Beth Hurst, Patricia J. Wall, and Renee White. 2018. "Lessons Identified by the Joplin School Leadership after Responding to a Catastrophic Tornado." *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 26 (4): 544–553. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12232>.
- Gurr, David. 2022. "Leadership of Schools in the Future." In *School Leadership in the 21st Century: Challenges and Strategies*, edited by A. Nir, 227–309. New York: Nova Publishers.
- Gurr, David, Campbell. McKay, and Christopher Reed. 2024. "Leadership and Technology Supporting Quality and Equitable Schools through the Pandemic Crisis." In *The Power of Technology in School Leadership during COVID-19 – Insights from the Field*, edited by A. Kafa, and N. Eteokleous, 39–54. Cham: Springer.
- Hardie, Suzy, Helen Goode, and David Gurr, eds. 2024. *Leading Schools through and beyond the Pandemic*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing).
- Harris, Alma, and Michelle Jones. 2020. "COVID 19 – School Leadership in Disruptive Times." *School Leadership & Management* 40 (4): 243–247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1811479>.
- Harris, Alma, and Michelle Jones. 2025. "Crisis Leadership: Implications for School Leaders." *School Leadership & Management* 45 (3): 201–205. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2025.2515299>.
- Hemmer, L., and D. S. Elliff. 2020. "Leaders in Action: The Experiences of Seven Texas Superintendents Before, During, and after Hurricane Harvey." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 48 (6): 964–985. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143219873073>.
- Highfield, Camilla, Melinda Webber, and Rachel Woods. 2023. "Culturally Responsive Leadership in a Pandemic Context: A Case Study of Three Primary Schools in a low Socio-Economic Area of New Zealand." *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2023.2248087>.
- Hulme, Moira, Gary Beauchamp, Linda Clarke, and Lorna Hamilton. 2023. "Collaboration in Times of Crisis: Leading UK Schools in the Early Stages of a Pandemic." *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 22 (1): 161–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2021.1917623>.

- Jamieson, Thomas. 2020. "Go Hard, Go Early': Preliminary Lessons from New Zealand's Response to COVID-19." *American Review of Public Administration* 50 (6-7): 598–605. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0275074020941721>.
- Lasater, Kara, Meghan Scales, Kelley Sells, Meleah Hoskins, and Jordan Dickey. 2022. "Compassion: The Legacy of the Pandemic in Rural Schools and Communities." *Journal for Multicultural Education* 16 (1): 43–54. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-08-2021-0151>.
- Liou, Yi-Hwa. 2015. "School Crisis Management: A Model of Dynamic Responsiveness to Crisis Life Cycle." *Educational Administration Quarterly* 51 (2): 247–289. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X14532467>.
- Longmuir, Fiona. 2021. "Leading in Lockdown: Community, Communication and Compassion in Response to the COVID-19 Crisis." *Educational Management Administration and Leadership* 51 (5): 1014–1030. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211027634>.
- McLeod, S., and S. Dulsky. 2021. "Resilience, Reorientation, and Reinvention: School Leadership during the Early Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Frontiers in Education* 6: 637075. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.637075>.
- Mutch, Carol. 2015. "Leadership in Times of Crisis: Dispositional, Relational and Contextual Factors Influencing School Principals' Actions." *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 14:186–194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2015.06.005>.
- Niesche, Richard, Scott Eacott, Amanda Keddie, Brad Gobby, Katrina MacDonald, Jane Wilkinson, and Jill Blackmore. 2023. "Principals' Perceptions of School Autonomy and Educational Leadership." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 51 (6): 1260–1277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211034174>.
- Nye, Adele. 2016. "Working from the Boot of a Red Falcon': The Impact of Major Fires in Four Australian Schools." *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education* 26 (1): 82–97. <https://search.informit.org/doi/pdf/10.3316informit.081797188049095>
- O'Connor, Peter, and Nozomu Takahashi. 2014. "From Caring about to Caring For: Case Studies of New Zealand and Japanese Schools Post Disaster." *Pastoral Care in Education* 32 (1): 42–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2013.875584>.
- Parveen, Khalida, Pham Quang, Bao Tran, Abdulelah Abkar Alghamdi, Ehsan Namaziandost, Sana Aslam, and Tang Xiaowei. 2022. "Identifying the Leadership Challenges of K-12 Public Schools during COVID-19 Disruption: A Systematic Literature Review." *Frontiers in Psychology* 13: 875646. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.875646>.
- Ramos-Pla, Anabel, Mireia Tintoré, and Isabel del Arco. 2021. "Leadership in Times of Crisis. School Principals Facing COVID-19." *Heliyon* 7 (11): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e08443>.
- Reid, David B. 2021. "Suppressing and Sharing: How School Principals Manage Stress and Anxiety during COVID-19." *School Leadership & Management* 42 (1): 62–78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2021.1974827>.
- Reid, David B. 2023. "Principal Perceptions of the Staying Power of Changes Made in Response to COVID-19." *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2023.2235672>.
- Reyes-Guerra, D., P. Maslin-Ostrowski, M. Y. Barakat, and M. A. Stefanovic. 2021. "Confronting a Compound Crisis: The School Principal's Role during Initial Phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Frontiers in Education* 6: 617875. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.617875>.
- Rincones, Rodolfo, Isela Peña, and Karina Chantal Canaba. 2021. "A Call for Rethinking Schooling and Leadership in the Time of COVID-19." *Frontiers in Education* 5: 618075. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.618075>.
- Robertson, S. 2024. "Aotearoa New Zealand: Leading for Equity through Disruption and Uncertainty." In *Leading Schools through and beyond the Pandemic*, edited by S. Hardie, H. Goode, and D. Gurr, 121–136. Information Age Publishing.

- Rolfe, G., D. Freshwater, and M. Jasper. 2001. *Critical Reflection for Nursing and the Helping Professions: A User's Guide*. London: Palgrave.
- Schechter, Chen, Rima Da'as, and Mowafaq Qadach. 2022. "Crisis Leadership: Leading Schools in a Global Pandemic." *Management in Education* 38 (4): 164–171. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08920206221084050>.
- Sharma, S., and U. Lenka. 2019. "Exploring Linkages between Unlearning and Relearning in Organizations." *The Learning Organization* 26 (5): 500–517. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TLO-10-2018-0164>.
- Smith, Larry, and Dan Riley. 2012. "School Leadership in Times of Crisis." *School Leadership & Management* 32 (1): 57–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2011.614941>.
- Striepe, Michelle, and Christine Cunningham. 2022a. "Gatekeepers, Guides and Ghosts: Intermediaries Impacting Access to Schools during COVID-19." *Ethnography and Education* 17 (3): 275–292. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457823.2022.2049332>.
- Striepe, Michelle, and Christine Cunningham. 2022b. "Understanding Educational Leadership during Times of Crises: A Scoping Review." *Journal of Educational Administration* 60 (2): 133–147. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-06-2021-0125>.
- Striepe, Michelle, and Antonios Kafa. 2025. "School Leadership during the COVID-19 Crisis: A Scoping Review of Empirical Research." *Journal of Educational Administration* 63 (1): 48–62. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-03-2024-0062>.
- Striepe, Michelle, Pauline Thompson, Sylvia Robertson, Mohini Devi, David Gurr, Fiona Longmuir, Adam Taylor, and Christine Cunningham. 2023. "Responsive, Adaptive, and Future-Centred Leadership in Response to Crisis: Findings from Australia, Fiji, and New Zealand." *School Leadership & Management* 43 (2): 104–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2171005>.
- Sum, Nicola. 2022. "School Leaders' Perceptions of Their Roles during the Pandemic: An Australian Case Study Exploring Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA Leadership)." *School Leadership & Management* 42 (2): 188–207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2022.2045268>.
- Sutherland, I. E. 2017. "Learning and Growing: Trust, Leadership and Response to Crisis." *Journal of Educational Administration* 55 (1): 2–17. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-10-2015-0097>.
- Szempruch, Jolanta, Katarzyna Potyrała, Joanna Smyła, and Łukasz Tomczyk. 2023. "Leadership Styles of Heads of School and Teachers' Creative Behavior in a Time of Social Change." *Leadership and Policy in Schools* 23 (3): 512–529. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2023.2172433>.
- Thornton, Kate. 2021. "Leading through COVID-19: New Zealand Secondary Principals Describe Their Reality." *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 49 (3): 393–409. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220985110>.
- Torrance, Deirdre, Denise Mifsud, Richard Niesche, and Michael Fertig. 2023. "Headteachers and the Pandemic: Themes from a Review of Literature on Leadership for Professional Learning in Complex Times." *Professional Development in Education* 49 (6): 1103–1116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2023.2229333>.
- Urick, Angela, Bradley W. Carpenter, and Jon Eckert. 2021. "Confronting COVID: Crisis Leadership, Turbulence, and Self-care." *Frontiers in Education* 6: 642861. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.642861>.
- Vanlommel, Kristin, Selia N. van den Boom-Muilenburg, and Evi Kikken. 2024. "School Leadership during Disruptive Change: An Emotional and Relational Practice." *School Leadership & Management* 45 (1): 125–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2024.2421526>.

- Virella, Patricia. 2023. "New Principals in the COVID Corridor: An Exploratory Case Study." *Journal of Educational Administration* 61 (1): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-01-2022-0012>.
- Williams, Tomicka, and Yi-Hwa Liou. 2024. "Framing K-12 School Leaders' Roles and Competencies in Times of Crisis." *Journal of School Leadership* 34 (1): 26–46. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10526846231187576>.
- Wylie, Cathy. 2020. "What Does It Mean to Be a Principal?: A Policy Researcher's Perspective on the Last 30 Years in Aotearoa New Zealand." *Journal of Educational Leadership, Policy and Practice* 35:42–58. www.sciendo.com
- Zhao, Yong. 2020. "COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Educational Change." *Prospects* 49 (1): 29–33. <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s11125-020-09477-y.pdf>