

# SMART MOVES

EDU-MAG



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**keller**

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## Feedback

### Why ongoing feedback matters



It is more important for the brain to be **fast** than to be **accurate**. If our brains were primarily an **accurate** processor, we would be extinct as humans. However, the schooling system demands accurate brains. This causes a massive conflict.

Our brains have evolved and humans have managed to remain an ever growing species after thousands of years, unlike the dinosaur, dodo, rhino, polar bear and koala bear. The reason for the survival of the species is our ability to adapt.

The moment we sense danger, the human reacts, even if it is not a real threat. Failure to react in a threatening situation would guarantee death. The ability to jump to a conclusion is part of our design. For this very reason, in schools, we all need to give rapid feedback to know whether we are safe or not.

The brain is designed to move towards **reward**

and **away** from **threat**. The speed in which it moves away is rapid. Even our strongest towards impulses, ie lust, are very slow compared to the speed of the away impulses.

**As educators, we need to devise multiple ways to ensure that our students are continuously moving towards reward.**

However, our schooling system is designed to be threat-based. The only solution seems to be to create a rapid, regular feedback system.

**“Success happens when the brain is constantly reframing, rethinking and building new skills so that it is able to think deeply.”**

Schools have missed the essential part of the human brain. Success is not dependent on numerous test results. Success happens when the brain is constantly reframing, rethinking and building new skills so that it is able to think deeply.

The good news is that environment can change our brains, but this requires strategy-based cognitive training. (Anand et al., 2011).

**By nature, our brains are designed to predict outcomes.** When our brains

get it right, even if the event is negative, it feels comfortable. When we recognise that the spider on our hand was in fact a leaf, we learn from the experience and we change the way we predict similar events in the future. This process of getting immediate feedback is vital for our brains. The feedback corrects the automatic reaction from our senses, thoughts and actions. In fact, our brains are useless without *regular* feedback.

Humans have a very large limbic brain, responsible for our feelings. What we feel is real, it is the link to how we think. As a result, humans are driven by emotions more than logic. Sensory data needs to pass through the limbic brain in order to reach the logical brain. How we feel will determine whether the data is passed through to the cortex or if it is stored by the emotional brain.

## What needs to change in our classes?

**1** Remove the focus on long-term feedback like end of unit tests or examinations and focus the attention of your students on **immediate feedback**. Teachers who walk around their classes watching their students actively engage with the material and highlight their achievements using positive comments and words of encouragement, along with a "thumbs up" sign or an eye-brows up and smiley eyes indicating that they are doing well, are providing verbal and non-verbal feedback. The input from the teacher makes the emotional brain feel a sense of worth and belonging and allows the data to be processed logically. Never forget the power of the non-verbal feedback.

**2** Provide **low quality feedback regularly**. It is far more effective that high quality feedback once a week or once a term. The use of quizzes is highly effective. Working in pairs to answer a quick review of the previous day's work, not only pulls the prior learning into the working memory, but avoids the anxiety of having to process the question on your own which gets stuck in our emotional brains when we feel anxious.

**3** Use **comparing and contrasting**. Look at two different pieces of writing on the same topic and using a Venn diagram compare and contrast.

4

Make use of the **3M's**.

- a) What was your last **mark**?
- b) What is your next **milestone**?
- c) What is your **method** to achieve this?

This 3M method provides a very effective tracking strategy when you use regular feedback. (Jensen 2023)

5

Make use of **S-E-A**.

"I love the **(S) strategy** that you used!" "You put a great deal of **(E) effort** into this - but just check the final step!" "Gosh! You have such a positive **(A) attitude** to this subject!"

Simple words can make an enormous difference.

6

Use **Gallery Walks**.

Allow students to work in pairs and design a poster on a given topic. Paste the posters on the wall. Allow the students to take a Gallery Walk around the room and leave post-it messages pasted onto the poster that either ask questions or provide feedback.

This tool is very effective when teaching Mathematics.

7

Use **technology**.

Send a voice note of **encouragement** after reviewing the students work. Make a short video describing how well your students did in seeking a solution to the problem. Then explain suggested steps when a challenging question is asked.

All of the above provide instant feedback in the lesson. The brain loves this and is able to adapt and improve rapidly.



## What I would do differently?

Three Big Ideas I would apply if I had my career over again



After 40 years, deeply embedded in schooling as a Class Teacher, Head of Department and School Principal I often look back and wonder what I would do differently if I was to have the experience again. Hindsight is so powerful, but we only have access to it once we have lived the moments.

### The three Big Ideas that I would do differently are:

#### Big Idea 1

#### Enjoy the precious moments with kids and keep them in focus

Because our brains have such a powerful tendency to focus on the negative, we rapidly forget the incredible moments. Those moments fade rapidly in our memories as we deal with the next drama. When I retired, each class was given an opportunity to write

notes that were put together in an amazing book. I often page through those notes and wonder why I spent so much time fretting about the small things instead of focusing on my primary task - raising children to be confident, capable adults of character, able to collaborate, communicate, think critically and be creative.

Keep a photo memory of the good times during your sojourn in this job - kids laughing, playing and having fun. Record the moments of the staff enjoying events and playing games. These moments are so important.

Instead, the **toxic 2%** leave their image embedded in our memory. It was quite some time into my career that I learnt the 80/20 principle. At any given time, 80% of the parents at your school are happy with what you are doing for their children. 20% are unhappy. All of us fall into the 20% some time in our lives. From time to time we are

unhappy with the service in a restaurant or at a store.

It is normal to be unhappy from time to time. But, of those 20%, 2% are toxic and will literally poison your love for teaching. They are the most dangerous people in schools and shouldn't be given any of your time.

Instead of lying awake at night pondering how to make the 20% happy, accept the reality of the 80/20 principle. If we don't, we start giving the unhappy 20% group, 80% of our time and those that are benefitting from the current environment only receive 20% of our attention. The toxic 2% drive us into deep anxiety which cripples our passion and drive.

One big idea that I would apply if I were to have my career over would be to saturate myself in the joy of the job and embed the positive in my mind.

## Big Idea 2

### **Spend more time finding the right person for the job.**

Human capital is the most precious resource in schools. Too often, in the fast paced world of school leadership, I resorted to filling the post instead of finding the right candidate. The pressure of the job meant that the TO DO list was so long. There were never enough hours to do everything.

I learnt that teachers can write amazing testimonials and current employers will speak glowingly about the candidate in order to get them out of their schools. They interview with the passion of a saint, but once in the job, their true colours emerge and they eat away at the synergy on the team like a rampant cancer cell.

**“...we start giving the unhappy 20% group, 80% of our time and those that are benefitting from the current environment only receive 20% of our attention.”**



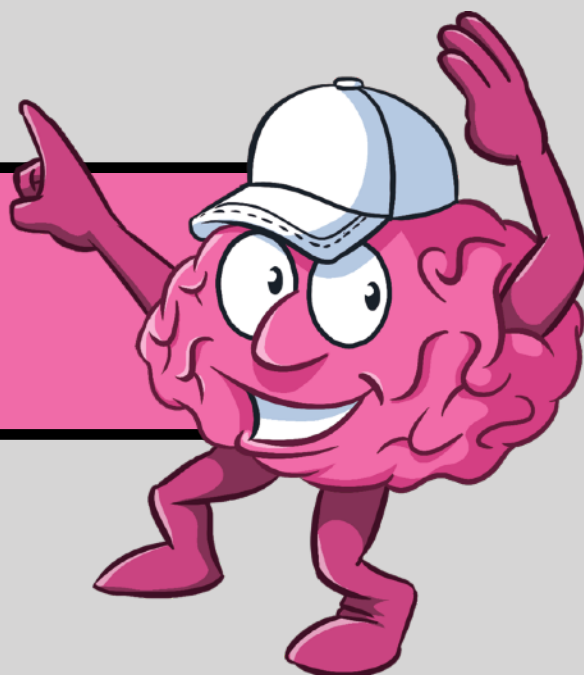
The energy required to heal the impact they have on the staff outweighs the time one could have spent making sure that the applicant is indeed the right fit.

## Big Idea 3

### Recognise that it is just a job

Educators make this fundamental mistake. We actually believe that we are an indispensable part of the school's life. We may play a vital role and bring about incredible change, but we forget it is only...a job.

**This will be my motto if I was to start again. Smile. Work hard. Work smart. Go Home!**



**Spending endless hours at school does not make you a better teacher.** Being the first car in the carpark in the morning and the last to leave in the evening may actually fall into the *psychotic* behaviour zone.

We literally lose contact with reality. The reality is that I am firstly a **partner**, then a **father**, a community **member** and lastly a passionate **teacher**. The moment we get these in the wrong order, we fall apart emotionally and physically. The job is only possible if we spend enough time looking after those that we love - including ourselves. It is not healthy to eat, sleep and live "**school!**" It is a job that we go to each day and deliver excellence. The moment the job takes control of our life, we become bogged down by the enormity of the task before us.

I have loved my sojourn as a teacher and education leader. But, being in the social entrepreneurial world for the last four years as a consultant, has opened my eyes to the pain and struggles of school leaders and teachers. We are worth so much, but the system is designed to devour us and spit out the broken pieces.

From day one, take control of your own destiny by carefully structuring your life in such a way that you enjoy the job and it provides the necessary support to achieve your goals as a human being. Limit your working hours and look after your health. Avoid working every night of the week, especially when weekends are used for sporting events. The body cannot work for ten to twelve weeks without a break and remain physically and emotionally healthy. Take time to look after your own wellbeing. If you don't, you will end up getting sick and losing your original passion and enthusiasm.



## Invisible Labour: Principals' Emotional Labour in Volatile Times

Jane Wilkinson, Andrew Pierpoint, Lucas Walsh, Amanda Keddie, Fiona Longmuir, Christine Grice



### The principals' role is changing.

In nations such as Australia, principals are being forced to navigate increasingly diverse and often volatile school settings and communities, arising from issues associated with identity, difference, privilege and marginality in areas such as sexism, racism, homophobia, gendered exclusions, Islamophobia and radicalisation (Howie et al., 2020; Keddie et al., 2018; Wilkinson et al., 2018; Zembylas, 2020).

The COVID pandemic has exacerbated relational tensions in schools, with the highest ever recorded levels of burnout and cognitive stress amongst school leaders (See et al., 2022); record levels of mental health issues for children and youth (Brennan et al., 2021) and rising levels of poverty (Davidson, 2022). In addition, externally imposed accountability measures have increased principals' workloads and added to the

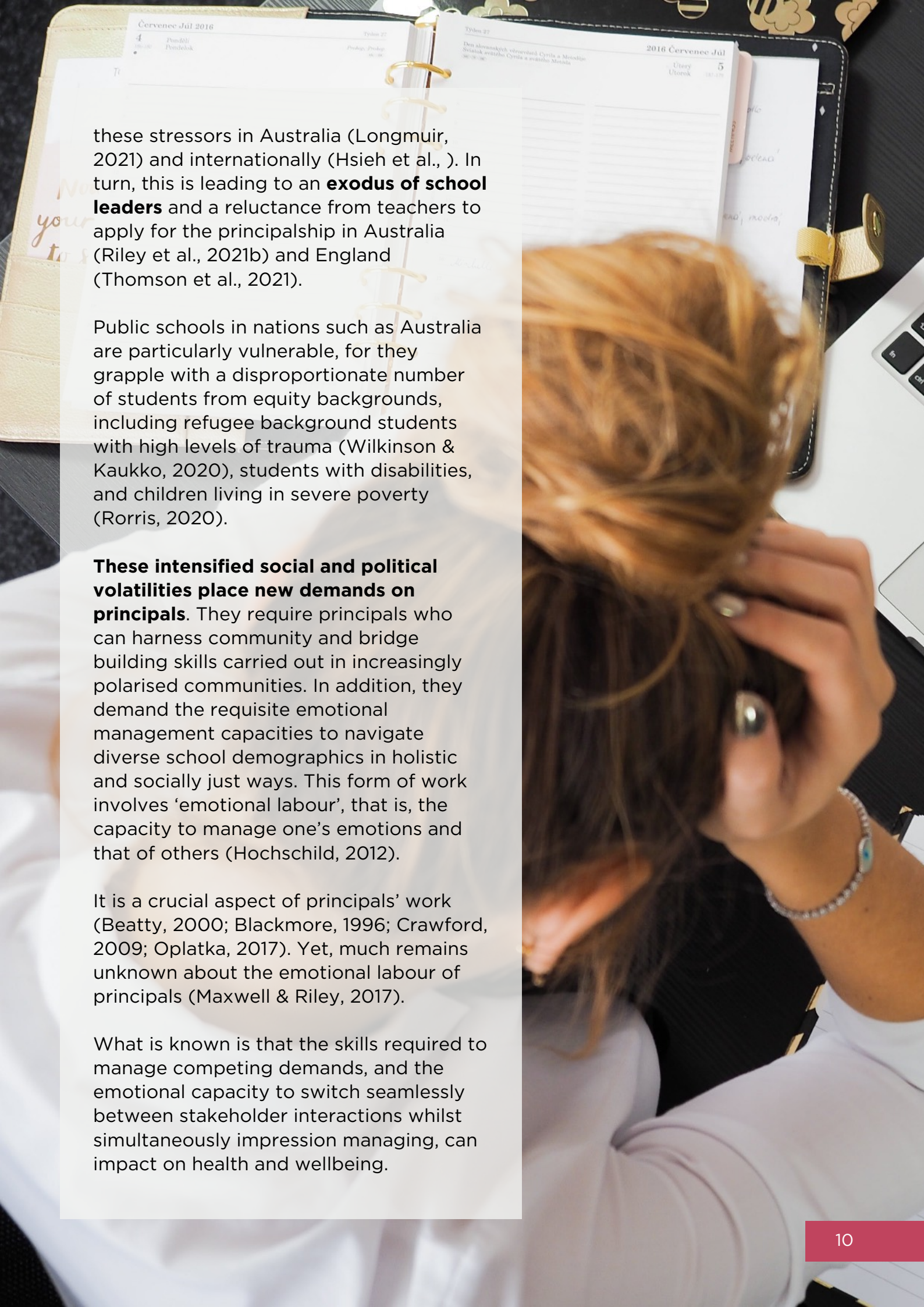
complexity and scope of their role (Heffernan & Pierpoint, 2021).

These factors, along with increased market competition, have intensified relational tensions within and between individual schools and school systems.

These circumstances are not peculiar to Australia.

**One in three Australian principals' health and wellbeing is deemed to be at serious risk (See et al., 2022),**

a pattern echoed in England (Thomson et al., 2021), New Zealand (Riley et al., 2021a) and Ireland (Rahimi & Arnold, 2022). The pandemic has exacerbated



these stressors in Australia (Longmuir, 2021) and internationally (Hsieh et al., ). In turn, this is leading to an **exodus of school leaders** and a reluctance from teachers to apply for the principalship in Australia (Riley et al., 2021b) and England (Thomson et al., 2021).

Public schools in nations such as Australia are particularly vulnerable, for they grapple with a disproportionate number of students from equity backgrounds, including refugee background students with high levels of trauma (Wilkinson & Kauko, 2020), students with disabilities, and children living in severe poverty (Rorris, 2020).

**These intensified social and political volatilities place new demands on principals.** They require principals who can harness community and bridge building skills carried out in increasingly polarised communities. In addition, they demand the requisite emotional management capacities to navigate diverse school demographics in holistic and socially just ways. This form of work involves ‘emotional labour’, that is, the capacity to manage one’s emotions and that of others (Hochschild, 2012).

It is a crucial aspect of principals’ work (Beatty, 2000; Blackmore, 1996; Crawford, 2009; Oplatka, 2017). Yet, much remains unknown about the emotional labour of principals (Maxwell & Riley, 2017).

What is known is that the skills required to manage competing demands, and the emotional capacity to switch seamlessly between stakeholder interactions whilst simultaneously impression managing, can impact on health and wellbeing.

**“...What is known is that the skills required to manage competing demands, and the emotional capacity to switch seamlessly between stakeholder interactions whilst simultaneously impression managing, can impact on health and wellbeing.”**

In turn, this can lead to chronic stress, feelings of burn out and lowered job satisfaction levels (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015; Heffernan & Pierpoint, 2021).

Yet education policies, workforce development/ induction programs and principals' standards are largely silent about this form of labour. This is even though these skills and capacities are indispensable in fostering the kinds of necessary conditions for students, schools and their communities to be healthy and thrive (Walsh et al., 2020).

This is particularly the case for public schools where disadvantaged students are predominantly located and women principals are typically over-represented given social perceptions of them as skilled emotional managers (MacDonald et al., 2021).

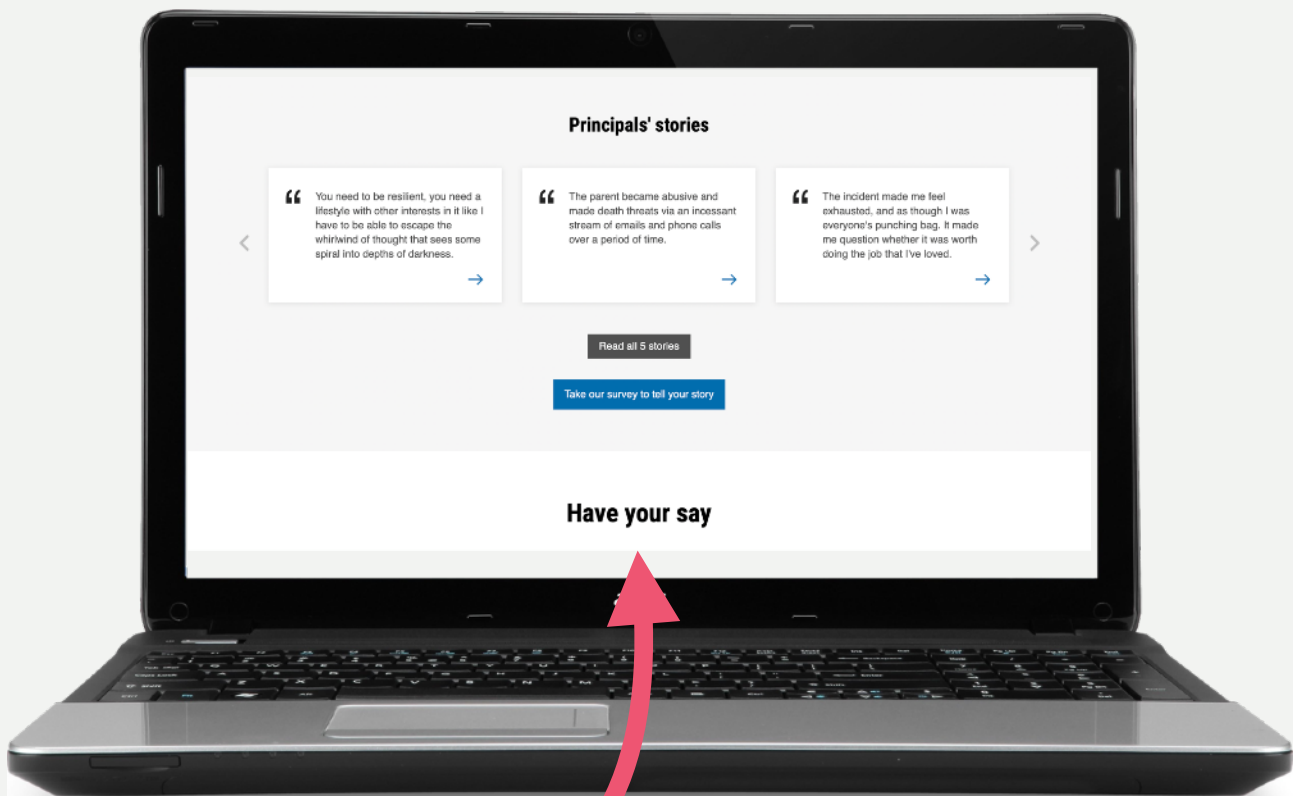
This project investigates the intensified emotional management workload demands of the principalship required in current socially volatile times. Funded by the Australian Research Council [ARC] and running from 2023-2025, it aims to:

- A. **Capture concealed aspects of principals' emotional labour** (via principal testimonials on a national website, focus groups with key stakeholders);
- B. **Map this labour in its granularity and specificity** through in depth case studies of practices of principals' emotional labour in Australian government schools; and
- C. **Generate new understandings** of the moral and ethical complexities of this labour and the conditions that enable and constrain principals' practices in this area.

The study has begun with a survey of these emotional complexities of principals' work. It provides a chance for principals in public schools to tell their stories about how these demands are impacting the nature of their work.

It will provide new understandings of the changing nature of the principals' role when it comes to these emotional demands.

A publicly available website that curates, in de-identified form, some of the principals' stories will give the public a glimpse into the new emotional intensities of principals' work. It aims to build public, media and political awareness of principals' day-to-day emotional challenges: <https://www.monash.edu/education/research/projects/school-principals-emotional-labour-in-volatile-times>



**Click [here](https://www.monash.edu/education/research/projects/school-principals-emotional-labour-in-volatile-times),**  
**and have your say!**



## It's a Wrap!

See you in 2024

2023 is almost ready to be wrapped and placed on the shelf of time. Let's put a bow on it and take a rest before the start of the new academic year.

To all our Partner Schools, we wish you and your families a wonderful festive season together. To our Christian colleagues, we wish you a very blessed Christmas .

We look forward to 2024 with enthusiasm and passion. The Keller Team send love and look forward to working as your support in the new year.

Our best wishes to you and your family.





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