Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1 'Servants of the Frontier'

O'Donohue (2007:166) exhorts those in leadership to "continue as a servant of the frontier … and never become a functionary". O'Donohue's exhortation, I contend, may be seen as an appropriate motif for the principals investigated in this thesis, irritating and emboldening them like Starratt's (1993a:148) Socratic gadfly as they motivate and sustain themselves in their principalships and in O'Donohue's (ibid:166) words again "evoke the bright fields that lie beyond the view of the regular eye".

1.2 Purpose of Study

During the course of this study I explored the leadership role of the primary school principal in Ireland. I was inspired by the work of Ribbins (2008:64) on the making of a principal (formation), on becoming a principal (accession) and being a principal (incumbency). Consequently I explored through the life story and career history approach the formation of a selected number of principals. Furthermore I painted a portrait of accession to principalship in Ireland. In the context of incumbency I investigated how participating principals perceive the role of principal early in the second decade of the 21st century and moreover what inspires and sustains them in their work. My aims included finding out what motivates principals to continue in their role, what are the relationships that inspire and sustain them, what are the aspects that absorb their energies, how do they cope with demands for change – what hinders them in their roles? These ideas were the focus of a pilot study research I conducted in October 2009.

1.3 Context of Study

Life story and career history approaches/portrait based approaches to studying school leaders have been carried out in a number of countries. Little has been done in Ireland in this field. There is a great opportunity at this time to obtain rich data from primary school principals, from some of the many principals who are leaving the system after lengthy and distinguished careers and from those who continue to work as principals. Those who have been in principalship for more than a decade have seen enormous changes in attitude towards schools and in the way schools conduct their business. They have seen expanding and changing curricula, ground breaking improvements in technology, developments in special needs and disadvantaged education and a complete economic cycle. Long serving and recently appointed principals alike have observed the effects of widespread immigration, the emergence of newer ways of inspecting and evaluating schools and increased emphasis on continuing professional development. They are working in a system that is bearing the brunt of a severe economic depression, where a debate initiated by the Minister for Education and Skills on school patronage is taking place and where the perennial 'a's, aspiration, accountability and autonomy exist as silhouettes, enlightening the frontier. They have a lot to say and I would aspire to enabling them "to speak for themselves" (Mortimore and Mortimore, 1991:vii).

1.4 Key Questions

The key questions in this research are designed to elicit from conversations with selected principals important data pertaining to their formation as people, pupils, teachers and principals and thereafter their reflections on accession to principalship and living the role of the principal; in the words of Ribbins and Marland (1994:8) 'preparing' for principalship and 'professing' principalship. The writers and literature that inspired me to research in this area provide me also with a template of specific questions which are ideal for the research. In designing specific questions I enter into the equation also my own knowledge and

experience of working in the Irish system, formerly as a primary school principal and latterly as the director of an Education Centre and also the experience of conducting a pilot study with four practising primary principals and the outcomes of that pilot study. I adhere to the broad thrust of the fourteen questions used by Pascal and Ribbins, (1998: 44-46) but have added, excised and amended in order to make the questions as meaningful as possible for an audience of Irish primary principals in the second decade of the 21st century.

1.5 Why the role of Principal is of interest to me

The research was important to me personally for a number of reasons. Firstly I am progressing through my fortieth year in the Irish education system; elements from this research have resided in my consciousness each year and each day of those forty years. The forty year career to date, falls into three categories. I was a class teacher for eleven years (1974-1985) in four urban/suburban primary schools in Dublin. In 1985 I became the founding principal of a senior primary school and worked in the capacity of administrative principal in a school that by Irish standards became a large school with a pupil population close to 700. In 2001 I became the director of a large and extremely busy Dublin based Education Centre, catering for the continuing professional needs of several thousand primary and post primary teachers, principals and other educators locally and managing national professional development support services with tentacles in every primary and post primary school in Ireland.

Secondly while still working as a principal I worked with groups of primary principals in four contexts; addressing large and small conferences on principals' issues; establishing, facilitating and maintaining Principals' Professional Support Groups in six different counties; contributing to regional Primary Principals' Networks that led to the formation of the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and developing professional development programmes for principals with the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), the primary teachers' trade union in Ireland. Furthermore I was a member of the Working Group established by the Department of Education and Science (DES) in 1999 that issued a major

report on the role of the primary principal in Ireland (Department of Education and Science: 1999).

Thirdly as the director of a major Education Centre in the Irish system I meet and work with school principals on a daily basis and am involved in the management of national continuing professional development programmes for principals.

Fourthly I explored the theory and practice of leadership roles in Irish primary schools while conducting research for a Master's thesis (McHugh, 1991) and while researching for three papers as part of a professional doctorate programme in Dublin City University. Furthermore in the course of addressing education conferences in seven different European countries I have observed the context of principal in other countries.

Consequently the theory, the practice, the language and the nuances of principalship flow in my veins and now inhabit my DNA; this is an area I am minded to research

1.6 Outline of the Study

1.6.1. Literature Review

Following this Chapter 1, I will present a review of literature in Chapter 2. I will also make appropriate connections with a broad literature as I present and discuss the findings in Chapters 4 and 5. The review in Chapter 2 will be presented in four sections. Initially a literature on leadership will be reviewed, a concept that is contested widely, where there are hundreds of definitions and thousands of publications. The review will echo briefly the ancient Greeks and the Chinese, it will trace ideas on leadership and management through the 20th century and into the 21st century. Further relevant literature will include works on educational leadership and the history and context of the Irish primary principal. Finally portrait based and life and professional career history approaches to educational leadership will be examined.

The review will trace the changing role of the primary school principal in Ireland as it mirrored societal change. The largely administrative role of the principal before 1970 was replaced by a "predominantly managerial" (Sugrue, 2013:10) role for the next two decades where there were numerous significant developments. The later 20th century where policy documents and legislation emerge, and with "mesmerising regulatory" (Sugrue, 2008:40) crossed the principal's desk and the early 21st century where according to McHugh (2009) moral, transformational and visionary (MTV) leadership was required will receive attention.

'Modern' manifestations of leadership in education following seminal works by Friere (1972) and Bennis (1989), developed by Ruth (2006), Sergiovanni (2006), Davies (2007) and others will be considered. Many of these writers argue for a "leadership culture based on moral purpose which provides success that is accessible to all (Davies, 2007:2).

A further block of literature including works by Gronn, Ribbins, Day, Bottery and others is at the heart of this research. Initially I will comment on Gronn's (1993) broad phases through which leaders pass during their careers, Day and Bakioglu's (1996:207) career pattern during incumbency "initiation, development, autonomy and disenchantment" and Bottery's (2009) "snapshot at a moment in time …. capturing the essence of a head". However it is to Ribbins' work in partnership with several other writers that I will turn for the central part of this section of the review.

1.6.2 Research Design

The research design and research methods and tools will be outlined in Chapter 3. This study will be located within what is termed a phenomenological paradigm using a qualitative methodology. Bowen (2008:138) contends that this kind of inquiry is characterised *inter alia* by "research in natural settings" and "the tentative application of findings". The advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research will be addressed. I will defend the methodology while acknowledging that my small sample size limits possibilities for generalisation,

nevertheless bearing in mind Bottery's (2008a:183) argument that "what is most meaningful is sometimes derived from the singular and unique; that generalisations in education are as likely to be useful if they are 'fuzzy' generalisations as if they are from scientific or statistical generalisations".

The research tool I used in this study is the face to face semi-structured interview. The purpose of the interviews in this research is initially to prompt the selected principals on what motivated them to become teachers and principals, who were their key influencers (formation – making a principal). I wished to engage with the interviewee principals at an in-depth level on accession, that is becoming a principal and on being a principal (incumbency).

During the course of this research I interviewed twelve primary school principals. The length of interview ranged from one and a half to two and half hours. I made a significant effort to achieve a gender balance and to have representation from many different types of school. Consequently a satisfactory gender balance was achieved. While a majority of principals worked as administrative principals in large schools in the Dublin area, principals from regional towns and teaching principals from rural areas were included in the sample. Most principals worked in mixed gender schools and while most led schools under church patronage participants working under other patrons were interviewed also. All but one principal worked in a vertical primary school (infants to sixth class pupils). About half the principals worked in schools that were designated 'disadvantaged'. Half the principals had experience of lecturing or working in continuing professional development in places other than their schools while a quarter of them had been seconded to a position in the area of professional development during their careers. While ten participants held one principalship, one had been principal in two schools and one held the position of principal in three different schools.

The questions asked at interview and consequently the context of the interviews were informed by using a structure developed by some of the pioneers in the field and adapting questions to suit an Irish context one eighth of the journey into the 21st century. I adapted the model pioneered by Ribbins and Marland (1994),

Pascal and Ribbins (1998) and Rayner and Ribbins (1998). I amended questions where necessary to ensure that all questions were relevant to an Irish primary school context.

In this research I use the term 'principal' rather than 'head teacher', the term used in England and elsewhere and the term used by previous researchers although I should add that in Gaelic the word used is *priomhoide*, meaning head teacher.

Through the lens of fifteen questions and answers I aspired to catch a glimpse of the backgrounds of twelve principals, who and what influenced them to become teachers initially and principals subsequently. I probed their style of leadership and their relationships with a myriad of other players. Questions led to an examination of what motivates and sustains them in their roles, the 'highs' and the 'lows' of their journeys towards the frontier.

I hoped to capture how principals view the changes that have taken place in primary schools in Ireland and in their roles arising from the Primary School Curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1999) a significant increase in continuing professional development, developments in information and communications technology, increased provision for specials needs education and for schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, the historically significant immigration phenomenon of the last decade and the vagaries of an economic cycle that visited boom and recession in quick succession. My final selection of questions and sub-questions was influenced by advice from my supervisor, lessons that I learned during the course of the pilot study and my ongoing interactions with school leaders, teachers, DES personnel, teacher tutors working in schools on curricular and organisational issues and other stakeholders.

Having gathered the data, "the elusive process … [of turning] raw data into nuggets of gold" (Watling and James, 2007:350), analysis of the conversations was conducted.

1.6.3 Presentation of Findings, Discussion and Conclusion of Study

The data gathered in this study, the twenty-two hours of in-depth conversations with twelve principals is reported in Chapter 4. A brief initial discussion of the findings and of emerging themes and trends takes place and is linked to appropriate literature. In Chapter 5 the themes and trends are discussed further and are placed in the context of principalship nationally and internationally. Finally in Chapter 6 there is a commentary on the findings, on the limitations of this research followed by signposts towards further enquiry, searching for the bright fields beyond the frontier.

1.7 Chapter Summary

In this introductory chapter I have plotted the course of this research, referring to the purpose, context and key questions of the study. My personal relationship and connections with the role of principal are acknowledged. Subsequent chapters dealing with a literature review, research methodologies, findings, discussion of findings and finally conclusions are documented.

Chapter 2 - Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

The review of literature in this study is reported in two ways; in this chapter a comprehensive account of relevant literature is outlined while connections with appropriate literature are made throughout the remainder of the study. In the context of this research, relevant literature includes works on leadership, educational and school leadership, life story and career history approaches/portrait based approaches to studying school leaders and the history and context of the Irish primary principal. Developments in the theory and practice of leadership and management throughout the 20th century are chronicled. Particular attention is paid to the transformational leadership genre because of its relevance for this study. The rich history of the Irish primary school principal is reviewed while the life story and career history approach to school principalship, upon which this research is based is addressed in some detail.

2.2 Leadership

The concept of leadership continues to be deeply contested despite the vast literature that deals with the issue. As a concept it has been viewed as “protean, impenetrable, elusive and delusive” (Burns, 1998:49). A decade and a half ago, Burns, one of the seminal writers on leadership commented that “there are more than one hundred serious definitions of leadership” (2). Half a century ago Bennis (1959) quoted by Sergiovanni and Corbally (1984:13) opined that “probably more has been written and less is known about leadership than any other topic in the behavioral sciences”.

In truth we can make reference to leadership theory, and practice, long before Burns and Bennis. Some of President Lincoln's more profound pronouncements, "a good leader avoids issuing orders, preferring to request, imply or make suggestions" (Phillips, 1992:48) or "a leader gains commitment from individuals through openness, empowerment and coaching" (ibid:40/41) predated respectively the Human Relationships movement by a century and Emotional Intelligence theories by a century and a half (human relations and emotional intelligence theories will be addressed later). Furthermore there are examples of leadership practice in action, in folklore, in story and in literature for millennia. The Chinese philosopher, Lao-Tzu, spoke of leaders 3,000 years ago thus, "of their best leaders, when their work is done, their task accomplished, the people all say we did it ourselves" (Hasselbein, 2002:25).

2.2.1 Early Theories

The origins of a 'modern' literature on leadership and management are usually traced to the early 20th century, following Carlyle's (1841) work in the previous century.

A sequential review of the literature commences with the scientific management movement where leadership and management were to be characterised by maximum specialisation and separation of functions while all organisational members were to be regarded as essentially rational beings, who with appropriate instructions and agreed incentives, could be expected to operate like machines so as to increase productivity.

Taylor's (1911) scientific management movement was complemented by the classical management theories developed by Fayol (1916), the earliest known proponent of a theory. The fundamental elements of management were defined as being to forecast and plan, to organise, to command, to co-ordinate and to control. Urwick in Britain and Gulick in the U.S. advocated general management principles enthusiastically (Urwick, 1963, Gulick, 1937). Weber (1947:358)

characterised the charismatic leader as one who was endowed with “supernatural, superhuman or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities … who enjoys loyalty and authority by virtue of a mission believed to be embodied in him”. The theories of the classical writers were widely and uncritically accepted mainly because of their “impeccable practitioner credentials” (Hughes, 1985: 5). They gave little attention to constraints and qualifications, or to conditions which would have to be satisfied for their propositions to be of value in predicting future performance.

In concentrating so closely on tasks, on forecasts and plans, and on rules and regulations geared to ensure uniformity, the scientific management, classical management and bureaucratic movements (Weber, 1947) ignored the importance of the human factor at work, and of the whole area of human motivation. “Merely cursory recognition was given to the fact that organisations consist of people with varied personalities, purposes and perceptions” (Hughes, 1985:6). The scientific management school saw human motivation as merely a response to “conditioned incentives” (Vroom and Deci, 1970:129) offered by management to bribe the worker into productivity. Such incentives were basically of an extrinsic nature. The rewards came from outside the job itself in the form of inducements, and were exemplified by monetary rewards, bonuses and other “fringe benefits” (Vroom and Deci); in short, they represented “physiological motivation” (March and Simon, 1958).

2.2.2 Human Relations Theories

The human relations movement developed in reaction to the formal tradition of the classical models. Follett (1868-1933) believed that the fundamental problem in all organisations was in developing and maintaining dynamic and harmonious relationships (Metcalf and Urwick, 1941). The development of the human relations approach is usually traced to studies done in the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company in Chicago by Mayo and Roethlisberger. These studies inform the literature describing informal groups, the study of which is

basic to an analysis of a wide variety of organisations (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939).

Mayo's studies of productivity on the factory floor revealed the vital role of non-monetary inducements and the importance of intrinsic motivation. His findings had a "shattering impact on the rabble hypothesis upon which most of the earlier industrial psychology had been based" (Brown, 1970:303). This "rabble hypothesis" which had seen man as pursuing his own individual self-interests, was forced to contend with the importance of the social context in which the job was set. The importance of the Hawthorne experiment was thus its discovery that the impact of the social setting of work and the importance of group cohesiveness within the work place far exceeded that of extrinsic inducements. The impact of both these aspects had been far greater than hitherto realised in that they served to highlight "the inadequacy of the assumptions" (ibid) on which most of the early work in this field had been based. Thus realising that work is essentially a "group activity" (ibid), Mayo advocated that "The drive for efficiency had henceforth to be backed by an understanding of the human factors at work" (Pugh, 1971:43).

Some studies used an autocratic-democratic-laissez faire typology when considering leadership (Lewin 1944), (Hemphill Coons 1954). Variously instrumental – expressive (Etzioni 1964), bureaucratic-human relations (Litwak 1961), closed – open (Bernstein 1967), structuring – supportive (Handy 1976) and tight – loose coupling (Weick 1976) have been used to typify leaders. Halpin (1966) looked on leaders and managers from initiating structure and consideration perspectives. Yukl in 1975 added a third dimension, decision-centralisation to Halpin's model. Blake-Mouton (1964) explored management styles ranging from impoverished to integrative (1, 1 to 9, 9) on task and person-centred criteria, such as initiating structure and consideration.

In 1958 a continuum with seven distinct signposts from "manager announces decisions" to "manager permits subordinates to function within limits defined by

superior" was devised by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1958). Likert's four-fold typology covers the same ground as the Tannenbaum and Schmidt continuum in a more succinct manner – it ranges from exploitive – authoritative to participative (Likert, 1967).

Furthermore research into the "*Human Side of Enterprise*" (McGregor, 1960) highlighted the role of personnel operating inside the organisational system. The concept of administration was seen in terms of the "hierarchy of subordinate – superordinate relations" (Getzells, 1958:151) which exist within any "intricate social system" (ibid). Attention was directed to the fact that "administration always operates in an interpersonal – or social relationship" (ibid). Getzells, clearly influenced by both schools of thought, regarded organisations as comprising two "conceptually independent and phenomenally interactive dimensions" (152). The ideographic dimension with its emphasis on the social aspect of work, the context under which work takes place, which was regarded as complementary to the nomothetic dimension, which highlighted the job content itself and that of the institution as a whole. Getzells thus regarded organisational effectiveness as a function of both dimensions – the job context and the job content.

Scientific management theory had, through the writings of Taylor, Fayol, and Gulick, directed its attention solely on the job task itself. It has thus favoured a highly structured bureaucratic style of organisation in the Weberian mode. Post 1950s writers, emphasising the social nature of work, attacked such structuring as rigid and restrictive. For them, the main function of any organisation was to facilitate individual development through better organisation of human relationships. Increased productivity, according to the human relations theorists, occurred not through the utilisation of task formulae but rather through concentrating on the worker himself and on his needs. Man was seen to become apart from, rather than part of, a mere machine.

The social needs of the worker were thus integrated into the overall needs of the organisation, with resulting mutual benefits. Indeed the satisfaction of worker needs came to be regarded as essential for the overall effectiveness of the organisation. Failure to cater for such needs was viewed as detrimental to its "success". Likert advanced the human relations school emphasising human relations in organisational terms. His 'System Four', involving supportive leadership and highly motivated employees sharing in decision-making, epitomises the philosophy of the human relations school (Likert, 1967). Barnard in his insistence that organisations are by their very nature co-operative systems contended that authority did not reside in the "giving" of an order by a superior, but rather in the accepting of the order by a member of the organisation (Barnard, 1938).

The emerging human relations theory of the 1950s concentrated on a largely ideographic dimension of organisation, with a view to enhancing overall organisational effectiveness. In accordance with this view, McGregor, in his work, "*The Human Side of Enterprise*" directed attention towards a bi-polar view of man the worker as seen by management. Stating that management thinking was based on "two very different sets of assumptions about people" (Robinson, 1972: 121), McGregor believed that management style reflected such assumptions. Termed originally X and Y, these assumptions have subsequently become applied to leadership styles. Thus leaders and managers are often classified as Theory X or as Theory Y leaders or managers arising from their negative or positive view of workers respectively.

It is clear, therefore, that Theory X likens man the worker to the age-old image of the donkey in the carrot and stick situation. Man needs to be coaxed by monetary "carrots" or beaten by the "stick" of redundancy, to "coax the productivity out of him" (Robinson, 1972). McGregor, reflecting the impact of the human relations school, preferred to take a more positive view of all employees, industrial or otherwise. He thus concentrated on the promotion of the latter half of his theory

which assumed that: "The motivation, the potential for drive, the capacity for assuming responsibility, the readiness for direct behaviour towards organisational goals are all present in people. Leadership and management does not put them there. It is a responsibility of management to recognise and develop these human characteristics for themselves". (McGregor, 1960: 33/34). McGregor emphasises the structuring of work content so that employees could experience a "sense of accomplishment and personal growth" (Lawlor, 1970:163) and permit their intellectual potentialities to be fully utilised.

The promotion of self-esteem and self-actualisation, higher order needs in a "hierarchy of prepotency" (Maslow, 1970:40), is congruent with McGregor's Theory Y as are Batchler's, (1981:48) ideas on "control and autonomy" and Herzberg's (1986:115) contention that "the motivation of an employee is dependent on giving him challenging work in which he can assume responsibility". The chief motivators which promote job satisfaction according to Herzberg are achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility and advancement, all of which are intrinsic in nature.

2.2.3 Situational Theories

As the 20th century developed leadership began to be seen as both a process, the use of influence directing and co-ordinating groups to meet goals and as a property, a set of characteristics attributed to those who use such influence successfully. The early 1960s marked the emergence of situational leadership models such as Fiedler's LPC Theory (Griffin and Moorhead, 2007). This was followed in the 1970s by the path-goal theory of Evans initially and later House and Mitchell (ibid).

The 1970s saw emergence of Vroom & Yetton's development driven and time driven decision-making trees. Research on participative leadership (following Lowin, 1968) in a variety of sectors followed in the succeeding decades giving

rise to situations where particularly in professional organisations aspects of leadership began to be shared Greenberg 1975; Conway 1976; Melcher 1976; Dachler & Wilpert 1978; Davies 1983; Conway, 1984; McHugh 1991.

In the 1980s and 1990s leadership through the eyes of followers received considerable consideration under headings such as transformational leadership, charismatic leadership and attributions of leadership. Burns (1978) talking of transformational leadership focuses on the basic distinction between leading for change and leading for structure. McHugh (1998) who refers to transformational leaders as bringing or transforming followers from one level to another, enabling organisations and people to make substantial positive changes in the way they do things includes visibility, facilitation, envisioning, enabling, celebrating, nurturing, fostering creativity, risk taking, partnering and developing their organisations as learning organisations as constituents of transformational leadership.

Since Burns moved the leadership conversation to transactional and transformational there has been no shortage of writers eager to join in the conversation. As transformational leadership in particular has resonance in this study it is to this phenomenon I will turn now.

2.2.4 Transactional and Transformational Leadership

Transactional leadership or contingent reinforcement is at one end of a continuum while transformational leadership is located at the other end (Bass, 1995:466/7). Transactional leadership covers many of the models of leadership in existence. Its focus *inter alia* is on the exchanges, the deals, the manipulation that takes place between leaders and followers, its key words include exchange and *quid pro quo*. Key words and concepts associated with transformational leadership include the interests of followers, trust, empathy, vision, integrity and the absence of ego. Northouse (1997:135) reproduces Bass's model of transactional, transformational

leadership outlining contingent rewards, constructive transactions, active and passive management by exception and corrective transactions as belonging to the transactional end of the continuum. On the other hand transformational leadership according to Northouse (1997:130) is about "values, ethics, standards, and long term goals, it is about "moral purposes … the 'good' society, participative democracy and the fulfilment of all individuals' intellectual, social and emotional potential". In Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee's (2002:59) view it is about empathy; for Ruth (2006: 60) transformational leadership is about liberty, justice, equality ... opportunity and the pursuit of happiness ... [echoing Burns] a prescriptive term that has a strong moral and passionate dimension". Bass (1995: 476) referred to transforming leaders converting followers to disciples and developing followers into leaders. Following Burns he saw leaders taking followers up Maslow's hierarchy of needs "from needs of safety and security to needs for achievement and self – actualisation ... in moving them to go beyond their own self interests for the good of the larger entities to which they belong" (467). Later Handy (1994:275) was to follow Burns suggesting that Maslow's "hierarchy did not reach far enough. There could be a stage beyond self – realisation, a stage we might call idealisation". Bass (1985:29) talked about a transformational leader "as someone who raised awareness about issues of consequence, shifting them to higher level needs ... and [motivated colleagues] to work harder than they originally had expected they would".

Moorhead and Griffin (2004:368) viewed transactional leadership as "essentially the same as management in that it involves routine, regimented activities" and transformational leadership as "The set of abilities that allow the leader to recognise the need for change, to create a vision to guide that change and to execute the change effectively" (368). Starratt distinguishes between the leader and the manager, between the transformational and the transactional and between O'Donohue's (2007:166) servant of the frontier and the functionary. He (Starratt, 1993b:18) maintains that the leader is concerned with growth while the manager or administrator is concerned with maintenance; the leader is the director while the manager is just that, a stage manager; the leader writes the script while the manager follows the script; the leader defines what is real by what is possible

rather than by what is; the leader has a vision, the manager is concerned with budgets, administration and 'administrivia'; the leader exercises the power of shared purpose while the manager exercises the power of rewards and sanctions (*quid pro quos*); the leader challenges people to be the best they can be while the manager is content to keep people happy. The leader motivates, illuminates and inspires while the manager controls, fixes and coordinates. These polarised or dichotomous qualities rather than constituting everyday reality do highlight the differences between a transactional focused leadership on the one hand and a transformational focused leadership embodying a "substantive rationality"(18).

2.2.5 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership therefore is "a metamorphosis in form or structure, a change in the very condition or nature of things ... a radical change in outward form or inner character" (Burns, 2003:24). Transformational and participatory leadership require "the involvement of a larger group in decision making [ensuring] organisational improvement" (Fink, 2005:100). Transformational leadership includes and subsumes concepts such as vision and charismatic leadership and involves 'doing things right' as distinct from the transactional leaders' doing right things. The excitement, the enthusiasm, the inspiration, the legends, the enduring legacies are more likely to come from those leaders we might deem transformational, Gandhi, Mandela, Roosevelt, Kennedy, King, Havel, Sakharov, Lincoln, Obama, Aung San Suu Kyi, than from those who do not come from the transformational end of the spectrum. The essence of transformational leadership arises from the relationships and interaction between the leader and the followers. Transformational leaders "tap the motives of followers in order to better reach the goals of leaders and followers" (Burns, 1978:18). They empower and "build the self-efficacy of followers" (Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy, 2006:416). They are committed to "elevating the followers to meet their higher order needs ... they look for other deeper unarticulated needs or wants that have the potential to transform and liberate the followers" (Ruth, 2006:60); consequently "followers and leaders are inextricably bound together in the transformative process" (Northouse, 1997:130).

Bass's (1985) argument, reported by Northouse (1997:134) suggests that transformational leaders motivate followers to do more than is expected of them, they raise "followers' levels of consciousness about the level and importance of idealised goals", furthermore they get followers to transcend their own self-interest for the good of an ideal, be it school, team, organisation, firm or country and they interest followers and engage them in addressing higher level needs. Such leaders have the capacity to inspire followers to lay self-interest aside and to campaign for and in some instances win political arguments, in the process transforming and uplifting their followers and transforming themselves also as a consequence. True leadership according to Ruth (2006:68/9) has liberation as well as transformation at its core. "Whether we call it transformational leadership, servant leadership or liberation leadership, we are describing a relationship where there is a commitment to growth, development and complete liberation of both leaders and their collaboration. Furthermore Bass (1998:5) categorised transformational leadership under four headings, under four I's; idealised influence, a synonym for charisma or charismatic leadership but without the 'tabloid' type attention that accompanies charisma; inspirational motivation; intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration; higher order constructs according to Avolio and Bass (1995:203). Transformational leadership in typologies enunciated by Burns, Bass, Ruth, Northouse, Davies and others subsumes charismatic, inspirational and visionary leadership. Northouse (1997: 134) suggests that "individuals who exhibit transformational leadership often have a strong set of internal values and ideals, and they are effective at motivating followers to act in ways that support the greater good".

I contend that an absence of ego is a significant factor in the success of some transformational leaders. The absence of ego and presence of self-esteem argument is implicit in the work of Collins (2001:36) where he describes his ultimate Level 5 transformational type leaders "channelling ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company". Collins' Level 5 leaders characterised by professional will and personal humility, are ambitious first and foremost for their institutions. Glad (1996:20) maintains that these top class leaders are "goal orientated, aware of constraints, sensitive to the obstacles

in the path to their goals and capable of self-discipline and restraint in attempting to overcome the obstacles.

Northouse (1997:131) makes the point that a further attribute of transformational leaders is that in the process of leading they also change themselves. Burns (2003:155) agrees instancing Gandhi who transformed both society and self "with inward liberation….using *satyagraha*, a power born of truth, love and non-violence and *swarag*, a vision of self-rule".

2.2.6 Emotional Intelligence and Beyond

A major contributor to leadership thinking since the mid-1990s has been Goleman and his associates, disciples of McClelland whose own work made a significant contribution to leadership in the 1960s. Goleman's concept of primal leadership demands that we bring emotional intelligence to bear on situations. He contends that understanding the powerful role of emotions in the workplace sets the best leaders apart from the rest not just in tangibles such as better business results and the retention of talent, but also in the all-important intangibles, such as higher morale, motivation and commitment (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002). Goleman's resonant leadership with a critical mass of emotional intelligence capabilities – such as drive to improve and the ability to catalyse change, the capacity for empathy and a talent for developing others creates a climate where people were energised and focused, had pride in their work, loved what they did and stuck around. Goleman however does not denigrate the place of cognitive leadership, he counsels "that no creature can fly with just one wing, gifted leadership occurs where heart and head – feeling and thought – meet. These are the two wings that allow a leader to soar". (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002:26).

The literature and discourse on leadership in the last decade assumes that emotional intelligence, primal leadership and empowerment have become a major

part of the agenda. George et al (2007), writes about authentic leaders working hard at developing self-awareness through persistent and often courageous self-awareness. McHugh (2007) talks of part of the leader's purpose being to find, to develop and to empower individuals who may then challenge the leader for his or her leadership position. Goffee and Jones (2007), view leaders as benevolent guardians, when granting respect and recognition. Miles and Watkins (2007), visualise a leadership team with complementary strengths. Ancona et al (2007), while acknowledging that leaders are incomplete, advocate a model of leadership including sense making, relating, visioning and inventing with a distinct emphasis on trusting and networking.

Very recent theories on leadership emphasise ethics, in part because of the fact that business leadership has become synonymous in the public eye with unethical behaviour (Gardner, 2007). Gardner and others insist that the retention of an ethical compass is essential to the health of organisations. This too will influence further theories in the next decade.

Over a century the image of leadership as a hierarchical pyramid with a leader on top deciding everything has been transformed to an image where a leader can now be seen underneath, supporting collaborators to achieve their ends. Ruth visualises a future where the shape will more likely resemble a circle of collaborators rather than a hierarchical pyramid (Ruth 2006).

2.3 School Leadership Literature

2.3.1 Impact on School Culture

School leadership literature had a later starting point than the general literature on leadership and management. As the research base of school leadership literature expands there is an emerging consensus that the quality of school leadership has a

significant impact on school culture and is a major determining factor in ensuring quality educational outcomes among our pupils in our schools (Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Waters, Marzano and McNulty, 2003; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000).

2.3.2 Enhancing Learning

Huber and Muijs (2010) having reviewed the literature on school leadership observe that effective school leaders lead the learning, they create a school climate where teachers can perform optimally and consequently they have a significant impact on the well-being of students. The complex matrix of relationships in the principal's life, the challenging and conflicting demands on principals and the web of management and administrative tasks that inhabit the principal's role are reviewed by Howley et al., (2005); Hess (2003) and Fenwick and Pierce, 2001). Hess (2003:1) refers to the multifarious expectations on school leaders; they are expected to "leverage accountability and revolutionary technology, devise performance based evaluation systems, reengineer outdated management structures, recruit and cultivate non traditional staff, drive decisions with data, build professional cultures and ensure that every child is served". Reflecting in a Canadian study on the multifaceted role of the school principal as an educational visionary, instructional and curriculum leader, expert in assessment, communication, human resource management, financial management and public relations Walker and Qian (2006:298) commented on the portrayal of the principal 'as an underpaid workhorse tangling with the conflicting demands of instructional leadership, bureaucracy, official mandates and adverse interest groups".

The contribution of the school principal to the enhancement of quality learning has been recognised. Sahlberg (2011) referring to the success of curriculum reforms in Finland attributed the success to the professional attitude and pedagogical leadership of school principals. Furthermore he contends that it was the school principals' emphasis on learning that enabled them to be …"a critical

voice in shaping education policies and steering school improvement based on the needs of teachers, students and society. Based on these experiences it is difficult to imagine that market based education reforms that often undermine the central role of pedagogical leadership could have been implemented in Finland" (Sahlberg, 2011:93).

Valedictory remarks supporting the contention that school leaders make a difference for the better are not confined to Finland or to this century, they are widespread in both the political and research worlds. Ribbins and Marland (1994: 2) cite Baker "it [achievement] depends essentially upon the leadership of the head and the quality of the teaching", and Patten "the single most important factor in a school's success is the quality of leadership provided by the head". In another continent and in another century, another politician (Obama, 2007:161) when commenting on the most important factor in determining a student's achievement wanted to recruit and train "transformative principals and more effective teachers", a point reiterated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2008) and the McKinsey Report (Barber and Moorshed, 2007) where there was clear comment about the necessity to attract and to develop a professional cohort of school leaders and teachers to improve the quality of education provision in schools.

The research community has little difficulty validating the contributions of school leaders to system improvement and the enhancement of student learning. In their reviews of research for the Wallace Foundation on how leadership influences student learning, Leithwood et al (2004) argue that the principal has a greater influence over children's learning outcomes than any other factor. They reference quantitative research studies demonstrating that school leadership is responsible for a quarter of the variation of student achievement explained by school level variables (21). Furthermore Marzano et al (2005) also found a .25 correlation between the leadership behaviour of the principal and student achievement having reviewed sixty-nine studies involving 2802 schools, 14,000 teachers and 1.4 million students.

Fullan (2006) makes a compelling case for the interdependency of leadership and learning in assuring quality education in schools. He is unambiguous about the role of the principal in school improvement; "the principal is the nerve centre of school improvement, where principal leadership is strong even the most challenged schools thrive. When it is weak schools fail or badly underperform" (Fullan, 2006: x).

Bush (2008:1) summarises when he argues that the development of a highly skilled workforce in the global economy "requires trained and committed teachers but they in turn need the leadership of highly effective principals with the support of other senior and middle managers". And in the context of the 21st century the belief that leadership traits were innate or inherited has been overtaken by an acceptance that leadership can be learned and consequently that leaders can be educated and trained. Linsky and Lawrence (2011:6) express a very clear view, "the only people we know who think that the capacity for leadership is inherited are those who think they have it. No, leadership is about courage and skill. And both the courage and the skills can be learned". West-Burnham (2009a) views leadership qualities as human qualities that grow within a personality and can be reinforced by experience, knowledge and understanding.

2.3.3 A 'Newer' and Contemporary Literature

Notwithstanding previous remarks about the contributions of leaders deemed to have charismatic tendencies, rich literature has been emerging in the last two decades focusing less on the extraordinary, the "heroes and heroines" (Sugrue, 2009:353), the 'super head teachers' (Copland, 2001) and more on the ordinary human side of leadership, in Fink's (2005) words, on 'leaders as mortals'. Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002: 19) applied Goleman's (1996) work on emotional intelligence to leadership, introducing the concept of "resonant leadership". Sergiovanni (2007) continued to theorise and write widely on moral leadership and Ruth (2006) wrote about liberation, servant leadership and followership and drew on seminal works by Friere (1972) and Bennis (1989).

Starratt (1993b) commented on the principal's dramatic leadership role in the post-modern world where not only are the dramaturgical terminology of role and script, plot and play, appropriate but there is a dynamic agency where the stakes are high, the outcomes are uncertain and there are underlying struggles over values. Such principals/leaders perform a variety of functions in the drama as player and director, as stage manager and critic and as an examiner of the scripts of leadership and as "the visionary grounded in some core meanings which are central to human life" (Starratt, 1993b:144).

In this almost complete United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Leadership (2005-2014) there have been many fine contributions on the theme including Fullan (2005), Hargreaves and Fink (2006) and Davies (2007) arguing for a "leadership culture based on moral purpose which provides success that is accessible to all" (Davies, 2007:2).

2.3.4 Distributed Leadership

Leadership is seen by some "as the effecting of policy … through collective action ... the moving of [people] towards goals … and it can be done well, badly or indifferently" (Hodgkinson, 1996: 30). Following the belief that leaders are not omnipotent and that personnel other than the designated leader in an organisation can exercise leadership, the notion of a distributed leadership has received increasing levels of attention in recent years in the work of Spillane (2006) and Sergiovanni, (2005). McBeath (2005) identifies six forms of distributed leadership; formal, pragmatic, strategic, incremental, opportunistic and cultural. Brundrett and Crawford, (2008:17) suggested that distributed leadership promoted "a culture which fosters leadership development". Meanwhile Duignan (2006:15) argues that "distributed leadership cannot be practised in schools which operate within a hierarchical and or control paradigm".

The debate in recent years has centred on the concept of distributed leadership as the antithesis to heroic forms of leadership. Spillane (2006:2) asserts "I develop a distributed perspective on leadership as an alternative to accounts that equate leadership with the gallant acts of one or more leaders in an organisation". The debate on distributed leadership is probably still in its infancy; Sugrue (2009: 366) maintains that "the jury is still out on the longevity or shelf life of distributed leadership". Leithwood et al (2009: 269) contend that "distribution of leadership is not likely to be *the* answer to what ails schools". Hargreaves and Fink (2006: 116) argue that distributed leadership "means more than delegated leadership". Scheerens hypothesises that individual hierarchical leadership may be disappearing as "leadership thinking (evolves) to the recognition that school leadership can be devolved over staff and other organisational "substitutes" for leadership" (Scheerens, 2012: v). He goes on to categorise this as a "lean form of leadership that is comparable to the concept of metacontrol" (ibid). Scheerens contents that a lean form of leadership or management "would make maximum use of the available substitutes and self-organisation offered by the school staff and other provisions (146).

Recent research in Ireland by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) found that while "there was an effort made to distribute leadership, there was a greater emphasis on consult and delegate rather than reciprocal responsibility"(PDST, 2014:13). Furthermore the PDST concluded that distributed leadership is not a panacea as there are "several understandings ... of what truly constitute distributed leadership" (13). The PDST view resonates to a degree with the contention of IPPN (D'Arcy, 2014) that post holders rarely carry the level of devolved management accountability that would be the case for roles at this level in other situations.

2.3.5 Newly Appointed Principals – Contemporary Research

Much contemporary research focuses on new, novice or beginning principals. In researching transition into principalship in the US Spillane and Lee (2014)

highlight the “reality shock” experienced by novice principals. The shock appears to have been brought about by the sense of ultimate responsibility, contributing to core problems of practice, including task volume, diversity and unpredictability. The research team found that “the conditions of novices’ transitions to principalship either eased or exacerbated the level of practice problems they encountered” (Spillane and Lee, 2014:431). In order to mitigate the reported stress, frustration, exhaustion and nervousness the authors recommended strongly that “leadership preparation and development programmes might directly work on the emotional dimension of the work ... serious attention to stress management in the work life and workplace is essential”(456).

Earley and Bubb’s (2013) findings in a small scale study in the UK mirror those of Spillane and Lee; they found that newly appointed headteachers reported feeling responsible for virtually everything in the school. One principal experiencing isolation and the burdens of new office expressed frustrations; “I find I can hardly get out of my office into the real world where there’s children and joy and happiness and creativity” (790). The authors are clear in their recommendation, “a major transition occurs in the first year of headship that requires bespoke responses … mentoring, coaching and other forms of support” (794/5). They comment on the necessity for headteachers to be self-evaluative; “to be able to reflect on practice and identify areas for improvement” (ibid).

Crawford and Cowie (2012) in Scotland commented on the emotional demands on new school heads and how the ‘demanding and greedy’ nature of headship was not conducive to the development of educational improvement strategies. Back in the US Shoho and Barnett (2010) found that newly appointed principals did not feel prepared for the enormity of the job or for budgetary matters. In an Irish context Sugrue (2005) refers to the ‘baptism of fire’, the urgent degree of immediacy in the life of the new principal. He advocates intergenerational learning and embracing the emotional element. Duignan (2006) in an Australian context agrees that newly appointed principals require training but urges that such

training is broadly based; "leadership is too dynamic, situational and unpredictable to be specified by a list of competences" (Duignan, 2006: 117).

A literature on mentoring and coaching as possible solutions to principals' anxieties has been growing in recent years. Barnett and O'Mahony (2008) point to mentoring as a key support process for aspiring and practising leaders. Meanwhile Anderson and Shannon (2013) speak of mentoring using words such as nurturing, encouraging, promoting professional and personal development. Coaching, "the process of generating awareness and responsibilities with another with the goal of improved performance" (Whitworth: 2007:15) is a profound method of professional development for school leaders in the view of some commentators and academics. West-Burnham goes further, "Coaching is the single most powerful learning strategy to support personal and professional growth (West-Burnham, 2009b:7). Starr (2008) maintains that the coachee's thinking, actions and learning will be challenged and changed for the better following the interaction.

2.4 An Irish Principal's Role Mirroring Societal Change

2.4.1 A Lengthy History

The Irish primary principal has had his/her day in the sun, in our literature. In Goldsmith's (1770) poem, *The Deserted Village* the principal was male and was held in high esteem in the community, "the village all declared how much he knew. His words of learned length and thundering sound amazed the gazing rustics ranged around" (Goldsmith), as they contemplated how "one small head could carry all he knew". It was a very different era but the point is that the principal was at the helm of the community. Generations later, indeed centuries later McDonagh was to talk about the teacher, a primary principal with "the solicitor and the bank clerk in the hotel bar drinking for ten" (Killeen, 1967), a change in emphasis, but the principal is still at the helm of the community. Visitors also have recognised a valuable heritage, "Education in Ireland has a long and distinguished history. Scholarship is embedded deep in the Celtic psyche"

(West-Burnham, 2011:177). D'Arcy (2014) on behalf of the IPPN reminds us of that relationship between the principal and the community in a recent publication. "Present day principals are heirs to a distinguished tradition of professional dedication and service and are generally held in high esteem by their communities" (D'Arcy, 2014:9).

The role of the primary principal in the Irish system has undergone significant changes in recent decades. As these changes got under way Coolahan (1981: 141) recalled for us the journey to date:

> *Factors in modern Irish history such as the colonial past, the religious affiliation of the population, the cultural traditions of the people, the economic structure and the goals set for education have all shaped the unusual, interesting and complex structure of the present-day education system.*

Before the 1970s the principal performed a series of administrative tasks but worked in a society where there was a great degree of certainty and where society placed emphasis on hierarchies. Nevertheless the Irish primary principal presided over a system characterised by Coolahan (1991) as one of legendary autonomy for classroom teachers. Reference to the principal (*priomhoide,* meaning head teacher) was included in the Rules for National Schools, last printed in 1965 (Department of Education, 1965). It should be recalled however that the vast majority of Irish primary principals were classroom teachers in a largely agricultural 'pre urban' society where their primary role was to teach a class and their secondary role was to perform perfunctory administrative tasks. The *primus inter pares* role identified later by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) (1991) and the Department of Education and Science (DES) (1999a) was still in the future. Furthermore it should be noted that historically there has been a significant ego identification of the school with the principal in Irish society (DES, 1999a; IPPN, 2001). The DES (1999a) report accepts the notion that this naming of the principal does affirm the reality that the principal of the school has a crucial, pivotal role in creating the spirit and atmosphere by which the school is recognised and in which the school community works. While the location of so

many schools in rural communities nationally gives rise to such an identification, the phenomenon was by no means confined to rural Ireland.

In our society of the early 21st century uncertainty and insecurity pervade our world of 'liquid modernity' (Baumann, 2000; Baumann 2006). Schools existing in this society are a microcosm of larger social forces, part of international 'social movements; (Castells, 2000; Castells, 2004; Sugrue, 2011). The principal's role and that of the school mirror to a large extent this broader society; Goodson (1992:242) maintains that "the traditions through which particular practices are transmitted and reshaped never exist in isolation from larger social traditions". The largely administrative role of the Irish primary school principal pre 1970 was replaced by a "predominantly managerial" (Sugrue, 2003: 10) role for the next two decades where there were numerous significant developments. The Department of Education issued Circular 16/73 in 1973, this defined the role of the principal. It was a seminal document listing twenty-nine duties/responsibilities; when these responsibilities were subdivided they amounted to in excess of one hundred tasks to be undertaken by the principal. The devolution of decision-making for curriculum matters to the school, the encouragement towards elementary forms of planning, the implementation of a post of responsibility structure, the emergence of Boards of Management (1975) and of the National Parents' Council (1985) which occurred against a backdrop of increasing urbanisation, the emergence of larger schools and an emerging culture of democratisation transformed the role of the principal in the school and in the community.

2.4.2 Late Twentieth Century

In the 1990s the pace of the change in Ireland accelerated as the recession of the 1980s was left behind, as globalisation assumed a new and real mantle and as traditional certainties and hierarchies were challenged by a more confident and liberal population. I characterise the 1990s in Irish education as an era of multiple reports and varied coloured papers as a plethora of discussion documents, policy

documents and legislation emerged and with "mesmerising regularity" (Sugrue, 2008:40) crossed the principal's desk. These included a Green Paper in Education in 1992 (Department of Education: 1992), a National Convention on Education in 1994 (Coolahan: 1994) and a White Paper on Education 1995, (Department of Education 1995).

As the 1990s got under way, Coolahan (1991:133) in a report on Irish education concluded that "significant expansion of leadership and management training would be required ... if schools were to be able to respond to the assumption of greater autonomy … and greater responsibility for their own affairs". Furthermore Coolahan (1994:53) in a report of the National Education Convention referred to "a haphazard preparation of teachers for management positions in schools". The principal was now expected to be an administrator as in the past, a manager and bureaucrat as in the previous two decades and a leader also. Dimmock (1996:150) recognised the dilemma for principals internationally, "school leaders experience difficulty in deciding the balance between higher order tasks ... (leadership), routine maintenance of present operations (management) and lower order duties (administration)". While the era of the principal as leader had arrived in Ireland as elsewhere, global and societal forces continued to expect and demand more on the management side. Stoll and Fink (1996:187) called for a realignment between leadership and management "as we become more deeply embedded in the global economy, management is being given pre-eminence when in fact leadership is being demanded". A decade later (Sugrue, 2005:12) reviewed evidence of the "relentless press, frequently fuelled by school effectiveness literature [which] has unleashed a set of policies that have pummelled teachers and principals".

The reports and papers of the early 1990s were followed towards the end of the decade by legislation, initially The Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998). It is extraordinary that the primary sector was not governed by an Act of Parliament until 1998 having existed on foot of a letter, the Stanley Letter, 1831 (Coolahan, 1983) and Department of Education circulars. According to the

Education Act 1998, Section 23 (2), principals and teachers were mandated *inter alia* to “regularly evaluate students … [to] report the results of the evaluation to students and their parents … to promote co-operation between the school and the community it serves” (Government of Ireland: 1998). Many principals, teachers and schools naturally were exemplars of professional practice evaluating students, reporting results and cooperating with the school community, however with the enactment of the legislation, compliance was no longer an option for any principal, teacher or school.

The Education Act was followed quickly by the Education Welfare Act (Government of Ireland, 2000a), by a significant circular on middle or as it came to be known in-school management, Circular 6/97 (Department of Education, 1997), by the launching of the twenty-three books of the Primary School Curriculum, (DES, 1999a), on 9/9/1999 and by the unleashing of a decade of intensive professional development for teachers embodied most ably and most successfully but not only by the Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP) commencing in 1999. The Irish primary principal was confronted within a short timespan therefore with the task of breathing life into a multitude of exhortations emerging in the literature in the final two decades; “restructuring … requires the formation of new decision-making structures at school level” (Dimmock, 1996: 137), “the head has to be willing to share control, show vulnerability, and look for ways to involve the reticent or the opposed,” (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992: 121), “if we want better schools we are going to have to manage and lead differently” (Sergiovanni, 1991: x), “the principal can be a powerful force in assisting teacher growth (Barth, 1986: 482), “the leader must be a superb listener, successful leaders are great askers and they do pay attention” (Bennis and Nanus, 1985: 96), “the most crucial role of the principal is as head learner … experiencing, displaying, modelling and celebrating what it is hoped that teachers and pupils will do” (Barth, 1990:46).

2.4.3 Early Twenty-First Century

While today it may be considered a cliché to comment that Ireland has changed in recent decades and that the context in which the Irish primary principal works has metamorphosed during the careers of many principals it is a truism and one that illuminated this research. O'Sullivan and West-Burnham (2011: xi) referring to a period of twenty-five years comment that "Ireland was a highly homogenous society with a very clear hegemony around core values. As in many other European countries that is now replaced by heterogeneity and a world modelled on subjectivist approaches". Burdened by great expectations the Irish primary principal entered the first decade of the 21st century challenged towards new frontiers "calling forth from [him/her] the full force and depth of (his/her) undiscovered gifts" (O'Donohue, 2007:39). One keynote address to a principals' summer school towards the end of the first decade of the new century I titled "The multi-dimensional role of the primary school principal: incorporating the notion of ambidextrousness as a basis for multi-tasking" (McHugh, 2009). The title was designed to encapsulate the concepts and the language that govern principalship early in this 21st century, building on and developing the concepts and the language of the late 20th century; curriculum, organisation, behavioural complexity (Quinn, 1988), turbulence in the operating environment (Cameron, Kim and Whetten, 1987), role diffusion, interchangeability between management and leadership, transactional and transformational leadership. The dimensions of such a lecture included moral, transformational, visionary (MTV) leadership, leading in the social drama, minds of the future, attributes of excellence, integrated thinking and professional will and personal humility. This multidimensional role practised by school leaders is viewed now by the international community as something of importance; (Nusche, 2008:16) echoing the OECD report she co-authored, (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008) asserts that "school leadership has become a priority in education policy agendas internationally", that there are concerns across countries "that the role of principal as conceived for needs of the past is no longer appropriate" (16) and that the major domains of responsibility as key for school leadership to improve student outcomes include "supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality…goal setting, assessment and accountability … strategic financial and human resource

management … and collaborating with other schools" (17). In tandem the Minister for Education in Northern Ireland purported to represent both governments on the island of Ireland on the issue of school leadership "at the North South Ministerial Council … we, both North and South, put school leadership on the agenda. It is very important that we hear the voices of teachers and principals" (Ruane, 2008:13).

Entering the second decade of the 21st century Minister Ruairi Quinn began to address one of the areas where the changing zeitgeist of Irish society could be observed, school patronage. A Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector was established by the Minister in 2011. As school communities in many instances began discussions on patronage the Forum's Advisory Group commented that "the role of the board of management and the school principal will be significant in ensuring that a calm and reflective process underpins discussions" (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012:78). As the century gathers pace the Irish primary principal will be preparing for a further interesting and challenging dynamic.

During the first decade of the 21st century primary schools and their principals attended in a very practical way to demands arising from the 1999 Primary School Curriculum (NCCA, 1999), from the Department's prioritisation of school development planning and whole school evaluation, from society's need to ensure the safety of children in all circumstances, from the arrival on the scene of the Teaching Council and from the system's emerging interest in the notion of school self-evaluation (SSE).

Mindful of the dearth of professional development that accompanied and followed the launch of the 1971 primary curriculum, the Department with the support all the educational partners delivered a comprehensive professional development programme through the media of the education centre movement and the PCSP. Schools were closed to children for more than thirty days during

the first decade of the century so that school staffs led by their principals studied the 1999 curriculum and adapted it to individual school circumstances in eleven curricular areas. This was the first time in the history of Irish schooling that school closings of this nature were permitted. It elevated professional dialogue within staffs to a new level, affording teachers opportunities to engage in professional learning with their colleagues on days when they did not have to teach classes.

Professional development in relation to a social curriculum which began in the 1990s continued in the new century as teachers came to terms first of all with the Child Abuse Protection Programme also known as the Stay Safe Programme (Cullen, Lawlor and MacIntyre, 1998). Subsequently the Relationships and Sexuality Education Programme (RSE) (Government of Ireland, 2000) and the Substance Misuse Prevention Programme (SMPP) (DES, 1999c), also known as Walk Tall. The concept of child protection assumed increased significance as the State attempted to protect children following revelations of child abuse in many areas of Irish life including schools, in preceding decades. The State's expectations were outlined clearly in a number of publications culminating in the Children First Guidelines (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2011) and Child Protection Procedures (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2011a). School boards, principals and teachers were responsible for implementing the guidelines and procedures.

The concept of school planning that emerged from pilot projects in Education Centres in the 1980s assumed importance in department circles during the 90s (Department of Education and Skills, 1999b) hence school development planning also featured prominently on the principal's agenda in a decade of frenetic activity. The *tuairisc scoile* concept of evaluating schools, in operation in the 1970s was replaced by whole school evaluation where sometimes teams of inspectors attempted to evaluate all aspects of school life including governance, management, whole school and community links as well as curriculum (DES, 2011b).

The notion of school self-evaluation made inroads into the consciousness of principals and teachers in the wake of a Department publication in 2003, (DES, 2003). During the decades that followed SSE gradually moved towards centre stage. The Programme for Government, 2011 set out specific targets in relation to self-evaluation and school improvement; furthermore the National Strategy targeted at improving Literacy and Numeracy required all schools to engage in robust self-evaluation (DES, 2011c). The publication of guidelines on SSE "intended to support schools as they evaluate teaching and learning" (DES, 2012: 8) and the inclusion of SSE on schools' professional development agendas has ensured its centrality in the minds and actions of principals and teachers.

A further development in the early years of the 21st century was the emergence after more than three decades of discussion and 'false dawns' of the Teaching Council. As various sections of the Teaching Council Act, 2001, are enacted the Council assumes added importance in the lives of school personnel; in the areas of registration, the induction of beginning teachers, codes of professional conduct and in the near future in the area of CPD.

2.5 Life and Professional Career History

2.5.1 Forms of Life Writing

A further block of literature including works by Gronn, Ribbins, Day, Bottery and others is apposite for inclusion in this review. These writers approached the study of headship/principalship from a life and professional career history perspective. One can categorise a number of forms of life writing within the genre as a whole. English (2006) identified twelve forms of life writing and discusses the contribution that each of these can make to "understanding the meaning of the decisions and actions of leaders" (141). He positions and lists the work of Ribbins as portrayals "…detailed account of a specific episode or event in a person's or persons' life/lives" (146) and prosopographies "a form of group

biography usually identified within a specific time period" (147). Ribbins disputes the classification and suggests that his work upon which my research is modelled might be described as portraits "the principals are named and their stories, which cover much of their lives, are reported individually" (Ribbins, 2008:62). The form of life writing used in this thesis might therefore be described as portraits without the names, as participants have been assured that anonymity will be preserved.

My research has been influenced and shaped by three models. Firstly conducting biographically oriented research, Gronn (1993) identified four broad phases through which leaders pass during their careers. Each leader will journey through what Gronn (1999:32) describes as four "sequential phases"; formation, accession, incumbency and divestiture, largely in a linear, progressive and inevitable manner as they travel what Gronn and Ribbins (1996:465) term "a mobility pathway or status passage through time". Ribbins and Sherratt (1997) contend that contextual, organisational and institutional factors will have an influence on the principal's style. In the second model Day and Bakioglu (1996: 207) identify an alternative four successive phases framework focusing on headteachers' career patterns once they are in position; "initiation, development, autonomy and disenchantment". Such a framework can be located within the 'incumbent' phase of Gronn's broader framework. The inevitability of a creeping negativism leading to a disillusioned exit from principalship which appears to inhabit the Gronn and the Day and Bakioglu frameworks is challenged and amended by Pascal and Ribbins (1998:11), when they allow for the possibility of "advancement" as well as disenchantment in the Day and Bakioglu model and for "reinvention" as well as divestiture in the Gronn model. This Pascal and Ribbins revision constitutes the third model.

The analysis of my pilot study and my own experience of working closely with principals over a thirty year period leads me to agree with the Pascal and Ribbins amendment and to subscribe to the concepts of "enchantment and reinvention" (Ribbins, 1998:11), (Ribbins, 2008:64) as alternatives to Day and Bakioglu's

(1996) "disenchantment" and divestiture". This makes allowances for those principals who were not disenchanted after many years in principalship but rather maintained high levels of professional satisfaction towards the end of incumbency.

The third model therefore gave rise to "a framework of two ideal typical leadership pathways" Ribbins (2007: 64). Both pathways follow the same initial three phases: Making (formation), Becoming (accession) and Being (incumbency as initiation, development and autonomy). The pathways separate at the fourth phase into Moving On (enchantment and reinvention) and Moving Out (disenchantment and divestiture).

Some authors studying headship transition, Weindling (1999) and Hart (1993) noted three stages of organisational socialisation through which leaders usually pass. In stage one the leader faces steep learning having arrived in the organisation and meeting its people. In stage two the leader attempts to accommodate to the work, the people and the culture of the organisation. Weindling (1999:91) comments that by stage three "stable patterns emerge but this is only visible in data from longitudinal studies". Earley and Weindling (2007) based on a longitudinal study and drawing on research by Gabarro (1987), Hall and Parkey (1992), Day and Bakioglu (1996), Gronn (1993), Ribbins (1997) and Weindling (1999) suggest a model, encompassing six stages following preparation, mapping transitions in principalship. Such stages included entry and encounter (first months); taking hold (3-12 months); reshaping (year 2); reinforcement (years 3 to 4); consolidation (years 5 to 7), and plateau (year 8 and more). Ribbins (2008:64) enters caveats "…principals can enter at different stages and not all do so at stage one, … principals can pass through the stages at different rates, …. no single factor … determines a principal's stage of development, … principals may operate at more than one stage at a time".

2.5.2 Making a Principal

The process of the formation of a principal is comprised of the influences that shape the kinds of people who subsequently become principals. According to Ribbins (65) "... the future principal is socialised into deep-rooted norms and values by the action and interaction of such key agencies as family (notably parents), school and teachers, peer groups and local community". Other authors such as Gardner (1995) and Kets de Vries (1995) believe that early childhood influences and influencers assist in shaping personality and generating a concept of self with particular regard to work style, attitude and outlook.

2.5.3 Becoming a Principal

Commenting on the prerequisites for appointment as principal, Watson (2003: 7) referring to twenty-three jurisdictions concluded that "almost all systems require the head teacher to be a trained (and to some extent) experienced teacher". In some countries where being a teacher may not be a specific requirement, such as Sweden and the Netherlands, Derks (2003:70) notes that "In practice heads in compulsory education have almost always started their careers as a teacher". In the United States, Gates et al (2003:xv) point out that "over 99 percent of public school principals … have some teaching experience even though teaching experience is not always a requirement. So prospective principals are teachers first of all and in our Irish system this is an absolute requirement. However some authors including Ribbins (2008) detect a possible trend towards selecting head teachers from outside the teaching force. "PricewaterhouseCoopers (2007) in a study sponsored by the Department of Education and Skills (DfES) [questioned] whether the person who is to lead a school (or rather the multi-agency integrated child services bodies envisaged for the future) must be a teacher" (66). Gunter and Forrester (2007: 6) suggest that "perceived problems in recruiting future head teachers" could lead to the appointment of school leaders who are not teachers. Gates et al (2003: xv) agree in a US context, "many states are contemplating changes to their requirements … routes because they are concerned about a shortage of people qualified" to hold such positions. The review group on the role of the primary principal in Ireland did not countenance wandering from the

ranks of qualified teachers when appointing principals. It viewed "the role of principal as instructional leader [as] crucially important ... it is this aspect of the principal's role that distinguishes it most sharply from leadership and management in other organisations and areas of endeavour" (DES, 1999a:28). The group asserted that it is much more than a management and administrative function and is connected with "the provision of optimal learning experiences for children" (ibid). The report went on to say that principalship "required an understanding of professional and educational leadership which is unique to education and schooling" (ibid). The Hay Group report on the role of the primary principal in Ireland was of a similar mind, "primary education is a unique environment which is clearly different from a commercial organisation" (Hay Group, 2007:3).

2.5.4 Being a Principal

Incumbency marks the period from appointment as principal until the individual leaves the position. In the Irish system it is more common than in many other systems that primary principals lead a single school. It is regular therefore to meet principals who serve as principal for two or three decades. There are rare instances where three generations of the same family have inhabited cumulatively a principal's position in the same school for a century. There are circumstances where Irish principals have worked as principal in more than one school; two such situations stand out. Firstly religious orders had a policy of moving principals to principalships in other 'order' schools after a period of six years in many instances. However in the 21st century the number of schools managed by religious orders has diminished considerably as has the personnel within the orders to assume school leadership positions. Secondly a situation obtained particularly in rural Ireland where some principals of small schools aspired to become principal of somewhat larger or more prestigious schools as they progressed through their careers.

Incumbency is comprised of initiation, development and autonomy phases. Ribbins (2008:72) maintains that the first phase "normally takes at least three years before a new principal feels fully initiated in post". Elation and enthusiasm often followed by realism and adjustment and not a little exhaustion characterise this phase for many principals. The quality of the transition into principalship is shaped by an array of contextual variables and also according to Ribbins by factors such as "self-belief; depth, breadth and relevance of previous experience and an ability to transfer this … prior preparation and training" (72). An ability to learn on the job is essential and the quality of support structure is important.

The development phase "normally takes four to eight years" (72). This phase is often characterised by growth, self-confidence, a growing sense of assurance and progress. After eight years Ribbins (72) considers principals (in general) to have entered the 'autonomy' phase. They [principals] have devised strategies to cope with … stress and can take a more open and longer perspective on the problems they face … their day to day professional life is usually much easier than it was" (72). During this phase principals may become involved in professional work outside the school, sharing their expertise with other educational institutions.

2.5.5 Moving Out/Moving On

Incumbency comes to an end for principals in a variety of ways, often determined by their experience in the position. For some the exit from principalship in the language of Day and Bakioglu (1996) may constitute 'moving out' in a cloud of 'disenchantment'. In some cases the seeds of disillusion commence during the autonomy phase when at the height of their power and authority elements of stagnation, frustration and a drop in enthusiasm can set in, frequently fuelled by stress, inadequate work life balance and burnout. But as all political careers do not end in failure, to contradict Powell's maxim (Heffer, 1999) neither do all principals' careers end in disenchantment.

Huberman (1993) argues that there are four conditions for sustaining high levels of professional satisfaction; enduring commitment, positive relations with colleagues, manageable job expectations and a balanced home and school life. Ribbins (2008:74) suggests that in addition to these "a balance between leisure and work activities and good opportunities for continuing professional development" are desirable to maintain 'enchantment' and a 'moving on' rather than a 'moving out' perspective. Ribbins found such long-serving principals "appearing at least as optimistic as some in the earlier phase. Happy with their lives as principals, they voiced feelings of much to do, and saw their work as focusing on children" (74). One principal who admitted to a number of work related illnesses and stresses maintained "it's still the most rewarding job there is" (Rayner and Ribbins, 1999:184).

"In much of the world, where principalship is seen as a form of middle management with many ambitious for further promotion" (Ribbins, 2008:75), re-invention takes the form of 'moving on' to more prestigious positions in the education system. In Ireland and in Britain however most principals regard their principalship as being at the top of the career ladder. Reinvention for Irish principals therefore frequently takes place in the context of a reorganisation of the school or curriculum or the undertaking of innovative projects on behalf of the school at local, at national or at international levels. It sometimes can take the form of practising principals sharing their skills and expertise under the umbrella of other educational institutions either on a part-time basis while they continue to perform the role of principal or after leaving principalship.

2.6 Variation

In Bottery's work (2008a), (2008b) and (2009) we find a variation of the life and professional career history approach where portraits of headteachers/principals are painted in the context of small scale qualitative research involving interviews and conversations. This work gives us "a snapshot at a moment in time … capturing the essence of a head" Bottery (2009). These approaches enable us to

examine principalship at micro and meso levels, they provide us with data we may use in the recruitment, training and initiation of new principals and which can assist us in dealing with the worsening ‘succession’ issues.

2.7 Chapter Summary

In this literature review I have referred to works on leadership in general emphasising the theoretical development of thinking on leadership during the 20th century, cumulating in transformational leadership late in the century. Literature on leadership in education and schools is reviewed where the connection between leadership and learning is highlighted. The journey of the Irish primary school principal from a role that was primarily administrative to a complex leadership and management role today is explored. Finally the life story and career history approach to school principalship upon which this thesis is based is examined. I will continue to integrate elements of this literature into the findings and discussion sections of this study.

Chapter 3 - Research Design

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will address the theoretical, conceptual and practical approaches that informed the research design bearing in mind Walliman's (2006:42) contention that research design is that conceptual framework which provides a structure for the collection and analysis of data and subsequently indicates which research methods are most appropriate" and Grogan and Simmons (2007:35) assertion that a "research paradigm includes …ontological … and epistemological perspectives and methodological approaches".

The purpose of this research was to explore the leadership role of the primary school principal in Ireland, examining formation, accession and incumbency. In the context of incumbency I investigated how principals perceive the role of principal and also what inspires and sustains them in their work.

In order to pursue the objectives of the research this thesis is located within what would be termed the phenomenological paradigm using a qualitative methodology. My ontological perspective therefore, borne out of 'Husserl's phenomenology' and 'Heidegger's hermeneutics' (Mertens, 2005:12) is constructivist as is enunciated by Bryman (2001:16) that "there is no one reality but a constant flow of revision". This mirrors the reality of a school principal's work; dynamic, uncertain and in part socially constructed.

Working in this phenomenological milieu I aimed to explore words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways, examine people's stories, capture the particulars of their lives, "more closely representing the situation as experienced by participants themselves" (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994:2).

3.2 Location within research paradigms

As social science research found its feet in the first quarter of the 20th century it was understandable that it would derive its mores and its methods from the mores and the methods of the physical sciences where a research culture had already been established. Social science research therefore was based on quantitative enquiry, the collection of objective data, reliability, validity and the null hypothesis. It converted observations into discrete units that were compared to other units by using statistical analysis. “This (researcher) ‘person’ related minimally with those studied” (Barber, 2006:146). The positivist (paradigm) approach had as its hallmarks explanation, prediction and proof. Its world view was simple, it was hierarchical, mechanical, epitomised linear causality and was objective. Hard generalisable data, complicated statistical formulae and measurements of statistical significance provided the answers to whatever questions were raised. While the merits of positivism can be defended in the physical sciences, in particular in certain aspects of medicine for instance pharmacology, in a social science forum where the behaviour of individuals is concerned the reduction of everything to numbers is contestable. The positivist search for a constant relationship between events and variables “constant conjunction” (Robson, 2002:21) may be appropriate in the natural world but in a social real world context it is less than adequate.

Byrne (1998:32) proclaimed that “Positivism is dead. By now it has gone off and is beginning to smell”. But of course it is not completely dead. McNamara and O’Hara (2008:16) citing Slavin comment on “the centrality of scientifically based research in formulating successful curricula” in the Bush administration’s ‘No child left behind’ movement in the United States. Variations of pure positivism remain in the work of some post positivists, logical empiricists and behaviourists, however it is to the paradigm that followed positivism and one that is most relevant for this research I will turn at this stage.

3.3 Phenomenological Paradigm

I subscribe to the Marxist theory of the thesis, antithesis and synthesis when considering social and political phenomena. I find it natural therefore that the positivist era (thesis) provoked an opposite reaction (antithesis) in the shape of a second paradigm encapsulating naturalist, phenomenological, interpretative and relativistic approaches (these had antecedents in 19th century German empathetic understanding, *Verstehen*, and in hermeunetics, from Hermes, the Greek God who communicated the desires of the gods to mortals) promoting the perspectival rather than the objective, a complex rather than a simple world view, heterarchic rather than hierarchical, holographic rather than mechanical, epitomising mutual rather than linear causality. Such approaches used qualitative research methods, replacing the statistics of quantitative approaches with an examination of words and actions in narrative or descriptive ways.

The hallmarks of this kind of inquiry according to Bowen (2008:138) are characterised *inter alia* by "research in natural settings", "purposive sampling", "the tentative application of findings" and "special criteria of trustworthiness". While Guba and Lincoln (2005: 207-208) contend that naturalist inquirers eschew objectivity believing it to be "a chimera, a mythical creature that never existed, save in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower", I aspired to a position espousing a relative level of objectivity made possible by my previous knowledge of the role of principal having worked in such a role for a period of sixteen years and having worked in situations lecturing to principals about their roles and facilitating and supporting their work. I have significant reservations about much qualitative research where a small number of cases are investigated, albeit in depth, but where there is no prospect of generalisability or of persuading policy makers of the usefulness of the data. Subjectivity, difficulty in replication especially in ethnography, problems of generalisation and the lack of transparency are referred to by Bryman as significant limitations in a critique of qualitative research (Bryman, 2001:282-283). On the other hand Bottery et al (2008a:183) would argue that "what is most meaningful is sometimes derived from the singular and unique; that

generalisations in education are as likely to be useful if they are ‘fuzzy’ generalisations as if they are from scientific or statistical generalisations”. Pawson and Tilley (1997:119) agree and suggest that “as we generalise outward, we may never reach some absolute ruling but we begin to develop ideas that attempt to encompass them all”.

This study is located clearly within that genre where generalisations might be fuzzy but may be worthwhile and helpful in particular for those entering the role of principal and those who may be losing their way in the role. I contend that the qualitative researcher will achieve credibility by demonstrating rigour and quality in his/her work, by being authentic, true, systematic, disciplined and standing up to critical review. In this study I attempt to reach these benchmarks by accurate recording, careful analysis, reverting to participants on matters of accuracy thus avoiding misinterpretation and in some ways attempting to co-create knowledge recognising like Olesen (2005:260) “that knowledge production is continually dynamic … knowledges are only partial” or coming close to becoming involved in a human encounter for co-production of knowledge” (Alvesson, 2007:34).

In conducting a study of this nature one brings to the foreground elements such as the values of context sensibility, an orientation towards the discovery of salient propositions, understanding situations as they are constructed by participants, the capturing of what participants say and do and how they interpret the world. “The posture of indwelling” (Maykut and Morehouse (1994:5) and indwelling as authentic investigation (29) are relevant as the skilled questioner and attentive listener know how to enter into another’s experience” (Patton, 1990:278).

Notwithstanding McKenzie’s (1997:9) assertion that “research is embedded in a churning vortex of constructive and destructive tensions” I contend that there are important research questions that need to be asked and answered, many of these are in the areas of the leadership role of the principal, of teacher empowerment, the professional autonomy of teachers and indeed educational policy which as

McNamara and O'Hara indicate may have the effect of de-skilling, de-professionalising and disempowering teachers (McNamara and O'Hara, 2008: 31). In concurring with Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 23) that "it is the researcher's task to select which combination of approaches should be used in a specific study", I decided that I would study elements of the leadership role of the primary principal and that I would pursue what Ribbins and Marland (1994:6) term a "situated perspective".

3.4 The Interview as a Methodology

The interview according to Dexter (1970: 123) and repeated in Ribbins (2007: 208) is a "conversation with a purpose". The purpose of the twelve interviews in this study was to prompt twelve principals into an in-depth discussion on their role as principal, in particular the leadership aspect of that role. Proponents of the interview write eloquently about its advantages, Guba and Lincoln (1981:154) cited in Ribbins (2007:207) maintain that "of all the means of exchanging information and gathering data known to man … interviewing is perhaps the oldest and certainly one of the most respected tools that the inquirer can use". Dexter (1970: 11) cited in Ribbins (2007:208) suggests that interviewing is the "preferred tactic of data collection when … it appears that it will get better data or more data at less cost than other tactics". Ribbins himself tells us that for him the purpose of interviewing "is to find out what is inside somebody else's mind but not to put things there" (208). According to Fontana and Frey (1994:361) interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings". Merriam's (2009:88) angle is that "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings or how people interpret the world around them". At the root of in-depth interviewing in the view of Seidman (2012:9) "is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience". Mears (2012: 172) warns that with semi-structured interviews "you can't be certain exactly where the answer will lead. The first response you hear may be a general description but buried in the response, you find the markers that point to other areas to explore". Our attention is drawn by Mears, (ibid) to our purpose in

holding semi-structured interviews, "you ask participants…to tell their experiences, share their feelings or thoughts and reflect on decisions and events. From their narratives you will be able to analyse the information and answer your research question".

My objective was to capture factual, value laden and attitudinal data" by exploring the views of the 'principal' interviewees in ways that would not be possible in other forms of research and having enabled them "to speak for themselves" (Mortimore and Mortimore, 1991:vii) to report those views faithfully, thus gleaning an authentic view and voice of the interviewees. I was mindful of Wolcott's (1982:157) reminder that it is impossible to embark upon research without some idea of what one is looking for and foolish not to make that quest explicit" and of Yin's (2009: 85) concern that "the nature of the interview is much more open-ended, and an interviewee may not necessarily co-operate fully in sticking to your line of questions".

In adopting this form of research I was conscious of the reservations expressed and caveats entered by several further authors. The concerns expressed by Barber (2006: 149-152), "researchers cannot afford to take the 'obvious' for granted", by Silverman (2006: 381) "recognise that interview data is situated and contextual" and by Taylor (2005:52) "interviews can only capture reconstructions of events rather than how people might behave" were all relevant and encouraged me to confine my judgements and conclusions to actual words that were used and to relate these words to concepts in the leadership literature. I was less concerned at Gronn's (2007:195) contention that "interviews can be notoriously unreliable", his conclusion appears to have been reached following a reflection on 'high profile', 'well established' leaders whose agendas may have been influenced by a desire to be viewed favourably by posterity. I did not use a triangulation of methods despite Guba and Lincoln's (1981:155) contention that "research based solely on interviews may be sabotaged and crippled" and Gronn's (2007:199) reservations about the advisability "of using interviews in leadership research as sole sources of data procurement". I relied on my own experience as a leader of a

primary school, my experience as a leader of an Education Centre that supports school principals, my experience as a facilitator of principals' learning in twelve different counties over a period of almost two decades and my knowledge of literature *inter alia* on the leadership role of the primary principal to provide a perspective and balance on the issues.

I was inspired to pursue this kind of research by the work of Ribbins in particular, Ribbins and Marland (1994), Pascal and Ribbins (1998), and Rayner and Ribbins (1999) also by Bottery, (Bottery et al, 2008a, 2008b) and by my own experiences in the field. Like Ribbins and Marland (1994:7) I contented myself to a first level "situated perspective" study of the principal, eschewing for the present a second level contextualised perspective and a third level contextualised in action perspective. I believed that face-to-face interviews across a range of issues and events would enable me to obtain a rich and comprehensive understanding of the perspectives and styles which principals bring to their work (6).

3.5 Types and Forms of Interview

In selecting interview type I avoided the extremes. On the one hand I did not use the verbal questionnaire which I considered was overly structured with its pre-determined responses redolent of quantitative research with "reality being hammered into shape by the interviewer" Ribbins (2007:209). On the other hand I did not use "discussions" with adjustable and open agendas or more informal, highly flexible 'chats'. I considered that the best way to provide a framework within which principals would express their views in their own terms was a semi-structured interview where I as the researcher would control broadly the agenda process of the interview "whilst leaving interviewees free, within limits, to respond as they see fit" (209). Like Smith and Bower-Brown (2010:119) I contend that "semi-structured interviews offer flexibility and allow the researcher to adopt a more natural, conversational approach". I used a semi-structured interview schedule containing fifteen questions.

I put the same questions to each respondent and permitted him/her to respond at ease. Where their responses raised issues that required probing I did this. In this context each respondent was not asked the same supplementary questions; when one respondent illustrated her responses by referring to the Delivering Equality of Opportunity In Schools (DEIS) initiative I pursued this matter with supplementary questions, otherwise useful and colourful data would have been lost. Pursuing DEIS issues with other respondents would not have made sense as their schools had no connection with the initiative. I was flexible to "the serendipity of conversation, in which one aspect gains more ground than another on some occasions" (Ribbins and Marland, 1994:31), thus capturing the enthusiasm and animation of respondents in full flow. I used the schedule in a flexible way when respondents wandered into territory that would be covered by subsequent questions, I permitted this in the belief that it is best to hear what respondents have to say when they introduce a sub-topic rather than interrupting their stream of consciousness and their flow of language. The strength of this type of interview, compared with other forms according to Ribbins (2007:210) is that "it substantially reduces the possibility of interviewer bias and increases the comprehensiveness and comparability of interviewee response, facilitating final data analysis".

Furthermore I believe I needed to be aware of the possibility of observer bias for two reasons; firstly that my experience of the issues might lead me to a biased selection of data and that I may have had expectations that would be likely to emerge, "selection encoding" (Moyles, 2007:244). All questions were short sentence length questions, supplementary or follow up questions were also short. This enabled respondents to respond with "extended, frank and fulsome answers" (Gronn, 2007:199).

My preferred form for interviewing was one-to-one, face-to-face interviews rather than telephone, email or written interviews. I contend strongly that the presence of the interviewer and respondent in the same room at the same time facilitates and enables the generation of better quality data, that the asides, the

supplementary questions and the positive rapport that cannot be replicated in other forms will prove to be a significant advantage. Five of the interviews took place in the respondents' schools, four interviews were held in the interviewer's Education Centre office. The remaining three interviews were held in one of the interviewer's support service offices, one took place in a rural Education Centre and the final interview was held in one principal's home.

3.6 Management of Interview

The schedule for interview was constructed following an examination of the relevance for this study of questions used in schedules by Ribbins and Marland (1994:216) and Pascal and Ribbins (1998: 44-46). It was based also on those topics, issues and events that I considered appropriate arising from my recent dealings with principals, teachers, DES personnel, teacher tutors working in schools on curriculum and organisational issues and other school stakeholders. The schedule was thought through in detail, open questions were used, the essence of qualitative interviewing. The questions were reviewed by three individuals, a colleague and two Dublin City University personnel. Amendments were made to the questions arising from this review.

At the interviews, rapport was established easily, a professional neutrality was also established where respondents became aware that they could be open, honest and critical in their responses with no consequent implications for themselves. A pre analysis of the interviews was under way already while the interviews were being conducted; Silverman (2007:147) suggests that "interview interactions are inherently spaces in which both speakers are constantly doing analysis - both speakers are engaged (and collaborating) in making meaning and producing knowledge". Audio recordings were made of each interview thus; I used a modern reliable sophisticated digital recorder (Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-6500PC) and also what might be termed a relatively old fashioned tape recorder (a Sanyo Memo-Scriber TRC-8080) using C60 tapes. While two recordings may have appeared to be a luxury or a waste of time (setting them up)

and resources, I needed the security of knowing that if there was a malfunction in the operation of one system that the other would most likely ensure that a recording was made. Furthermore I wished to become acquainted with the operation of the digital recorder in a safe environment. In the event both systems worked properly and consequently I have two audio versions of each interview.

3.7 Content/Topics

Using the model pioneered by Ribbins and Marland (1994), Pascal and Ribbins (1998) and Rayner and Ribbins (1999) I adapted and amended their questions ensuring that they were relevant to the Irish primary principal early in the second decade of the 21st century. The initial questions on the interviewee's early interest in principalship resembled questions in the Ribbins/Marland model, subsequent questions echoed some resonances of our own era and also resonances prevalent in all eras. I found that the fourteen main questions asked by Ribbins and his collaborators encapsulated the genesis of what I wished to discuss with Irish principals. I used the term 'principal' rather than 'head teacher' and started from the premise that most Irish principals will have served as principal in one school only. I took situations into consideration where interviewees worked as principal in more than one school. In the current rapidly changing educational world there are virtually an unlimited number of questions that could be asked and an unlimited number of topics that could be discussed.

I hoped to capture how principals viewed the developments that have taken place in primary schools in Ireland and also in their roles arising from changing circumstances in the first decade of the 21st century; such changes include the Primary School Curriculum (NCCA, 1999) a significant increase in continuing professional development, developments in information and communications technology, increased provision for special needs education and for schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, the historically significant immigration phenomenon of the last decade and the vagaries of an economic cycle that visited boom and recession in quick succession. I incorporated these issues into question

14 which deals with changes in primary education. Before the final selection of questions and sub-questions I took into consideration the advice of my supervisor, lessons which I learned during the course of the pilot study and my ongoing interaction with school leaders, teachers, DES personnel, teacher tutors working in schools on curricular and organisational issues and other stakeholders.

The list of topics to be discussed at the face-to-face interviews was offered to the interviewees in advance, eleven of the twelve indicated that they would 'have a look' at them, the twelfth principal felt that the dialogue might be more spontaneous and ultimately more valuable if the questions were not viewed in advance of the interviews. Fifteen questions/topics were circulated in my Interview Schedule. (Appendix A)

3.8 Selection of Participants

Following advice from my supervisor and from Ribbins, one of the originators of the genre, I determined that I should interview twelve principals for periods of one and a half to two hours. My experience of conducting a pilot study was helpful also in making this determination. My objective while not purporting to interview a strictly representative sample was to include principals from as many contexts as possible. Consequently my list of twelve principals included principals from urban, suburban, large town and rural settings, from large and small schools, females and males and principals from a variety of school types and categories. The list of schools included single gender, coeducational, vertical and senior primary schools as well as *Gaelscoileanna*. Schools under the patronage of religious denominations, the Educate Together movement and the Education and Training Board (ETB)/Vocational Education Committee (VEC) sector were also included as were schools categorised as DEIS or designated disadvantaged and also those not so designated. While a slight majority of principals worked in schools in Dublin, five counties and three provinces were represented. One of the interviewees worked in a border county, very close to the fourth province, Ulster.

3.9 Profile of Principals

In this study seven male and five female principals participated. Seven of the principals worked in schools in Dublin, one in a town outside Dublin, two were principals in large towns in the provinces of Connaught and Leinster and a further two worked in rural schools in Connaught and Munster. Ten principals worked in schools under the patronage of a religious denomination, one in an Educate Together school and one in a Community National School.

Ten of the principals worked in co-educational schools, one in an all boys' school and one in an all girls' school. Of the twelve participating principals eleven worked in vertical schools (infants to sixth class) while one worked in a senior school (third to sixth class); in the pilot study one principal worked in a junior primary school (infants to second class).

Ten principals have held one principalship, one has been principal in two schools and one principal in three schools. Six of the twelve principals are the founding principals in their current schools. Four of the schools in which the participating principals worked are in the DEIS programme, five of the schools are not disadvantaged while the principals of three of the schools are clear that while their school is not categorised as a DEIS school the school is located in a socio-economically disadvantaged area. One principal works in a *Gaelscoil*, another principal led a *Gaelscoil* during a previous principalship.

Three of the principals taught in schools outside Ireland while seven have been involved in facilitating professional development for teachers or have spent some time lecturing in the education system. Eight of the participating principals attended St Patrick's College Drumcondra for their initial teacher training, two graduated from Carysfort College Blackrock, one from Froebel College and one from Coláiste Mhuire, Marino. Four of the principals described themselves as coming from a farming background, three referred to a "working class'

background, the remaining five may be described as coming from professional or 'middle class' backgrounds.

3.10 Data Analysis/Coding and Categorisation

Five year old children in senior infant classrooms in Irish schools engage in classification and categorisation, in subsequent classes they code and they analyse, essentially it involves common sense. Watling and James (2007:350) contend that "analysis is the researcher's equivalent of alchemy – the elusive process … [of turning] raw data into nuggets of pure gold". My objective in the words of Denzin and Lincoln (2003:9) was to put together "a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations … connecting the parts to the whole".

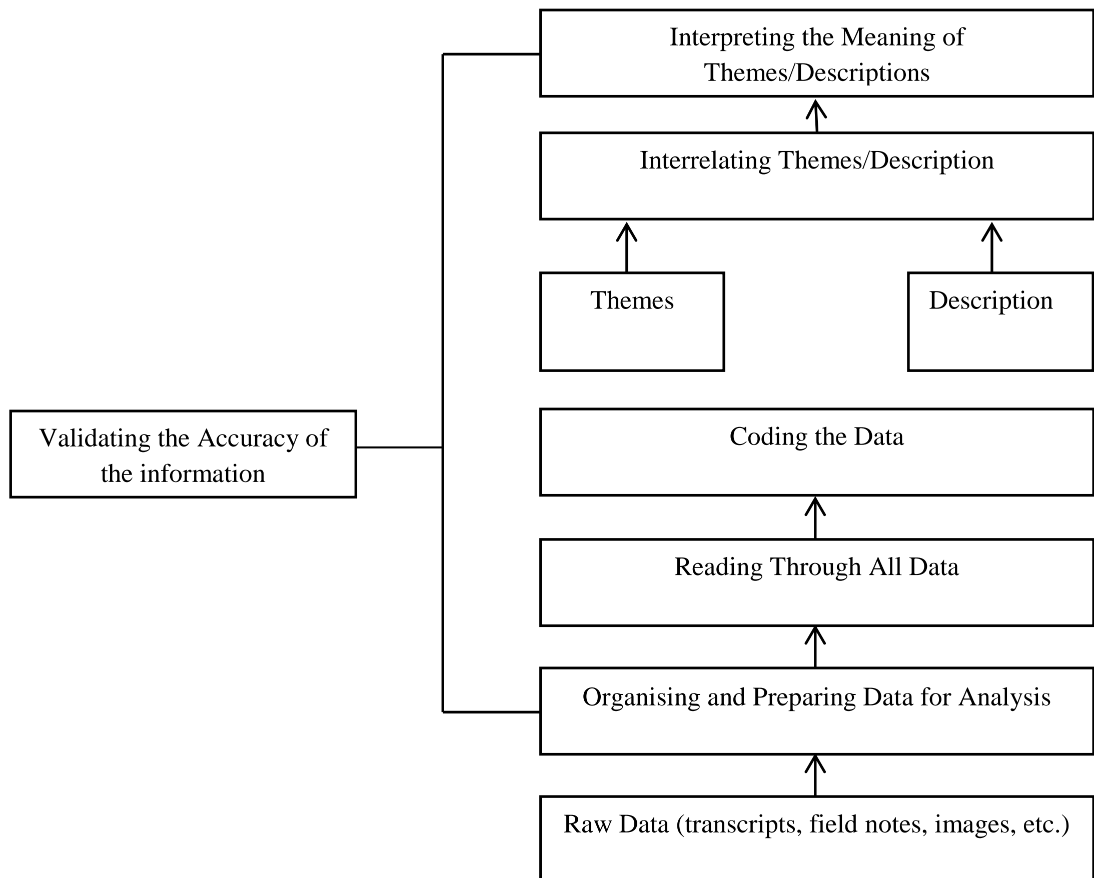
Miles and Huberman (1994: 56) view coding as analysis, "to review a set of field notes, transcribed or synthesized, and to dissect them meaningfully, whilst keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis". Like Bogden and Biklen (1982: 145) I contend that data analysis is a process that takes place at every stage of the research and involves "working with data, organising it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what you will tell others".

During the course of the analysis and coding part of the research I was guided by the work of Miles and Huberman (1994:12), 'Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model' moving from data collection to data display to data reduction to conclusions drawing and verifying; by Creswell's (2007:150) 'Spiral of Data Analysis' and by Creswell's (2009:185) 'Data Analysis in Qualitative Research' in six stages. The advice for this novice researcher from Maykut and Morehouse (1994:134), "combine inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained"; from Creswell (2007: 150), "the processes of data collection, data analysis and report writing are not distinct steps in the

process, that are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project" and from Folkestad (2008:4) "For each interview that is conducted more knowledge is possessed, not only about the phenomenon that is studied in itself but also about the interview guide as well" was most illuminating and very helpful.

I was mindful of Creswell's (2007:150) 'Spiral' as I organised my data through Miles and Huberman's (1994:12) 'Interactive Model' and Creswell's (2009:185) 'Data Analysis in Qualitative Research' model.

Figure 3.1 Data Analysis in Qualitative Research



(Source: Creswell, 2009:185)

3.11 Stages in Data Analysis

In this section I outline how the data that was gathered in the interviews with twelve principals was analysed, reduced and displayed following generally Creswell's (2009:185) six stage process and Miles and Huberman's (1994:12) 'Interactive Model'.

Following the recording of the twelve interviews, twenty-two hours in all, each interview was transcribed. Minimal extra notes were made at the interview and transcription stages. The recordings made on the digital recorder were transferred via the supplied USB cable to a personal computer for the purpose of minor editing and for ease of access. Interviews were not edited apart from removing hesitations, repetition of words, syntactic and linguistic imperfections. Each respondent was sent a transcript of his/her interview and was invited to propose corrections or revisions. Very little use was made of this opportunity, the respondents indicating that the transcripts were an accurate reflection of what they had said and of their views on the topics discussed. The necessity for respondents to suggest or propose corrections to the interview transcripts was obviated I contend by supplying them in advance with the interview schedule and briefing them adequately on the nature of the research. I contend that any minor disadvantages of permitting respondents to have prior sight of the schedule of questions and of affording them the opportunity to suggest amendments to the draft transcript, such as loss of spontaneity are far outweighed by the advantages of obtaining more complete, more colourful and more considered responses. The transcripts are intelligible to the reader and remain faithful to what interviewees said.

3.11.1 Stage 1 Organising and Preparing Data for Analysis

The process of initial coding was carried out in the case of each transcript. The letter P (from principal) was assigned to each transcript and a number between 1 and 12 to individual transcripts. Furthermore each paragraph was assigned a number. When reference is made to a theme or sub-theme in the text of the thesis

or when a participant principal is being quoted these assigned codes will identify the principal e.g. P4/35 indicates that reference is being made to paragraph 35 in the transcript of Principal 4.

3.11.2 Stage 2 Data Immersion/Reading through all Data

In order to enable classification and categorisation of data each transcript was read, re-read and examined through a process of data immersion/crystallisation which according to Borkan (1999:180) provides a means to move from the research question, the generated text and/or field experience, and the raw field data to the interpretations reported in the write-up". While re-reading actively, highlighting and annotating transcripts, research questions which were used to guide and plan the research were revisited in order to help identify units of meaning. *Posteriori* categories began to emerge from the data at this stage, complementing and enhancing the *a priori* codes inherent in the interview questions. Creswell (2007:151/2) cites Marshall and Rossman (2006) and discusses a continuum of coding strategies "that range from the pre-figured categories to emergent categories". Creswell suggests that "if researchers use a prefigured coding scheme then they should be open to additional codes emerging during the analysis" (152). This represented my position.

3.11.3 Stage 3 Coding the Data

Creswell (2009:186) recommends in this third stage "beginning detailed analysis with a coding process". This involves taking segments of text and labelling the categories. The research questions such as family background, education, preparation for principalship, accountability, all predetermined categories because specific questions were put to each participant, were considered as mandatory categories with which units of meaning or segments of interview data were to be matched. A similar procedure was used working with categories that emerged from the data. Matrices or tables were constructed and included words and phrases suggestive of emerging themes and sub-themes extracted from the data. A sample Coding Frame (Figure 3.2) is included in Appendix B.

3.11.4 Stage 4 Generating Descriptions and Categories

The coding process was used to generate a description of the categories, themes and sub-themes for analysis. This involved re-reading and re-drafting participants' responses in order to facilitate data reduction. Reading the material in the matrices enabled the organisation of sub-themes into broader families of themes, thus creating in the words of Maykut and Morehouse (1994:145) "the harmonic sound of data coming together".

3.11.5 Stage 5 Interrelating Themes/Description

The themes were organised into what Creswell (1998: 148-149) calls 'patterns of categories'. Creswell (153) goes on to suggest that this involves:

> *Taking the text or qualitative information apart and looking for categories, themes or dimensions of information. As a popular form of analysis, classification involves identifying five to seven general themes. These themes, in turn, I view as a 'family' of themes with children, or subthemes and even grandchildren, subthemes represented by segments of data. It is difficult especially in a large database to reduce the information down into five or seven 'families', but my process involves winnowing the data, reducing them to a small, manageable set of themes to write into my final narrative.*

3.11.6 Stage 6 Interpretation of the data

Having reached stage 6, I had put together twenty-four pages of detailed hand written notes highlighting essential data and a further seven pages of notes, guiding me towards themes and sub-themes. In this final stage I interpreted the data using the understanding that I as researcher brought to the study, my background as a former school principal and a facilitator or enabler of school principals and also my understanding of a vast literature on leadership in general and on leadership in education in particular.

These phases of data analysis echoed advice from Miles and Huberman (1984:21) regarding data display, reduction and interpretation, a process that allowed data to be organised in "an accessible, compact form so that the analyst can see what is happening and either draw justified conclusions or move to next step analysis". This analysis process resembles also Hatch's description of "an ongoing synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorisation, hypothesizing, comparison and pattern finding involving researchers engaging their own intellectual capacities to make sense of qualitative data" (Hatch, 2002:148).

The sequence pursued (the audit trail) in this research can be summarised thus: my research question emanated from a review of literature, in particular the work of Ribbins and others and my pilot study. This led to the conducting of twelve semi-structured interviews which was followed by an analysis rooted in data immersion crystallisation that gave rise to a number of themes and sub-themes, the material for the report and conclusions.

In Figure 3.3. on page 62 I outline the steps I took in translating the raw data into a meaningful report.

Figure 3.3 From Raw Data to Text

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Identify bits of posteriori data following extensive reading	Nineteen emerging themes	Five themes	Eighty-two sub-themes and mini-themes allocated under themes	Report written under five themes and sub-themes

Step 5 Expanded- Report on Subtheme Children – text constructed using dialogue from paragraphs shown below.

1/102	safe environment
1/110	children first
1/112	university
1/148	child centred
2/82	child centred
2/84	voice of children
2/94	a teacher rather than a principal
2/126	HSCL
3/54	happy children
3/70	children first
4/36	needs of children
4/90	children first
6/60	serve needs
9/78	learning
9/84	profound effect
9/188	influencing lives
10/74	happy children
10/210	confidence
11/22	happy children
11/64	happy children
11/66	understanding children
11/90	happy children
11/92	stories from children
12/64	EAL

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Wellington hypothesises (2000:54) that "an ethic is a moral principle or code of conduct which governs what people do". In the context of qualitative research Yin (2009:73) maintains that "the study of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context obligates you to important ethical practices akin to those followed in medical research". Echoing Sammons (1989) cited in Busher and James (2007:106) my procedure and practice could "be described as a commitment to honesty" and demonstrated "a respect for the dignity and privacy of those people who are the subjects of (my) research" (Pring, 2000:143). I subscribed during the course of this thesis to an ethical code that precluded generating "greater risks of harm to participants" (Busher and James, 2007:107) or inducing stress or being unnecessarily intrusive. I was conscious that carrying out research may involve "a series of emergent or immanent ethical moments" (Usher, 2000:162).

Acknowledging that informed consent is an entitlement of participants in research arising from "fundamental democratic rights to freedom and self-determination" Busher and James (2007:110), I engaged in a three stage process that provided me with an assurance that I could create "an ethical environment for the research which [allowed] participants to feel confident that their privacy [was] protected and the risk of harm to them or their communities...[was] minimised to a level acceptable to them" (118/119). Firstly I discussed the research project in some detail in person with each prospective participant and made clear the voluntary nature of the project from his/her perspective. I answered all questions that were put to me and I received a verbal invitation to interview each individual. Secondly when I confirmed with the respondent principals that I would be proceeding with the interview schedule I forwarded a formal letter and Plain Language Statement (Appendix C) to them outlining my research objectives and assuring them again of the ethical parameters of the research project including

anonymity and confidentiality. In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality I decided not to make interview transcripts available publicly. Thirdly I contacted each prospective participant by telephone seeking assurances that s/he wished me to proceed with the interview. I assured the participants that they could withdraw consent at any stage in the process. Transcripts of twelve interviews are included in Appendices D - O.

In 1.5 I explained why the role of principal was of interest to me and the context in which I have encountered principals on a professional basis. I am acquainted with a large number of principals in the Irish system and have met each of the principals interviewed in this research in contexts outside of this study. In the majority of cases these were brief encounters. However in the cases of three interviewees, while working in support services in earlier parts of their careers, two with the PCSP and one with the Walk Tall service, they worked in an organisation of which I was the head. One individual reported to a committee to which I was the chairperson for a period of two years, the remaining two worked at grades three to four steps below my director grade. These working relationships ceased in 2003, 2004 and 2009 and were not relevant in the context of the interviews carried out as part of this research.

I note also that in my role as Director of a large Education Centre I have responsibility for the overall management of the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), an organisation that is mentioned on a number of occasions in this study.

3.13 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I addressed the theoretical, conceptual and practical approaches that informed the research design used in this thesis. I located the research within a phenomenological paradigm, I defended the use of a semi-structured interview methodology and described how categorisation, coding and analysis were carried

out. Finally I outlined the procedures used that ensured compliance with the ethical standards required for this kind of research.

Chapter 4 - Presentation of Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will explore, examine and investigate the data gathered in the face-to-face interviews. Initially I will present findings in connection with the formation of our cast of twelve characters and their accession to principalship. As incumbent principals I will report on their early days in principalship, their initiation into the role. I will not report the development, autonomy and advancement phases of the Pascal and Ribbins (1998) framework separately, rather I will deal with a number of *a priori* and *posteriori* themes following interviews lasting over a period of twenty-two hours with the twelve contributors.

When I present the findings, discuss and analyse the findings and make recommendations in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, my writing style inclination is towards writing the report rather than in the words of Richardson (2003:501-502) "writing up the research". I am more comfortable foregoing "a static writing model [coherent] with mechanistic scientism and quantitative research" (Watling and James, 2007:362) quoting Richardson in favour of the "qualitative …. researcher … is the instrument" (Richardson: 2003:501-502) model, finding refuge from time to time in the bosom of the poetic, the artistic and the dramatic.

4.2 Shaping the Character of Potential Leaders

Gronn (1993) hypothesises that there is a preparatory stage in which possible candidates for leadership positions shape themselves and/or are shaped for

prospective roles prior to their assumption of such leadership roles. Ribbins and Sherratt (1997) shared Gronn's assumption when studying the careers of Secretaries of State for Education. Pascal and Ribbins (1998) claimed that such an assumption is valid in the study of headteachers and contended that in the general process of formation "such leaders are socialized into various society and institutional norms and values – into codes of taste, morality, values, belief and authority – by three key agencies: family, school and reference groups" (12). These agencies have the capacity to influence or to shape the character or personality of a potential leader "by generating a conception of self and the rudiments of a work style and outlook" (ibid).

4.3 Formation

In this study family and schooling were notable influencers in shaping values, attitudes and the careers of the participant interviewees as pupils, as teachers and ultimately as school principals.

4.3.1. The making of twelve pupils

While there were differences in the backgrounds of this group of principals there was significant common ground, much of it deriving from the value placed on education in Ireland. Eleven of our principals were born in Ireland spread over four provinces and eight counties, the twelfth born in Wales took up residence in Ireland aged four. Four principals stated that they came from farming backgrounds; P11 remembers the 1960s "we lived in a rural area…it's sort of an area where everybody knows everybody else. Things like GAA and Fianna Fáil and various things like that, you know the Church would be strong as well in the area" (P11/2). Three interviewees described their backgrounds as working class; "I was born and reared in a very working class background, in the Liberties in Dublin, just on the outskirts of the old wall of Dublin City" (P5/4). The remaining five would be described as coming from more comfortable surroundings, P2 shares that he had a "very middle class upbringing but I attended a school which now would be a DEIS Band 1 primary school" (P2/4).

Two of our principals had a parent who was a teacher; P12 was taught by his mother in a small rural school, he goes on to explain, “my mother’s family were all very embedded in teaching, she was actually taught herself in primary by her older brother” (P12/2). Meanwhile P4 was the “son of a primary school teacher who taught for forty-five years and most … of his teaching life he was a school principal of … a two teacher school” (P4/2). P1’s paternal grandfather was a primary teacher and her mother worked in schools also, she tells us, “I came from a home where I would always have known intrinsically that education was highly valued” (P1/2). P6 is grateful to two strong women in his early life, his mother and his father’s mother. His father “had alcohol problems [but] he also had values … his addiction did not stop him working” (P6/6). Two aunts who were teachers and nuns were also influential in his upbringing. Other parents worked in ordinary jobs; a nurse, a rate collector, a carpenter.

Each of the twelve principals attended local primary school, some rural, others town or city. P1 “enjoyed being in school very much” (P1/4). Her positive experiences were not shared by all. P11 did not like primary school, “I associate the corporal punishment and the use of the stick … I was delighted to leave primary school, not happy there at all” (P11/4). It was in secondary school, in a Christian Brothers School that P6 encountered ‘beatings’, he goes on to say that when he started teaching in the 1970s corporal punishment was used; he believed that the concept was wrong and suggested that its abolition in 1982 “[was] one of the singular most important things that happened in education in my life” (P6/2). P2 was quite disillusioned with his primary education in the 1960s and secondary education in the 1970s in an all male Christian Brothers School, “it was very restrictive, very boring, very authoritarian, very subject centred and it was a bit like Patrick Pearse’s ‘Murder Machine’, there was very little holistic development” (P2/4). It influenced him to have a completely opposite vision for education in his working life. P12 worked closely with his mother teacher in primary school and in summer camps for rural disadvantaged but was less enamoured by second level, “the secondary education I got, I think, was quite

dull" (P12/4). P8's parents imbued a strong sense of respect into their eleven children for the local rural teacher but he says "I could never accept the corporal punishment regime which they had endured and which continued right through to the 60s" (P8/8). However in fourth class he came across "a wonderful teacher and she would have future influence on both myself and my peers" (P8/4) and restored the warmth engendered by his junior infants teacher five years earlier.

P5 also was both terrified and inspired in primary school, "I can't eat a packet of Tayto to this day" (P5/10), she tells us because one teacher used a number of rulers together with Tayto advertising on them; "she would line us up around the wall for the spelling and the sums on Fridays and if you didn't know them you were whacked. And she would also use her knuckle to thump you in the back and we were terrified of her, absolutely" (ibid). On the other hand Sr. Annunciata, a very young nun who taught her for a short period in junior infants had a profound positive influence on her "she drew this magnificent cat on the blackboard…she would do visuals…she'd capture the class no matter what she was teaching…she was a magnificent artist" (P5/8). Her fourth class teacher, Helen O'Donnell, also touched her artist soul; "I remember her doing crafts and clay work with us and also my love of classical music stemmed from 1972 when we would be doing sewing or knitting and she put on Strauss" (P5/10). The music in the classroom extended to poetry, she remembers Wordsworth's 'Daffodils' in particular. The 1999 curriculum evoked images for P5 of her time in fourth class almost three decades earlier in a class where the teacher "had a respect and reverence for the children" (ibid).

The imprint of the great teacher on the generations (McMahon, 1992) is evident in P10's recalling her father's education in 1930s Dublin, in Rathfarnham where the principal Mr Duffy told them "about every bird that alighted on every bush and he could quote [father] any kind of poems fluently, Tennyson, Yeats, the whole lot. He knew more about science than we all know since the new science curriculum came out" (P10/2), a vicarious influence across the generations,

reminiscent of President Michael D. Higgins', marvellous holistic primary teacher in a two-teacher school in Newmarket-on-Fergus [in 1940s] (Quinn 1997:185)

P4's principal father was reminiscent of Goldsmith's Village School Master, (Goldsmith, 1770) "he was a local sage, he was the seat of wisdom on so many issues. He was a person who could analyse issues and deal with issues" (P4/2). P4 concludes that his father was a formative influence on him and that his condition, his attitudes and his views were shaped by his father. P9 was happy in primary school and from an early stage knew that she wanted to go to college. P7 suggests that in primary school she was "very quiet and retiring and invisible. I was an invisible child in school and I think … that shaped how I feel about teaching and schooling" (P7/6). P1 was also described as quiet in primary school, her senior infants teacher encouraged her, her fourth class teacher coaxed her to put up her hand. However the birth of a younger sister when she was in fifth class "seems to have been a pivotal event in my life … [it brought her] out of herself" (P1/8). While P6 was unhappy about corporal punishment at second level he considered his primary school to have been "a wonderful school, it was a two teacher school … the standard model at the time" (P6/2), and it was there that he encountered a great role model and the person who may be responsible for inspiring him to become a teacher.

4.3.2 The making of twelve teachers

When P6 entered the senior end of his two teacher primary school he commenced a new positive trajectory; he recalls "I encountered Pat O'Neill as probably the greatest role model, certainly male role model I've had and maybe the reason that I am a teacher today. He exemplified all that is good about teaching, he lit fires and I think that fire still burns brightly today, he influenced my life" (P6/2) . In the case of P1 she remarks "I think there was a kind of an understanding among everybody that I would teach". Her History teacher when she heard that P1 was going to the training college quipped "why is she bothering, why couldn't she just do it now?" (P1/10).

Despite his own primary school experience P11 believed that "even when I was quite young I was always good with children … I could easily relate to small children and they to me" (P11/22); it was a factor in his decision to become a primary teacher. For P2, becoming a teacher provided an opportunity of leaving provincial Ireland at a time of limited opportunity. P10 was happy in school and was inspired by a post primary English teacher who "broke all the conventions at the time … so creative … she taught outside the box" (P10/6). She remembers another English teacher, a nun "who flew her own plane" (ibid), who had a passion for her subject. Her *protégé,* P10, still quoting Henry IV "so shaken are we, so wan with care" (ibid) was inspired to become both a teacher and a nun. Her own passion for life and the prospect of creating "a better future for Ireland … by educating our youth" (P10/16) were also significant motivators.

P9 acknowledges the influence her first/second class teacher had on her and continues to admire her today. Another principal (P7) had occasion in later life to tell her fifth/sixth class teacher from 1970/71, Ms McNulty, that her innovative project work and her nurturing nature influenced her decision to become a teacher. Nollaig Ferriter influenced P3 in a brand new school in the suburbs of Dublin in the early 1970s to have an interest in Irish, also Nollaig was "the first person I looked at and said, yes I want to be teacher" (P3/4). P5 took a longer route than the others, ten of whom enrolled in a college of education in Ireland immediately after their Leaving Certificate examination, the eleventh did likewise after one year in the labour market. Initially she (P5) felt a need to escape the poverty, heroin and anti-social behaviour that was becoming rampant in her neighbourhood. She accepted a place in St Patrick's College but because of worsening family circumstances following the death of her father she left during first year. A job in Guinness's brewery led to a number of positive outcomes for her, she met her future husband, she learned about trade unions and the arts group and the musical society stimulated her. An extramural course in UCD on child development brought her into contact with the work of Froebel, she recalls "I thought this is where I want to go … I want to learn the craft of teaching and …

before the 1999 curriculum … Froebel appeared to me to be the most progressive college" (P5/4). If she had remained in Guinness's for another year she would have benefitted from a redundancy payment amounting to £5,500, that would have covered college expenses for those years but her decision was made, "I went back to college as a mature student with a huge strong commitment and a sense of grounding that this is the right thing" (P5/4). Coincidentally she incurred costs twice subsequently in her career, when she was allocated her first class such was the dearth of resources that she borrowed £60 from her mother to purchase materials and repaid from her salary (P5/16). This was repeated when she was appointed principal in a green field site "I actually got a loan myself and I kitted out the classrooms with my own money and I bought a kettle for the teachers and cups and my husband nearly divorced me because of it" (P5/38).

P4 believes that under the influence of his principal father, he "was conditioned towards working in education" (P4/4) and when he received the euphemistic 'call to teaching' he accepted, as subsequently two of his three siblings (brothers) did also. P8 was less certain. He left home in the autumn of 1972 with a place in Law in Trinity College Dublin and a place in St Patrick's College. His intention was to go to Trinity but a combination of fear of the unknowns in Trinity College and a concern that a longer term in third level would place financial strains on his parents who were rearing a large family led him to the gates of St Patrick's College and a career in primary education; "I was three weeks in St Pat's when my parents discovered, they were elated" (P8/10).

P8 recalls that he "entered in the spirit of St Pat's and had a wonderful time" (ibid). Growing up, maturing, achieving independence are among the memories of the interviewee principals when speaking of college of education experience especially St Patrick's College; "it was my university of life, my social education began here" (P6/16). P2 free of a restrictive post primary education felt that in St Pat's he encountered "true education, it was holistic, there were two genders there and you were treated as an individual, you were given responsibility" (P2/4). P7 loved St Pat's, her memory is that "this was fantastic, that you were doing things

that you really liked" (P7/20). While P11 attended a secondary school that he described as "fairly enlightened and liberal for its time (P11/16), he engaged every day in St Pat's where he came in contact with some tools to start learning about teaching but it was much more than that, "I developed friendships in St Pat's that to this day are very strong. I think it was a great growing up exercise, social bonding" (P11/26). Meanwhile in Coláiste Mhuire, Marino P4 was inspired by the humanity and liberating leadership of Piaras Ó Nualláin, president of the college, "[he] was a formative influence in terms of his passion for the arts" (P4/6). P12's experience in Carysfort qualifies for the genre of 'interesting story'. He did not enjoy a first year teaching practice in Carysfort. In January he took up a position in the Civil Service. He met a fellow student ten weeks later who informed him that he was listed for teaching practice in a school. He reflected, "I wonder has anybody noticed that I left so I took a chance on it, I turned up for teaching practice having been out of college for a solid ten weeks and never looked back (P12/6). With high powered teachers like Hugh Mulrooney in Philosophy and Seamus Heaney in English he enjoyed the remainder of his time in Carysfort.

4.4 Accession

When we discuss accession to principalship we are reflecting on a developmental period in an individual's career life-cycle where teachers either knowingly or unknowingly are involved in constructing themselves as credible candidates for principalship. They create a profile of themselves in their own schools or in the wider education system where their talents, achievements and potential are recognised, appreciated and ultimately deemed worthy of appointment to the position of principal. In my consideration of the 'making of twelve principals' I will comment on their experiences teaching, on the motivation and decision to seek a principalship, on the kind of preparation undergone, and on the story of accession including supports and process.

4.4.1. The making of twelve principals

There was no pattern in the decision of our twelve teachers to seek principalship. Circumstances was a significant factor in the decision of a number of the cast. P2 is very clear "I never had an ambition to be school principal. Still don't but I did work for a very good principal" (P2/16). He replaced the principal whom he admired having been his deputy principal for a period but had to deal with a very disgruntled disappointed candidate for a year. This created "a very very bad atmosphere in the school and looking back on it, I don't know how I got through it" (ibid).

P1 qualified as a teacher in the mid-1980s when demographic circumstances dictated that young teachers frequently served a lengthy apprenticeship in substitute positions. Now she realises the value of that character forming experience, "I learned an awful lot without realising I was learning it, about the culture of schools and about the role of principal and about staff dynamics" (P1/22). Frequently the learning and the messages were 'subtle', she recognises that she "learned about mentoring in its absence and in its presence and you really did learn the difference that a good principal, a strong principal could make in a school" (ibid). She observed the workings of "a wonderfully democratically run" (ibid) school and "a very effective dictatorship" (ibid). She added a law degree to her repertoire with principalship in mind and was encouraged and empowered in a full time teaching position by Padraig O'Duibhir, "an extraordinary good principal, who was very good at finding the strengths of his staff" (P1/24). Having observed how a number of principals "shaped their own school" (P1/28), among these some *Gaelscoileanna* and having been involved in the Education Centre movement, "I found that very empowering as well" (ibid), she applied for the principalships of new *Gaelscoileanna* and was successful with one application.

P4 made some strategic decisions *en route* to principalship. After four years teaching he sought and secured a teaching position in a 'developing' Dublin suburb where the population was increasing. He took on extra curriculum responsibilities and observed "more closely the workings of leadership in that school, how they were meeting the challenges of the time, especially establishing

a school in a new community" (P4/14). Furthermore he did an in-service course that qualified him to hold the position of remedial teacher. When I conducted research in the late 1980s on internal school decision-making I concluded that teachers with qualifications in remedial education were more likely to be involved in decision-making in their schools, most likely as a consequence of their involvement in in-service education for remedial teachers (McHugh, 1991:176, 193). So while P4 when referring to his appointment as principal of a new developing school in a Dublin suburb commented; "I was blessed to be in the right place at the right time", in fact his appointment owed less to good fortune than to strategic positioning.

Circumstances, and being in the right place were factors in P11's accession to principalship. When he left St Pat's he taught for five years in a South Dublin school where he remembers "we were led by a principal who gave us our head to a degree…and encouraged us to improve in weaker areas" (P11/28). He admitted that he "was hankering to a certain extent for the country" (P11/36) rather than for a principalship. He wasn't preparing for principalship but a vacancy for a principal occurred close to his home area in rural Ireland. He considered the position, "I suppose with a bit of pushing from my parents as well" (ibid). He says it was a case of "being in the right place at the right time" (P11/40). In 1970s rural Ireland P11's appointment as principal was reported in the local newspapers and his parents were delighted, "people would come to my door, not so much to congratulate me as to congratulate my father and mother" (P11/48).

P8 spent three years teaching in Dublin before a family tragedy necessitated a move to his home town. He learned lessons in a very regimented boys' school in North Dublin "where there was a lot of disharmony in the school; union fundamentalism I would say was a problem in the school" (P8/18).He found the principal "to be extremely disciplinarian but he had a great sense of fair play" (ibid). P8 feared the principal on the one hand, a fear perhaps remaining in his DNA following negative experiences in his own schooling but he did respect him, "he gave me ideas about discipline and behaviour and code of conduct that I think

I internalised and brought with me later on" (ibid). In his home town he joined a staff "ridden with union and personal animosities" (P8/30) where there were four different canteens and a deputy principal who was "extremely aggressive and derogatory to the junior staff members" (ibid). Despite the unhappy atmosphere P8 imbibed the *La Salien* atmosphere in the school where he served under two De La Salle brothers for eighteen years. He had an interesting autonomous experience for two and a half years when he and his class were located in a building far removed from the main school, he equates this with being the principal of a one teacher school. Following a battle with University College Galway he was permitted to do a part time PhD on Roman Love Poetry. P8 was offered a principalship in an adjoining county even though he had not applied for it. While it was never in his 'game plan' (P8/54) to become principal of his own school, when the principal resigned suddenly in 1995 he found himself becoming the first lay principal of his De La Salle school; circumstances.

A De La Salle school in Ballyfermot Dublin provided the backdrop for P6's first foray in a classroom in the 1970s. In his first year he taught sixth class, he believes that nothing in a teacher training college "can really prepare you for that baptism of fire" (P6/18). He was heartened by a visit from an ex-Chief Inspector, Batt O'Sullivan, who told him that he should learn skills, hone them and that he should be a very fine teacher, "young man the way you should view your career is as a trade and any good tradesman, it will take him five years to learn his trade" (ibid). He enjoyed the following six years in Ballyfermot and found the De La Salle brothers to be impressive and supportive and encouraging a sense of team, "probably it was an early encounter with a collaborative model … in a support sense that everybody felt they were part of a team" (P6/22).

He did not visualise himself as a principal and considered the inspectorate. Moving back to his home town he applied for every job that was advertised. His aunt and mentor, a nun, told him "you are better than you think" (P6/24) and encouraged him to apply for the principalship of a brand new school in 1979. He was surprised at his appointment to the position.

In the case of P10 she had no choice about location or role. As a Sister of Charity nun it was a question of obedience to the order. She admits that a disadvantage of the obedience system was that some sisters "had to say yes in obedience [but] they weren't up to it [the job]" (P10/40). She herself "never wanted to be a principal because of the power … I wanted to be a principal so that I could … bring about change (P10/18), an opportunity she was afforded in three quite different principalships. She always saw herself "as a teacher, never a nun … a nun is only a fraction of who I am" (P10/14). She did not consider the two principals to whom she reported as a teacher as inspirational leaders (P10/20).

Both P5 and P7 not only were the founding principals of their schools on 'green field' sites they were principals of schools imbuing new concepts. P5 admitted to a certain kind of ambition "I am very driven with regard to my work … I always wanted to break new ground" (P5/16). She led literacy initiatives as a teacher and subsequently was among the first cohort of teachers who were seconded to the PCSP in 1999 to mediate the 1999 curriculum to teachers; "I remember it was a rollercoaster, huge learning" (P5/22). She looks back on that period as a time of excitement, rejuvenation and renewed interest in curriculum, "when I talk to my own staff now, I say to them, the 90s was really a renaissance in primary education" (ibid). Her PCSP work led to an interest in curriculum leadership and a Master's degree in School Leadership in NUI Maynooth with an emphasis on curriculum leadership and also a position as lecturer in Coláiste Mhuire in Marino College of Education where she brought many ideas from PCSP. The seeds for her ambition to become a principal were sown while supervising teaching practice for Marino where she observed "a dearth of equipment and gloomy surroundings" (P5/24) in schools that would have finance available. Her attitude was "don't be saving it up for the rainy day, these children don't have rainy days, they've only eight years" (ibid). She believes that "there is a greater, grand plan out there" (P5/26) that afforded her multiple experiences of schools and led her to the conclusion that the 'leverage in the system', "the person who really effects change" (ibid) is the principal. In order to be in a position where she could lead

curriculum change she applied for five principalships in 2006 and was offered three. The position she accepted involved a new concept project in the Irish system. The project envisaged a nursery and early years facility, a primary school, an after school facility and a canteen. The vision behind the concept was to "ensure that all children's care needs were met onsite" (P5/50) and that there would be sufficient attention to emotional needs. In an English context using a future tense, Ribbins (2008: 66) refers to "multi-agency child services bodies envisaged for the future", a likely similar concept.

P7's second principalship was adorned by a unique epithet also, at least for some time. It was the first Community National School in the state literally, a primary school in the then VEC (now ETB) sector. Ironically when it opened its doors for the first time in a temporary premises in an Institute of Horology it was "under the temporary patronage of the Catholic archdiocese" (P7/70). P7's first principalship also involved a 'start-up' situation as she established a *Gaelscoil*. Her journey to her first principalship took her from St Patrick's College to a teaching position for six years in a *Gaelscoil* where it was easier to find a teaching position than in another school, to Australia for four years and back to the *Gaelscoil* for another four years. In Australia she discovered that "children had a voice and they were able to use it and it was a big culture shock" (P7/34). She encountered process writing and First Steps before they reached our system. Furthermore she was impressed by "continuous professional development … academic dialogue and professional dialogue and … talk about strand units" (P7/36). In her opinion and experience professional dialogue was not a feature of 1980s Irish staffrooms; this would not have been the experience of some of our other contributors.

Principalship was not high in her priorities but she did admire her *Gaelscoil* principal in Ireland who was "a very human person and she had great humanity" (P7/42). When her own children were reaching school going age she was involved with other parents in attempting to start a new *Gaelscoil* in her locality. When the school was established, "due to pressure from other people who were involved in the start-up…I sort of fell into that [principalship]" (P7/44). Her involvement in

campaigning for the establishment of the school meant that she had given thought to a philosophy for the school, “I wanted it to be very child centred, I wanted it to be a happy place, I wanted the children to feel relaxed and happy coming to school” (P7/48).

P12 had the distinction also of teaching for a period outside Ireland and later becoming the founding principal of an Educate Together school. After Carysfort he taught in what he described as a twelve teacher semi rural school in north Dublin where pupils “were well tutored for exams” (P12/8). With five years teaching and a Masters from UCD (including one year full time) behind him he left for east London where he taught for five years, returning after a year travelling in India, only because “part of her [wife’s] prenuptial was to come back to Ireland” (P12/10). His excitement about his overseas experience is palpable, “I found teaching in England a wonderful experience … there was a real commitment in schools and in teaching staffs to the care and education of the children. I found the curriculum interesting and exciting” (P12/10). Furthermore the resources of schools in London impressed him greatly. In terms of leadership one male head teacher in London “bordered on the bullying end of things and I would have learned … how not to go about things” (P12/22). However that head teacher was an accomplished organiser; P12 admits he “learned a lot about the craft of the job, if not the philosophy of the job from him” (ibid). Notwithstanding his reluctance to re-enter the Irish system he acknowledges the excellence of his Irish principal, “she understood school leadership…[was] a wonderfully supportive person, positive, real interest in the children, real interest in their education, really progressive in her philosophical understanding” (P12/12). Comfortably reinstated in his semi rural school he felt empowered to participate in collaborative projects, had his first experience of designing curriculum with the INTO professional development programme, published books on geography and literacy and worked on a part time basis with St. Patrick’s College, teaching curriculum, history and geography. While seconded to St. Pat’s for a year he commenced doctoral studies.

It was during this period in the 90s while a member of the board of management of his own children's Catholic school that he concluded "I didn't want to teach under the Catholic patronage … I met some of the most ignorant people under the name of professionals that I'd ever met" (P12/12). His disillusion and reflection led him to conclude that "Educate Together schools are the closest to what the state school should be with a very liberal view of multiculturalism and round multi-denominationalism and inclusive practice" (P12/14). With a refined philosophical perspective, research on educational leadership in hand and with experience of principals from whom he learned something about the philosophy of the role and the craft of the job he became the founding principal of an Educate Together 'project' school where ninety-two percent of the initial cohort of pupils were African. The prospect of a 'ghetto school' loomed.

P3 spent some time teaching in London also on his own journey towards principalship. Like P11 he liked the idea of working with children and was attracted to a variety of roles within teaching. After leaving St Patrick's College in 1982 he worked for six years in what would be described as a middle class suburb of Dublin, teaching first and second classes where there was an emphasis on First Communion. A career break took him to Kuwait where he learned a lot teaching a British curriculum to ex patriots from Britain and Australia mostly. His sojourn in Kuwait was interrupted by Saddam Hussein's invasion of the country so the remaining three years of his career break were served "in a lovely Church of England school right beside the Oval Cricket Ground" (P3/22) in London. He valued another different experience, "it was a very socially economically deprived school. Ninety percent of the children were Afro-Caribbean and there again it opened my eyes to another different culture" (ibid). He became acquainted with the concept of classroom assistant, taught a SATs class and studied for a Masters in Education at Goldsmith's College. On his return he became involved in continuing professional development (CPD) on a part-time basis initially with the INTO professional development programme and then on secondment with the Substance Misuse Prevention Programme (SMPP) also known as Walk Tall and the Primary Schools' Sports Initiative (PSSI). Subsequently he was appointed national coordinator of a revised and revitalised

SMPP but when the principalship of his own school became vacant he was faced with a dilemma. Using a rationale that he was "familiar with the staff and children and the environment" (P3/28) of his own school and also that he'd gained an insight into what principalship was about in my travels" (ibid), he applied for the principalship and was successful.

Finally P9 viewed schools and principals also through the lens of a support service. Following three enjoyable years in Mary Immaculate College in Limerick she secured a teaching position in Sligo and taught there for five years. Her involvement in projects and courses prompted her at a young age to attempt to broaden her experience so she applied for and secured a position with the PCSP in 2006. Hers was the first generation of young teachers to have such a professional option arising from the establishment of support services in the 1990s and the PCSP in particular in 1999. She speaks highly of the experience, "that [the PCSP] I would say more than anything else would have shaped me into the person I am now … it gave me a real love I suppose of knowledge and teaching" (P9/16). The PCSP also provided her with her first leadership or management experience albeit for six months only, "I was aware that there was a very clear difference between being the leader and somebody who wasn't in that position" (P9/20). During this three year period she also did a Masters degree developing an interest in research and she acquired some understanding of principalship, "[what] I like about principalship was the fact that you got a chance or an opportunity to lead a learning community" (P9/18). Buoyed by her PCSP experiences she applied for a number of principalships towards the end of her third year in the service. The first interview she was offered led to a successful outcome and a new position as a teaching principal in a village community in rural Ireland.

4.4.2 Concluding the journey to the Principal's Office

Circumstances, some strategic positioning, being in the right place, obedience to a religious order and a determination to effect change in children's lives in our

education system and in society in general, featured in the accession of our cast of characters to the role of principal. As there were thirty years between the appointment of Ps 6 and 11 in 1979 and P9 in 2009 the kind of preparation for principalship engaged in by our contributors ranged from little or no preparation, "no, I was not preparing for it" (P11/38) to strategic preparation such as taking a law degree (P1/24) or a Masters degree in leadership or curriculum (Ps 3, 5, 7, 9, 12), securing a teaching position in a developing school (P4), observing principalship through the lens of a support service (Ps 3,5,9) or from another professional development vantage point (P12). That there was such variety in preparation for principalship including no preparation is not surprising as there has not been an official requirement that candidates for principalship do formal preparation. The emergence of the Leadership Development for Schools (LDS) support service, now part of the PDST with a brief for providing professional development opportunities for deputy principals as well as principals may ensure that future principals may have more formal preparation. However only one of our contributors worked as a deputy principal before accession to principalship, consequently the net for preparing aspiring principals needs to extend beyond deputy principals.

Despite the broad spectrum with regard to preparedness for principalship, there was a certain consistency among the cast on the adequacy of any kind of preparation for principalship; "I think nothing actually prepares you for it, I think it's still a very much sink or swim job" (P1/38), "I don't think you're every fully prepared for the job unless you're in it" (P9/22).

4.4.3 Adequacy of selection processes

P2 summed up the beliefs of many of the principals in the research on the issue of selection of principals when he said, "I think it's fair, I think it's transparent" (P2/22). P4 notes that there have been improvements in the selection process, "Now the whole process of vetting and preparation … is a world away from what I would have experienced twenty-seven years ago" (P4/24). However some of the

inadequacies that existed in selection processes when one of our longest serving principals was appointed in rural Ireland in 1979 are echoed by our shortest serving principal, appointed to a rural school in 2009. In 1979 P11 maintains that networking among the clergy was an important factor in the appointment of principals, "the parish priest decided who it was going to be" (P11/46). When he had settled into his position the parish priest also chairperson, confided in him about the roles of those on the interview panel; "their job was to give a rigorous interview, his [parish priest] job was to decide who the successful candidate would be" (P11/42). P8's (P8/54) experience of being offered a principalship in rural Ireland without having applied for it in the mid 90s does not exude transparency. P9 in her rural teaching principalship finds that selection is "very colloquial and it's very local" (P9/28), she refers to a culture of 'being local' and 'having football' continuing to exist particularly in appointments to teaching positions.

The two principals appointed in 1979 believe that their gender played a role in securing their principalships, "in retrospect I probably got it…on the basis that I was male" (P6/24); "one of the things I can say for sure, that one of the criteria was that it would help to be a man" (P11/42). There is no suggestion among the cast that gender bias was significant in any appointment since 1979.

In the company of our cast of contributors we are poised to move from accession to incumbency and immediately to the initiation sub-phase of incumbency.

4.5 Incumbency

In our model incumbency marks the period when the principal is in office, discharging the responsibilities of office and leading the school. Principals progress in their own unique ways through the stages of initiation, development, autonomy and advancement. Each has his/her own 'style' or approach as s/he addresses the tasks and challenges encountered. Pascal and Ribbins (1998:26)

suggest that "Style will be shaped and modified, in particular, by the dialectical interplay between a leader's own sense of agency and the social structure within which the head is working". The principal's performance in the role will evolve and develop as it reaches the further sub-phases of incumbency and will serve as an expression of the principal's potency, ambition and vision.

4.5.1 Initiation

The initiation sub-phase can prove to be a salutary experience for principals. The first day, week and month in the role of principal is recalled easily by our principals; memories of excitement, isolation and chaos are etched inexorably in vivid minds.

Some principals still remember the shock of the first days, P11 remembers thinking "what in the name of God have I let myself in for" (P11/52), having left behind a twenty-five teacher school in Dublin working with teachers of his own age and now the principal of a two-teacher rural school, the other teacher being the wife of the retired principal. Returning to his own school as principal from a secondment on 7th January, P3 received the keys and a 'handover' on the previous day and found himself in his office saying to himself "what do I do now" (P3/38). 'Handover' issues featured in the first days of Ps 8 and 10, both of whom replaced 'religious order' principals. P10 remembers "you didn't know where anything was in the school" (P10/42). P8 the first 'lay' principal of a De La Salle school met his predecessor for fifteen minutes on the first morning of his principalship. As it was custom for the 'religious order' principals in the school to keep all administration within a tight grip, P8 was confronted with stark realities, "I discovered that we had eight school accounts … the *leabhar tinrimh laethúil*, the *réamhleabhair* were big shocks to me" (P8/60).

For some of our principals starting in new schools accommodation was a significant issue. P7 started in her *Gaelscoil* in less than optimal conditions, "In a

Gaelscoil you're sort of on your own … we started off in temporary accommodation in a scout den and it was really awful accommodation, dreadful accommodation and I worried about everything" (P7/60). In her second principalship, a new Community National School her initial accommodation was also temporary but more edifying, in an Institute of Horology. However she had other challenges; eighty-nine of her pupils on the first day were children of 'newcomers' to Ireland, one child was of Irish origin. When P12 assumed the principalship of a new Educate Together school in 2005, forty-nine pupils from an enrolment of fifty-three were African, a challenge, but one that later was transformed into an opportunity. P1 started a *Gaelscoil,* also in temporary accommodation. She too invoked 'God', "oh my God, what have I done, I've left a job in a perfectly wonderful school with real classrooms and real teachers and real children and I've come out here to a coffee shop" (P1/34). She was optimistic however and described the situation as "crazy but fabulous because you were doing something that was tremendously new and dynamic and exciting, terribly scary at times" (ibid). Her approach to the insurmountable problems is that they just have to be solved. P5's worries and shocks started long before her new school opened on 1st September. Having being interviewed and offered the position twice (there had been a procedural *faux pas* with regard to the first recruitment) she abandoned her family holiday and spent "five to six weeks finishing the building, ordering furniture, kitting out classrooms … it was a very lonely time" (P5/38). She had no board of management in place, the single manager was "extremely confrontational" (P5/44) in particular about the appointment of teachers, some sections of the Department of Education were helpful, others were not, the message from the patron while encouraging was blunt, "you're a school principal, just show leadership, get out there and just manage" (ibid). By the time the school opened she had three teachers and fifty-six happy children, she believed she had been through a "baptism of fire" (P5/46), echoes of Sugrue (2005).

Loneliness and isolation inhabited the early experiences of P9 when, still in her late twenties she assumed the teaching principalship in a rural village, "I think I never felt as lonely in my whole life as that day when I actually walked to open

the gates of the school" (P9/36). The sense of camaraderie she felt in previous positions was missing probably because hers was an 'outside' appointment to a staff where a much older teacher had not been preferred for the principalship. The best wishes and 'good luck' messages from a distance helped her to feel that she was not alone even though she was very lonely. Furthermore she says, "everybody kept telling me that I was so young … it [made] me think do they think I'm not capable" (P9/40). She found solace in the teaching aspect of her role, "the children have to be your primary focus" (ibid).

Some principals assuming principalships in start-up situations were fortunate enough to have a new building ready in time. P4 and his single assistant "taught for about five blissful months" (P4/28) before changes in housing policy in Dublin in 1984 generated a major rapid increase in population with consequent challenges in the second half of his first year. P6 and his single assistant visited parents in their homes for a fortnight before the school and their new careers commenced, to ensure that the prospective pupils would turn up at these "two prefabs in this bog, which it was" (P6/30). However he sums up the attitude of many of our contributors when he comments, "It's a tremendous honour for anybody to be given the role of looking after somebody's children and looking after their welfare and more importantly their education" (P6/30).

Having reported on the early days of principalship, I will address themes that emerged from the interviews. As specific questions were asked about autonomy and accountability I will treat these as *a priori* themes and will proceed to deal with them in the next section.

4.5.2 Autonomy and Accountability

There is a large measure of agreement among the principals in this research on the issues of how autonomous they believe they are in their roles and to whom they see themselves as being accountable. P6's contention that he is autonomous "but

not in the sense that you are a independent fiefdom" (P6/96) is representative of the views of several principals. P9 concurs and suggests that "you don't want to be a little dictator on your own" (P9/126). Further concurrence is evident in the remarks of (P8/174) "great autonomy", (P2/78) "a great deal of autonomy", (P12/66) "huge autonomy". P1 asserts clearly that she is "very autonomous. I know listening to Johnny Coolahan many years ago at a lecture … Johnny figured that seventy-eight per cent of decisions that directly impact on schools were made at school level in this country … I would say that's pretty much the way it is, I would feel I have huge autonomy in what I do"(P1/92). P3 was more tentative and suggested that his degree of autonomy was 50:50 in some areas (P3/102). He criticised the DES for diluting principals' autonomy with a surfeit of circulars. P4 sees the principal as the CEO of the organisation, autonomous on day to day issues but maintaining a unique partnership with the chairperson (P4/66, 68). P9 talks about the cultivation of a relationship with the chairperson and the necessity for trust in that relationship. P10 feels autonomous but with a responsibility to listen, echoing Ruth (2006: 8) "listen deeply"; she characterises her belief "I can't be wired for transmission and not for reception". Finally P5 while conceding that "on a day to day basis I have complete autonomy" (P5/96), she cautions principals against taking on too many responsibilities themselves.

After her initial problem without a board of management in 2006, P5 has a functioning board with three accountants on it, she sees herself as being accountable to her line manager, the chairperson of the board, "an incredibly busy man, he's one of the top people in the Redemptorist Order" (P5/94). Their *modus operandi* is that P5 on sensitive issues prepares "a rationale document…an A4 page … with bullet points" (P5/100). He has been a great help in dealing with governance issues "between the care side and the school side" (ibid) in her unique school/care facility. Many of the principal participants in this research understand accountability in relatively similar terms, "I would feel I'm accountable to everyone" (P1/90); "I'm accountable to absolutely everybody, believe me" (P7/154); "you're accountable to everyone but no one is responsible to you" (P10/116) while (P3/100) sees himself as accountable to everyone to a degree, instancing the board, the children and the staff in particular. P2 speaks of multi-

layered accountability with emphasis on the board; Ps 4 and 12 add their church and Educate Together patrons to the board while P8, citing accountability to staff, children and parents highlights his accountability "to the De La Salle tradition" (P8/170)"; P6 verbalises accountability to self as well as to all others. (P6/88).

In addition to talking about his accountability to the board and to children in particular "I know children are the most important people in this school … and I would never lose sight of that" (P11/134), P11 turns his attention to his accountability to the state, the DES through the inspectorate. He proclaims his desire to be accountable to the inspectorate but is disappointed that "we have a dreadfully bad system for school inspections" (P11/142). He asks what business or system "where management wants to make sure that things are going well only visits once every ten years or maybe longer … I think the inspector should be a visitor to the school on a fortnightly basis" (ibid), a view not enunciated widely elsewhere.

While P5 in a very special set of circumstances was uncomfortable with a single manager early in her principalship, P7 now in her second start-up principalship has had a positive experience with a single manager who previously "was an inspector with the Department and [is] fantastic … he has an educational background, he understands the running of the school. I think there's an awful lot to be said for that form of management" (P7/156). P9 declares that she has "huge questions about the whole management structure" (P9/126). Echoing her concerns about transparency in appointments, despite her trusting relationship with a supportive chairperson in the area of school governance she finds "it is very colloquial and there are local politics … you are being accountable to people who don't actually understand the role or understand the job". The idea of a direct manager would not be alien to her. She looks beyond the board to an accountability to parents "because they're actually … entrusting you with their children (P9/130) and building a learning community. On the other hand the two longest serving principals speak in one instance of working within the community; here you "get a cohort of people and you build them up" (P6/88),

empowering them for management and in another instance feeling "privileged to have people on the board … who are all parents and look to further … the good of the school" (P11/140).

4.5.3 Emerging Themes

An analysis of the conversations with participant principals that took place in connection with a group of questions on incumbency led to the identification of a large number of issues that were grouped into themes and sub-themes. In total seventy-six sub-themes and mini sub-themes, in the words of Creswell (1998: 153) children and grandchildren of themes, were identified. Following further analysis five major themes were identified in this part of the study, however a number of these themes and sub-themes were evident also in the analysis of the dialogue in the formation and accession aspects of this study and also in discussions about accountability and autonomy. Some sub-themes could possibly be categorised under more than one major theme, however for the purposes of this study sub-themes are depicted under one major theme only. The themes and sub-themes are depicted graphically in Figure 4.1 (Appendix P).

The five themes emerging as most important in my conversations with twelve principals can be described as follows:

1. Values/Moral Purpose/Interests of Children
2. Empowerment and Continuing Professional Development
3. Frustrations
4. Passion and Pride
5. Changing Landscapes

As I present findings under each major theme I will refer to a number but not all sub-themes.

4.5.4 Values, Moral Purpose and the Interests of Children

The overwhelming finding in this study is that the focus of the primary principals who participated in the study is most definitely on values and moral purpose and the interests of the children under their care. More than 180 'bits' of information throughout the conversations demonstrated that this was the theme that occupied the thoughts and intentions of our twelve principals. The significant sub-themes include values and moral purposes themselves, the centrality of children as well as respect, trust, relationships and community. Pursuing a vision, cultivating a caring ethos, listening, constructing an inclusive school, attempting to make a difference and cultivating humanity are classified also under this main theme; values, moral purpose and the interests of children.

4.5.4.1. Values and Moral Purpose

When recruiting teachers P6 sought individuals who "had something to give society" (P6/58). After appointing such teachers he then believed in investing in them, something that was confirmed for him when he encountered Concepta Conaty the legendary and dynamic leader of the Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) programme and a significant change agent in disadvantaged schools. She convinced him that "investment in human resources would benefit six times over" (ibid). Working with committed teachers striving for excellence enabled him to improve the quality of life among his pupils and their community. Decades before the state created P5's combined education and care facility, P6 established a facility with community assistance and with the blessing of the patron. It consisted of a "cradle to grave" (P6/ 104) facility; firstly a pre-school section, secondly "a family support group that made a greater difference to…marginalised within the community than any other grouping" (P6/98) and thirdly a training centre where parents and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) acquired Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC) qualifications, "we effectively had practically an industry within the confines"

(P6/68). Reflecting on three and a half decades of principalship he contemplates some objectives that were realised, “I think the quality of the care children received in the school, together with the quality of the education gave them an opportunity or a stepping stone in life and that’s what I’ve really enjoyed most” (P6/118).

A commitment to equality featured highly in the psyches of our contributors. In her diverse school community P7 is committed to a vision “that the school is about partnership, it’s about equality, everybody is treated equally” (P7/94). P10 emphasises equality also, in particular in the context of integration and recounts the story of a pupil with serious special needs in her school, “her personality’s developed and she also presented the flowers to the President and she could hardly walk … if we’re talking about equality and the value of human beings and that nugget that is the genius and the soul of every human being then the way to go is integration” (P10/204). She extols the virtues of the DEIS initiative and its title, delivering equality in schools. Her value system is underpinned by “the infinite riches and potential in every human being” (P10/206) and that what we will be remembered for “is the little bit of love we leave behind” (ibid). She believes that the measure of any society is “how we treat our most vulnerable” (P10/214).

Meanwhile P8 measured success in some non-quantitative ways; his barometers of success envisage happy and fulfilled pupils, he was pleased to see a “weak child doing well, he also had his day at assembly where he was lauded for some achievements” (P8/114). When P2 talks about standards in his disadvantaged school he refers to “human standards rather than educational standards” (P2/42). He would like to think that visitors to his school would “meet people who are happy to be there, people who have lots of opportunity to grow, to develop, to achieve, people who feel valued, people who feel respected” (ibid). Having a duty of care for all in the school community provides a challenge for P5; she warns that “you become depleted quite naturally, emotionally and psychologically … because you’re giving, giving, giving all the time (P5/130). Notwithstanding the

drain she was swift to intervene when some of her teachers were contemplating a reduction in their voluntary commitment to the school in the context of a trade union statement, she demonstrated strong leadership and a commitment to a value system, “the children are not going to be victims of the recession, and we are professionals” (P5/118); she was successful.

P1 highlights the necessity for ongoing quality “you never just settle for what might be good enough” (P1/64), echoes of Obama (2007), “better isn’t good enough”. She cautions against allowing the development of a narrow focus on literacy and numeracy scores and putting us “in danger of losing so much of what is good about our system and the breadth that’s in it” (ibid). She has created a culture involving an ‘open’ policy, accessible principal, accessible teachers, uncomfortable for teachers who come from more rigid systems. Pupils and parents alike had reacted positively leading to a dynamic school community. The generous response from parents “affirms that you’ve been doing the right thing” (P1/68), in Starratt’s (1993a) parlance, ‘doing right things’ rather than ‘doing things right’.

All of our principals would in one way or another share the purposes and the values outlined by P4 when he described his school as a springboard where “children are enabled to be able to forge ahead in life and to avail of all of life’s opportunities” (P4/42). This focus on children as central to the value system and moral purpose of the school while unsurprising is nevertheless overwhelming in the voices of the principals and it is to this aspect I will turn now.

4.5.4.2 Children

Questions on what are the high points in your principalship and what do you like most evoked responses that almost universally included remarks about children. The central place of children is prominent throughout all the conversations, for example: “children are our first responsibility” (P4/90, (P2/82), (P1/102); “happy

children" (P3/54), (P11/22, 64, 90), (P10/74). P1 develops the concept of first responsibility to the children; she talks of a "safe and stable and nurturing educational environment" (P1/102), she talks of smiling children in the schoolyard as a success indicator and she talks of the aspiration of those children achieving "their potential in that partnership between you as a school and their parents and their homes. And that you have to get that balance right" (ibid). The OECD (2013: 128) appear to be in agreement with P1 when they conclude that "parents are more likely to consider such criteria as a safe environment and a school's good reputation more important than high academic achievement of students. P2 is unequivocal in his remarks about the interests of children, "Ultimately, everything that happens should be for the benefit of children … whatever decisions are made here have to be in the best interests of children". (P2/82). While all principals place children at the centre of their role, children receive special mention in the conversations with the two teaching principals.

"Children first" (P4/90) was P4's response about what he liked best about his role. A further high point was when he could "see that the totality of needs…of children with learning support needs, language needs was being met" (P4/36). Being inhibited by bureaucracy in meeting those needs is upsetting for P1, "that can be the thing that keeps you awake at night" (P1/110). P3 while reminding us of the purpose of school, "we are here for the children" (P3/70) likes to stand "in front of assembly in school and see … [children] … well cared…reaching their full potential … enjoying themselves" (P3/54). P2, principal of a large disadvantaged suburban school regards himself as "a teacher first and foremost" (P2/94), what he likes most is "positive interaction with children. Meeting the children, listening to what the children have to say, watching the children learn, having an input into their learning" (ibid). Furthermore he contends that because his school is DEIS Band 1 that there are occasions when he needs to be "the voice of my pupils" (P2/84).

In P11's rural school setting the centrality of children in the life and operations of the school is manifest, "sometimes the staffroom fills with children, some child

comes in about something, someone else comes … children come in and tell their stories" (P11/92). He aims to build children's confidence, to enable them to be good citizens and that means having discussions with them. He wants his pupils "to be happy and content and interested and … if they are, then it will be a happy place, it will be a busy place" (P11/90). In building relationships with children he believes that "you need the child to know that you have some understanding of them and of maybe why they did something" (P11/66). Consequently the possibility of conflict is reduced. "Developing children's self confidence enables them to protect themselves in society" (P10/210) featured on P10's agenda also. Principals demonstrated their prioritisation of children by instituting structures and involving their schools in a myriad of activities. Preparing children for a society where the odds were not naturally stacked in their favour occupied the thinking of P6 and his staff. They brought their pupils to events and competitions in a wider cultural milieu, they attended Questions Times and Feiseanna, exposing children to realities beyond their own community, "we have to serve the needs of our students but we also realised that we had to make sure that the children who had the opportunity of getting out of the poverty trap through education had to be served, so we created the best possible opportunity" (P6/60).

In efforts to afford optimal opportunities for his pupils taking into consideration "the large numbers of children who don't have English as their first language" (P12/64), P12 adopted a team teaching approach deploying non-mainstream teachers "at crucial places within the eight years where children require more attention" (ibid).

P9 is conscious that in her role as a teaching principal "you're influencing lives" (P9/188), she is conscious of the "profound effect" (P9/84) she can have on children, she told her board of management that for her education is about "actually creating independent learning" (P9/78). She echoes Thornburg (2002) when she says "we're trying to prepare children to answer questions … that don't even exist" (ibid).

4.5.4.3 Child Protection

Some literature in leadership talks about the ‘hedgehog syndrome.’ MacPherson, (1991:11) borrows from the Greek poet, Archilochus, the Russian writer, Tolstoy and the British philosopher, Berlin in using the hedgehog phrase about Lincoln, “a thinker or leader who relates everything to a single central vision”. This research would suggest that our primary principals are in ‘hedgehog’ mode when they are engaged in the protection of children.

Contributors to this study were very clear in their responsibilities in the area of child protection. P4 speaks of his school’s relationship with the Health Services Executive (HSE) on “the issue of the welfare of children and child protection” (P4/78), he looks forward to a “potential imperative or will … to ensure that a proper legislative basis is firmly established to ensure that children’s rights are maintained” (ibid). In the context of nurturing and protecting children P8 (106, 144, 270) places emphasis on school as a second home where values such as trust and respect are paramount.

4.5.4.4 Respect

In the views of P2 “school should be like life itself, it should be about learning, but it should also be about being happy and being valued, being courteous, being respectful and respected” (P2/54). Furthermore when considering what he likes least about his role he contends that “a lack of courtesy and a lack of respect between people, whether they’re children, whether they’re parents or whether they’re members of staff” (P2/96) is the root problem. The respect sub-theme is a matter of importance for other principals also. P11 believes that showing respect at all levels is important, “you treat children not just with respect, but you treat children letting them know that they matter” (P11/66); “I would show respect for the teacher’s judgement and the teacher’s interest in something if they felt that

something mattered" (P11/128). P9 talks of the enriching experience of having children who have special needs in the classroom and when everybody practises tolerance and respect "they can actually teach us quite an amount themselves that we never knew or thought possible" (P9/192). In the hustle and bustle of everyday management and administration P7 cautions on the balance to be struck, "you need to take on board everybody's viewpoints and be very respectful…but you cannot please everybody" (P7/116). P10 contends that she has removed many of the rules in the school in favour of one rule, "there's one rule – respect and I said if you respect then you break no other rule" (P10/82). The policies promoted by some principals in the way children are addressed is borne out of respect for the pupil as an individual. In an all boys' school where a previous culture would have involved calling children by surnames P8 (116) is proud of his achievement in changing that culture. P1 enunciates that in her *Gaelscoil* situation "we operate with the children on a first name basis, we would try and operate with the parents on a first name basis. It makes for a different relationship dynamic" (P1/100).

4.5.4.5 Trust

Trust overlaps with a number of other themes and sub-themes, however in its own right the building of trust was recognised by interviewees as being essential in initiating, developing and fostering relationships and building learning communities. P6 considers relationships and trust together and suggests that if a staff have good relationships and trust one another "that is in turn transmitted to children" (P6/50). P1 speaks of trust and empowerment in teachers in the same breath, "I think you have to trust somebody implicitly and say to them, it's your job, it's your responsibility … I trust you, I think you have the capability to do this" (P1/78). In a previous round of interviews with principals (McHugh, 2010:30) one respondent in his concluding remarks encapsulated his vision for his role as a school leader in terms of "absolute integrity and openness … trust and consistency". Such remarks about trust are fairly representative of the attitudes of principals in this study and echo a trust first approach advocated in the literature on moral leadership in particular, "schools that succeed in bringing about change use a trust first approach" Sergiovanni (2007:160); "changes in behaviour precede

rather than follow changes in belief" (Fullan, 1991:91) and principals "establish both respect and regard when they … actively listen ... and eschew arbitrary activities (Bryk and Schneider, 2003:43).

4.5.4.6 Building Community through Relationships

An emerging sub-theme that generated more discussion than most others was what I have termed community, the building of community, the development of community, sometimes the initiation of community, always through the cultivation of relationships. The subsection includes relationships building with staff, the cultivation of relationships with pupils, the welcoming and encouraging of parents, an openness to parents and others in the school, support for/from board of management and relationships with a variety of patron bodies. The conversations in this section are underpinned by the concept of relationships; the word relationships itself is used frequently by all interviewees.

When P11 reflects on his rural school he sees a community in action. Referring to pupils, staff and the board of management he explains, "I don't see them as all separate and on the ground they are not all separate" (P11/132). He admits that there have been major changes over the years "in my relationship or my attitude to parents" (P11/94). When he arrived in the school in 1979 "the best place for the parents was at the gate" (P11/152). He was fifteen years there before his 180° change commenced. Now he has a very good relationship with parents, "I'll take phone calls at weekends, they all have my mobile number" (ibid); during our conversation he accepted a cell phone call from a parent on a late August evening during the school summer holiday season. The other teaching principal who has a much shorter incumbency than P11 has not taken as long to open the gates, "I would try to involve the community as much as possible" (P9/80). In her second year as principal she addressed a major litter problem in the environs of the school and reclaimed valuable space, "we trained the children and we managed to get a huge response from the parents and from the local community" (P9/134).

It may not be possible for all principals to share their cell phone numbers with the whole school community, nevertheless the concept of building community through relationships is widespread among our cohort of principals. In her Community National School with a school population of children whose parents almost universally are immigrants to Ireland, P7 insists that “building a sense of community within the school here is so important for all of us” (P7/246). She contends that “a lot of our parents find it hard to integrate into Irish society” (ibid), that despite the narrative that Ireland is a welcoming country many parents tell her that school is the only welcoming place they experience. She contends that it is a pivotal role of the principal “to look after everyone in the school community, children, teachers, SNAs, parents” (P7/84), her efforts to achieve this give rise to the high points of her principalship. She feels privileged to share in the “sense of community or camaraderie amongst staff and parents and children” (P7/200).

P5’s school is not termed officially a community school but she likes “the notion of us being a community school … a school run by the community for the community” (P5/72). In building a community school she repeats the word relationships four times for emphasis and argues that “if you haven’t got it [relationships] right, no amount of expertise in curriculum, no amount of expertise in management of schools will make this a nice place to work” (P5/90). She works on her relationship with parents, “I’m at that gate every single morning, hail, rain or snow … to say good morning, *Dia duit* … how are you … I try to get to know the names of all my parents. I know the names of every child [335]” (P5/102). She encourages good relationships with older schools in her area where “there’s a lot of sparks flying and there’s a lot of history among the principals” (P5/138). Furthermore she engages with a wider community, an intergenerational reading project ‘wizard of words’, a music programme with RTE, “organisations like Family Scope that come in and support speech and language therapy and family support programmes” (P5/114), Dublin City Council and Barnardos who “have such a high standard in the way they work and everything is researched and evaluated and their programmes are based on international best practice” (ibid). That notion of intergenerational and community involvement is echoed in P10’s

reminder of the old adage “it takes a whole village to educate a child” (P10/216). She brings the wealth of experience of another generation to her pupils through ‘Grandparents Day’ and a community orchestra.

Relationships with parents are not always as cordial as those described in the preceding paragraphs. P3’s school is located in what is described as a ‘middle class’ area with consequent advantages and disadvantages. He speaks of children who “come from homes where they are very much protected and the slightest thing that might happen in a yard … might be described as bullying by a parent where they don’t see the real meaning of the word bully” (P3/118). Furthermore some of these children “would be pushed an awful lot from home academically” (ibid). P3 maintains that he has learned to distinguish between small issues and more significant issues in particular dealing with those parents who may be perceived as a “thorn in the side of a principal” (P3/52). On the other hand the parents’ corporate connections and involvement led to a situation in the recent past where a major company “donated fifty-seven laptops to the school…that would be through parents” (P3/122). P1 whose *Gaelscoil* would also be described as belonging to a ‘middle class’ milieu believes that “you need your school to be part of the community and you need to cultivate all those external relationships that can be vitally important” (P1/110). She recounts a community based project with a multinational company that led to twenty volunteers painting the school. Sometimes the volunteers “like the feel of the place and they register two children, so you add to your school community” (P1/112). In the interests of pupils she works with the community in making the case for a post primary *Gaelcholaiste* and brings fifth class pupils to a third level campus so that they can explore in the science building; she argues “it’s probably too late by the time children get to transition year to be educating them about third level” (ibid). In building a broader community she extended the hand of friendship to the latest addition to the educational fabric of the town, an Educate Together school, mindful that when she was the newcomer in the past she was “not made particularly welcome by one of the schools” (P1/106).

Like P7, P4 also felt "enormously privileged" (P4/90) to be part of a vibrant school community. What he liked best was "absolute engagement with the school community" (ibid). Reflecting on his twenty-seven years as principal he is proud of a school community where he presided over events marking the "acknowledgement of the pursuit of excellence … whereby you see your colleagues being accredited and being affirmed for achievements" (ibid). In this situation "there is a kind of intimacy … there are strong bonds particularly between parish and community organisations and the school itself … I think that the school seems to be at the fulcrum of things" (P4/44). Arising from his lengthy involvement in one school community he can see an intergenerational effect from a different vantage point to P10, the return of a new generation; "I see now at this stage very large numbers of former pupils who send their own children back to [the school] from some points distant … in an unspoken way I think that this testifies to what school has meant for the community and generations of children who will pass through" (ibid).

In the view of P2 a sense of humour is as important a factor as numeracy and literacy in ensuring that learning is taking place. Contending that almost all "educational practice revolves around interpersonal relationships" (P2/44), he suggests that when people are in conflict or tension laden situations "they are less likely to learn … are less likely to hold their heads at the angle you would like them" (ibid). His approach to relationships building is influenced by a conflict and bad feeling that followed his appointment as principal. He believes that "the vast majority of the work of the school principal involves interpersonal relationships" (P2/30). He continues that "the quality of the interpersonal relationships that are built up … will determine the effectiveness of the person in the job [principal]" (ibid). He contends that certain kinds of conflict and bullying arise "because our union is too strong". (P2/32). His principalship is characterised, he says "by a determined effort to watch out for possible conflicts or difficulties" (P2 /34), to anticipate them and to diffuse them. In building his school community P2 places emphasis on a twin track approach, working in the school and working on projects outside of school. He contends that the two aspects "are inseparable … because my work in school has often shown me a

need for something which I have tried then to address in some way outside of school hours and they have gone along together very well" (P2/38). He is very clear that a high point in his career as principal "is being able to see and experience the development of a school, of the children within that school, of the staff within that school and even development in parents and in families" (ibid). In line with other contributors in this study he considers it "a wonderful privilege … to be able to put into place projects or initiatives or approaches that actually result in the development of people" (ibid). He argues strongly in the context of his DEIS Band 1 school that educating parents is a necessity, "in many cases the children's parents are more needy than the children" (P2/50). He contends that positive relationships created in the school environment ripple out into the community, that the principal and teachers "are role models for the children…and positive role models for parents" (ibid).

That notion or concept of a school community enhancing lives in addition to students' lives is developed also by P12. When referring to Aristotelian phronesis and Aristotelian flourishing in the school community he refers to teachers, SNAs, student teachers and parents and hopes that "the school is contributing to their lives too … we do have parents here whom I think their involvement in the school is keeping them happy, is making for full lives for them" (P12/48). In the cases of parents who have routine contact only with the school he speculates that the school might have some "vicarious effect on their happiness" (ibid).

4.5.4.7 Listening

The imperative for an educational leader to listen was raised by principals in the course of this study. P7's multi-belief school has many complexities not least that among the school population there are four major belief systems, Christians, Islamists, Buddhists/Hindus and non-believers and within each of those there can be further complexities. Building community through relationships, a key target of P7 is very challenging, "it demands an amount of management and a huge amount of listening and taking on board opinions, views and modifying things

accordingly" (P7/114). She extols the virtue of listening but acknowledges that it would be impossible to satisfy fully every member of the community, "I would listen to the parents and listen to their concerns … but I think you cannot have a situation where parents are coming in and dictating or running the school. There needs to be strong leadership" (ibid). P7's listening leadership is also intended for children; "I would hope that I would be a strong leader but a leader that really listens to the children, that takes on board their needs, their concerns, their welfare as paramount" (ibid). P5 while her personality leans towards her saying 'yes', to everything, in her role as principal she has developed complementary skills; "I've learned the skill of saying I'll come back to you on that and I've learned to be judicious and I've learned to step back and listen a lot more" (P5/86). Managing himself and keeping himself up to date for P2 is less a matter for reading and studying but rather "it's about talking to people and listening to people" (P2/90). Conscious of the charismatic nature of her own personality, "I would lead a bit too much from the front" (P1/70), P1 maintains that she is also an open leader, "I'm very open to consultation and I'm very open to listening to other people's ideas" (ibid). P6 also believes that listening is important, that IPPN has been instrumental in bringing about some change and that now rather than seeing themselves in competition with one another principals "are listening to each other and learning from each other and that's very positive" (P6/138), an omen for an improving future.

4.5.4.8 Making a Difference

Conscious of the responsibilities principals retain for the education and aspects of the lives of children and of communities some principals gave expression to their aspiration to make a difference. P10 proclaimed "I'm really a woman of the universe, the nun is part of it but I felt when I went into teaching I felt I wanted to make a difference" (P10/14). P11 evoked a renowned Kerry teacher, principal and writer, "Bryan McMahon, didn't he say a teacher leaves the tracks of their teeth for is it three generations" (P11/98), a reference to McMahon (1992:9) "leaves the print of his teeth on a parish for three generations." P11 himself with no intention of leaving the stage or the role of principal after three and half

decades as principal in a rural school might deserve to apply the epithet to himself. P4's thoughts also turned to tracks or imprints, "I was very very cognisant of the fact that I had my fingerprints over everything because I was the first person there [founding principal] to oversee the implementation of the curriculum" (P4/40). Looking to the future and handing the school over to a successor in a new world almost three decades later he is moved to hope "that my fingerprints won't be wiped away" (P4/120). Heaney (1984:66) in Station Island comes to mind "we are earthworms of the earth and all that has gone through us will be our trace".

4.5.4.9 Caring Ethos

Caring for staff as well as children in major and in minor ways featured on principals' radar. P7's desire to have a school with happy children is matched by her aspiration that "the staff felt connected and happy, motivated within the school (P7/90). P10's advice to herself as principal is "to look after your staff, they need to be cared for as well … if you look after them … they will do twice the work" (P10/84). P6 is conscious of the need for teachers teaching in difficult situations to replenish, "it's not every teacher can teach a senior class in a disadvantaged area" (P6/66). He talked of the inevitability of teachers suffering from burnout in those situations. His skills and instincts as a principal assisted him to intervene in a timely manner, "people were afforded opportunity to move away" (ibid) and share valuable experiences elsewhere. Internally he devised a system where he was "able to move people before they actually achieve burnout" (ibid).

4.5.4.10 Visibility

A message from principals in this study is that they see themselves as "*primus inter pares*" (P8/102), "first among equals" (P1/66). "I'm a teacher first and foremost, I'm a member of the INTO, I'm a member of staff even though I'm the leader of the staff, I'm still a member of the staff" (P2/94). Principals make the point strongly in the interviews that despite the myriad of distracting

responsibilities, they ensure that they are visible and accessible in the school, confirming a *primus inter pares* rather than an ivory tower disposition. Part of her *modus operandi* according to P10 is "to walk around the school, be visible when I need to be visible, be invisible when I need to be invisible" (P10/70). P2 also is very visible, "I don't believe in little pigeon hole boxes for people to get messages, I deliver messages myself, so I'm a frequent visitor to classes, I frequently interact with teachers and with pupils" (P2/64). Perhaps mindful of Roosevelt's admonition to leaders, that it is frightening to look over your shoulder when you're leading and find that there's nobody following (Burns, 1956), P1 thinks that it is important that she is seen around the school, "that the children know who I am, that I'm visible, that I'm not somebody who's inside a closed office door … you're responding to whatever is happening … very much part of the fabric" (P1/168).

4.5.4.11 Cultivating Humanity.

A recognition of humanity touched the thoughts of contributors at different stages of their lives. P7 recognised "great humanity" (P7/42) in a principal to whom she reported early in her career, the example remained with her. P6 and his staff recognised that a little child with Downs Syndrome "brought more humanity into the school" (P6/132). P11 mindful of some unhappy experiences as a pupil in school attempted to put himself "in the place of the pupil and the storm clouds gathering" (P11/68). He is convinced that humanity works, "treat them as a human being and let them see that you have an understanding of their situation…the child will go away happier" (ibid). Nussbaum's exhortation to cultivate humanity and to nurture in children a capability of love and imagination (Nausbaum, 1997) is heard clearly in Irish primary schools.

4.5.5 Empowerment

An empowerment/enabling theme emerged strongly across the interviews. It presented itself at many different junctures in the conversations, clearly it is part of the lexicon and the being of contributors to this study. Numerous sub-themes

contributed to and supported an empowering/enabling theme; they include networking, mentoring, distributed leadership and delegation, and a significant sub-theme CPD incorporates references to Education Centres and to the LDS programme, now part of the PDST.

For Bennis (2000) cited in Ruth (2006:56), the creation of a sense of empowerment among other people in the organisation is a consequence of good leadership. The empowered can have "a pervasive feeling that what they are doing has meaning and is significant" Ruth (2006: 56); that what matters is learning from mistakes. They imbibe and develop a sense of unity, of community, of team, of excitement about the work and a "sense of challenge, stimulation and fun" (56).

4.5.5.1Empowerment and Enabling

Empowering, enabling and encouraging; another group of 'e' words permeated the transcripts of the interviews in this study. Principals understand that the position P11 accepted in rural Ireland in 1979 "the actual job at the time wasn't that different to the job of an ordinary teacher" (P11/48) bears no relation to the position each of them occupies in the 21st century. They realise that they must not attempt to do the job on their own, that they need to distribute leadership, that they need to empower and enable colleagues to share the leadership, management and administration of the school. P1 had a good role model; her principal, Padraig "gave those of us who were able for responsibility an awful lot of responsibility and empowered us hugely" (P1/24). He encouraged her to apply for a principalship. She in turn now encourages her staff in a similar way, "I've been putting the principal 'ads' in front of a few people" (P1/82). She believes that "there are lots of ways of empowering people…even like putting a student teacher into a classroom – a teacher can learn an awful lot from that student as well as teaching them something" (P1/86). P12 speaks of student teachers also, he accommodates student teachers from all Irish colleges and from overseas and "does a little bit of pre-service teacher education" (P12/74) for all of them, "I'll

always do two or three sessions with them regardless of whatever college they come from about what's an Educate Together school" (ibid), in some cases beginning a transition into the school. Furthermore he hopes to empower senior teachers by enabling them to gain experience on the board of management in due course.

P2 wants a board of management where all members of the board are active, that "it's not a board of management in name only while the principal makes all the decisions or the chairperson does" (P2/72). When discussing empowerment P3 refers to students' councils and is pleased, "that's where you see the children grow because they're coming with decisions" (P3/84). He advocates also enabling teachers who do not have formal responsibilities to assume leadership and management roles. In an era of a moratorium on filling vacant posts of responsibility this concept of 'volunteering' for leadership and management responsibilities is desirable and practical from team building points of view; P6 (76) notes that "younger teachers are now taking on leadership without being paid for it". P5 (64) had tried to inculcate the notion of volunteering in her staff modelled on experiences from her own school days.

P3 believes "that people grow [when they are] offered or provided with opportunities (P3/78). He empowers staff members to lead staff on curricular areas, the outcomes sometimes are a source of satisfaction for him, "just seeing them delivering that day to the rest of the staff gave me a great high" (P3/64); "you'll see staff taking responsibilities for their own areas as well without you … having to push that agenda too much" (P3/56). P9 also advocates creating "that opportunity" (P9/86). She continues, "if anyone comes to me with an idea I don't think I've ever said no" (ibid); she contends that by empowering people you recognise their ability. Ceding control to someone with capability to reform a role should be seen as a win/win for an organisation and for the individuals involved. P7 would agree with that contention, with regard to her first principalship she makes an admission, "I tried to micro-manage … I felt I had to know everything" (P7/120). She acknowledges the limitations of such an

approach; now in her second principalship she has learned, “I leave people off to do things … it’s the best thing I’ve ever done in all my life … they do things a million times better and it works out a million times better” (ibid). P10’s variation on this theme is that “when people take their power I think it’s totally empowering for a principal” (P10/58).

One of the teaching principals believes that he doesn’t have many options in a small school, “you are totally dependent on the other person’s co-operation” (P11/54). He empowers, he attempts to “bring people along” (P11/106), he claims that he “would encourage them all the time” (ibid), he works to build consensus. He suggests “consensus in a small school is easier to achieve, mind you if you don’t achieve it you are in right trouble” (P11/100). However despite successful consensus building and real empowerment he has a remaining challenge in the area of ICT in which he excels himself, “my difficulty is trying to bring any of the other staff along because none of them is interested in ICT” (P11/214).

Empowerment and giving people opportunities assist in building trust and relationships. P6 recalls a teacher “very much a maverick with incredible ability” (P6/80). He and his deputy principal encouraged her to attend training as part of the ‘Incredible Years’ programme”. He was very pleased with the result, “she just adapted everything … and merged it to form the basis of an incredibly successful literacy programme” (ibid). The teacher concerned acknowledges that the success was a consequence of the freedom she was given. As well as building trust and relationships P4 suggests that empowerment with greater levels of participation by staff will enhance the decision-making process and that “there’s a far greater likelihood that one’s key goals or decisions are going to be implemented” (P4/56).

P5 is concerned that while commendable work is done in schools there isn’t a mechanism for sharing this, she intends to be proactive in this area; she believes that “principals have a moral duty ...[to ensure]… that good practice is

disseminated and shared" (P5/72), a form of inter school empowerment. The means for spreading the messages from this section is CPD; P6 agrees "when you expose [people] to professional development … you are facilitating education" (P6/124). We will turn our attention to the issue of CPD now.

4.5.5.2 Continuing Professional Development

The CPD sub-theme encompasses and incorporates ideas and remarks about Education Centres, some of the programmes now residing within the PDST and principals' support groups as well as school based CPD. Principals' responses to a large degree echo the OECD (2013: 139) view *inter alia* that "school principals can shape teachers' professional development ... [and] suggest modifications to improve teaching practices and help solve problems that may arise within the classroom or among teachers" P5 promotes the concept of up-skilling among her colleagues on a regular basis. She works with teachers on an individual basis and makes recommendations about improvements, "we can up-skill people not in a discriminating way but in a very supportive, capacity building way" (P5/68). P2's view is that "some of the best CPD happens within a school at staff meetings and planning days, where people actually learn from each other" (P2/114). P1 maintains that on her staff "we're continuously upskilling" (P1/54). She has communicated her interest in research to colleagues where at present six staff have Master's qualifications. She instanced an example where eight members of staff wished to become involved in Incredible Years in-service. She is satisfied that in her school "people are encouraged to upskill and there's that atmosphere of furthering our own education and our own capacity on staff" (ibid). P8 also claimed "I would encourage/empower quite a lot of staff to do Master's, I would facilitate them in every way" (P8/84). While staff take part in formal training in areas such as autism and Reading Recovery he promotes the notion of teachers using multimedia sources for the purpose of keeping up-to-date (P8/252).

P7 bemoaned that the Irish system did not engage in professional dialogue at the time she left for Australia in the 1980s. She credits the CPD that accompanied

the introduction of the 1999 primary school curriculum with remedying the situation, "it did introduce the idea of professional dialogue and that really helped I think in bringing up the standard of teaching and learning in schools" (P7/82). In this decade she is complimentary about the development of CPD, "the best thing of all is the supports from the PDST, from DEIS support, advisors, and I can't sing their praises enough" (P7/248). There isn't enthusiasm however for all CPD initiatives. P9 when referring to CPD and school self-evaluation (SSE) indicates that "it can be met with resistance" (P9/100) and that her colleague who was expected to assist her mediating SSE messages lost her enthusiasm for the task. She refers also to school CPD hours that were put in place following a national agreement on salaries and conditions of service; she says "they can be quite difficult because I do feel it is left to the principals and that's quite frustrating because you are trying to push this on people" (ibid). Concepta Conaty (HSCL) told P6 after a meeting with his staff, "you and your staff are on the verge of burnout … there is only one way out of this and that's professional development" (P6/52). He is now a strong advocate of CPD, believing that it "opens your mind" (ibid), his school benefited enormously from programmes such as "Incredible Years" and "Restorative Practices". An outside principal who did some work in P6's school at a time "when other schools were going into meltdown around the economic recession" (ibid) remarked that he had "never seen anything like the energy" (ibid) being generated in P6's school. He concluded that "it's down to professional development, it's down to people getting an opportunity to work together to improve any element of their professional being" (ibid). In this instance the processes of the 'Incredible Years' programme with a focus on engagement, re-engagement, self-evaluation and improvement have made a substantial difference. P6 goes on to suggest that engagement with advanced CPD, well facilitated, empowered staff with techniques, it opened minds and it built a team (P6/70).

4.5.5.3 Education Centres/Support Services

Throughout the conversations that are the centrepiece of this study there is widespread acclaim for the work of the Education Centre movement and the DES

support services that are managed by Education Centres. Working with an Education Centre empowered P1 and demonstrated to her that she "could work with adults and that was very encouraging" (P1/28). She sends staff members on Education Centre capacity building courses, "they would have modelled lessons based on the materials they received on the capacity building" (P1/84). When teachers from P10's school attend their Education Centre "they find that's totally reviving … they're reviewing their own practice" (P10/202). P4 welcomes the notion of Education Centres, "the development … of the Education Centre … has been absolutely marvellous … it has been a key enabler" (P4/76).

P12 sits on interview panels, appointing principals to Educate Together schools, he asserts that he is "quite taken aback with the calibre of the candidates … not big in number … but high in quality" (P12/40); he attributes credit to the PCSP and other services for this state of affairs. P2 was impressed by the Misneach programme, previously part of LDS, now PDST; he opines "I think it should be mandatory that anybody who has been appointed principal or who wishes to be should do a course, Misneach" (P2/26). He describes Misneach as "an excellent training ground" (P2/20).

P2 refers also to the values of principals' support groups as organised by Education Centres and other groups; he offers his opinion, "the principals' support group that exists in this area here is also a valuable source of information, advice and guidance" (P2/90). The Education Centres' support groups were acclaimed by other contributors notably P1, P3 and P7 who struggled initially in her first principalship, "they [support groups] were fantastic. I found it very hard at the beginning" (P7/62). P3 is of the opinion that the regular monthly meeting "is the most powerful experience that any principal can actually go through in relation to advice, information … letting off steam as well.

LDS programmes Misneach, Forbairt, Spreagadh and Toraiocht were acclaimed by contributors who expressed some concerns about further development; P12

summarises "when I had to experience Misneach and wanted to experience Misneach, it was excellent" (P12/112). However P12 issues a note of caution at a more recent shortening of the Misneach programme. P3's view is that "Forbairt and Misneach for principals was an excellent system … it was a pity it wasn't developed further" (P3/46).

4.5.5.4 Networking

Involvement in networks is considered to be a *sine qua non* for the 21st century principal in the opinion of principal participants in this research. Such thinking is in line with the OECD (2013: 129). When echoing Sliwka (2003) they contend that "Networks of schools help to overcome the isolation of individual schools and educators by providing opportunities for organised professional exchange, development and enrichment. P2 is cryptic "I think every principal should have a network" (P2/90). In addition to his Education Centre, INTO and IPPN networks he meets regularly with a group of ten friends from college, now mostly principals. P3 maintaining that "networking is extremely important" (P3/58) adds the IPPN conference to the list of gatherings of interest to principals. P1 knows that if things go wrong she has a "very good support network" (P1/130). Furthermore she asserts that "principals are very generous with their time" (ibid) and she knows the appropriate approach to take, "I know how to ask for help when I need it" (P1/36).

P11 speaks of the "isolated existence of [the] principal in a rural school" (P11/188). He believes that networking is a solution and contends that "principals are the best source of support" (P11/170). He adds that he has "the mobile numbers of all the local principals" (P11/174), however he regrets humorously that his generation of principals have all retired. In the centre of a Dublin suburb P4 refers to isolation also but finds a solution through an IPPN mechanism, "we're daily logged into our IPPN networking and we cannot underestimate the value of that … in the context of … that sense of isolation" (P4/86). Such a service was not commonplace in the mid-80s when he became principal; another

principal introduced him "to an august body called the principals' association, which was akin to joining a masonic society or something" (P4/28). The formation of a principals' grouping was resisted by the teachers' union, the INTO. The idea was kept alive and the IPPN was founded over a decade later.

P12 belongs to more than one principals' network. In the Educate Together movement he describes one network, "we have a good network amongst ourselves where we are able to speak quite frankly to each other about difficulties that are arising or emerging, we support one another … like friendships" (P12/84). He mentions the IPPN Leadership + journal as an asset (P12/82) and he founded a journaling group, "I have a group of principals who are journaling that I coordinate and we meet frequently enough and read an excerpt from our journal to each other and chat about it in the way that journaling in particular allows" (P12/44).

4.5.5.5 Mentoring

There were many references to mentoring during the course of conversations with principals. Some of these conversations referred to mentoring of newly qualified teachers in school, a consequence of the work of the National Induction Programme for Teachers (NIPT), a DES support service. Other conversations touch on the concept of peer mentoring in the areas of reading (P8/116) while most reference to the mentoring concept was in the context of the mentoring of newly appointed principals. P11 is almost prescriptive in his advice to newly appointed principals, "get to know some of the other principals … get under the wing of a more experienced principal" (P11/62). He advises new principals, "with the best will in the world you are going to walk into difficulties, you are going to make difficulties for yourself through inexperience … by aligning yourself with an existing principal … you can maybe avoid some of the pain and the distress" (ibid). P6 agrees that principal advice that comes from experience is valuable but he thinks also "that techniques can be taught no more than any other trade … the more you are mentored the better able you are … and better

prepared" (P6/34). P1 contending that the LDS provided a valuable service in the mentoring area concurs with previous contributors asserting that the mentoring of new principals by experienced principals is hugely beneficial" (P1/38). Meanwhile P5 commending the IPPN is clear in her view, "what you need is a buddy system … where … the minute a new principal is appointed there is a mechanism where … the IPPN is informed and the IPPN immediately gets a mentor to ring you and say this is new for you" (P5/54). She believes that helping the principal to 'survive' in the first month is of paramount importance.

4.5.5.6 Distributed Leadership, Creating Leaders

A number of sub-themes come together loosely under the heading distributed leadership and creating leaders. Distributed leadership subsumes notions of delegation and the use of posts of responsibility while the concepts of ownership and unleashing talent belong to the idea of creating leaders.

Reference was made in Chapter 2 to the notion that not all that masquerades as distributed leadership constitutes leadership but rather might be the performing of delegated tasks. On the other hand it was suggested that the concept of distributed leadership is found in operation in some Irish schools. P12 contends that he tries "to empower everybody with a sense of ownership of what goes on in the school" (P12/60). He doesn't want his relatively new Educate Together school to be seen as 'his project'. In collaboration with other Educate Together schools he has attempted to build 'a community of leaders as much as a community of practice" (ibid) and to cultivate the "idea of distributed leadership whereby people organically grow as the focal points for expertise and people will gravitate to them" (ibid). P4 in a school with a different ethos and background has nurtured the idea of curriculum leaders 'within' the organisation" (P4/58). These teachers have responsibilities for curriculum areas and initiatives and they should "be seen to be leaders 'within' the organisation responsible for implementing [curriculum reforms]" (ibid). Members of P6's staff have commended him for enabling distributed leadership within the school; he contends himself that "we as a young

staff created a culture to make that possible but it was a long learning curve" (P6/72). He also wishes to share with his close senior team the accolades from colleagues that the fourteen teachers who left the school to become principals of other schools during his thirty-four years as principal is significant, and is a manifestation that "the sign of a leader is to actually create other leaders" (ibid). P8 has created a new culture in connection with the "devolution of power and responsibility" (P8/104) where teachers assume responsibility in the area of leadership and management; he wants them to take responsibility and he will not overrule them (P8/148). P1's attitude is "if it's your job to do, do it, then don't come back to me unless there is a problem". P8 contends further that part of the *raison d'être* of an educational leader is "to enable them [staff] to be educational leaders with him" (P8/246). P5 tries to achieve this outcome by tending "to assign responsibilities where teachers have a natural interest and affinity because it's a win/win" (P5/78). P9, just three years into her principalship where previously distributed leadership would not have featured in a small rural school talks about a school garden and that the responsibility has been "handed over this year and it's been a huge success" (P9/116). In this instance it would appear that responsibility for carrying out certain tasks has been delegated, this would fall short of what we understand to be distributed leadership. In contrast in his large DEIS school P6's deputy principal has overall responsibility for special needs; assistant principals have responsibility for other sections within the school where each of them was given budgets and they were managing budgets" (P6/86). Distributed leadership would appear to be embedded in the culture of the school.

P2 in cautioning that it is a huge mistake for a school principal to try to do everything and to try to be in control of everything (P2/52) favours delegation, even distributed leadership "giving people responsibility, accepting that they will make mistakes and they won't be perfect" (ibid); he expects reciprocation on the issue of human imperfection from them also. His deputy principal is at the centre of his view of principalship, "I would have constant and short meetings with my deputy principal" (P2/62). The contribution of the deputy principal is central to the comments of many other contributors "I meet the deputy every morning … the deputy principal probably knows even more of what's going on [than the

principal] and is a very good conduit between yourself and the staff" (P3/92). P7 speaks of the deputy principal in tones bordering on hyperbole, "unbelievably involved" (P7/130), "just incredibly involved and fantastic" (P7/132) while P11 (114) depicts the relationship as one of 'conversations'. P12 asserts that he and his deputy principal "have very different skills bases, [the deputy] is absolutely excellent in all things logistical" (P12/62) while on some of these logistical issues "I don't think I'd be able to keep the look of boredom off my face" (ibid). His deputy has his own budget from the board of management, "we meet endlessly both formally and informally … there is nothing he [deputy] does not know" (ibid). Finally in relation to working with deputy principals P8 summarised the contribution of three deputy principals during his seventeen years as principal "the first deputy brought order and structure, the second woman brought wisdom and friendship, the third … would have been my right arm, right hand, she would identify and be able to [name] people in the corridor, she was like a nomenclature" (P8/80). It would appear that successful principalships in 21st century Ireland are enhanced by deputy principals exercising leadership of their own.

4.5.5.7 Enabling a curriculum

Pedagogy and working with a curriculum are central to schools' purposes and it is the responsibility of school leadership to ensure that pedagogy, curriculum and the development of curriculum receive the attention their importance warrants. P5 sought a principalship because her work at third level removed her from the aspects of education that occupied her heart, "I chose it [principalship] because of its variety and its complexity and because I basically love teaching and learning, pedagogy is my love" (P5/144). Despite the high profile of her school and the success of her principalship, pushing the parameters, hoping to "evoke the bright lights that lie beyond the view of the regular eye" O'Donohue (2007: 166), she is not yet fully fulfilled, "unfortunately the pull and tug is that I don't have enough time to spend on that [pedagogy] and that's a huge frustration" (P5/144). She recommends that larger primary schools "be assigned a part-time administrator [to] look after the administrative aspects and to leave the principal to have head

space and time to deal with what's really important" (ibid). On a topical issue she has a clearly thought out view, "I've a firm belief that curriculum overload is just a phenomenon. It's an illusion … I have a firm belief that project based learning is the key answer to our problems around the timing of every curriculum subject." (P5/140) She encourages principals to look intelligently and creatively at project based learning and signals her own position, "I have the confidence to do that with my staff at the risk of upsetting the Department of Education" (ibid). She tells us elsewhere that "staff meetings are curriculum focused and learning focused" (P5/88) demonstrating her central priorities.

Curriculum is also at the centre of P9's principalship, being a teaching principal her options and opportunities to visit other teachers' classrooms are limited. But when she visits classrooms she knows what she wants to see, "I want to see the curriculum in the classroom … I want to see that the children are engaged in learning … the worst nightmare … is to go into a classroom and to see children filling in a textbook" (P9/108). She promotes 'real' active learning and peer tutoring and when she visits classrooms, particularly those of newly qualified teachers she learns herself, "I find I learn so much myself from those teachers" (P9/110). P10 also refers to active learning, she would love to see "a curriculum emanating from action" (P10/194), she thinks "we need a much more hands-on curriculum" (P10/192). P4 wishes to protect the integrity of the time given to curriculum and while promoting the concept of faith based schools, he advocates that provision for faith instruction should take place outside school hours and isn't permitted to "impinge on overarching responsibilities of ensuring that [sufficient] curriculum provision is made" (P4/82).

The 1999 curriculum received favourable mention as an appropriate mechanism to serve our pupils and our society. P11 is pleased that it gives "as wide a scope to children to learn as possible and [gives] them a wide range of experiences" (P11/212). P8 describes himself as excited by the 1999 curriculum, "it gave us a freedom to implement a curriculum that would address the needs of our [children] in our school and it also gave teachers a freedom to pick and choose as long as

they delivered a high standard" (P8/250). P12 is welcoming of the 1999 curriculum but adds a word of caution, "the 1999 curriculum is excellent and I wouldn't like to be teaching in a primary system where there was to be a fundamental change to the child centred nature and broad curriculum that it is" (P12/108). He is suspicious of the motives of the upper echelons of the inspectorate and believes that school self-evaluation rather than empowering teachers with regard to ownership of curriculum is more concerned "about self flagellating over literacy, numeracy" (P11/110). He is however optimistic that the profession will protect a child centred curriculum.

4.5.5.8 Modelling

In their work as principals many of our contributors engaged in modelling in a variety of circumstances, modelling lessons in classrooms, modelling what they call best practice or good behaviour in their schools and even modelling policies for a community beyond the school and the school community. P9 perhaps re-enacting her role as a PCSP *cuiditheoir* in the area of Social, environmental and scientific education (SESE) declares, "I have actually modelled lessons in classes for science", now the class teacher for whom she modelled science lessons teaches science lessons herself. P1 recalls, "I modelled circle time lessons for newly qualified teachers, the concept escalated, "I modelled circle time lessons and then a couple of the other teachers said can I get in on the next one you're doing and I said you can and the SNAs sat in" (P1/84).

As well as modelling classes P9 models in a more general way also, "I try to model best practice myself" (P9/106); P11 doesn't call it modelling, more example, "I've never had to ask anyone twice to do something … including people who are retired, they are great, but if I'm in there early in the morning and if I'm late in the afternoon and I'm working like blazes it's more likely that the teachers will be anxious to kind of take, adapt the vision that I have" (P11/102). In the case of P12 modelling practice extended into institutions in the town, struggling to take cognisance of new multi-cultural surroundings. Organisations

and clubs in the town engaged in dialogue with P12 and his school to explore the school's inclusive policies. P12 explains, "we've offered them opportunities to pilot things here with us and while they were here with us we modelled good practice and we were able to help people who are leaders in those organisations to envision in their organisation" (P12/54), the principal and the school back at the helm of a 21st century community two and a half centuries after Goldsmith (McHugh, 1998).

4.5.6 Frustrations

While the primary principals in this study were very positive and constructive as they discussed their roles and what it is that continues to inspire and sustain them as principals they did vent the frustrations that inhibit them in their work, that keep some of them awake at night, that lead to stress and ill health and that challenge them enormously. I will report principals' frustrations under a number of sub headings or sub-themes for convenience, entering the caveat that there is an overlap among these sub-themes. The first sub-theme will carry the same title as the theme itself, frustrations. Bureaucracy, stress and health, managerialism and loneliness will also be addressed. Principals, indicative of their tremendous commitment to their roles suggest solutions that can alleviate some of the frustrations.

4.5.6.1 Specific Frustrations

It is worth noting that the principals who comment least on the frustrations are those who have served longest, those in the thirty year or more category while most comments on frustrations emanate from those who became principal since 2000. P11 working as principal of a rural school since 1979 referred to the aftermath of the issuing of Circular 20/87 during the cutbacks imposed by the Haughey government, "I felt a bit disillusioned" (P11/84), the only low point he recalls in three and a half decades as principal. At that time inspectors visited the school, there was "nothing else they wanted to see except the roll book … the whole notion was to cut back" (ibid). It is the cutbacks of another generation that

is causing disillusionment and frustration among many of our contributors; P2 sounds angry, "it is hugely frustrating to see the most needy children in my school and in other schools being targeted and scapegoated for the sins of others, I think it's really wrong" (P2/98). He goes on to instance "the increase in class size" (P2/112) and fears that "we're edging our way towards a collapse of the fabric of a primary school system" (P2/128) with consequent losses for children who have disabilities, "poorer educational experiences for all their peers, not to mention a more frustrated teaching body" (ibid). On the same point P4 suggests that "we're still trying to do the same job, with the same kind of resources by and large we had about fifteen to twenty years ago" (P4/54). P3 is concerned about an aspect of resources also, "it's very frustrating for a principal and it's very frustrating for a school if they don't have technical support" (P3/168). He regards the technical support issue as significant in schools where there are competent and capable computer literate teachers but no ICT support. P3 complains also about what is known as "summer works" projects, "there are a number of principals who are still involved in building projects at the present moment [27th July] which are stressing them out" (P3/144). P1 joins in the discussion on the erosion of summer vacation time, "I have never since I became principal, taken my full complement of holidays … you're always recruiting or you have a building programme going on … or you're chasing a SENO [Special educational needs organiser] for an SNA during the summer…you're never actually finished" (P1/132). She admits that she finds that aspect of her work most exhausting. The long hours during the working week frustrated P7 to the extent that she questions herself, "maybe I'm just not bright enough for this job or I'm not clever enough" (P7/206). She is in school for around ten and a half hours each day, "I'm working non-stop during that time and I'm never up to date" (ibid). Overwork is also a concern for P5. She analyses a major staff study each summer and prepares consequential policies in addition to other issues (on the interview date, 20th July, the school was a hive of activity for pupils). Some of her frustration arises from the fact that staff have little understanding of her role or what it takes to have everything running smoothly, "there's a mismatch between their perception of what you do [and the reality]" (P5/148).

P5 is frustrated also by the DES, “they don’t step up to the mark at all, they are not proactive. They don’t come up with ideas and inevitably they’re going to wait for us to be a success despite them and they’re going to take credit” (P5/106). She invited department personnel to “please journey with us” (ibid) as her unique school/care facility was taking root; she is disappointed that there has been no response. The DES did not listen to P12 on a significant issue and “by not listening the DES allowed a serious school places issue and a serious skew of demography to happen in an urban area, [it] was scandalous” (P12/70). He believes that the school has surpassed the vision DES had for the school and its environs. P12 is scathing in his summary of the situation, “I think if we were living in a tin shack and were the worst school ever…the DES would only be about as interested in us as they are now” (ibid). The DES refusal to listen is a matter of concern for P4 on a different issue, the curriculum. “There were times when principals and teachers were not listened to with regard to the practical constraints…of implementing the curriculum” (P4/106). He concludes that the system is now in reactive mode following PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results in literacy and numeracy, he believes this would have been avoided “if only people had been listened to a number of years ago” (ibid).

Despite acknowledging that his relations with DES are cordial P3 finds communicating with the DES frustrating and connecting with the HSE even more difficult and fraught. He consoles himself, “you’re there for the needs of the school and the care of the child and you have to try and do as much as you can and sometimes bite your lip and sometimes bite your tongue” (P3/116). P3 has a further concern with an aspect of national policy and he is supported by P4. The notion of principals having to assume responsibility for the probation of newly qualified teachers in the future “is going to be a very big issue … it’s going to become more complex … it’s going to become more frustrating for principals” (P3/194). P4 commenting on the prospect of principals becoming involved in the probationary process thinks “that there is a cohort of principals there that will find that extremely challenging because … [of] the lack of an effective support structure to administer and manage schools” (P4/96).

A number of frustrations relating to the circumstances of being the founding principal were enunciated by contributors during the course of the interviews. Some of these have been reported earlier. Tardiness on the part of responsible bodies in building and finding link roads to the new schools are noted by Ps 6 and 12. P5 did not have a board of management in place until seven months after her appointment and had to work with a very uncooperative single manager, "I was being strangled and I was not allowed to do my job" (P5/50).

A further source of frustration for principals is raised by P1 although she acknowledges that it is not a personal issue for her. She is very active in the primary teachers' union, the INTO and is well connected to the most senior personnel. All primary principals are members of the INTO, it is their trade union and the trade union of their teaching colleagues. P1 explains a viewpoint held she believes by many principals "I would not feel the union is particularly supportive to principals"… and in the case of a dispute [with a teacher] … the union would always support the teacher" (P1/118). However P8 (108) found that the INTO at national level was understanding while he had been under pressure from INTO personnel at local level.

P9 reported further frustrations, some emanating from her role as a relatively new and 'young' teaching principal in a rural school and some arising from her appointment as an outsider. Firstly she arrived from "a very dynamic work environment" (P9/36) in the PCSP where you accepted change and moved on; in school change was not happening, she says "I couldn't understand why things just didn't happen" (ibid). Secondly she faced a reality that when she believed she was improving some 'hygiene factors' (Herzberg, 1986), such as replacing "extremely old … desks with the ink holes in them" (P9/58) she wasn't anticipating appreciation but thought that staff would be pleased but she was informed "no that's not the way we do it" (ibid). Thirdly she was frustrated because she brought wonderful ideas for the classroom from PCSP but as a

teaching principal she couldn't find the time to work on these ideas, "I was very frustrated with myself because I was aware of all that I should be doing and I was also quite conscious of the fact that I wasn't doing it … I still find that frustrating" (P9/40). Fourthly there was frustration arising from feelings of guilt about the teaching role, "you don't think of all that you have done, all you think of is all that you've left out" (P9/42); about getting the job, "feeling I got the job but did I actually deserve it" (P9/54); about the dual role "you're doing half of each job but you're not doing either correctly" (P9/174).

4.5.6.2 Bureaucracy

Returning paperwork to the DES in particular and to other organisations is a matter of some significant frustration to the principals who took part in this study. P9 is of the opinion that "some of the paperwork is quite time wasting … surely to God there can be a system where I enter my numbers, it goes to Marlborough Street or wherever it should go instead of all this constant recording of numbers and percentages and data … paperwork for the sake of paperwork" (P9/172). P1 describes a ridiculous scenario when the DES requests a form in May "when you won't actually have the information until June" (P 1/108); she finds this stupid and "extremely irritating" (ibid). P5 declares "I don't like paperwork … I hate filling in forms" (P5/142). She has a great reputation for locating finance but "it's the management and the paperwork that goes with that and the forward planning and budgeting that I wouldn't be good on" (ibid). Paperwork ends up on P7's conscience, "there's an awful lot of paperwork … and it's constantly on your conscience that I haven't done this, this and this" (P7/208). P4, on his way out of principalship asks himself what will he not miss and answers himself, "admin and circulars and all that" (P4/90). There are organisations other than the DES where the bureaucracy of the system frustrates principals, such organisations are likely to be located in the areas of health and care. P1 finds it "extremely frustrating that the [health] service is compartmentalised" (P1/110), that a child with multiple disabilities may have to 'wait' in different queues because of the absence of an overall framework. She describes as "soul destroying and exhausting" (P1/134) having to send the same information on a child to three or

four different places in the HSE. P3 makes a similar remark about the DES in connection with special needs provision, "the amount of paperwork and bureaucracy involved in special education needs now is just phenomenal…you are actually duplicating an awful lot" (P3/170). On the one hand he tells us that he is learning how "to play the system" (P3/52) and on the other hand he makes a plea to minimise bureaucracy "take out as much bureaucracy as is possible and let teachers teach and let children learn and let principals lead" (P3/188). Meanwhile P6 thinks that "there is a need for bureaucracy, a level of bureaucracy" (P6/122) but cautions against excess bureaucracy, advocating a balance.

P7 makes the link from excessive bureaucracy to another 'frustrating' sub-theme, managerialism. She sees the increase in paperwork bringing about a situation that is "much more managerial and hands-off" (P7/264) with a consequential detrimental effect on teaching and learning. P12 is more acerbic, he has fears about a trend towards managerialism emanating from speeches made by the Chief Inspector of the DES, "I see a managerialism and a person who understands principals as … managerialist and that's not school leadership" (P12/118).

4.5.6.3 Stress / Health

The frustrations and bureaucracy enunciated so ably by many of our contributors led in many instances to consequences in terms of more than normal levels of stress and on occasions, illness. It is worth noting that in the ordinary course of a day and of living, individuals experience stress when they encounter new challenges, attend difficult meetings, are facing unrealistic or oppressive deadlines. Such feelings of stress would be considered normal, it is when stress levels rise and remain and show little prospect of abating that health and performance are at risk and alleviation interventions become necessary. However an indicator of the proactive nature of the principals interviewed as part of this research is that they did not focus unduly on the stress or on health issues but moved to describe coping mechanisms, how they deal with stress and gave messages of hope.

P1 recalls a particularly stressful day when her new school was moving from one location to another, "I remember stopping the car on the [road] on the way out because I couldn't actually drive, I was so stressed" (P1/142). She remembers getting out and standing on the edge of the road and saying "Oh my God, what am I doing, this is crazy, this is my second or third trip to [school] today because my chairperson was fighting with the person who was going to rent us the building and I had to go out and referee this dispute" (ibid). P9 summarises the views of many principals, "people can let it [job] take over their lives for periods of time ... it can be all consuming" (P9/176). P7 admits that her role as principal had an impact on her health, "my health has really suffered, more recently I was hospitalised … with a perforated ulcer … I've ongoing problems with my stomach in relation to that" (P7/222). Those who were close to P8 were concerned about the state of his health, "M [his wife] would have felt that [serious health issue], J would have felt that, my deputy principal. The chairperson was concerned but I couldn't see where they were coming from" (P8/232). When he announced that he intended to retire from his position, four months before our interview his general practitioner congratulated him, "he was absolutely and totally elated because he had felt that it was only a matter of time before the boiler would actually blow", "I didn't feel in any way that I was under pressure at all" (P8/220). There was an improvement in his blood pressure in the weeks after his retirement from school, however he did suffer a major heart attack three months after the interview but has made a full recovery. On the health issue P1 is happy but cautious, "I really enjoy principalship but no, it's not good for my health I would say. I've had a hard year this year but it is year fourteen and I've had a very good run up to now" (P1/138).

Security issues are stressful for many principals whose schools are located in areas where there is a high level of criminality. P6 referred to a situation which he did not describe as stressful, however objectively one would have concerns about inherent dangers, featuring as it does a terrorist organisation, vigilante groups and 'drugs families.' Following a robbery at his school, stolen property

was returned by members of an illegal terrorist organisation obeying orders of their command structure. As the Northern Ireland Peace Process led to the diminution of some terrorist organisations the principal's situation continued to be unsafe as the 'drug families' became the controlling influence (P6/106).

Less frightening but also significant, the loneliness and isolation of the early days in principalship gives rise to stress. P9 recalls the loneliness of the first day, "I think it will actually stick with me forever" (P9/36). On P5's appointment in the summer of 2006 she admits, "I had to abandon my family" (P5/38), she worked ceaselessly to prepare the school building. She acknowledges "it was a very lonely time and all the other principals were on holidays" (ibid).

Contributors used many mechanisms to enable them to cope with the stresses of the job. In the case of P5 her board of management fund external professional assistance once a month where she meets "somebody who'll challenge me" (P5/130) and who will discuss career cycle and the developmental cycle of the school. She is conscious that she needs to 'replenish her wells', "Jenny Mosley talks a lot about 'our wells', our emotional well, our psychological well and administrative well and professional well" (ibid). P1 has a variety of coping strategies "I walk, I sail, I study, I love a night out with my husband, love a night at the cinema … do things completely different to my teaching" (P1/128). P9 attends to physical well-being and exercise also but is conscious of mental well-being and a need to talk, "I'm the kind of person that needs to talk about things so it would be an awful lot of talk" (P9/154). P7 talks also about keeping fit and going to the gym three times a week when possible. She has a mental strategy also, "I try not to take things so personally … I try to think outside the box when things happen and I try to de-personalise it" (P7/194). P11 has de-personalised and may have perfected that approach. "Ten years ago or fifteen years ago, I'd be wondering … there'd be a lot of self-doubt" (P11/178) when parents were being critical or when he encountered a difficult pupil. But this has changed, "at this stage I would have learned how to deal with stress, no I am less stressed now in my job than I was ten years ago" (P11/176), a principal clearly who has reached

Weindling's (1999) plateau stage, or the autonomy sub-phase of the model espoused by Pascal and Ribbins (1998:34). He contends that "the principal has to keep on an even keel the whole time, if I've learned anything, I've learned that; that you cannot go with the highs and lows of a school year or a school week or a school day or even a career" (P11/64). P10 uses journaling but not in the sense described by P12 earlier. She acknowledges that when she is stressed, "very often it's from overwork and tiredness … [but] it's my own stress" (P10/162). She is clear about the solution, "I pray quite a bit, I journal, journaling is a life-saver for me … I would be delighted to get away to a hermitage just to focus, listen to sacred music to review what I'm doing" (P10/158). She believes that, "it's all about living in the present moment and I think we as principals could learn that" (P10/90).

4.5.6.4 Further solutions

Principals sought solutions to alleviate frustrations. P10 believes that she is solution oriented or focussed. She is not pleased with the naming of a problem without seeking a solution. When staff raise problems she tells them "we'll discuss it and find a solution" (P10/60). Principals know when to seek help, previously they have mentioned the IPPN, the INTO, Education Centres; in frustrating moments P9 finds the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) an excellent support" (P9/72). There were those who found elements of the DES very unsupportive in certain respects, however they acknowledged that on other occasions the DES did alleviate difficulties, "I find them supportive as a back office with regard to employing the teachers and things like that .... I find teacher allocations good" (P12/72). P7 had a difficult time in the early days of her first school, a *Gaelscoil*; however when she was establishing her second school, a Community National School, "the support and backing and endorsement [from the DES] was fantastic" (P7/78). In dealing with the DES and other organisations where bureaucracy is endemic P1 takes the view that 'forgiveness not permission' is a worthwhile strategy. She recalls how she pushed the parameters on the erection on prefabs when she was about to lodge a commencement notice with the planning authority a DES official told her "you

haven't permission and I said, I have to do it" (P1/46). Permission was granted two days later.

The longest serving principals advocate balance, P6 was advised at a time when he was working very hard, "you can't do better than your best … the day that you do better than your best, you will burn yourself out and you will be no good to anybody" (P6/50). He learned also that "the only way out of conflict is a win/win situation and that means compromising" (P6/120). P11 as described earlier maintains an even keel, he also thinks that "the secretary for most principals is the most vital person in the school … there is nothing that happens in the school that the secretary doesn't see or isn't involved with … the secretary gets me out of trouble more often than not" (P11/118). Finally P5 believes in the possibilities of 'hope' when looking to the future espousing sentiments on hope akin to Sergiovanni (2007) and Obama (2007) she stresses that "Leaders have to offer hope to their staffs and in a realistic way … you have to be able to say to them, look at the good things" (P5/154). She believes that she has "to model for these young inexperienced teachers how you get through a recession and still educate the children to the best of their ability and that's possible" (ibid).

4.5.7 Passion and Pride

The passion and pride theme in this study which manifested itself through sub-themes such as pride in their schools and in their work, in expressions of love for the job and for the buzz that accompanies the job of principal and in the use of e-words (Handy, 1997) define the Irish primary principal in a very positive, in a very proactive and in a very professional way. Further manifestations emerge through other sub-themes including pride and passion themselves as well as the Arts in general, creativity in particular and a recognition of the capacity of curriculum to sustain the pride and passion and on occasions becoming beacons of light bestowing comfort and reassurance where they are needed.

Passion and pride were motivators and continue to be motivators for our cast of principals. P6 acknowledges that "I probably went in there with the enthusiasm that was engendered in me by a principal when I was in primary school" (P6/38) and that he employed "young passionate teachers by and large" (ibid). He agrees with the sentiments of his first chairperson in their green field site in a bog that "we weren't so much looking for teachers as missionaries, people who are actually moving into an area where people are extremely deprived … and raising boats as well as raising lives and hopes" (ibid). P10 had a passion for life and hoped for a better future for Ireland (P10/16) reminiscent of Erasmus, "the best hope of a country lies in the education of its youth" (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002: xiii). She wanted to pass on her own enthusiasm, "to make a difference" (P10/14), to open children's minds "to the wonders of poetry and music" (ibid). She wanted her pupils to have "a sense of pride in their school" (P10/84); something P2 viewed "as a central theme or a central tenet of my principalship" (P2/83) and in his DEIS Band 1 school in a very under privileged area made "persistent efforts to make the children and their parents proud of their school and where they came from" (ibid). There are parallels perhaps with the extraordinary transformational effect reported by Murgatroyd and Morgan (1993) that a single vision statement we've got pride had for a depressed inner city school. With a distinct tinge of pride (P8/100) talked about his school's success on sportsfields and latterly in arts' arenas while P3 advises that he like any principal "would like their school to be the best in the country" (P3/724). Our Irish principals are not alone; Ribbins and Marland (1994:33) quote one of their contributors, Brian Sherratt emphasising that "part of the headteacher's task is enabling pride, and, indeed pleasure in the school; I think it's necessary to feel good about the school and to enable staff to feel good about the school". Our cast of principals was unanimous that at least they enjoyed their role and many of them proclaimed their love for their job and for the buzz that accompanies it. P1 is at the more effusive end of the spectrum; she posits very clearly what it means for her, "I love the challenge of it and I love the variety of it. I love dealing with the children and I love the idea of the school as a community … I get my energy from other people and I find that hugely satisfying". Ps 10, 7 and 8 are brief, "I love every minute of it" (P10/174), "I absolutely love it" (P7/214), "I love going to school every day" (P8/236). While P11 agrees, his "high point is going in

every morning delighted with himself, happy knowing full well that something is going to come around the corner that I hadn't expected but that is the excitement of it and the joy of it" (P11/84). His fellow teaching principal despite her early travails in the role tells us that she enjoys the teaching and that she enjoys the idea of being a leader, "you can lead change, you can lead curriculum change, you can set example, you can try this out in your own classroom" (P9/166); she evidently enjoys the role of teaching principal. She goes on to explain further, "I love the fact that I have the autonomy to actually be able to do things … I love the dynamics of the school and the classroom … and I love the dynamics of working with children" (ibid). P12 is animated also, "anybody who knows me well would know that I thrive personally in the job, you know that I am engaged in it, I am interested in it" (P12/100).

P2 (104) finds the role fulfilling, enjoyable, funny and very inspirational; P6 maintains that principalship ticks all his boxes. Others are less effusive to varying degrees; P5/116 acknowledges that she derives real satisfaction from aspects of the role; P3 admits that he enjoys the job, "I enjoy the challenges but I have a feeling that in years to come the job is going to change" (P3/146) while P4 says that he enjoyed parts of the job but found some of it "extremely difficult to come to terms with in the latter days, in particular the loss of resources" (P4/98). The 'buzz' however keeps some principals going despite the challenges, "I love the buzz and I love the children and I love this school. I feel really honoured to be here" acknowledges P7 (224) in her challenging new suburban Community National School. Meanwhile P11 in his small rural school feels the 'buzz' also "I love the whole buzz and excitement and innovation and everything that goes with school life so I enjoy it very much" (P11/202).

Handy's (1997) e-words and more importantly the messages and the sentiments behind them are prevalent in the dialogue in this study. P10 mentioned that "her real energy comes when I can motivate teachers, see them fired with enthusiasm" (P10/166); she contends that her "big problem is that she is interested in everything" (P10/160). P9 reflects on the excitement of being in the classroom as

a teaching principal after her period on secondment where she learned more about active learning and different types of assessment; "I think that that's exciting and I find it exciting … I just think it's exciting for children. It's a different type of education" (P9/186). P1 when reflecting on her school's board of management in her *Gaelscoil* situation comments that "you cannot buy the enthusiasm of a dedicated volunteer" (P1/96), however she realises that she may be lucky. She echoes parental remarks about being "completely overwhelmed by the enthusiasm shown" (P1/80), and in an echo of words of John O'Donohue she declares in relation to her school that "it's a place of enthusiasm and it's a place of positivity and a place of happiness and you can feel that atmosphere when you come here, people do say to us" (ibid).

The promotion of the Arts and creativity were among the factors that generated passion and pride in children and in schools. P12 cited arts work due to take place the week after our conversation; he is excited at the prospect and admits, "I love some mornings coming to work when I know that something that I haven't done before is going to be happening that day" (P12/92). He believes that "all the teachers are looking forward to it, the children are looking forward to it, the parents are looking forward to it, the board of management are looking forward to it" (ibid), a strong community celebration. P5 having been stimulated artistically by some of her own primary teachers and having imbibed Froebelian integration philosophy was determined that the DNA running through the veins of her school would be the Arts (P5/62). As a young teacher she "realised that children had a natural affinity for music and movement and drama…they were very uninhibited" (P5/64). When she became principal she concluded that her pupils' most significant poverty was culture, she and her staff took steps "to have them absorb some of the wonders and richness of culture, both nationally and internationally, music, art and drama" (ibid). Six years into her principalship she admires the work of the Association of Creativity in Arts in Education (ACAE) (P5/72), is inspired by Ken Robinson's "type of integrated creativity and education" (P5/164) and can say that the Arts "infuse the whole ethos of the way we work so that's why when we walk through the building we have proper frames, picture frames, that you see in galleries because we want children's work to be displayed

like in a gallery" (P5/68). P4 also places emphasis on the Arts as a means of building confidence and self-expression in children, "we can provide a very enriched curriculum that's Arts based, that will in some way give children the opportunity to be able to develop themselves" (P4/106).

Finally it was passion and pride that motivated P6 to develop his unpromising project 'in a bog' into a school of choice for large numbers of parents, "a school functioning in a ghetto suddenly with a sort of beacon" (P6/38). A similar scenario unfolded for P12 who having told the panel that interviewed him for the position "I really want this job … I am willing to make [it] my life work (P12/36), then challenged vested interests and "restrictive practices of other primary schools in the town" (P12/28) and rather than permitting demographic anomalies and vested interests create a project ghetto school he brought about a situation where "we were indeed a National School, there was no project element to us" (P12/28). So instead of allowing a school develop that would have one hundred percent African children, he has a school with thirty percent Irish children, thirty percent eastern European children, thirty percent African children and ten percent middle eastern children. He brought about or enabled this school of choice by recruiting "really excellent staff, I pursued people who I knew would be good so that we could nudge our bicycle to the front of the pack" (ibid). He achieved it also through his passionate belief in equality, a passion that now gives rise to real pride.

4.5.8. Emerging Landscapes

There are a number of sub-themes that did not fit directly under any of the previous major themes. I propose to locate them loosely if a little uncomfortably under a fifth and final theme, 'emerging landscapes'. Principals' views of the future for principalship, for schools and for the system permeate this theme. The issue of school patronage while not the uppermost issue on the minds of principals is a matter of some importance for all of our principals and of major importance for a number of them. Ireland's population and landscape have

changed in the last decade and will continue to change as the wave of immigration that visited the country since the relatively recent turn of the century settles down to find a new equilibrium in terms of culture, society and what it means to be Irish. As a system for inspecting Irish schools wears new and different shoes, with the lexicon including *mórthuairisc* and *tuairisc scoile* giving way to whole school evaluation (WSE) and school self-evaluation (SSE) our contributors share how they accommodate to the change. Indeed the emerging landscapes theme notes the change that inhabits the role of principal.

4.5.8.1 The future

P4 contends that "we're on the cusp of change in a whole range of areas" (P4/120). He believes that some of the challenges of the future will emerge from the foisting of change on schools arising from "economic constraints but also … the changing nature of society" (ibid). He suggests that school communities will need to exploit whatever opportunities are presented and that future leaders will require a skills set that enables them "to adapt to circumstances" (ibid). P6 admits that in relation to his principalship "I was fifteen years learning my trade as a principal" (P6/44). However he maintains further that he adapted to change, "I've had to reinvent myself every five or six years" (P6/48), and he instances examples of his development of a *Gaelscoil* wing in his disadvantaged school, "an initiative that took on a life of its own" (ibid) and his promotion of technology in education. In the words of McMahon (1992) he unleashed "the latent power" (ibid) or talent of his staff. While one might argue that the fifteen years learning the trade is an exaggeration based on humility, the point is that the principals of the future will not have the luxury of a lengthy learning period and will require the wisdom of P6 and his generation in order to perform their roles as principals. Reinventing themselves in their roles should they have a tenure beyond five years may be a *sine qua non*.

P6 refers also to the possibility of a more democratic future in the school and talks of the democratic exercise involving "student representative councils or student

councils … acquiring the green flag" (ibid). He views the green flag initiative as a mechanism that will help us "mould young people into becoming responsible young adults"(ibid), people who in the words of Sen (2009:332) will "examine and scrutinise what we should take from the past and what we must reject, in the light of our contemporary concerns and priorities". P12 views his school as a multicultural school, now in a period of consolidation. His successes in building a school that avoided epithets such as 'project' or 'ghetto' and becoming a school of choice "not always … because it is characteristically multicultural or multidenominational … I think some of them feel it's a good school where x, y, and z goes on and where they are valued as a parent" (P12/116). He hopes that in the future "the spirit of generosity to children other than one's own which characterised how we got through the first five years" will be maintained. In school leadership he looks forward in the future to a "kind of empathetic leadership or a kind of good sense of emotional leadership … as opposed to … [seeing] the person as being a functionary who needs to improve their managerialism" (P12/120), the language of O'Donohue (2007: 166) again.

4.5.8.2. Immigration

Between the years 2002 and 2006 the population of Dublin 15 increased by twenty-eight percent probably the largest increase in population in a suburb in Europe at the time (CSOI, 2006). While merely one of our principals, P7, works in Dublin 15 the wave of immigration into Ireland had an impact on communities in many parts of the country. P2 says that ten percent of his pupil population comes from a non-Irish background but adds that this group "has had a very very positive impact in my school … the parents in general have a far greater interest in education than the other ninety percent" (P2/124). His conclusion is that "they enrich the school by their presence" (ibid). In rural Ireland P9 teaches pupils from an eastern European background, she agrees with P2, "it's had a very positive effect on our school … we've learned a lot from these children … I think they enrich us if anything" (P9/200). At the centre of the activity in Dublin 15, P7 can also see positives "It is such a positive interesting school in lots of ways" (P7/246) but in a school where the initial enrolment had one pupil from ninety

that had an Irish background the challenges have been immense. There are significant language and communication problems, "quite often children would be frustrated because they can't express themselves" (ibid). There are behavioural issues arising from the 'co-location' of so many different cultures, "a lot of the parents have come as refugees, they came with their own troubles and with their own baggage and their children sometimes bear that" (ibid). In describing the difficulties and the challenges P7 finds it difficult to know where to begin – miscommunication, misunderstanding, mistrust all "come into her ken" (Keats, 1817b). The area of special needs is fraught, parents may not be willing to share information "because maybe in their own countries a child with special needs is a lesser child … and they don't obviously want their child looked on in that way" (P7/246).

In the less frenetic circumstances of a rural town, embracing diversity is far less challenging for P8. He claims that immigration has enriched his school, "it made it a more interesting place, it gave us access to new cultures that we never experienced before, it gave us access to new religions we never experienced before, it also gave us different challenges" (P8/184). He is anxious that they integrate at a young age and thus avoid "groups of disaffected teenage children" (ibid) later. He is very pleased with the involvement of immigrant parents and with a schedule of celebrations, "we had to come up with a type of cultural evenings, cultural events, day events, celebration of religions and cultural events for the children, so we feel that our own children are better prepared citizens of the world" (ibid), redolent of Thornburg (2002). Murals on the school walls are now inclusive incorporating "a distinctive type of art" (ibid) created by immigrant parents, "in a way … a recognition of their values" (ibid).

Affirmation and recognition come to mind to P4 also when he reflects on the quarter of his pupil population that come from international backgrounds. He asserts that "all in all it [immigration] has been a most positive experience in our situation" (P4/116). He believes that integration rather than assimilation is taking place and that "provision … for language support … went way way beyond

language support" (ibid). He summarises that such provision suggests that immigrant children and their families were "being recognised by the State as having something valuable to contribute to our school life" (ibid).

4.5.8.3 School Ethos /Patronage

The ethos of their schools is important to principals in the study. Many have had "a sense of a personal investment in ensuring that" (P4/120), the maintenance of a school ethos and a value system. Ten of the principals interviewed in connection with this study work in schools under the patronage of Roman Catholic Bishops or Archbishops, one under the patronage of Educate Together Ltd and the twelfth had a VEC/ETB patron. The patronage of schools in our system has been an issue stimulating much discussion since Minister Ruairi Quinn prioritised it for action in 2011 when according to Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather (2012:29) ninety-six percent of primary schools were under denominational patronage. The debate on patronage was of interest to contributors in this study. P4 highlights an issue in many schools; he was the founding principal in the mid 1980s of "a distinct parish school, it is still the only school in the parish" (P4/82). Today a quarter of the children come from international backgrounds and there are an array of belief systems in the community. Furthermore many of those baptised and registered as Roman Catholic have few remaining ties with the church of their birth. P4 maintains that there has been a very close bond between school and parish and the parish community contributed to a school ethos that was "very caring, compassionate and inclusive" (P4/36) and there was always support available to cater for the welfare and educational needs of "children who would have come from disadvantaged situations or disadvantaged circumstances" (ibid). P3 has good relations with the parish community of his school and they have worked closely on issues such as child protection, "we would have had a very big connection with the church" (P3/76). With regard to the patronage issue he is clear, "I would like to be working in a Catholic ethos school … I wouldn't like to see my own particular school change" (P3/160). P8 would not look forward to a change in patronage either. His is a De La Salle school under the patronage of the diocese (Archbishop). P8 suggests that "in a way the De La Salle felt they were

an order apart, slightly superior with an international outlook" (P8/72) and the diocese allowed them more latitude than other order schools. P8 has a "great sense of gratitude to the De La Salle brothers" (P8/112), he sees no reason to change patronage or allegiance. He states "our school is a Catholic De La Salle school … an international school" (P8/178). He emphasises, "there are people who are very clear they want their children to go to a Catholic based school … precisely because of our tradition" (ibid). P11 makes the point that "the church doesn't generally interfere with what's going on in schools" (P11/194). In his rural catchment area he thinks that "most parents would strongly vote to keep the school with a Catholic ethos and a lot of those parents wouldn't go to Mass on Sundays" (P11/194). P6 reiterated this point quoting his grown up son, "Dad I may not go to Mass but I want my children to go to a Catholic school" (P6/102). P6 believes that this opinion is representative of the views of many parents. On the possibility of the Church cooperating with the divesting of patronage he wasn't anticipating movement in some parts of Ireland in the near future; "when you are in an Ulster diocese you are in pre Trent practically" (ibid).

P5 would be open to a change in patronage. She says, "we have a very multicultural population … maybe five percent of the school population are practising Catholics … it would reflect the current reality if we were a multi-denominational school or a community school" (P5/110). P7 in her two principalships has experience of four different patrons, the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin, An Foras Patrúnachta, the Minister for Education on an interim basis and the VEC/ETB sector. She has no complaints, she was very pleased with the Catholic Archdiocese in their role as temporary patrons of her new Community National School, "while I'm not sure they're answering the needs of … a diverse society, I do think that they are tried and tested patrons in Ireland and I think they have great supports" (P7/110). She is very pleased with the VEC/ETB as a patron, "the VEC are fantastic patrons, they have taken such care of us, they have taken us under their wing … and their services are fabulous" (ibid).

P10, a Roman Catholic nun indicated that she would welcome the divesting to other patronages of some Catholic schools (P10/126). She believes in inclusion, "it's important to be inclusive and my experience is that when you're inclusive you've nothing to fear" (P10/124). She talks of the need to respect the views of parents and people in an area, "I think in an area where you have many different religions … they could be honoured by a different patronage" (ibid). P/12 is satisfied with his Educate Together patronage and has some issues with denominational involvement in education. He equates belonging to a religious denomination with belonging to a sports club, he believes that "it should be a pleasure for Catholic families and the Catholic parish to educate their own children for their own sacraments and I don't see what value the state are getting out of the massive amount of resources [it invests] … it's … a private matter" (P12/18). He facilitates families "who wish to pursue faith formation for their children in the school setting … with a structure … after school for free" (P12/20).

In the areas of school ethos, school patronage and faith formation in the context of school there are a range of views among the principals interviewed as part of this study, such a range of views can be heard throughout Irish society.

4.5.8.4 Evaluating the School

In the course of conversations on the current issues in the Irish primary school the issue of how we evaluate what happens in our schools was discussed. I should note that all the interviews were carried out before the publication of the School Self-Evaluation Guidelines for Primary Schools in November 2012, (Department of Education and Skills, 2012), consequently SSE was not as central a topic on principals' minds during the interviews as it would have been a year later. For this reason and because SSE arose in question 14, subsection 7 conversations on the self-valuation issue were relatively short. Nevertheless principals demonstrated that they were embracing SSE, albeit at different levels of sophistication. In essence, "school self-evaluation reframes the school

development planning cycle" (ibid: 14), a process very familiar to principals. The SSE guidelines require specifically of principals that they engage in collaboration and inclusion, that they provide effective leadership and that they are flexible (ibid: 13).

A spectrum of opinion was laid bare, from P12's contention that "school self-evaluation is something we've done from the word go" (P12/110) to P1's contention that "I don't think schools are self-evaluating" (P1/154). She did modify the remark, agreeing there are some "wonderful models of self-evaluation" (ibid) in the system but she wouldn't consider her own school as being in that category. The conversation about evaluation included commentary on external inspection by the DES, the whole school evaluation (WSE) system and the movement towards school self-evaluation (SSE). P12, having indicated that his school adopted self-evaluation on its inception goes on to define SSE; "it's about looking at yourself as a whole organisation and it's about school self-evaluation in a way that…empowers everybody with regard to their ownership of everything that goes on in the school" (P12/110). P10 uses the empowering word also, she thinks that "self-evaluation is very powerful and it's empowering (P10/208). Furthermore she would like to teach "children to self-evaluate themselves without being critical of each other" (ibid), noting their own strengths and weaknesses.

While many consider SSE to be a rather recent phenomenon in Irish schools P6 has been thinking SSE since 1985/6 when he discussed a document on self-evaluation with a member of the inspectorate (P6/40). In the pre WSE era he and his staff were engaging with SSE, "we were self-evaluating and I said we, it wasn't me, it was at whole school level" (P6/42). P11 is not a stranger to SSE either, "self-evaluation is something we do all the time" (P11/144). In his small school he accepts while much of the SSE involves committing notes to paper some of it is less formal, "that's informal but its self-evaluation" (ibid). P8 also contends that his school has been involved in SSE for three years, "we seem to be ahead of change, not that we got direction to do so but it would evolve out of our

role at meetings" (P8/280). It leads in his view to "greater transparency, accountability, truth" (ibid) and to a modification of methodologies.

The road to SSE appears to be well trodden in the scenarios painted by further contributors; P7 contends, "we do self-evaluate as a school, we do a lot of self-evaluation" (P7/252). Meanwhile P5 asks her teachers to complete a nine page annual review survey towards the end of the school year, she works on it in July and she had completed an eighty page summary document just before our interview on 20th July (P5/88). This constitutes a starting point for the next school year. She comments on the necessity for critical reflection but realises that many "young teachers can be very defensive about how good they are and very much protectionist … they aren't ready for all this level of reflection" (P5/104). She believes that she needs to engender a sense of confidence in my senior management team (ibid) and to prepare staff to engage in critical reflection and to be open to outside evaluation.

The role of the outsider exercises a number of our contributors. P2 is clear in his view, "there has to be an inspectorate … I think it's beyond the capacity of any school to accurately evaluate how well it's doing on its own" (P2/120); that self-evaluation as the only way for schools to evaluate their work is not sufficient" (P2/122). P11 is in favour of outside inspection in addition to SSE but is unhappy with the current frequency of inspection. He considers that "it's a public charade now with inspector reports being put on the DES website in the guise of accountability and transparency" (P11/148). He would prefer regular incidental visits, he contends that if there is a genuine effort to improve standards, "the only way that can be done is by regular inspector visits" (ibid). With regard to inspection, P1 described a WSE in her school as "a very traumatic experience for the staff" (P1/154). The attitude of the DES inspectors was "if it wasn't written down, it didn't exist" (ibid), inflexibility around this point was disturbing. She is concerned that the inspectorate is "still only ticking the tickable boxes" (ibid) while "there are a lot of untickable targets in primary schools when you look at what we are espousing to do" (ibid). P3 had a different experience; accepting that

there must be accountability he found the WSE experience to be positive "I actually don't mind the present format" (P3/184). His school's experience of SSE appears to be limited but he acknowledges that he would like "to see more self-evaluation as a whole school" (P3/186).

P9 has never had the experience of a WSE and she hasn't had an opportunity in her three years as principal to engage seriously with SSE yet. However she welcomes the SSE concept, "I do think it's a good idea if it's actually to make us think about what we can improve on and if it is to replace, not necessarily the school plan but all of this paperwork we have on our shelves" (P9/204). Like P11 she would be happy with incidental visits from inspectors, "I think the incidentals are probably better, a better idea because the WSE is a performance, I feel myself" (ibid). Ps 9 and 2 recommend that the inspector's role should be supportive as well as evaluative and P2 makes a strong point that inspectors who have never worked in DEIS Band 1 schools should not inspect such schools, "you cannot evaluate, you cannot support a school that operates in the context of which you have little or no experience" (P2/120). P4 would like to ensure that the evaluation process is an opportunity for a school community, "that it is for the good and the betterment of educational provision" (P4/118). Finally P8 cautions that SSE "could put more pressure on the principal" (P8/285). He fears it might change the relationship between a principal and teachers, that he's going to be feared rather than be seen as a mentor or a friend" (ibid). He suggests that a principal could be more vulnerable when dealing with underperforming teachers.

4.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have reported on 550 pages of conversations with principals under a number of key themes. Initially I outlined the findings in relation to the formation of twelve individuals who will become principals and on their accession to principalship. I reported on the incumbency aspect of principalship through the lens of initiation into the position through *a priori* themes of autonomy and accountability and through five emerging themes, Values/ Moral Purpose/Interests of Children; Empowerment and Continuing Professional Development; Frustration; Passion and Pride and Changing Landscapes. I found

twelve individuals challenged but comfortable in their roles partaking in an odyssey of liberation. Their overwhelming interest in the welfare of pupils and in stimulating children reminded me of the inspiring words of one of Ireland's best known principals of a bygone age; "As we see to lure our pupils to enter the mystery, to explore the magic cave and unlock the secrets of the words and worlds about them" (McMahon, 1992:52).

Chapter 5 - Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

The German sociologist, Tönnies writing in 1887 used the words *gemeinschaft* meaning community and *gesellschaft* meaning organisation or society "as metaphors for two ideal types, two different ways of thinking and living, two alternative visions of life", (Sergiovanni, 2007:104). As societies moved from hunting to agriculture to industry, the societal transformations resulted in a move from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*, from a vision of life as a sacred community towards a more secluded society. The third form of *gemeinschaft* viz *gemeinschaft* of mind, mutual binding to a common goal, a shared set of values, strengthening of the 'we' identity, represents the truly human and supreme form of community" (Tönnies [1887], 1957:42). The principals in this study convey to me a sense of professionals with great integrity preserving the essence of the *gemeinschaft* in a society heading inevitably towards *gesellschaft*.

The primary principals in this research emerge as a cast of characters performing roles in a social drama. Moreover I see them also inhabit and give meaning to the lines of O'Donohue's (2007:165/6) powerful poem 'For a Leader'. Later in this chapter I intend to conduct part of the discussion through the lens of Starratt's drama and O'Donohue's poem. Before we reach that part of the discussion I intend to comment on what this study, acknowledging its limitations, offers us on the life histories and contemporary views of a group of Irish primary principals who between them have seen service in the role from three years to three and half decades spanning the final fifth of the 20th century and the initial seventh of the 21st century.

5.2 Overarching Themes

An overarching theme emerged when principals talked about what they enjoyed about the job, a theme exuding excitement, variety, uncertainty and challenge, a theme encapsulating the essence of the thesis title, illustrating what constitutes the leadership of the principal for the contributors, what inspires them and what sustains them. Handy's (1997) 'e' factors, excitement, enthusiasm, electricity, exhilaration, effervescence imbued their reactions as they blended vision and action, echoing Obama (2007:94) "vision ... inspires us, but realism, practicality, flexibility and curiosity ensure survival".

The principals echo Pollard's (1996:242) optimism, "I believe that this crucible of uncertainty provides a great opportunity for positive direction" and Chopra (1996: 81) when he extols the virtues of uncertainty, "in the wisdom of uncertainty lies freedom … and in our willingness to step into the unknown … we surrender ourselves to the creative mind that orchestrates the dance of the universe". Indeed their state of intentional open-mindedness may qualify these principals as exponents of Keats' theory of 'negative capability', a qualification reserved for 'great people', "They are capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Keats, 1817).

While there is substantial evidence of energy, commitment and optimism among the cohort of principals in this study these are not uniform in every case. There is also evidence of frustration in all cases, of not knowing where to turn, of tardiness in addressing new issues and of tunnel vision in a number of instances. Principals acknowledge *lacunae* and shortcomings; P7 reflects, "Maybe I'm just not bright enough for this job or I am not clever enough" (P7/206); P11 admitted that he was fifteen years in position before he adopted an inclusive approach to parents. In other instances a lack of clarity permeated some responses; P7 is vague about the

frequency of meetings of the in-school management team, “now and again … it works out” (P7/138); on SSE P3 appears uncertain, “I suppose it’s something we have to look at a little bit more ourselves” (P3/186).

5.2.1 Exhilarating Leadership

A revealing and significant finding from this limited study was a strong positive statement principals made about their leadership role in schools. Compelling evidence emerged in many cases of what Caldwell (2007: 27-28) terms “exhilarating leadership … animating ... inspiring … uplifting”. That this should be the case at a time when public servants generally in Ireland are under severe pressure arising from adverse comment from a range of commentators and when all public servants’ salaries/wages have been reduced significantly and when schools and principals face demands to redress many of the ills of society is testament to the existence of a selfless, high professionalism within the ranks of Ireland’s primary school principals and a clear demonstration that for them there is “no exemption from the common obligation to give of themselves” (Obama, 2009a). While principals acknowledged the frustration of excessive bureaucracy and sometimes the unrealistic expectations a section of middle class parents place on them, they were overwhelming that their rich dividends were derived from enabling pupil centred learning, thus creating “places where every child can learn and grow” (Deal et al, 2004:250), from establishing a sense of unity and purpose to bring this about and from building trust. Hall’s remarks (Caldwell, 2007:39) seem apposite; “the real exhilaration comes … when you stumble upon [your ideas] being taken further than you imagined … initiatives and innovations springing from original thought … the ‘buzz’ in the school and the excitement in the students responding … make it all worthwhile”. P6 in this research had a similar feeling, “the real joy comes when you see other people [teachers] with initiatives” (P6/48).

5.2.2 Moral Purpose

The principals in this study revealed an adherence to a strong moral compass in the way they exercise leadership. The "heart, head and hand of leadership" Sergiovanni (2007:20) are present in their work, manifested in a commitment to values, theories of practice and practical actions respectively. The point of the leadership exercised by the principal contributors was not necessarily to get people to follow them but rather as Starratt (1993a:43) suggests "to get us to pursue a dream, an idea, a value by which we make a contribution to the world and realise our highest human potential". Martin Luther King talked about "bending the arc of the moral universe towards justice" (King, 1963). Conscious of their responsibilities for pupils who have physical, emotional and learning disabilities, for newly arrived immigrants, consequently cultural, political and religious minorities as well as the under privileged, the poor, the depressed, the displaced and the disenfranchised, the moral code enunciated by the principals is one which aims at interventions that will 'make a difference' and will bring to their pupils more justice, more freedom, more opportunity, more dignity, more integrity and more humanity.

The themes and major sub-themes that emerged in this thesis namely values, advancing the interests of children, passion and pride, empowerment, vision, building community through relationships and the exercise of strong practical action, conducted in a positive milieu underpinned by moral purpose portray highly professional primary principals operating at the stages of development autonomy and advancement of Pascal and Ribbins' (1998:11) framework, modifying, Gronn's (1993) and Day and Bakioglu's (1996). There is no sense whatsoever of Gronn's 'divestiture' or Day and Bakioglu's 'disenchantment'. The "resilient attitude" (Bottery et al 2008a:198) in the face of frustration, bureaucracy and a myriad of other challenges observed in Bottery's study of headteachers in England and China is shared by their Irish counterparts in this study.

In the way they envision, empower, build communities and exude "a proactive leadership spirit" (Kouzes and Posner, 1996:101) the principals are pursuing a 'magnificent quest' (Starratt, 1993a) with the aim of constructing an ideal community or communities of excellence as distinct from its antithesis, mediocrity. This research can confirm and the principals in this study will acknowledge themselves that there are occasions, issues and circumstances where they fall short, sometimes well short. Nevertheless despite some *lacunae* they perform well on Starratt's (1993a) five benchmarks or qualities for achieving excellence. Firstly they are "responsive to the human and natural context in which they find themselves" (112), "they hold themselves to a high standard of work" (ibid), "they take pride and satisfaction in their work" (ibid) and allow their work to carry the stamp of their personality. Thirdly they are very strong about relationships and demonstrate a "conviction that others deserve our best" (ibid). Fourthly they care about the quality of public service and public life and work "to create a fairer, more humane community" (113) and finally they support through a significant commitment to real, authentic empowerment pupils, teachers, parents, SNAs and others in their journeys towards excellence.

The principals in this study acknowledge like Fink (1994) "change is mandatory, growth is optional", the inevitability of change, a notion not unfamiliar to Heraclitus 2600 years ago, "nothing endures but change" (Laertius, 300 BCE). These principals while subject to the strictures and constraints of a modern bureaucratic state appear to have created for themselves autonomous space in which they can be imaginative and creative and in that space use a kind of "esemplastic power" referred to by Coleridge [1817] (2007). P1 touches on this point, "things that other people see as important but I don't see as important, I just don't do … I do them my way" – no Faustian pact with Mephistopheles or with bureaucracy there - and in the words of Joseph Campbell, scholar of mythology, no "capitulation to the devil" (Cousineau, 1990: 108), just a genuine statement of need and want emanating from within an authentic professional.

Passion and pride were voiced in the interviews throughout this study. It is this passion to make a difference "that turns beliefs into reality and is the mark of sustainable leadership" (Davies, 2007:16). These principals in the words of Bolman and Deal (1995:12) possessing heart, hope and faith, rooted in soul and spirit and of Obama (2007) 'rooted in values and powered by hope' aspire to be the creators of dynamic communities of meaning. In many instances they succeed and they make meaning.

That concept of celebration residing in tandem with a projection of optimism is important in the execution of vision and in bringing coherence to the cacophony of voices that inhabit the principal's world; "principals find good things that are happening in the school and publicly recognise the work of the staff and pupils and parents who have contributed. They express appreciation to individuals and recognise special effort" (McHugh, 1998:49). Many manifestations of such celebration and appreciation are demonstrated in this study.

5.2.3 Life Histories

The formation of our cast of twelve principals as they became pupils and later teachers makes for interesting reading. With the exception of one who came to Ireland when he was four years old all members of the cast were born in Ireland. Each was educated at primary, post primary and at third level in the Irish system, a system once described by Coolahan (1981:141)) as "unusual, complex and interesting". Childhood from what we can glean was generally a happy time. Backgrounds varied, our principals as children lived on farms, in inner city working class communities and some in leafier suburbs. Some experienced straightened circumstances arising from being part of a large family from economic constraints and from a parent's addiction problem in one case.

Each of them had a lot to say about school. One hears the passion coming through in the voices; some inspiring teachers of art, music, drama, poetry and

project work. There were strong statements of antipathy towards corporal punishment regimes experienced by a number of contributors in primary and post primary schools in the 1960s and 1970s and universal relief that this issue is firmly confined to the past. Some experienced a restricted curriculum as pupils; such restrictions and the experience of corporal punishment sharpened the resolve of our contributors to use their influence to build a very contrary system.

The parents and families of all interviewees, irrespective of their personal circumstances ensured that third level education was pursued by every member of the cast of contributors. Some found their inspiration to pursue a teaching career within their families; parents, grandparents and aunts playing their parts, in one instance (P5/4) 'inherited' her mother's 'lost vocation'. Teachers had an influence on the decisions of about half of the cast as they accepted the "euphemistic call to teaching" (P4/4). In some cases it was innovative, child centred, project based methodologies that aroused interest, in others it was the igniting of an artistic spark or just being an outstanding role model as in the case of P6 when a primary school teacher "lit fires…that still burn brightly today" (P6/2). For others it was where a teacher "had a respect and reverence for the children" (P5/10), whereas McMahon (1992) would say seeds were sown that would fructify later.

The college of education experience was very important in the lives of our cast. More than half attended St Patrick's College where they claimed they grew up, matured, achieved independence, developed socially, started lifelong friendships; for P6 "it was my university of life" (P6/16). In the concurrent model of teacher education the importance of the college of education in the social development of student teachers who are still teenagers cannot be underestimated.

There is no defined route to primary school principalship in our system. There is no formal training or leadership qualification required although deputy principals can take part in the Misneach programme and aspiring principals may take leadership qualifications at a third level institution or participate in courses in

Education Centres aimed at aspiring leaders. Many of the contributors had post graduate qualifications in Law and Management, Masters in Education and a Doctorate. A half of the principals in this research were 'founding' principals in their schools. Positioning, strategic or inadvertent, in a location or community where a new school will be established is an advantage for an aspiring principal. The trend in the establishment of new schools in recent times in that the majority of these schools will be *Gaelscoileanna*, Educate Together Schools or Community National Schools. Service in one of these schools will be an advantage to teachers seeking positions in new schools of a similar type; the accession of Ps 1 and 7 to *Gaelscoil* principalships illustrates the point.

One only of the principals in this thesis saw service as a deputy principal. Other kinds of experience however did assist candidates in their quest for promotion. Three contributors had been on full time secondment to DES support services during their careers, two held full time positions for short periods in third level institutions and a number of others worked on a part time basis in third level and Education Centres in the areas of continuing professional development. In a number of instances also this work led personnel to pursue studies that led to Master's degrees in leadership or in curriculum. Furthermore three members of the cast had experience teaching in other jurisdictions during the accession period. These involvements which bring aspiring principals into contact with a variety of schools and large numbers of teachers are invaluable experiences. Furthermore personnel gain experience of designing programmes and coordinating project work, skills that prepare them for principalship. It is worth noting also that in periods of an oversupply of teachers, newly qualified teachers may spend a lengthy 'apprenticeship' period working as substitutes in a variety of schools. Despite the frustration that may accompany the uncertainty generated in these situations the young teachers gain valuable experience of different schools and different leadership styles; P1 recognises the advantages, "I learned an awful lot without realising I was learning it, about the culture of schools and about the role of principal and about staff dynamics" (P1/22).

5.2.4 Initiation into Principalship

The early days of principalship in the words of our principals were dramatic, exciting, chaotic, confusing, scary and lonely. Irrespective of the level of preparation for principalship a sense of great responsibility and sometimes isolation permeated the thoughts of the newly appointed principals. Founding principals were sometimes in situations where every life skill they had acquired was necessary, in prefabricated buildings, in undeveloped 'green field' sites with very inadequate access roads. Others started in unsuitable older buildings, a coffee shop was mentioned; one principal walked into a furnished school. The difficulties were prolonged in some instances as a permanent building was not secured for well over a decade, in the cases of some *Gaelscoileanna* this scenario has been repeated many times. Inadequate accommodation, a paucity of furniture and an absence of a definable support structure provided gratuitous challenges for founding principals, I suggest that there are moral, legal and practical responsibilities on the state, the Department of Education and Skills to ensure that appropriate accommodation is provided in a timely manner and that newly appointed principals do not have to use their own funds (P5/38) or have to spend their summers as 'designated principal' working on a building site. I contend that a situation that exists when new post primary schools are established in the ETB sector and latterly in the Educate Together sector, where principals are appointed many months in advance of the school opening for the first time and that they work, with support, on 'establishing' issues should obtain also in the case of new primary schools.

Principals succeeding in existing schools also encountered the excitement as well as some isolation, loneliness and chaos. Three of the six principals who followed outgoing principals had issues with the 'handover' of responsibility, in one case a fifteen minute meeting on the morning he assumed the role of principal with the outgoing religious order principal constituted the 'handover'. The transfer of responsibility from the outgoing to the incoming principal in an inadequate manner and over too short a period provides further unnecessary challenges for the incoming principal. There are grounds for arguing that there should be a

period of overlap, where the incoming principal as principal designate works alongside the outgoing principal, thus ensuring a seamless transition and a maintenance of continuity in the life of the school.

Two of the six principals who were appointed to existing schools were subjected to unprofessional behaviour on the part of teachers who were unsuccessful in the recruitment process for the position of principal. While one understands a natural disappointment when a candidate fails to secure a position, such disappointment must never lead to a departure from the standards of probity that would be expected of staff in an organisation staffed by professionals. One of the strongest sub-themes to emerge in this research is respect, it applies to all the partners alike in the school community, child and adult, and is at the core of the Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct (Teaching Council, 2012). I believe that respect, civility and courtesy should be included on courses in initial teacher education and on all courses preparing personnel for school leadership.

5.2.5 Frustrations in the Role

It is not surprising that my conversations with principals dealt with the great frustrations experienced by principals in their roles. The role, tasks and duties of principal have increased exponentially since Circular 16/73 (Department of Education, 1973) was issued more than forty years ago and since P11 was appointed in 1979 believing that the job "wasn't that different to the job of an ordinary teacher" (P11/6). Highly committed principals interviewed in this research and others with whom I have spoken on other occasions, formally and informally, have given very long service. The scale of the frustrations, bureaucracy and stress encountered by principals who took part in this study, principals who primarily were highly motivated and passionate about their work, is such that only a minority of individuals would be able to sustain themselves in the role for lengthy periods of time in the future. While many of our contributors may have perfected the art of reinventing themselves "I've had to reinvent myself every five or six years" (P6/48), it appears unreasonable to expect an individual to

perform the role of the modern principal for a lengthy period. Some suggestions for addressing this challenge were suggested by contributors. A time limit on principalship of ten years was suggested by P5 (158), P8 proposes 'sabbaticals' where one would not work in education, where one would return "refreshed...wiser but maybe not more erudite in education" (P8/110). P7's suggestion is that principals do as she did, move to a second principalship, in her case after eleven years.

The notion of working as principal in a number of different schools was the norm in the cases of some religious orders, P10 worked in three communities as principal as instructed by her Sisters of Charity supervisors. However as religious orders are not likely to have personnel to fill principalships in the future there is likely to be less use of that practice. However the system, the partners in education should consider the matter of the length of principalship and the possibility of rotating principalship as part of a review of principalship. The matter of sabbatical leave for principals which received some consideration before the economic recession changed mindsets in 2008 would be worth considering again; the benefits to our system would be likely to outweigh any financial investment. The fact that two of the principals in this research referred to having significant illnesses and others commented on ongoing stress levels suggests that consideration of creative approaches to principals' tenure is no longer optional. Furthermore there are obstacles in the Irish system to seconding principals to work with, coach and mentor other principals. This avenue which is nurtured in other jurisdictions would be a worthwhile use of the expertise of very experienced principals, it would also enable the experienced principal to have a further valuable career.

5.2.6 Distributing Leadership

The evidence in this thesis suggests that deputy principals play a full role in leadership and management in the school. The Report of the Working Group on the Role of the Primary Principal (DES, 1999a:110) recommended an

examination of the role of the deputy principal with a view to enhancing the role. Remarks from principal contributors in this research such as “I have an absolutely wonderful deputy principal who is a fantastic support for me” (P2/58), “[my deputy principal] is absolutely excellent on all things logistical” (P12/62), “she [deputy principal] is just incredibly involved and fantastic, unbelievably” (P7/132) confirm that the deputy principal plays an important and central role in primary schools, an improvement on the situation that obtained less than two decades ago.

The situation with regard to middle management and distributed leadership is less certain but gives rise for optimism. The non-replacement of personnel holding posts of responsibility below deputy principal since 2009 due to a government moratorium has had some positive but many negative consequences. On the positive side it has led to an increase in volunteerism, a concept that has characterised selfless contributions by many primary teachers over the decades where many sought “no exemption from the common obligation to give of themselves” (Obama, 2009a). On the other hand a dependence on volunteerism is not an appropriate way to organise complex 21st century educational institutions. It is imperative that the moratorium is set aside and that schools’ allocations of posts of responsibility are restored. Secondly it is desirable that collegial leadership is enhanced in schools and that distributed leadership becomes the norm. The evidence of this research is that middle management is working well in many schools but is not achieving optimally in all schools. Our schools would benefit enormously if the volunteerism to which I’ve referred can be integrated with an effective management structure, embracing a creative distributed leadership model.

5.2.7 Continuing Professional Development

The notion of continuing professional development was embedded in the empowerment theme enunciated strongly by contributors. Principals in the study had significant commitment to encouraging and nurturing staff members, in

providing them with opportunities to improve themselves personally and professionally. Their commitment to continuing professional development of staff and empowerment of staff was redolent of a very professional approach to their leadership role and went beyond the exhortation in the Education Act (1998) "to provide leadership to the teachers and other staff" Section 23 (2) (b) and also to create "a school environment … which promotes the professional development of teachers" Section 23 (2) (c), (Government of Ireland, 1998:23-24).

I detected in the interviews a genuine, open and empowering style of leadership among the respondents, a style that can have the effect of bringing about a synergy, a style that may assist teachers to be self-directing and to establish in their own schools "not just learning and caring communities but communities of responsibility" (Sergiovanni, 2007:138). Such principals may be involved I suggest, advertently or inadvertently, in "succession planning" a characteristic of leadership valued in contemporary literature (Fink, 2005:137-160). Such empowerment may alleviate the "reluctance factors" associated with succession to principalship referred to by Anderson et al (2011) and the consequent "leadership disengagement" which is of interest to Gronn and Rawlings-Sanaei (2003) cited in Anderson et al (2011). I contend that the leadership demonstrated by the principals in this study *inter alia* "is about preparing individuals to be able to lead today and tomorrow in ways which are sensitive and responsive" (Southworth, 2007:177). Such an approach echoes my own view shared with educational leaders some years ago" if only I could find the talent, develop the talent and the capacity of teachers in the system, empower them and bring them to a stage where they are better than me, where they will challenge me for my job, then I will have fulfilled the purpose of my being a true leader of an educational community" (McHugh, 2007:14).

There was unanimity among the principals in this research that CPD should be available for aspiring principals, newly appointed principals and for the general population of principals and that it should be structured. There was widespread support for a continuation of LDS/PDST programmes of CPD such as Misneach

in particular, Forbairt and Toraiocht with P2 (26) suggesting that "Misneach should be mandatory". The shortening and dilution of the Misneach programme in more recent years was a cause of concern to some principals including Ps 12 and 3. The strong views of our principal interviewees supported by literature on educational leadership would suggest that rather than diminish, decision makers should strengthen, enhance and modernise such tried and tested programmes. It is in this context that earlier remarks about the deployment or secondment of experienced principals are appropriate. The necessity for comprehensive programmes of CPD in school leadership makes it imperative that restrictions on seconding experienced principals are removed. There is an overwhelming logic in the argument; Ireland has a cohort of talented long serving experienced primary principals, some of them contributors to this research, on the other hand there is a great necessity to provide leadership, management, and mentoring programmes for the benefit of existing principals, newly appointed principals, deputy principals, those in middle management and teachers who aspire to become educational leaders. The system would benefit also from availing of the services of recently retired school principals whose expertise can be augmented by reflection and some theoretical work and whose services can be made available to the system for many years after retirement, bringing the European concept of 'grey gold' to an Irish stage.

Evidence from this study would suggest that's the DES might consider augmenting the capacity of the PDST to continue its involvement in all the programmes that it and LDS delivered so satisfactorily in the opinion of contributors to this study. It would be worthwhile if the DES was to hold a dialogue with a wide range of interested parties on the notion of establishing a National Centre for Leadership. The establishment of such centres in other jurisdictions where they may be described as worthwhile but not a panacea will lead to pressure being applied to the DES by some interested parties to establish a

National Centre for Leadership in Ireland. Such a Centre would need to address the empowerment of school leaders at all levels in our system; aspiring school

leaders, special duties assistants, assistant and deputy principals and beginning and experienced principals. Furthermore it would need to have independence from the DES, have an adequate budget, be staffed appropriately, led firmly and have a vision to incorporate the wisdom on leadership of a range of existing players in our system. A consultation process needs to meaningful and should enable the many existing providers of CPD for school leaders to contribute to a vision for the future.

All discussions and decisions in the area of CPD for school leaders should take place in the context of imminent mandatory CPD and the role of the Teaching Council as it implements the provisions of section 39 of the Teaching Council Act, 2001 (Government of Ireland, 2001), its policy on the continuum of teacher education (The Teaching Council, 2011a: pp 19-21) and its strategic objectives, "Establishing a framework for ... CPD, including procedures and criteria (The Teaching Council, 2011b: 17).

5.2.8 Community Building

When principals spoke of building communities they invariably referred to a relationship with parents and with a capacity to listen. One of the great changes in Irish primary education in the last four decades has been the role of parents and the way parents are viewed by the school. The establishment by the Department of Education of the National Parents' Council in 1985 was one milestone, followed by a Department of Education Circular 24/91 (Department of Education, 1991) that entitled parents to be considered as partners in education. The real progress however arises from the attitudes of teachers and principals and the ways they work with parents. The reality that emerges in twelve interviews is of schools very welcoming of parents, in many instances engaging in meaningful partnership, in the case of P2 outlining the need for the school to engage in the education of parents as a matter of urgency, furthering and developing the work of the HSCL programme. A natural tension can exist between home and school arising from the differing perspectives of each party. One principal (P3) working

in a school in a more affluent suburb might agree with Harry Croft, an English headteacher interviewed by Bottery, "the most intractable problem was from parental attitudes towards education and the school" (Bottery, 2008b:191). However the findings of this research suggest that principals understand the home school dynamic and have structures in place, building synergies between home and school. P11 is a living manifestation of the changes in home school relations over the last forty years moving from a position "that the best place for a parent was at the gate (P11/152) to "they [parents] all have my mobile number … they know they can ring me … even if it's something small" (ibid).

A key element of developing relationships according to contributors is through listening, deep listening, "[professionalism] … is about listening to people" (P2/90), "listening to what the children have to say … is a great source of encouragement to me" (P2/94). In this instance P2 is echoing Ruth's exhortation to "listen deeply" (Ruth, 2006: 8), to "listen to feelings" (9), "to create enough safety for people to tell us honestly" (11). Much of this deep listening, emphasised by P2 but present in other interviews also takes place informally; Ruth (8) quotes Block (1993) suggesting that "one good lunch room conversation as being worth a hundred surveys". In my own experience such listening frequently occurred on walks on the corridor, in the playground and on the fringes of sports events. Ruth (2006: 20) views such activity "as a central principle of conflict resolution, namely that it is possible to 'listen people' into agreement much more easily than it is to argue them into agreement".

5.2.9 Representing Principals

Reference was made by one contributor to the efforts in the 1980s to establish a Principals' Association and of the determination of the INTO to prevent the development of such a structure. In this research I find that principals are comfortable with the co-existence of the IPPN and the INTO working together on occasions and separately on other occasions in the interests of principals. The view of principals in the research and elsewhere is that the INTO should continue

to represent principals on matters associated with terms and conditions. They believe strongly also in the need for the IPPN to continue assisting principals in the professional aspects of their role. As the INTO has engaged in CPD for principals and for teachers long before the advent of the IPPN, both organisations are among those who continue to provide CPD for principals. One concern of note on the part of principals is echoed in remarks in this research, namely that in circumstances where there is a dispute between a teacher and principal, both members of the INTO, many principals feel that the union is more sympathetic to the teacher's argument. A healthy and now constructive tension between the INTO and the IPPN is apparent in the nuances of conversations with principals, the negativity of the 1980s has been replaced by an acceptance that the existence and support of both organisations is in the interests of the 21st century principal. Interestingly the accommodation between the INTO and the IPPN mirrors another accommodation in Irish society over a similar period, that between the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Gaelic Players' Association.

5.2.10 Transparency in Selection of Principals

Selection processes and transparency in the appointment of principals would appear to have improved in the period covered by this research. Earlier appointees in 1979 make reference to the power of the parish priest and to gender bias in selection. The offer of a principalship to P8 in the mid-nineties when he had not applied for the position was not evidence of good selection practice. All interviewees considered that appropriate procedures are in place at present for the recruitment of principals. One contributor however remains unhappy about 'local pressure' in the recruitment of teachers.

5.2.11 Anticipating Conclusions

Conclusions will follow in Chapter 6. Before I complete Chapter 5 I will compare the findings in this study with a benchmark set in the National Education Convention twenty years ago. Furthermore as an Arts backdrop has hovered in the shadows of this thesis I will examine briefly the findings in the context of

Starratt's (1993b) social drama and O'Donohue's poem "For a Leader" (O'Donohue, 2007).

5.2.11.1 Twenty year benchmark

In the report of the National Education Convention, Coolahan (1994:42) summarises the core tasks of the school principal thus:

> *... creating a supportive school climate, with particular emphasis on the curriculum and teaching and directed towards maximising academic learning, having clear goals and high expectations for staff and students, establishing good systems for monitoring student performance, promoting ongoing staff development and in-service and encouraging strong parental involvement.*

Less than twenty years later Ireland's primary principals responded in their own way. P11 and PI offer a supportive school climate; "I wanted a school to be a happy busy place where children would come to learn" (P11/90); "in everything to do with the school, that they [teachers] would want to do the best for the children" (P11/86); "it's a place of enthusiasm and it's a place of positivity and a place of happiness and you can feel that atmosphere when you come here, people do say that to us (P1/60). Emphasising the curriculum and maximising academic learning are important to all contributors; P12 and 9 provide examples, "I firmly believe in the Aristotelian idea of phronesis … incremental learning that one goes through … context based, action orientated ... dialogue … and then the reflective practice will result in your growth (P 12/48); P9 put it simply, "for me it's [education] about actually creating independent learning" (P9/78).

High expectation of staff and students are manifest throughout conversations with contributors. P6 talks about the acquisition of "young passionate teachers ... missionaries ... actively raising boats as well as raising lives and hopes" (P6/38). Meanwhile P5 uses a management system where all post-holders have pastoral and administrative roles. There is a very low tolerance for poor performance from teachers or pupils. She addresses underperformance in a supportive manner, "you

need to improve … we'll help you" (P5/68). She goes on to state, "we can upskill people not in a discriminating way but in a very supportive capacity building way (ibid). Monitoring student performance, P3 visits all classes every week. He asks pupils "about what they're doing in relation to maybe a project … [looks at] the powerpoint presentation that they've done" (P3/132). P11 talks about "teacher observation" (P11/88) when measuring success while P6 refers to testing, "there was always this notion of trying to raise the bar for everybody" (P6/60) among a suite of competitive and non-competitive activities.

The benchmark on promoting staff development and in-service was surpassed by all principals easily, empowerment being one of our principal themes. P9 is adamant, "I think it's [CPD] even more important than in other professions … because things are constantly changing ... we live in such a dynamic world that you have to be up to date … you're influencing the lives of our future" (P9/188); P6 observes, "that's what professional development does, it opens your mind" (P6/52). I discussed previously the strong parental involvement in our 21st century primary schools, P11 exemplifies this, "one area which would have changed a good bit in our school and in me over the years, is my relationship or my attitude to parents (P11/94); P2 is a strong advocate for parents, "a lot of our time is [spent] dealing with parents and educating parents and being positive role models for parents" (P2/50).

5.2.11.2 Social drama

Our principals played all the parts in Starratt's (1993b) dramaturgical postmodern play where leaders understand that "their power does not come from the force of their personalities, but from the power of values that ground human life as meaningful and worthwhile" (137). The principals in this research carried with grace the roles of player and director, stage manager and critic and they balanced the scripts of leadership.

As players the principals were mindful of the necessity for leaders to be visible, they maintained credibility by being involved in the action, by modelling lessons, by being visible "when I need to be visible" (P10/70). When P11 works in school early in the morning and later in the evening he believes "It's more likely that the other teachers will … adopt the vision that I have" (P11/102); he models "the kind of responsibilities other members are expected to take" Starratt (1993b:139).

In this study there is strong evidence portraying the leader as director and stage manager in the contributions of all our principals. P6 established a 'cradle to grave' facility (P6/104,108). P4 felt enormously privileged "to be in a situation where you are an enabler ... where one can be steering" (P4/90).

P5 plays the role of the leader as critic, a benevolent Socratic gadfly as she prompts colleagues from a younger 'entitled' generation to match her expectations for them (P5/68, 90). She is mindful "of the human drama in which they are involved and hence the need for humility and compassion in the face of imperfect achievement" (Starratt, 1993b:142).

Our principals juggled scripts emanating from a variety of sources, some contradictory; staff in all its manifestations, parents, pupils, boards of management, parents' groups, DES, HSE, local authorities, IPPN, INTO, sports and arts organisations – the list is unfinished; successfully preventing "these centrifugal forces from tearing the institution apart" (ibid). P12 juggled with a sluggish DES, a reluctant town council and antipathetic educational institutions, using empathetic and emotional leadership (P12/120) as he transformed a possible 'ghetto' school into a beacon, a school of choice (P12/16). Now he models inclusive policy making to his erstwhile critics; placing the school at the helm of the community.

5.2.11.3 For a leader

Continuing an Arts theme our principals are living manifestations of O'Donohue's (2007:165/6) poem, 'For a Leader' (see Appendix Q). They acted kindly; being a 'voice for children' (P2/84); saving a staff member from burnout (P6/66). They acted out of service not arrogance; "My role [is] to look after everyone in the school community" (P7/84); "[The job is] in my head all the time … when you are principal, I am thinking, working things out … at home, in the bog, wherever we are" (P11/104). It's a tremendous honour ... to be given the role of looking after somebody's children ... their welfare ... and their education" (P6/32).

They showed respect and cultivated the art of presence, "I feel whether it's two months or two years or four years that they spend in your care, they are precious years, they cannot be made up again so ... you give them the best opportunity you possibly can" (P9/130); I stay in the moment there [with a difficult situation] ... when I get away, I just sit and journal (P10/162).

They are involved in creative thinking; engaged in phronesis (P12/48) and have a central plan for the Arts (P12/92). P5 is expansive and thinks 'outside the box'; "principals have a moral duty ... [to ensure] that good practice is disseminated and shared [in the system]" (P5/72). P1 advocates creativity also, "you just ... have to think outside those very small boxes" (P1/48).

They practise deep listening, "it demands ... a huge amount of listening … I would listen to the parents and listen to their opinions" (P7/114). They love the frontiers; "overload is just a phenomenon … project based learning is the key answer … [I'm] ready enough to begin that process of pushing the boundaries out and taking a new fresh approach [to timetabling subjects]" (P5/140). They experience leadership as a true adventure of growth; we grew organically, we grew together (P6/60), I've had to re-invent myself every five or six years" (P6/ 48)

I contend that on the evidence gathered for this study Ireland's primary school principals have acquitted themselves well in relation to Coolahan's challenge two decades ago. I conclude further that as moral, transformational, visionary and creative leaders our cast recreate Starratt's social drama, infusing it with passion and meaning. They are O'Donohue's leaders.

5.3 Chapter Summary

Some months ago I named a presentation to a group of primary principals, *"Un gran laberintino de encrucijadas multiples* (A giant labyrinth of intersecting crosswords) Lorca (1930).

The text of this chapter discussing as it does exhilarating and empowering leadership, vision and optimism, passion and pride on the one hand and on the other hand frustrations and bureaucracy, stress and health and between these a focus on solutions gives us a vivid sense of the intersecting crossroads in the life of the Irish primary school principal. Discussed also in the chapter are the life histories of our cast of twelve principals with a wide range of experiences acquired in five different decades in a variety of schools and school settings. Away from the freneticism of the crossroads one detects a serenity among a cast of leading professionals exercising a leadership foretold in China almost three thousand years ago:

Bearing, yet not possessing
Working, yet not taking credit
Leading, yet not dominating
This is the Primal Virtue

Lao-Tzu (Burns, 1978:240)

Chapter 6 - Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I intend to reflect on my experience carrying out this study. Having commented on the limitations of the study I will proceed to draw conclusions. Based on the presentation of findings outlined in Chapter 4, the discussion of findings in Chapter 5 and the conclusions I have drawn, I will make recommendations for policy makers and for the research community. My concluding remarks will evoke the theme ‘servants at the frontier’.

6.2 Comment

Several central messages arising from this research are extremely positive and outweigh the *lacunae,* the mistakes and the unfulfilled dreams. Highly capable and productive principals recounted where their great priorities lay in carrying out the role of principal in 21st century Irish primary schools. They have developed and are working in cultures where their priorities include the enhancement of the lives and the education of children through the lenses of values and moral purpose. They perform their duties with passion and have great pride in their schools. They aspire to create other leaders through empowerment and enablement. The commitment and contribution of such principals, working at the frontier is uplifting and worthy of fostering into the future, however there are many areas where support for principals is lacking and where improvements in several aspects of the system are required so that inspiring and high achieving educational leaders will continue to come forward, that they will be nurtured and nourished by the system and that they will lead our schools using a combination of best international practice and inherited national tradition.

Principals in this research for the most part represented themselves as highly motivated with a unique sense of professional values and moral responsibility and extraordinary commitment. Their frustrations, failings and future orientation are also evident. The drive to perform would appear to immunise principals against the demands of the job. Sugrue (2009: 367) remarks that "many incumbents, mere mortals do extraordinary work"; McDonald (2008: 36) echoing Donaldson and Lorsch (1982) and Miller and Droge (1986) comments that "individuals partially determine their working conditions such that in striving to achieve job performance at a high level other contextual forces can be treated as of little or of only moderate importance". Vaill (1984: 94) contends that "successful high performing leaders – principals among them - are not afraid of hard work", they invest large amounts of time, feeling and focus into their work. Despite their high levels of motivation, commitment and professionalism principals believe that they work in an environment where frequently there is a dearth of understanding of the challenges they encounter and their solution focused approach to not only maintaining the status quo but to working as dynamic 'servants of the frontier'.

6.3 Limitations of Study

The findings in this study have been discussed in Chapter 5. In drawing conclusions from the research I am cognisant of the limitations of the study. Firstly the sample size was small and different types of school and different regions are not represented proportionately. However the sample did consist of principals from a variety of schools and included principals working in new 'concept' schools. There was more representation from 'founding' principals and from 'administrative' principals, however there is no claim that the sample is representative. Secondly the study was confined to a "situated perspective" (Ribbins and Marland, 1994:6); therefore information was gleaned from the self reporting of twelve principals and was not accompanied by observation of the principals in action or by a framework that set out their accounts against the views of others. While there is no attempt to generalise the outcomes to the whole population of principals nevertheless the themes that emerged resonate with themes in the literature on leadership and on school principalship. I contend that

a deeper investigation of these themes with a wider group of Irish principals would elicit further valuable information on the exhilaration and uncertainty of modern principalship. The experience as a novice researcher was invaluable, many lessons were learned at each stage of the process which will enable me to use time more efficiently if conducting a similar exercise in the future. Having caught a glimpse from the fringes of the life and professional career history approach to the study of principalship I am minded to pursue this illuminating approach at another time.

6.4 Conclusions

Having presented and discussed the findings I will draw twelve conclusions; these will be outlined in this section.

6.4.1 Role of Principal

A conclusion arising from the evidence in this study is that it is time for all interested stakeholders to engage in a constructive review of the role of the primary principal in the Irish system in the light of developments in the role of principal in the last fifteen years and likely future developments.

6.4.2 Professional Development

This study concludes that there are a number of avenues through which principals can access professional development. It concludes further that there needs to be more coherence in the way professional development is made available for principals and for others involved at various levels in school leadership.

6.4.3 Using Experience of Principals

Finding a cohort of very experienced principals, many with highly developed leadership skills and very relevant academic and professional qualifications leads

to a conclusion that the expertise needed to provide first class professional development for school leaders and emerging school leaders may be accessed within the system, much of it within the existing cohort of principals and those who will retire from principalship soon.

6.4.4 Planning in the Context of Establishing a School

Many ‘founding’ principals of new schools worked initially in circumstances that were less than adequate for the children and the adults involved. I conclude that an absence of strategic planning involving the DES, local authorities and others led to such shortcomings.

6.4.5 Appointment of Principals

Evidence in this study leads to a conclusion that there is inadequate preparation time between the appointment of a principal in the Irish system and the principal taking up the position. This is particularly the case in circumstances where new schools are being established; it applies to a lesser degree in all schools.

6.4.6 Tenure of Principals

The tenure in office of Irish primary principals is becoming a matter of some concern; it is desirable that it be reviewed.

6.4.7 Boards of Management

Notwithstanding the success of many boards of management, there are issues concerning the establishment of boards for newly established schools and the operation of some boards in other schools. I conclude therefore that the operation of boards of management needs to be reviewed.

6.4.8 DEIS Categorisation

The study concludes that there is unease in the system with regard to the categorisation and non categorisation of some schools as DEIS schools. This matter requires attention.

6.4.9 Moratorium on Posts of Responsibility

The evidence in this study concludes that the moratorium on posts of responsibility on the one hand and the need to develop home school relations in many schools on the other hand has placed strains on schools and on principals.

6.4.10 Bureaucracy

Bureaucracy in government departments and agencies has led to increased frustration and stress among principals. This study concludes that more efficient methods of transferring worthwhile information from schools to departments needs to be considered.

6.4.11 Experience Gained on Secondment

There is evidence in this study suggesting that teachers who spent time on secondment to DES support services developed a broad range of skills while on secondment that they used subsequently in their principalships. Further research might explore how the system can benefit from a large cohort of seconded teachers taking up positions in schools.

6.4.12 Code of Professional Conduct

There is evidence in this study that a significant lack of courtesy and respect on the part of candidates who did not secure principalships caused significant stress

to some newly appointed principals and impeded them in the optimum discharge of their duties. I conclude that such behaviour may be in breach of The Code of Professional Conduct issued by the Teaching Council (The Teaching Council, 2012).

6.5 Recommendations

Fourteen recommendations follow from the conclusions in this research.

6.5.1 Review of Role

This recommendation refers to all aspects of the role of principal. It is fifteen years since the Report of the Working Group on the Role of Primary School Principal was published. While there have been valuable reports in the meantime there has not been a report emanating from discussions involving the various interested parties. I recommend that a group be convened by the Minister for Education and Skills representing all the partners in education and those with competence in the fields of leadership in education and continuing professional development and that such a group be asked to examine the role, duties, responsibilities and rights of the primary school principal in Ireland and to make costed and prioritised recommendations. The Working Group should comprise of representatives of the Minister of Education and Skills, the DES, the Department of Finance, the IPPN, the INTO, Patron Bodies, National Parents' Council (Primary), Education Centres, the PDST, the Teaching Council, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and Colleges of Education. The group should include serving principals.

Subsequent recommendations could be considered by the Working Group described above, however they will be considered in this study as standalone recommendations.

6.5.2 Consultation on the concept of a National Centre for Leadership in Education

This recommendation refers to CPD for school leaders. The need for professional development for aspiring and practising principals and also for others involved in school leadership has been highlighted throughout this study. I recommend that the DES consult widely on the notion of a National Centre for Leadership in Education and should listen carefully to contributions from existing providers of CPD to school leaders. The purpose of a National Centre were it to be a preferred option would be to deliver a planned, coherent, strategic programme of CPD on school leadership, at both primary and post-primary levels to cater for teachers who aspire to hold leadership roles in schools, for teachers who are working as special duties assistants and assistant principals, for deputy principals and for practising principals. In the case of practising principals consideration should be given to the career stages of principals, targeting specific support for those at stages of initiation, development, autonomy, and advancement. A National Centre should be asked to take cognisance of the programmes of CPD that are in operation in the system at present and should ensure that in a new integrated programme there will not be duplication of provision.

A National Centre should receive adequate funding and should be separate from the DES. Organisations already making a meaningful contribution to CPD for school leaders should play a central role in a National Centre were it to be established. These would include the DES, the PDST, Education Centres, the IPPN, the NAPD, the Teaching Council, Teachers' Unions, School Management bodies, the NCCA and third level institutions with experience of leadership in education programmes. A variety of CPD models should be explored including traditional, online and blended learning models. Elements of the Misneach programme such as two/three day CPD events should be retained. While leadership, management, administration and communications modules should continue to be central to programmes, mentoring and coaching particularly of newly appointed principals should be accorded a status of high importance.

6.5.3 Professional Development

This recommendation refers to CPD for school leaders. In the event of a National Centre for Leadership in Education not being established and taking into consideration that the need for professional development for aspiring and practising principals and also for others involved in school leadership has been highlighted throughout this study I make an alternative recommendation. I recommend that a forum including key interested parties be convened by the DES for the purpose of planning a coherent, strategic programme of CPD on school leadership to cater for all the groups described in 6.5.2. The forum should be asked to take cognisance of the programmes of CPD that are in operation in the system at present and should ensure that in a new integrated programme there will not be duplication of provision. It is desirable that the forum has a brief for both primary and post primary school leaders.

The forum should include representatives of all the organisations named in 6.5.2. As in 6.5.2 a variety of CPD models should be explored including traditional, online and blended learning models. An outcome of this review of CPD provision may be that contributing organisations be designated to take responsibility for aspects of an overall programme that would be coordinated in a coherent, strategic and creative manner by one individual or organisation that would have appropriate authority to ensure a consistent high standard of provision.

6.5.4 Arrangements for New Schools

When new ‘start-up’ schools are created it is usually with the intention of serving a ‘new’ or expanding community. A myriad of tasks need to be carried out before the school enrols pupils for the first time at the beginning of a school year. I recommend that a principal is appointed and assumes the position of principal six months in advance of the opening of the school. I recommend further that an embryonic board of management is put in place at the same time and that a full board is constituted within one month of the opening of the school. It is desirable

that the patron body and the DES work closely with the principals to ensure that adequate furnished accommodation is in place at the beginning of the school year. If it is necessary to have temporary accommodation for a period such accommodation should be of a high standard. Plans for a modern new school should be advanced without delay.

6.5.5 Appointment of Principals

It is desirable that there should be a seamless continuity in school leadership, management and administration when a school needs to appoint a new principal. I recommend that in all cases, with the exception of emergencies, procedures should be put in place to ensure that the incoming principal will be appointed as principal designate and will work alongside the outgoing principal for a period of one month.

6.5.6 Board of Management Structure

A school's board of management is in existence for the purpose of managing the school at a macro level. The current situation has been in place with some modifications since the replacement of the single manager almost forty years ago. I recommend that the board of management structure be reviewed taking into account its effectiveness in different types of school and the needs of school in the 21st century.

6.5.7 DEIS Categorisation

Schools were designated as DEIS schools on the basis of need as determined by criteria. Since the initial designation there have been significant changes in population in areas all over Ireland. I recommend that a comprehensive review of DEIS status be carried out to take account of current needs and that a flexible system of designating schools be introduced.

6.5.8 Educating Parents

The HSCL programme has made a significant contribution to developing home school relations since it was established in 1990. I recommend that in the interests of 'educating parents' to enable them to play a full role in supporting their children's education and in the context of the reduction of home school coordinators in recent years the number of home school coordinator posts be reviewed in conjunction with a general review of DEIS.

6.5.9 Gathering Statistics

Policy makers require accurate and up to date statistics in order to make the best decisions possible. Accurate statistics are required from schools by many sections in the DES and by sections in some other departments. I recommend that the DES consult with the partners in education and design a template for the purpose of gathering statistical information from schools. Requests for statistics should be logical. Sophisticated user friendly technologies should be used in collecting data from schools. Appropriate training should be provided to school secretaries to enable them to respond to requests for data without the principal having to micromanage responses.

6.5.10 Research after Secondment

Several hundred primary teachers have been on secondment from their schools to positions in the education system in the last fifteen years. I recommend that an investigation be undertaken to determine (a) where teachers go after a period on secondment, (b) what is their experience when they return to the school from which they were seconded, (c) what is their experience when they take up a position in a school other than the school from which they were seconded and (d) what is their experience when they are appointed as principal following a period on secondment.

6.5.11 Survey of Retired Principals

The vast majority of those who vacate the position of principal in the Irish system do so in the context of retirement mostly aged between fifty-five and sixty with a minority remaining beyond sixty, they must retire at sixty-five. I recommend that a sample of retired principals be surveyed in order to determine how they spent their time in the first ten years after retiring. The survey might also determine if retired principals would be interested in sharing their expertise in the context of education or CPD programmes for those involved in school leadership.

6.5.12 Reverse Moratorium on Posts of Responsibility

Schools have not been permitted to fill vacant posts of responsibility below the level of deputy principal since 2009. I recommend that this decision be reversed and that schools be permitted to recruit and appoint assistant principals and special duties assistants to levels existing before 2009.

6.5.13 School / Care Facility Concept

A new model of school and care facility opened in Ireland in 2006; it was intended that further facilities of this nature would follow. I recommend that a review of the success of this school and facility be undertaken in the context of international practice and that a decision be made about the future of such a facility in Ireland.

6.5.14 Adherence to a Code of Professional Conduct

Teachers demand high standards of respect from their pupils. In a school organisation it is desirable that respect be shown at all levels of the organisation, in the case of adults professional responsibilities would demand a high standard of respect. I recommend that the Teaching Council's Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers is included in all initial teacher education programmes, in

all programmes for aspiring principals, in all leadership programmes and in other CPD programmes for teachers as far as possible.

6.6 Concluding Remarks

In this thesis I have attempted to investigate the leadership role of the primary school principal in Ireland in the company of twelve principals. With regard to the formation of the principal I have traced journeys from childhood to the principal's office. I have probed what the leadership role means for these principals, what inspires them in the role and what sustains them in their work. Within the cohort of principals I found some evidence of what Collins (2001) calls Level 5 leaders; highly capable individuals, contributing team members, competent managers, effective leaders and executives all exhibiting "professional will and personal humility" (36). While the principals demonstrated high levels of ambition, "their ambition [was] first and foremost for the institution [school], not for themselves" (21).

For the most part leadership was constituted for the principals in this study by the weaving of a tapestry which is achieved in the context of pursuing excellence through five themes that emerged in the investigation. They pursue excellence through lenses such as values, moral purpose, passion and pride. They enable and empower generations of children assisted by cohorts of adults, staffs and partners in education, whom they also empower. They build communities through relationships and practical action. Sometimes they fail and try again, sometimes they struggle at the frontier and need encouragement to go on. Their varied experiences have had the effect of inspiring the principals and sustaining them as they deal with multiple frustrations and unrelenting bureaucracy in challenging and onerous roles. Not content with the status quo, echoing Obama (2007:203) "better isn't good enough" the principals were involved in a process of reproducing, revitalising and improving their organisations, every day cognisant of Starratt's (1993a:147) contention that "those institutions exist only in an through our collective action". Furthermore I contend that the furtherance of the

Lincolnian emphasis on “repeating and renewing visions” (Phillips, 1992:126), regenerating values, rejuvenating processes and revitalising their organisations leads to the emergence of a variety of echelons of expertise within staffs, to the consolidation of authentic partnership with parents, to the cultivation of sustainable and synergistic relationships with a wider community and more importantly to the embedding of a culture where pupils learn, grow and develop “holding their heads at the angle you would like them to have” (P2/144).

My penultimate observation is that it was a privilege to have the opportunity to engage in a professional dialogue with a group of people exhibiting such strong professional values and demonstrating such high levels of moral, transformational and visionary leadership. One of that group is realistic though optimistic about the future;

> *I think that it’s not going to be easy but I think you will still have the same quality and calibre of person applying for it [principalship] because you still have those people out there who are dedicated to what they do and who have a vision and who have an energy and who want to change, even if it is only a small little corner of the universe that they can have a positive effect on it* (P1/62).

My final thought when referring to the general findings of this research is to repeat sentiments I have used in speeches to primary principals, most recently in August 2014, with some residual acknowledgement to Paine and Obama, (2009b). “I believe that future generations will attest that when we (current generation of principals) were tested we did not falter but with eyes fixed firmly on the horizon, (where O’Donohue’s, 2007:166 frontier awaits us) we carried forth that great gift of education, inherited from our selfless forebears, we merged it seamlessly and professionally with the methodologies and technologies of our time and we delivered it to future generations” (McHugh, 2014).

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