School Leadership: An Examination of the Role of the Irish Primary School Principal in a period of Change and Rationalisation

being a thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT:

This thesis is set against a backdrop of major rationalisation in primary education in the Republic of Ireland which has heralded unprecedented change in the working lives of primary school principals.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the role of the primary principal, framed as it currently is in a historical context that, arguably, limits its potential, is becoming an unattractive one due to sustained societal, curricular and educational expectations. Principals may be coping with change, but, it is clearly not managed change and increasingly their frustrations at not being able to achieve professional self-actualisation in their careers are becoming evident.

Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to gather evidence in support of better working conditions for the Irish primary principal and, it remains the opinion of the researcher that, unless proper training and supports are offered, the latent leadership potential within our schools will remain untapped. This would be unfortunate as leadership may well be the single most important element in school effectiveness in the future.

In this thesis, which adopts a quantitative approach with supporting qualitative and statistical triangulation, the perceptions of the principals with regard to some of the core skills and competencies of their work are analysed.

In particular emphasis is placed on their skill levels, the source of these skills and their training needs. Arguments are subsequently developed in support of the need for planned systematic support for all primary principals. This would, ideally, replace the current ad hoc arrangements, which put all of the responsibility on individual principals in an educational environment where they are seen as ‘first amongst equals’ and where the autonomy of the individual teacher is traditionally guarded.
The thesis is divided into six chapters.

Chapter one gives a brief overview of the Irish primary school system and looks at the historical development of the role of the primary principal which still underpins their working lives.

In Chapter two relevant literature is reviewed which explores aspects of leadership theory with the intention of facilitating the framing of any emergent theory within a relevant theoretical context and supporting the broad hypotheses of the research.

Chapter three outlines the methodology involved in this research and explains the rationale behind the particular research approach in this thesis, i.e. quantitative analysis supported by qualitative and statistical triangulation methods.

Chapter four presents the principal findings of the quantitative research which were analysed using SPSS and these results are discussed in the context of the literature as well as emerging theory in Chapter five of the thesis. In addition results are triangulated using qualitative follow-up group interviews and statistical reporting procedures.

In Chapter six, which is the concluding chapter of the thesis, results are discussed in the context of optimum working conditions for the primary principal and suggestions are offered as to how the leadership potential of the current cohort of primary principals might be harnessed for the benefit of their schools.
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Chapter 1.

Introduction:

1.1 Introduction:

The purpose of this thesis is to examine leadership in the Irish primary school. In it leadership is defined, examined in terms of its effectiveness and a way forward, that will embrace leadership at all levels within existing structures, is outlined. Notwithstanding the above, this thesis acknowledges the complexity of the education system at primary level, where:

...schools operate in many different contexts, location, school sector, size, demographic trends, trusteeship, staff-profile, designated status, pupil background, tradition, ethos and characteristic spirit are but a number of criteria that may lead to the unique circumstances of a particular school. The particular circumstance of each school creates its own individual challenges and leaders in schools are expected to respond to the challenges they face.

In West Cork (See map in Appendix I) where this research was conducted, all of the above may be observed, and within the 123 schools included in the research many differences are apparent, though a common curriculum, equal access to resources and similar staffing schedules are a common thread. All of these schools (See Appendix II) could be classed as progressive rather than traditional in terms of their teaching practices. They, generally, have a major focus on process, integrate learning, use child-centered active and exploratory methodologies, are aware of the need to build communities of learning and use assessment as a means to improve on and re-direct learning for the benefit of pupils. These schools are considered to be efficient learning institutions within the Irish educational context where a sea-change has occurred in terms of the curriculum

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in the past twenty five years. A new curriculum was introduced to Irish schools in 1971 and this has been revisited and revised in recent times, culminating in a revised curriculum which was launched in 1999 and accompanied by a comprehensive in-service programme for all primary teachers, which is on-going. Change has become the order of the day, new subjects have been introduced to the point where the law of diminishing returns may have set in and phrases like, 'curriculum overload' and 'teacher burn-out', have become part of the language of education.

At the moment, schools, as has already been indicated, are involved in a comprehensive programme of national in-service in order that they become fully conversant with the revised curriculum for schools. This work is underpinned by the Education Act of 1998 which makes provision for all aspects of the work of schools.

It is the opinion of this author, that schools have achieved high levels of efficiency, perhaps optimum levels in terms of teaching and learning, but in order to progress further, new models, structures and systems of school governance may need to be looked at. At this point in time, the role of the principal in the Irish primary school is a much expanded one and the emergence of lobby groups such as the IPPN \(^2\) are a result of the disquiet which is felt by principals at the ever expanding boundaries of their job.

In support of that position, the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) general secretary, John Carr, stated in the Irish Examiner \(^3\) of December 28, 2004 that, "primary school principals are over-burdened, overstretched and overworked" whilst at the same time being, "undervalued, underpaid and under-resourced." \(^4\)

\(^2\) The Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) highlights the myriad of challenges which the principal in primary schools is faced with.
\(^3\) Carr. J. (2004), Irish Examiner, Tuesday, 28.12.2004, p.4
\(^4\) Ibid. p.4
However, before this idea is further explored, it is necessary to look at the development of the Irish primary school system as a means of understanding the current status quo with particular regard to the role of the Irish primary school principal.

1.2 The Irish Primary School System

The Irish primary school system was shaped by particular historical circumstances and developed a unique character. Ireland had a long history of education from Monastic times but in the nineteenth century the English colonial administration which legislated for Ireland, had decided to provide state support for education as a means of socializing the Irish. Their intention was both political and educational and they particularly needed to secure peace in Ireland which had, historically, been a hot-bed of revolution and civil unrest.

It was no surprise, considering their policy of the time of reducing lawlessness by being proactive, when in 1831 the London based parliament of the day, under the guidance of Lord Stanley who was Chief Secretary for Ireland, announced their decision to fund a system of national schools in Ireland. These schools were to be voluntary and under local control. The basis of this system was that the state was prepared to give financial support to local national schools which abided by certain rules and regulations in the interests of society. Implicit in that was recognition that education has a key role to play in the pursuit of national goals.

Thus, locally owned schools were set up with state aid and that management system and

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5 From the 5th to the 10th Century Ireland was renowned throughout Europe as the ‘Island of Saints and Scholars’
the principles that underpinned it are still evident in the school system of today in that communities must provide sites for building schools and contribute to the building costs up to a maximum of twenty per cent.

It was intended that these schools would provide combined secular instruction and separate religious instruction but this notion was not popularly supported by either Catholic or Protestant churches of that time. Emerging as they were from a period of repression, the Catholic church was anxious that their newly won emancipation would extend to education for Catholic children. Cardinal Cullen, who was a powerful figure in Irish politics in the late 19th century spoke of, “Catholic education in Catholic schools for all Catholic youth.” Therefore, from the beginning, the spirit of the 1831 Act was diluted and, by the end of the 19th century, primary schools in Ireland were generally denominational in form, controlled by local clergy and funded by the state. This point of view is supported by Ó Buachalla who stated the following about the Irish education system at the end of the 19th Century:

By the end of the Century, education for the majority of children was received in schools which were parochially organised, denominationally segregated and clerically managed. The state’s role was defined as responding to the needs and demands of educational providers by means of building and teacher grants amounting to the major portion of such costs.

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7 The Penal Laws which restricted the civil rights of Catholics had been the dominant legislation of the late 17th and 18th centuries.
8 Catholic Emancipation Act 1829 had given Catholics the right to vote and sit in Parliament
Hence, one of the main objectives of the National Board of Education, the establishment of non-denominational schools, was not achieved. By the time the Irish State was founded in 1922, a system of denominational education was firmly in place and it still survives, with some modifications. The principal change today would be the reduced role of the clergy and religious orders in the running and managing of schools. The new state, in 1922, did not alter in any significant way the balance of control and ownership of the school system which it inherited, and, concentrated on curricular rather than administrative reform. Inspired by the cultural nationalism of that period the state sought to reinforce the position of the Irish language, history and culture and set up the Department of Education in 1924 with that purpose clearly in mind. This post-independence phase of education lasted from 1922 to 1971 when a new child-centred curriculum was introduced. At that critical stage, the emphasis on transferring a cultural inheritance that previous generations had been denied was drastically altered to embrace the concept of investment in the individual as well as the idea that education was a window to social mobility and equality of opportunity within the island of Ireland, and, on an increasingly international stage. From the late 1960s, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science (DES) had devised a more child-centred curriculum which was introduced in 1971 and which acknowledged that previously:

*Education was ‘curriculum-centred’ rather than ‘child-centred’ and that the teacher’s function, in many cases, was that of a medium through whom knowledge was merely transferred to his pupils*

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11 The National Board of Education was set up in 1831 to set up schools in Ireland and consisted of seven members representing the major religious denominations of the day.

A process of review of the child-centred curriculum was initiated in 1990, which for the first time in Irish history, did not result in a new phase, but in a continuation of the same principles as the preceding period. In that respect, the previous child-centred approach to learning was developed upon and educational continuity was ensured.

Thus, the historical development of education in Ireland has been interesting, to say the least. Since the mid 19th Century, a range of different philosophies have underpinned it, beginning with the colonial outlook of the English administration in Ireland, followed by the nationalistic post-1922 phase of educational policy which was dominated by the needs of the language revival movement which in turn led, from the sixties, to a greater appreciation of the need to make the child central to the learning process. This has led since 1971 to a more participatory and enlightened phase of school development which rightly has placed the child at the centre of the process of teaching and learning.

Changes have also occurred in the management of schools and since 1975, in the spirit of Vatican II which marked a more inclusive Catholicism, lay people have increasingly become involved in the governance of schools. In 1975 the functions of the clerical manager were transferred to a Board of Management comprised of parent and teacher members, appointees of the Bishop, a chairperson appointed by the Patron and the school principal.

The functions of the Board are defined as follows:

*The manager is the person nominated by the patron and recognized as Manager by the Minister (for Education). The Manager is charged with the direct government of the school, the appointment of teachers ... and the*

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14 Ibid. p.30
conducting of necessary correspondence ... The Minister may withdraw recognition from a Manager for failure to observe the rules.

In recent times, with a drop in vocations for the priesthood and a lack of availability of priests, it has become common-place for schools to have lay managers appointed by the Patron. Thus, though schools still conform to traditional structures, it is clear that they are increasingly secular in practice, and what were once local denominational schools are now inclusive parish schools, with the majority having a catholic Patron. In all of these schools thirty minutes per day must be devoted to religious instruction in the Catholic faith. Provision is not made for religious instruction to non-Catholics. However, it is clear that, today, the dominant power in Irish primary education is the Department of Education and Science, especially since the publication of the Education Act.  

It funds schools, devises, implements and monitors the curriculum and the work of teachers, provides initial training and in-service training from a centrally organised bureaucracy, i.e. the Department of Education and Science (DES).

Within the contemporary school system schooling is compulsory from the age of 6 to 16 years and there were in 2001/2002, for example, 3,382 primary schools supported by the DES within which 441,065 pupils received education in language; mathematics; social, environmental and scientific education; arts education; social, personal and health education and physical education, from 23,935 teachers.

The DES provides for full time administrative principals in schools of over 180 pupils but allows administrative time on a pro-rata basis not exceeding one day per fortnight, for principal of schools which do not have 180 pupils enrolled. According to government

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statistics, 17 72% of schools do not have administrative principals and in, for example, a
school with 179 pupils, the principal will be required to teach a class. except for one day
per fortnight when he/she will be allowed administrative time and still be expected to
operate as efficiently as a colleague in a school with 180 pupils who will be fully
administrative without specific teaching duties.

The role of many of these principals is surely an unhappy one and it is obvious that new
structures are required to address this anomaly. Good educational planning for the future
will need to address structures as well as policy and allow leadership to develop in a
supportive environment.

In the Republic of Ireland a watershed was reached with the passing of the Education Act
(1998) which heralded an era of change and partnership. School now plays a key role in
maintaining the knowledge society and has become a crucial element in the achievement
of national goals. Education policy has clearly been re-shaped in recent years to cope
with the knowledge society in a framework of lifelong learning. Change, innovation and
transformation now appear to challenge stability and predictability as the cornerstones of
the education system and between these conflicting paradigms lies the need for
educational leadership and the development of a professional group capable of delivering
it, within a support structure that facilitates this process. Therefore, critical issues around
leadership in education must be addressed and it is the intention of this researcher that
this thesis will contribute to the debate by gathering statistical data outlining the concerns
of existing principals on a range of issues relevant to the topic.

17 Ibid. p.28
The general aims of first level education in Ireland, paraphrased as follows, remain: 18

- To enable the child to live a full life and to realize his/her potential as a unique individual in society;

- To enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society;

- To prepare the child for a continuum of learning.

The revised curriculum of 1999 which reinforced the principles of the 1971 curriculum has to a large extent addressed these principles in an effort to provide support and nurture to children of all ages and/or abilities in spirituality, morality, cognition, emotional development, creativity, art appreciation and social and physical growth. This is a reflection of the aspirations of current Irish society and clearly education is understood by the majority as an essential element in our future success as a nation in a modern consumerist world. The revised curriculum, for example, is designed to nurture the child in all dimensions of his or her life – spiritual, moral, cognitive, emotional, imaginative, aesthetic, social and physical. This curriculum reflects the educational, cultural, social and economic aspirations of Irish society in the twenty first century. It takes account of the changing nature of Irish society and aims to help children adjust to these changes by providing instruction in the key areas of:

- Language
- Mathematics
- Social, environmental and scientific education

• Arts education, including visual arts, music and drama

• Physical education

However, within these existing structures radical change has not yet occurred in terms of the day to day management of these schools, the majority of which are State-aided parish schools. Most national schools remain under the patronage of the local Bishop with the State giving explicit recognition to their denominational character. There are a small number of multi-denominational schools which have been established in response to local parental demand and a number of Gaeilscoileanna are under the separate patronage of Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge. Within this system individual members of the School Boards of Management are volunteers, and not under the control of the Minister for Education and Science or the Patron. The Minister exercises control insofar as he/she can state the conditions by which funding is disbursed. The Chairperson has specific duties in relation to the Board, but in reality, much of the work of school management in the Republic of Ireland falls on the shoulder of the school principal. In an effort to alleviate the burden of responsibility placed on the school principal in recent times, more posts of responsibility have been created in schools. Schools now may have, depending on their size, Principal, Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal and Special Duties Posts. All of these posts, with the exception of the principal, are internal school appointments and in many instances seniority is an important consideration which, arguably, may be a disincentive in terms of appointing the most suitable candidate in leadership roles within schools. In addition, the reality is that the vast majority of principals are teaching in a full-time capacity. This is particularly so in West Cork, where there is a proliferation of small schools, in predominantly rural locations.
As has already been mentioned, only Principals in schools of more than eight teachers do not have full-time teaching duties, and as schools of less than eight teachers are commonplace the majority of principals in primary schools are teaching principals. In the area of West Cork where this research is focused only 12% of principals are administrative, i.e. do not have teaching duties. Non-administrative principals have an allocation of release days\(^{19}\) depending on the number of mainstream teachers in their school. (See page 7) For example, schools with less than three staff members have a twelve day allocation, four or more bring a sixteen day release period and if a school has six or more staff the principal gets a 20 day release for administration. Beyond eight mainstream teachers, school principals become administrative, and no longer have responsibility for teaching a specific class.

Having reviewed the historical perspective of primary education in the Republic of Ireland, it is the specific role of the primary principal, which will be the focus of the next section of this thesis.

### 1.3 The Role of the Principal

It is the duty of every Board of Management to employ a principal teacher along procedural lines agreed by the Patron, the Department of Education and Science the Teachers’ Unions and the Boards themselves.

All candidates for principalships must be qualified teachers, i.e. hold an education degree from a recognized college which includes an Irish language component, be fully probated i.e. have satisfied the DES inspectorate that they are competent, and have a minimum of

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five years teaching experience. No period of training is undertaken by newly appointed principals. No mentor is provided and it is not necessary to have previously held a post of responsibility in a school. Newly appointed principals learn through experience and generally just get on with the job while continuing to teach full-time. The duties of a principal have been set out in the Education Act and include, inter alia, the following: Day to day school management, leadership, working with partners and stakeholders, curriculum development, setting learning objectives and standards, assessment and professional development of colleagues and school communities.

At all times the principal is required to act under the direction of the Board of Management and Section (23) of the Act, for example, imposes a duty on the principal to consult with teachers and other staff in discharging his/her functions whenever practicable.

This is a clear indication that the Act does not envisage autocratic principals in primary schools.

Section (23) of the Act does give the principal “all such powers as are necessary and expedient” but these powers are to be used subject to the policies of the Board of Management and the directives of the Minster for Education and Science of the day.

Section (33) of the Act is quite specific with regard to the Minister who may regulate. “... for the purpose of giving effect to this Act.” However it is clear from the Education Act of 1998 that the role of the principal is a distinct and complex one, and that it is

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21 Ibid. p.44
22 Ibid. p.44
23 Ibid. p.57
viewed as being a catalyst for further change and greater efficiency in education in the Republic of Ireland.

This has been acknowledged by a 1999 report which mentions, "... enormous development in the role of the principal following societal, legislative and educational changes".

In the same report the following acknowledgement if also made:

There is a general agreement and recognition that responsibilities of leadership, management and administration have become more onerous and diverse in recent years. Review, rationalisation, reconceptualisation and refocusing are timely, therefore, if the position (of principal) is to continue to attract high quality candidates and if its occupants are to continue to make a considerable contribution to the quality of teaching and learning in Irish Primary Schools.

There has been a clear development in the role of the Irish Primary school principal's role. Sugrue has categorised this development in three phases.

Phase one: Pre 1971 – Predominantly administrative.
Phase three: 1990's – a growing emphasis on leadership in addition to the tasks of administration and management.

Prior to 1971, the functions of the principal were mainly bureaucratic. This was the era of small schools, clerical authority and the period when the autonomy of the classroom teacher was sacrosanct. Principals of this period were teachers who opened and closed schools, maintained discipline and they were part of a hierarchy of school manager, inspector, principal, assistant teachers in an era when it was best to serve, not question.

The success of a school at this time was measured in terms of pupil performance in the

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25 Ibid. p.85
state administered primary certificate examination and, to that end, standards were maintained using harsh means with little or no regard for individual differences and/or capabilities.

When the new curriculum was introduced to Irish primary schools in 1971, principals were made responsible for staff meetings, school planning and their role began to broaden out and include many new aspects. This was further expanded when Boards of Management were set up in 1976 which included principals and marked a huge shift towards democracy in school management. This policy shift was not welcomed at the time and much opposition was voiced by both clergy and principals alike. According to Sugrue,\textsuperscript{27} "... it was with the greatest of misgivings that managers and principals began to move slowly towards more democratic structures..."

Following the facilitation of Boards of Management principals were asked in the early 1980’s to facilitate Parents’ Associations in their schools which made further demands on their time. In Don Herron’s 1991 paper\textsuperscript{28} undertaken at the request of the Irish National Teacher’s Organisation the evolution of the role of the principal was explained as follows:

\textit{These responsibilities were radically different from the generally bureaucratic nature of the tasks up to this time. The term ‘educational leadership’ or ‘curriculum leadership’ have been used in relation to the administration of schools to highlight this aspect of the principal teacher’s role.}

All of these developments created more work for the principal and in the late 1990’s, A and B posts of responsibility were created in larger schools, in order to share the burden of responsibility and to enhance the middle management structures in them. However.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid. p.13
\textsuperscript{28} Herron, D. (1991), The Role of the Principal – A Review. I.N.T.O. p.28
these posts have arguably, been badly utilized and in many cases may have a bias in favour of seniority above ability in terms of appointments. In fact, it may be argued, that the way in which these extra posts were managed, re-affirmed the perception of the previous era, which saw the principal as having sole responsibility for the running of a school. Gradner (1995) 29 and Copland (2001) 30 argue that the myth of the super principal has grown from this phase and that the way in which middle management structures in schools have been developed only encouraged the role of the principal as 'heroic leader' and did little to ease the increasing administrative burden being placed on principals. Alongside these changes in the administrative structures of schools came social change. Traditional models of authority were being questioned and the division of Church and State became a feature of Irish society. In this secular phase, individuals began to be as important as institutions, and this in time led to a more collaborative approach to leadership in schools, with the notion of the principal as 'first amongst equals' becoming an acceptable one. Around this time, a more collegiate and teacher-centered style of leadership was gradually replacing the excessively narrow, authoritarian and often dehumanising styles which were a feature generated by more classical styles of school administration.

A Report in 1991 by the OECD 31 concluded that:

_A significant expansion of leadership and management training would be required in the near future if schools were to be able to respond to the assumption of greater autonomy ... and greater responsibility for their own affairs._

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The dilemma of principals of the day who were expected to be all things to all people and to manage, administer, teach and lead was well captured by Dimmock 32 in the following quote.

... school leaders experience difficulty is deciding the balance between higher order tasks designed to improve staff, student and school performance (Leadership), routine maintenance of present operations (management) and lower order duties (administration). Restructuring generates increased expectations for school leadership, while at the same time demanding more work of a maintenance and lower order nature.

A survey conducted by Mercator Market Research on behalf of the Irish Primary Principals' Network in 2000 33 found inter alia that 67% of teachers do not wish to apply for the position of principal and only 5% indicated that they might do so at a future date. The trend towards a decrease in the number of applicants has been clear since 1996 when a ratio of 5.4 : 1 pertained. This was 4.5 : 1 in 1998 and reached on all-time low of 3.9:1 in 2000.

Some of the reasons given in this survey were as follows.

- Salary and conditions
- Lack of Role Recognition
- Lack of professional development / support.
- Teaching principalships
- Stress
- Selection procedures

Sugrue cites Moller 34 as evidence that a similar situation exists internationally. In Norway for example, it is typical to have less than three applicants per vacancy and

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according to Sherman et al (2000) in Nova Scotia teachers perceive the job as "too stressful" and were discouraged from applying due to "inequitable hiring practices" and the "amount of time required in the job."

Clearly, worrying times lie ahead and the role of the principal needs to be redefined in face of relentless change. The caution urged by Fullan might well be heeded and on the tendency to 'bury our heads in the sand' he says.

... it would be naïve to hope that the overall pace of change will noticeably decrease. It would be a sure-fire recipe for unsustainability to think, "if only we can get through the next three years of this particular reform, we will be okay".

Frustration and burnout are the most likely outcomes of this mindset ... We can begin by not trying to resist the irresistible, which is relentless change ...

Consequently, there is a necessity to provide clearer definitions and structures within which school principals may operate more effectively. Schools require, as Feheney suggests, leaders with "the ability to articulate vision, to generate commitment and enthusiasm around values, to form culture and to lead change". It is the purpose of this thesis to add to the leadership debate in Irish Primary Schools and to suggest a model of selection, training and practice that would be of benefit to all current and future educational stakeholders.

This is a difficult task as education is a growing and living organism, within which efficiency, "...as a simplistic and limited vision of rationality and science which assumes that one can play down to the last detail", does not exist.

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Greenfield supports this point of view and argues that, 

"...a management science focused on control in organizations brings with it unfortunate consequences in education."

In this thesis, the notion that educational leadership needs to be conceptualised in order to be meaningful, will underpin all that is written. Because of this, and the need to redefine the role of the principal in a changed environment, it has become a matter of expediency to do research of this nature.

The Report of the National Education Convention makes the following points.

Research has identified a strong relationship between positive school leadership and institutional effectiveness, and describes the successful principal as providing skilled instructional leadership for the staff, creating a supportive school climate, with particular emphasis on the curriculum and teaching and directed towards maximizing academic learning, having clear goals and expectations of staff and students, establishing good systems for monitoring student performance and achievement, promoting on-going staff development and in-service, and encouraging strong parental involvement and identification with, and support of school goals.

This myriad of tasks and expectations needs some ordering if principals are to get to grips with their role which encompasses leadership, management and administration.

This thesis is primarily concerned with the leadership aspect of the principal's role and underpinned by a firm belief that a new blend of these roles must inform future debate on school leadership.

Stoll and Fink stated the following which succinctly captures the fundamental issue which this thesis seeks to address, i.e. the leadership versus management debate

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...the balance between leadership and management needs to be realigned because, as we become more deeply embedded in the global economy, management is being given pre-eminence when in fact leadership is being demanded.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction:

In order that this study will not be assessed in a vacuum it is proposed to review the available literature in the field of leadership. Some of this will be literature with a general organizational focus, but it will be relevant, in that much of the theory on leadership will be applicable to an educational setting, though there are differences in that education is process not product driven, unlike business, which is driven by a desire to make profit.

However, schools like businesses function as organizations. This review will, in turn, form the foundation on which the research will be built and will provide the reader with a comprehensive overview of relevant previous research.

In the context of this research topic, which examines the role of leadership in the Irish primary school, it is important to relate the research to available literature in a wider context. As much of the literature has emerged since the eighties this period will be the particular focus of the review, though a number of seminal writers form earlier decades will also be included.

In the period under review, little has been written with a completely Irish perspective and generally the focus will be on literature from the U.S. and from Britain. It is also arguable that, since the Irish educational experience generally lags behind its British or
American counterparts by a generation, this is a valid approach. In actual fact, the leadership issue is a relatively new one in an Irish context, while it has been the subject of much research and debate worldwide over a longer period of time.

Therefore, it is intended to reference this material so that readers can find the original documents cited, if required and may, subsequently, be able to evaluate the quality of the research in a particular context. This literature review will also help in distinguishing between fact and fiction, inform the research process, assist in making reasonable judgments based on emerging research findings and in helping to support the principal arguments of the thesis in a coherent and logical manner. The literature review undertaken will be included in Chapter 2 of this thesis and will be referred to in subsequent chapters, particularly whilst assessing and analyzing data and presenting findings.

2.2 Leadership as a new priority:

Schools are no longer self contained institutions where outsiders come in only when they are invited. Instead, they have become centres of a vast network of partners and stakeholders. Schools now have porous boundaries and as Michael Fullan \(^2\) of Toronto has noted, “out there” is now “in here” and, these relentless pressures have intensified the workload of principals. Not surprisingly, the level of interest in vacant principal positions had decreased (See page 16) and existing principals are calling for an improvement in their lot. Included in that call for an improvement in the principals’ job description, is a

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call for greater leadership, and particularly, a call for a change in the quality of and support for school leadership.

Leadership is a concept in our society on which much seems to turn and this is increasingly so in the sphere of education. Yet, structures which support the autonomy of the teacher as a professional do much to limit the emergence of leadership that matters in Irish primary schools.

In fact, it may be argued that the tradition of good teachers becoming principals is a detrimental factor in the new search for leadership in the Irish primary school. This is symptomatic of a general mindset which does not consider the particular aspects of management, leadership and administration as any more than an “add-on” to the basic teaching role that most principals will have. In truth, the view of the principal as a teacher with additional duties has a strong historical basis in Irish society and as the Irish educational context evolved historically the issue of the changing role of the principal was never fully addressed. Consequently, there is no clarity around the essential knowledge base and/or the skills required to be an effective school principal. Nor is there a real acceptance that leadership is vital to the success of school reform or that it is even a necessary ingredient in creating and sustaining conditions that will enable all teachers and students reach the highest attainable learning standards. This anomaly has become a critical issue in the fast changing current phase of educational restructuring and cannot be postponed indefinitely. The traditional view of the Irish primary principal is, arguably at least, no longer enough to manage change in education. Unless more clarity is sought and the current context is evaluated, in terms of the crucial role of the school principal going forward, educational momentum may be restricted in the future. In order to
address this issue it is proposed to examine the traditional view of the role of the primary principal with a view to understanding the current impasse.

2.3 The traditional view of the principal:

The traditional view of the principal was as a head teacher and that perception of the historical hedge-school master as man of learning which was captured by Dowling in the following quote.

... his social standing among the people whose children he taught was remarkably high, he was one of themselves but different in the respect that he was a man of some learning.

This tradition has remained and according to Duffy

Present day Irish teachers are heirs to a distinguished tradition of professional dedication and service, and are generally held in high regard by their communities.... Teaching has traditionally attracted students with a good academic record who have tended to make teaching their sole career in life.

A good teacher or schoolmaster, "leaves the print of his teeth on a parish for three generations" according to Mc Mahon when writing about the Irish school system of the 1980s, a time when small rural schools with a local Master. i.e. a principal who usually spent all of his working life in a community to which he became a central figure.

However, at all times in the literature it appears that the teaching aspect of the job of being principal has been paramount.

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Official documents of the D.E.S. in 1973 had the following to say on the stance of the DES on the teaching aspect of the principal’s role:

... in addition to teaching duties which may vary according to the size of the school and which may be determined by the minister either generally or in relation to any particular school, but from which the teacher can, in no case be completely relieved ...

Therefore, even the administrative principal in an Irish context is viewed as being a teacher first and foremost, and traditionally in Ireland, principals are promoted on the basis of having been good teachers, in the first place.

However, on promotion they are instantly seen as a ‘buffer zone’ with regard to DES inspectors, parents and educational partners and expected to allow teachers remain as an anonymous and autonomous as possible.

This notion was examined by Clancy who asserted that, in relation to parents, the principal was allowed to engage in liaison with them only when it did not encroach on teacher autonomy.

This results in many cases with principals working to unite schools by exerting a philosophy with regard to school related tasks and keeping a discreet distance from the teacher’s zone of influence, which is, the classroom.

Therefore, from a historical perspective, the principal, viewed as a colleague with extra responsibilities, is in a poor position from which to exercise leadership and new structures which challenge these traditional and professionally limiting points of view.

need to be, at the very least, examined. At this point in time the autonomy of the teacher


certainty inhibits the professional development of the principal as leader and this is magnified by the cellular structure of our schools which denies teachers opportunities for real professional interaction. It also inhibits teachers in getting an overview of the school, and is generally a deterrent to professional interaction and collegiality, which may need to become the cornerstone of education in the future. Leadership for the future will, arguably at least, need to be viewed as a systematic characteristic of schools and professionals must expect to be charged with responsibility in return for the autonomy they have been traditionally afforded by the system. Managing the educational programme and the general administration of a school is now a complicated task involving, *inter alia*, the following:

- Managing and co-ordinating the educational, administrative and financial affairs of the school.
- Developing approaches to management and policy within the constraints of DES policy and the constraints of the day.
- Networking with school and wider community interests.
- Identification of present and future staff and pupil needs.
- Implementation of assessment procedures.
- Maintenance and development of school infrastructural needs.
- School promotion.
- Enforcement of school discipline policy.
- Representing the school at relevant events and meetings.
- Recruitment and management of school staff.
- Teaching duties
Based on the myriad of tasks that are currently the lot of the school principal and the range of personal attributes necessary to be effective in that role, which may include good inter-personal skills, team-work, leadership, analytical skills, ability to absorb pressure and attention to detail, it is, arguably, naïve to expect that the traditional view of the principal as a teacher with minor additional duties will suffice in the future changed educational context.

2.4 Leadership as an organizational quality:

If this change of emphasis, with leadership viewed as a quality of schools not necessarily confined to principals, were to occur, then a new concept of school would emerge, which would allow the present difficulty which sees structures to some extent impeding development, be surmounted.

This is not a new perspective on leadership and Barnard 49 and Thompson 50 discuss the concept of leadership through an organization and lay claim to its existence at all levels in every hierarchy.

Tannenbaum’s 51 work showed that organisations have different levels of leadership and that this totality of leadership can impact positively on the overall efficiency of any organization, if structures allow that to happen.

Charles Handy 52 speaks of “Communities of individuals, not arrays of human resources” and says that, “stealing people’s responsibilities is wrong because it

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ultimately deskills them" 53. He also emphasis the notion of, "influence not authority" 54 and says that a reputation for making things happen, is more important than a traditional title, in any organisation.

Following the line of thought, introduced by Handy, and applying that mindset to schools is not an easy task as leadership of a community of individuals, who themselves are given opportunity for leadership, is difficult. It will be difficult to earn their respect or to be humble enough to admit to being wrong on occasions because, ultimately, one who has no followers cannot be an effective leader. Education is currently living with these paradoxes and the focus is on roles, in many cases, with little emphasis on getting the work done. Whatever the reason, our continued habit of linking leadership to positions and structures is, arguably, an inability to fully understand the impact of organizational change. Schools have paid lip-service to delegation as a tool for empowering colleagues but this is not enough and Pinchot 55 says the following about delegation within a traditional hierarchy:

In a hierarchy, delegation is the primary tool for creating opportunities for more leaders. The subordinate leaders accept the scope of their command and use leadership to accomplish tasks given to them. If delegation is the norm, each leader can create subordinate leaders. Given the rules of bureaucracy, subordinate leaders have limited scope for big-picture or cross-functional thinking. As a result, the people at the top have too much to do, and everyone else is waiting for orders.

However limited the reality of delegation is, it is eminently more realistic than the notion of a principal who is all-knowing and an expert in all aspects of school life, with an ability to manage, administer and lead that is almost superhuman.

53 Ibid. p.5
54 Ibid. p.6
55 Ibid. pp.26-27
This reality is further complicated by the different constructions of leadership that exist and it is probable that, in some schools, the interpretations of the leadership role, values, tensions and dilemmas are interpreted differently by some or all educational stakeholders. Yet Sarason suggests that principals may be perceiving more limitations in their role than is warranted and this may be due to the fact that as teachers they have little opportunity to learn about the role and on assuming it, tend to play safe in all situations of conflict. According to Sarason, they either, "assert authority or withdraw from the fray" and may in fact give the system more respect than it deserves. or the, "individuals conception of the system serves as a basis for inaction and rigidity. or as a convenient target onto which one can direct blame for most anything." 

There may in fact be a tendency from principals to anticipate opposition from the system and, in doing so, they may see this perceived threat, whether real or imaginary, as an obstacle to innovation.

First the knowledge on the part of the principal that what he or she wants to do may and will encounter frustrating obstacles serves as a justification for staying near the lower limits of the scope of the role. Second, the principal's actual knowledge of the characteristics of the system is frequently incomplete and partly to the degree that his or her conception or picture of what the system will permit or tolerate leads the principal to a passive rather than an active role. Third, and perhaps most important, the range in practices among principals within the same system is sufficiently great as to suggest that the system permits and tolerates passivity and activity, conformity and boldness, dullness and excitement, in-competency and competency.
Therefore, to some extent the principal can, if he/she wishes, take consolation in the fact that the system is not perfect and must get its act together before they can do their jobs efficiently.

Patterson et al.\textsuperscript{60} identify the “If-only” syndrome and conclude that attitudes such as this only create dependency and according to Fullan.\textsuperscript{61} “Transcending if-only thinking is one of the ways of changing the system that contains us because we take other actions that begin to change the immediate context in which we work”.

Hesselbein\textsuperscript{62} adds to this argument by identifying, “...not taking charge of one’s own learning and development” as a barrier to effective leadership and suggesting that principals cannot afford to be passive or unconfrontational if they are to be successful. They must try always to provide alternatives to the realities that confront them in their work and articulate a vision for their schools. Vision shapes everything in schools and, is arguably, the most powerful tool for teaching. However, it remains a difficult task for the individual to define what his/her school wants to be and to get others to commit to shared values and common beliefs and expectations. It is much easier for a principal to perform as a teacher with extra responsibilities than to build vision which will guarantee continued high performance over a long period of time because, ultimately, no leader can survive without understanding and shaping the work of his/her organisation.


This under-responsibility has been described as leading to, "feelings of disempowerment and vulnerability and subsequent failure to solve the problem". The result is ineffective leadership, at a time when an injection of vision and leadership is needed in our schools, in order that advances in curricular areas can be supported and maintained by structural reform.

Increasingly in education at primary level, the principal is becoming a catalyst for change and is, arguably, ideally placed to mediate between the day-to-day problems of schools and the long-term vision of the DES which currently are not in harmony, or so it would appear.

The obvious solution to that impasse is to acknowledge the importance of the role of the principal and "clarify the power and nature of the principal's role, and invest in developing the capacity of principals ...". It is not enough to increase their workload and responsibilities because this simply leads to job dissatisfaction and inevitable stress. In the Republic of Ireland, we are currently at a crossroads of leadership development and some meaningful initiatives are urgently required to ensure that good people take up the mantle of leadership in our schools. This reality is well represented in the following quote from Fullan:

*Leadership, as I have said, is crucial to large-scale, sustainable reform. It cuts across all pieces of the change puzzle. It represents the strategy of the 21st century, we need pipelines for leadership, leadership at all levels, and opportunity for future and current leaders to learn in context. Above all, we need to cultivate leaders who understand and internalise the underlying conceptions of change and pedagogy, not just the surface terms and leaders, we need leaders who can simultaneously drill down in their organisations while realising 'the big picture', The main mark of effective leaders is not how they...*  

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impact the bottom line of student achievement at the end of their tenure, but rather, how many effective leaders they cultivate and leave behind who can go even deeper than they did.

Therefore, leaders must initiate things, encourage dialogue, become problem solvers and acknowledge the concerns and needs of students, teachers and the wider educational community. Principals need to be both contributors to and recipients of effective leadership practice in schools where leadership is embedded in the quality of personal and professional relationships.

This is, arguably, the case in the Irish context where the traditional view of the principal as 'first amongst equals' allows this synergy which may lend itself to collaborative leadership. However, this possibility has to be understood in the context of a perceived lack of real commitment that leadership is at the core of the successful primary school, many of which remain cellular in nature and, within which, the autonomy of teachers is closely guarded.

Peter Drucker in Hesselbein et al (1996) 66 rejects the ideas of traits or styles of leadership and he says of leaders generally:

... Some locked themselves in offices and others were ultra gregarious. Some (though not many) were 'nice guys' and others were stern disciplinarians. Some were quiet and impulsive; others studied and studied again and then took forever to come to a decision. Some were, warm and instantly "simpatico"; others remained aloof even after years of working closely with others ...

Leadership according to Drucker 67 was obvious in people of all sorts but he did identify a number of common criteria which includes, inter alia, the following:

67 Ibid. p.XII
The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers. Popularity is not leadership, results are. Leaders are highly visible. They therefore set examples. Leadership is not rank, privileges, or money. It is responsibility.

However, Drucker 68 does go on to say that regardless of, "...diversity with respect to personality, style, abilities, and interests, the effective leaders I have met, worked with and observed also behaved much the same way". They were concerned, and I paraphrase Drucker, 69 in finding out what needed to be done, how they could make a difference, and what the goals of the organization were. They were not afraid of diversity in people or strength in their associates.

In the context of schools, this understanding of leadership points to a future which offers opportunities for all sorts to become leaders once they are 'doers' and gives opportunities for others in the organization to be leaders at different times and in ways that support the common goals of the organization.

But that does not say that you can no longer equate leadership with position altogether though those assumptions are fast becoming obsolete. Every organization requires 'lead horses' but these lead horses must not obscure the view of others who follow. This point is raised by Sally Helgesen 70 who reminds us of the view of subordinates in organizations who may be disempowered by structures which is reflected in the slogan, "Unless you're the lead horse, the view never changes".

In other words the equation of leadership with position may breed cynicism among colleagues. In schools, the reality is that structures should allow people to use specialised skills, knowledge or expertise without too much regard for their official status. In that

68 Ibid. p.XII
69 Ibid. p.XII
70 Helgesen. S. “Leading from the Grass Roots” in Ibid., pp.20-21
scenario the whole may eventually become greater than the sum of all its parts. Pinchot
71 says that, “the most indirect and potentially invisible forms of leadership focus on
creating conditions of freedom that, like the “invisible hand” of Adam Smith,
automatically guide people toward serving the common good.
The more indirect the style of leadership is, the more room there is for other leaders to
emerge within an organization.
Schools, as communities of learning, offer leaders great opportunities to build a common
vision around teams committed to a common goal. Great leadership will exist when the
best is brought out in colleagues and when indirect leadership is done well enough those
people will say, “We did it ourselves” 72.
In other words, the real issue in schools may be to get genuine commitment from the
different levels of the organization, and if power, through misinformed leadership is
exercised unwisely, it may be detrimental to that process.
Leaders of the future will have to have more of the following characteristics that ever
before according to Schein 73

extraordinary levels of perception ... motivation ... emotional strength
... new skills in analysing cultural assumptions ... the willingness to
involve others and elicit their participation ... the willingness to
encourage leadership to flourish throughout the organization.

That is all very well but, in the Irish Primary School system. 70% of principals have full-

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71 Pinchot, G. “Creating Organisations with Many Leaders” in Ibid.. p.27
72 Lao Tsu. Ibid.. p.25
73 Schein, Edger. H. “Leadership and Organisational Culture” in Ibid.. pp. 67-68
time teaching responsibilities and are generally regarded as teachers with extra duties who receive an additional pay allowance. This creates a situation where there is no real incentive to become a principal and the appetite for leadership roles in schools is currently, at a low ebb. (See statistics on p.16)

Cottrell \(^2\) makes the following pertinent point:

\emph{In other walks of life the appetite for leadership is great, why not in primary education? It is quite clear that the lack of an adequate reward system is fundamental to this lack of appetite.}

This, in turn, results in badly led schools and resultant teacher dissatisfaction which may ultimately results in poor teaching. Therefore, good principals are a key element in good schools and this has been recognised by the DES who initiated a Leadership Development for Schools programme in February 2003 which is designed to assist participants to lead their schools effectively and to support them in balancing their new role with personal leadership development.

This is a welcome development and, gives some principals the necessary support, to internalise their role and to learn the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to adequately perform a given social role.

A measure of control is fundamental in becoming an effective principal and when basic needs are unsatisfied principals will, arguably at least, not be properly focused on instructional goals. In the current Irish context, it is necessary for all principals to survive which necessitates them gaining control, achieving stability, attaining educational objectives and in time a measure of professional self-actualisation.

Not everyone will of course become a successful principal and some commentators

\(^2\) Cottrell, S. (2003). "The professional voice of Primary Principals" \emph{Leadership, March 2003, No. 15, p.3}
speak of optimal leadership traits, leadership styles and contingency and best-fit models of leadership. Handy,\textsuperscript{75} supports the point of view that leadership traits should be apparent and says, "... if we cannot make good leaders we will at least be able to select good leaders". But it has been a problem to find these common characteristics and is, in the view of many, an inadequate means of finding a successful leader.

As Bennis and Nanus\textsuperscript{76} discovered in their study of ninety corporate presidents, a leader is not easily characterised by personality traits.

\begin{quote}
Our leaders were all "too human", they were short and tall, articulate and inarticulate ... There was nothing in terms of physical appearance, personality, or style that set them apart from their followers.
\end{quote}

Leadership style theorists assumed that people would work harder for leaders with a variety of styles ranging from democratic to authoritarian.

Handy\textsuperscript{77} does not agree and argues that effectiveness depends on more than style.

He also addressed the issue of contingency theory and agreed that choosing a leadership style to reflect the current problem is ineffective, particularly when a leader has only moderate support, to begin with.\textsuperscript{78}

The “best-fit” approach to leadership is a refinement of the contingency approach that also includes the environment as one of the variables which the leader must take into account.

According to Handy\textsuperscript{79}:

\begin{quote}
The “best-fit” approach maintains that there is no such thing as the ‘right’ style of leadership but that leadership will be more effective when the requirements of the leader, the subordinates and the task fit together.
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{78}Ibid. p.99

\textsuperscript{79}Ibid. p.103
The role of the principal in the current context suggests a need for visionary leaders who can see the future and enable others to share that view.

Bennis and Nanus\(^8^0\) describe their visionary leader as one who achieves goals by:

\[
\text{... pulling rather than pushing, by inspiring rather than ordering, by creating achievable, though challenging expectations and rewarding progress toward them rather than by manipulating, by enabling people to use their own initiative and experience rather than by constraining their experience and actions.}
\]

Without a philosophy a leader cannot really have a sense of purpose or communicate it to others. As Colgate cited in Peters\(^8^1\) says of the school principal.

\[
\text{Unless he adopts a policy of sheer expediency living from day to day, from crisis to crisis, taking a series of off-the-cuff decisions, he must have a philosophy which is based on his conception of the aims of education.}
\]

Principals need to develop a realistic vision for their schools and be able to articulate this in terms of the present context within which they work as much as in terms of future attainable goals:

Good school leaders must therefore communicate values, and, according to Everard & Morris:\(^8^2\)

\[
\text{Leadership must combine visionary ideas at the highest level of abstraction with actions at the most mundane level of detail ... Clarifying the value system and breathing life into it are the greatest contributions a leader can make.}
\]

Consequently, if, as Bennis and Nanus\(^8^3\) state, "... the essence of leadership is the capacity to build and develop the self-esteem of others", then sharing power becomes very important to real growth. In order to manage change, schools must develop the

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\(^8^0\) Bennis, W. and Nanus, B. (1985), op. cit., p.225
\(^8^3\) Bennis, W. and Nanus, B. (1985), op. cit., p.225
human, financial and material resources and this process of change must be understood by all principals as, "... the culture may not only fail to support these changes but may actually defeat them". 

In the context of leadership, the literature suggests, that to align the requirements of the leader, the worker and the task is, at the very least, desirable. That is not to say that schools resemble organizations in every way, and to suggest that a highly bureaucratic approach to schools would guarantee success, is unwise as teacher professionals retain a strong need for autonomy. In many cases teachers may be better qualified than their principal and sometimes organizational goals can conflict with the professional teacher's struggle for autonomy. Drucker suggested in the fifties that supervision goes against the very grain for professionals and in any organization the words of Everard and Morris may apply:

... tensions will arise between professional autonomy and managerial control, individuality and hierarchy, structural authority and participative, decision making, the heads dual roles of 'leading professional' and 'chief executive', the educational goal of the many and the self-interest of the few.

In taking cognizance of the above issues, it appears important that the principal must be capable of creating enthusiasm amongst the staff so, "... that colleagues are willing to sacrifice some of their own individuality in favour of a common approach".

From the literature, it is clear that leadership is a complicated area, and not just concerned with setting goals and objectives. Attention is also given to meanings and values and

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87 Mortimore et al. (1988), School Matters. The Junior Years. Somerset: Open books Publishing Ltd. p.282
according to Pondy, paraphrased here, the effectiveness of a leader lies in his/her ability to make activity meaningful and to give others a sense of understanding of what they are doing.

In that context, a school principal should be concerned with making clear the activity of the school by defining school mission and ethos as well as constructing a social world around these realities, i.e. a school community.

Greenfield quoted in Crawford et al says that, “Leadership is willful act where one attempts to construct the social world for others” and suggests that, “leaders will try to commit others to the values that they themselves believe are good. Organizations are built on the unification of people around values”.

Therefore, leadership needs to be concerned with tasks and relationship in order to be successful in schools. For example, there may be a huge variety in terms of staff skills and/or experience and a principal may need to treat people differently.

Hersey and Blanchard suggest that, as a result, a highly personalised approach to leadership behaviour is essential, and leaders need to know how certain acts are appropriate, or not.

This aspect of leadership has been developed by Fiedler, and, has implications for matching people with particular characteristics to particular situations. This encourages

the adaptation of leadership styles depending on situations, and is in general agreement with the contingency and best-fit models of leadership, mentioned earlier.

2.5 **Transactional vs. Transformational leadership:**

There is also a distinction to be made between transactional leadership and transformational leadership and according to Burns\(^2\) cited in Crawford:

... *Leadership is transactional in most instances, that is, there is a simple exchange of one thing for another: jobs for votes in the case of a political leader and the electorate; a congenial working atmosphere and security in return for keeping central office, parents and students happy in the case of a principal and teaching staff. The transforming leader, while still responding to needs among followers, looks for potential motives in followers, seeks to satisfy higher needs, and engages the full person of the follower. The result of transforming leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents.*

Transactional leadership assumes that people work best in a social structure which has a clear chain of command and within which extrinsic motivation works. Within the leadership versus management debate leadership by negotiation is very much towards the management end of the scale. However, it is arguable if it works in an educational environment where intrinsic motivation is the norm and where the classroom teacher is afforded a high measure of autonomy.

Nor does transactional leadership necessarily effect or facilitate change and, in many instances, the truly transactional leader is primarily interested in maintenance of the status quo.

Transformational leaders will, on the other hand, cultivate, where possible, a learning environment where constructive conflict is possible and where change is managed and

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embraced. In this transformational construct the intellectual capital of all parties is valued and commitment is created through shared values, meanings and especially through vision.

In the context of this research, leadership theory places a high value on the concept of vision as a fundamental aspect of organizational leadership. School principals must have a clear philosophy, be catalysts for change and be doers who influence people in the best interest of clients. In this research, many of the theoretical constructs relevant to organizational leadership were framed in the context of the core skills and competencies which are fundamental to the professional survival of the principal in the current educational era and, amongst these, were the ability to articulate vision and the ability to empower others through delegation.

Within an organizational framework issues raised in the literature, with particular reference to the totality of organizational leadership in a cultural context, questionnaire items which sought the responses of principals to matters pertaining to the skills/competencies of ethos, school promotion and public relations were included.

In addition, the political framework on which the school as an organization exists, which was framed in the literature in an autonomy versus external control context, was addressed by questionnaire items which referred to the skills of negotiation and policy reconciliation.

The full list of questionnaire items are referred to in section 3.3. which explores questionnaire design and are also included in the appendices in full.
The following generalizations taken from Crawford et al.\textsuperscript{93} reflect some of the recent advances of knowledge about leadership.

1. Emphasis should be given to transforming rather than transactional leadership.

2. Outstanding leaders have a vision for their organization.

3. Vision must be communicated in a way which secures commitment among members of the organization.

4. Communication of vision requires communication of learning.

5. Issues of value - 'what ought to be' - are central to leadership.

6. The leader has an important role in developing the culture of the organization.

7. Studies of outstanding schools provide strong support for school-based management and collaborative decision-making.

8. There are many kinds of leadership forces - technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural - and these should be widely dispersed throughout the school.

9. Attention should be given to institutionalizing vision if leadership of the transforming kind is to be successful.

10. Both masculine and feminine stereotype qualities are important in leadership, regardless of the gender of the leader.

Bennis and Nanus\textsuperscript{94} concur and add the following, "...the Management of Meaning, (the) mastery of communication, is inseparable from effective Leadership" while Sergiovanni,\textsuperscript{95} paraphrased here, has asserted that the meaning of leadership behaviour is more important than the actions of a leader which makes it impossible to lead without considering the responses of others in the educative process.

\textsuperscript{93} Crawford et al (1997), Ibid., p.29
\textsuperscript{94} Bennis, W. & Nanus, B. (1985), op. cit. p.33
\textsuperscript{95} Sergiovanni, T. J. (1987), The Theoretical Basis for Cultivating Leadership, Englewood Cliffs, N. J.
Nor will it be enough to pay lip service to a vision or school ethos, and in pursuit of higher goals, a principal will need to convey sincerity.

To that end, Kelley and Bredeson\(^{96}\) have stated that, leadership must be "communicated through the patterned use of words, actions and rewards that have an impact on the beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviours of others with whom the principal interacts".

Leadership theory has then grown from a constrained and superficial view which emphasized formal authority in achieving goals to recognition that leadership is a multi-faceted and multi-layered concept with a growing emphasis on building and sharing vision as the cornerstone. If leadership in the Irish Primary School is to develop in line with literature then it will be important for school principals to consider the 'big picture' view of their role. This encompasses vision, commitment to sets of values and an intention to 'institutionalize' vision so that it shapes the everyday work of the school.

If leadership is the vital ingredient with respect to change management in schools, then the traditional role of principal, as 'head teacher' endeavouring to maintain the status quo, will need to be addressed and until this happens, the school leader may not be in harmony with the school community in which he/she works. Warren Bennis\(^{97}\) has cautioned:

> Resisting change is as futile as resisting weather, and change in our weather now is that constant and that unpredictable. Leaders live in it and so do organizations, and there is much organizations can do to make the process easier.

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The message for schools is to recognize the context in which they operate. and, this context is now unprecedented social and cultural change. We cannot afford to have the office of principal devoted to administration when leadership is required.

As Anne Jones¹⁸ suggests:

*In a threatening and unstable environment, survival becomes a real issue. If too much of the energy of the staff goes into survival ... not enough energy may go into the kind of creative work which will take the institution further. The urge to survive is necessary to keep the system open and alive but if it dominates over all else, it may in the end be counter-productive.*

The reality of a principal’s life is that he/she may be concerned with short term issues to the cost of long term ones, and in the Irish context, with the majority of principals preoccupied with teaching a class, this is certainly the case.

Adair⁹⁹ says, “leaders and change go together” and on the difference between management and leadership, he has the following to offer:¹⁰⁰

*Leadership is of the spirit compounded of personality and vision. Its practice is an art. Management is of the mind, more a matter of accurate calculation, of statistics, of methods, timetables and routines. Its practice is a science. Managers are necessary. Leaders are essential.*

All good leaders will require vision which will come from an awareness of their current situation. They will need to be aware of the past, well grounded in the present and have their eyes fixed firmly on the future. The vision of leaders will be especially relevant in times, of change, as it will elevate others above the ‘fire-fighting’ mentality which currently pervades our schools.

Ezra Bowen¹⁰¹ writing in Time magazine said of the visionary leader,

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¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p.61
¹⁰¹ Bowen, E. (1987). “His Trumpet was never Uncertain” in *Time Magazine*: May 18”. p.68
The very essence of leadership is that you have to have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet.

Bennis\textsuperscript{102} provides an insight into the modus operandi of transformative leaders and says that, "they understand the lesson of taking charge without taking control, that they must inspire their volunteers not order them".

All leaders should be aware of this subtle difference between having power with people as opposed to power over people.

Defining the contemporary role of the principal has been the subject of a comparative study carried out in Britain, France, West Germany, Denmark, Iceland, Northern Ireland, Norway and Sweden under the auspices of the council of Europe by Everard\textsuperscript{103} who found,

\begin{quotation}
The school leader's role is evolving from a situation of stable definition to one of emergent definition. It is not a question of moving from being a traditional head ... to another well defined role such as a leading professional. The school leader is moving rather into a situation where role definitions are to a degree continually evolving.
\end{quotation}

Everard\textsuperscript{104} further states that principals will need to anticipate the future in order to remain, "in control rather than being controlled by unfolding events".

But it takes time to cultivate a vision and Irish Primary Principals are currently consumed with day-to-day issues and 'fire-fighting' to an extent that visionary leadership is not a priority for many of them. They are hindered too by the traditional understanding of their role which sees them to a large extent as teachers with extra responsibilities.

\textsuperscript{102} Bennis, W. (1989), op. cit. p.3
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p.128
In order for them to become transformational leaders they must be fully supported in all aspects of their administrative, managerial and instructional roles. Only then will principals be able to, in the words of Duke, 105 find time:

... to cultivate a vision. It involves such time-consuming activities as scanning the horizon for new developments, anticipating the future, understanding your values and those of others and simply listening to people.

Currently, in the Irish primary system, change is the order of the day. Much of this change is externally imposed, and often new demands appear before the impact of preceeding ones have been fully absorbed by schools, leaving the principal with an intolerable burden. Teachers in that system are also functioning under stress and some may lose interest, leaving the principal with the task of motivating them and re-awakening their commitment. Through vision this can be done, but it requires that principals have time and the ability to communicate a sense of excitement, which will boost morale and enhance the quality of work in a school. It goes without saying that the human factor is the greatest resource in any school and this point is well made by Wielding 106 who says of the human element in organizations:

Nowhere is this factor more crucial than in our schools, where the kind of education the children receive is so heavily dependent on the quality of the performance of teachers who staff them.

Quality in terms of teachers is often dependent on the prevailing culture in schools which is personified in the principal. Culture is shaped by the principal and in schools effectiveness will depend to a large degree on the principal’s success in shaping a culture which effectively governs the organizations expected outcomes.

Sizer 107 points to a significant relationship between school culture and “whoever sits in the principals' office” and in general literature points to the principal as a significant agent in change management. However, in Irish Primary schools, operating as they are in a changing environment, there is not enough clarity around the role of principal to ensure that it is as relevant as it can be, or needs to be, into the future. Authority by virtue of position is all very well, but the legacy of the school master tradition in Ireland, i.e. a teacher with additional minor administrative functions, will not be enough to sustain schools of the future.

It is not enough for principals and particularly teaching principals to put the teaching aspect of their jobs first and, as an Irish Principal, 108 commented:

> At a time of change when a teaching principal finds himself in the very middle of the expectation and demands of so many interests ... being organized within your own class is the most essential ingredient in running a rural primary school. It is for how well we taught our pupils that we will be remembered. It is within our classrooms that we make our name.

In other words, the traditional role of head teacher is the saving grace of the harassed, overworked, under trained and underpaid principal who cannot exercise his role, due to constraints of time, in the manner expected of him by a school community. This mindset is a recipe for disaster in an era of continuous change. and, takes absolutely no cognisance of the role of the principal as leader, which, in the view of this researcher, must underpin their work in schools, in order that satisfactory levels of efficiency are achieved in the current educational maelstrom.

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Within the research objectives of this thesis the literature on transactional and on transformational leadership suggested the following possible linkages between the skill/competency levels of principals and the fundamental aspects of these leadership paradigms.

- The acceptance of organizational goals, indicative in many instances of the transactional leader, was explored by questionnaire items on school ethos, school profiling and record keeping. Principals who are obsessed with issues of this nature are generally defenders of the status quo though all principal must and do pay attention to these issues.

- The use of extrinsic motivators, a common trait of transactional leaders, was explored through a questionnaire item which examined issues around staff appraisal and management issues.

- Setting new directions and goals which are indicative of a transforming leadership style were addressed in the form of questionnaire items which referred to vision, empowerment, staff development and organizational development.

- Conflict management issues, which the transformational leader is generally good at, were included in the final questionnaire as items referring to negotiation, policy reconciliation, curriculum, change, staff development and motivation.

- Issues around the need to engage in dialogue which underpin the work of the transformational principal were addressed through questionnaire items which referred to networking, public relations, communication and inter-personal skills.
2.6 Instructional leadership

Within the current school reform and curriculum revision there is a strong emphasis on standards driven accountability practices. This has implications for school leaders who have to place student learning at the centre of their agenda, and in the process become instructional leaders.

This is not a simple matter of paying attention to instruction, setting curricular goals, monitoring lesson planning and evaluating the work of teachers. It is far more complicated than that, and requires that the principal can engage in intensive, focused examination of teaching and learning throughout their school. Instructional leadership requires principals to understand good teaching and be able to align good staff development practices with student learning needs. Therefore, school leadership must, ideally, combine the traditional duties of the principal with the new perceived demands of the role by maintaining a balance, where possible, between management and vision.

In addition, they will need to accept standards-based accountability practices and endeavour to encourage teacher colleagues to attain tangible academic standards. This aspect of the work of the principal requires a range of skills/competencies that may occur in the Irish primary school context. However, this is not a guarantee.

In this research, questionnaire items were framed to explore the attitudes of principals towards aspects of their instructional/curriculum leadership role. Included were items which explored the following aspects of the work of the instructional leader:

- Prioritisation of learning through curriculum change and professional development.
- Raising of expectations and morale.
• Raising of expectations though motivation and promotion of dialogue and shared vision.
• Reconciliation of instruction with learning objectives and standards through judicious use of assessment practices.
• Creation of a learning culture through staff development, networking and shared practice.
• Promotion of community involvement through the shared responsibility and team building efforts.

These aspects of the work of the truly instructional principal obviously requires that he/she be aware of all aspects of the teaching learning process throughout his/her school, devote time to reflection and dialogue, and be able to guide practice from a position of understanding. All of this is interesting but is it possible for a principal who is a full-time teacher with limited administrative supports to engage in what Prestine calls "...a turning of the role of principal 90 degrees from everywhere".

This model of leadership sees the principal as the passport to educational success and within that definition he/she becomes the manager of an increasingly complex organization. Strong collaboration and instructional skills have replaced bureaucratic skills as important attributes of effective principals (Drake and Roe) and this is a challenge to the teaching principal who has limited time for the additional aspects of the job, i.e. the non-teaching aspects.

Many writers stress the importance of the instructional leadership responsibilities of the principal but in the Irish context, it may be argued that, there has been a shift away from the notion of instructional leadership towards the transactional and transformational models. It is not clear, at this point in time, if it is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that everyone understands that learning is a shared responsibility and, arguably, it is seen as a collection of individual efforts which may or may not be co-ordinated effectively.

In this research the effectiveness of the principal will be explored though judicious use of questionnaire items which seek information of their ability to prioritise and align curriculum, instruction and assessment to standards. In addition, the ability of principals to support collaborative efforts at learning in their schools through best practice in assessment will be examined.

Fullan makes the point that, "the role of the principal has become dramatically more complex, overloaded, and unclear over the past decade" and in the Irish context the tradition of the 'Master', referred to in Chapter 1, which heralded a leadership philosophy which was goal orientated, individualistic, male-dominated and management orientated has been replaced by a more collaborative model which emphasizes client interests, dialogue, inclusivity, diversity and consensus.

Some believe that instructional leadership is seldom practiced and Stronge calculated that 62.2% of elementary principals' time is spent on school management issues and

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added that, "...a typical principal performs an enormous number of tasks each day—but only 11% relate to instructional leadership". 113

Fullam added to that debate by stating that, "...effective instructional leaders are distinctly in the minority" which clearly points to the possibility that, the daily duties of the principal restrict them in becoming effective instructional leaders. There is evidently a gap between reality and what needs to be.

Flath, 114 who is paraphrased here, says that lack of education and training coupled with a lack of time and increased volumes of paperwork restrict the ability of the principal to become an instructional leader. Furthermore, the public expectations for the principal’s role are mainly managerial and this offers a safe and comfortable professional route to many principals.

However, despite the above observations Flath 115 also considers that, "...the principal is pivotal in bringing about the conditions that characterize effective schools" and is supported in that point of view by others, such as Findley & Findley 116 who believe that, "...if a school is to be an effective one, it will be because of the instructional leadership of the principal"

Even understanding the term instructional leadership has been an issue in the literature and many would say that educational leadership and instructional leadership are one and the same, or, that instructional leadership simply addresses specific aspects of educational leadership, i.e. curriculum and instruction.

113 Ibid., p.32
115 Ibid., p.20
In an Irish context, such a leader might be a principal who emphasizes, where possible, the interaction of teacher and student with the curriculum and who manipulates these forces in order to maximize the quality of instruction.

There is also a lot of literature on instructional leadership qualities. Amongst these qualities would be the ability to articulate vision; to translate vision into action; to create a supportive environment; to know what is going on in the school and to be able to act on knowledge.

Perception is also a strong indicator of effectiveness and Fullan found in his research that:

_Schools operated by principals who were perceived by their teachers to be strong instructional leaders exhibited significantly greater scores in achievement in reading and mathematics than did schools operated by average and weak instructional leaders_

An additional criterion for the instructional leader is that he/she should be a practicing teacher. Weindling states that head teachers in the United Kingdom indicated that, "the most important thing contributing to instructional leadership was that all continued to teach for an average of about 20% of the week"

Harden gives credence to this and says that in order to gain credibility principals need to work closely with students and develop teaching techniques as a means of understanding teacher perspectives in order to establish a base from which to make

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curricular decisions. In addition, a teaching principal strengthens the perception that.

"the sole purpose of the school is to serve the educational needs of the students" 126

Highsmith & Rallis 121 offer some interesting insights into instructional leadership. They argue that a well managed school will, "enable real instructional leaders to empower teachers who can create the effective schools reformers are seeking"

Furthermore, they believe that, "... as a group, women are more likely to evidence behaviour associated with effective leadership" 122

The results of their study suggested that women are more attuned to curriculum issues, instructional leadership, teachers' concerns, parent involvement staff development, collaborative planning strategies and community building.

In the context of this research, which is concentrated on the perceptions of principals vis-à-vis their role as leaders in school communities, the literature on instructional leadership throws up some interesting issues. Instructional leadership is focused on the actions a principal may take or, delegate, in the interests of promoting student learning but what is instructional leadership in today's schools?

The common perception is that at this point in time, principals spend far too much time on managerial issues and, although the role of the principal as instructional leader is widely advocated, it is practiced much less.

The term instructional leader describes the primary role of the principal in the quest for educational excellence. This requires a strong principal with great conviction who will

120 Ibid., p.88
122 Ibid., p.163
be able to bring vision into reality. As Cuban\textsuperscript{123} suggests, in support of the complexity of the task under review, "Road signs exist, but no maps are yet for sale."

There is no clear evidence to date that Irish primary principals separate management issues from instructional leadership ones or that the changes in their role, due to a multiplicity of new skills, have been fully internalized by them. The quantitative research, which is the substantive feature of this doctoral thesis, will make it possible to establish if the instructional leadership aspect of the work of the primary principal is an accepted aspect of the job. It may be possible, based on the findings, to establish if the skills which facilitate instructional leadership are recognized by principals as a necessary and vital part of their work and if attitudinal change has begun to occur with regard to the core skills and competencies of instructional leadership. The categories of skill which are encompassed by an instructional leadership framework are both technical and interpersonal and include issues relating to goals, assessment, planning evaluation, communication, dialogue, motivation decision making, problem solving and conflict management. All of these aspects of the work of the instructional leader, as mentioned in the literature, are included in the list of core skills and competencies (see section 3.3) which are the foundation on which the questionnaire was developed and, through the investigative process which underpins this thesis, it is expected that the principal's role as a catalyst for school improvement will be clearly identifiable.

2.7 Values in Educational Leadership

It is interesting to consider, in the current era of constant change in education, the issue of whose interests are really being served in terms of leadership in our schools. There is an illusion of procedural efficiency but what does that mean?

Schools have strategic plans, respond to social expectations, are accountable, employ a variety of measures of assessment, regulate their structures according to precise rules and have inclusive and pluralist missions statements, all of which give them legitimacy. However, it may conversely be argued that a lot of the processes and transaction in education are concerned with legitimacy only, and do not, to any great extent, have a proven positive impact on what goes on in the classroom.

It is possible too, that school leaders serve no purpose other than to satisfy the need of society for a visible leader. This brings the added danger that in developing school leaders for the future the 'one size fits all' approach may appear to be attractive as we try to get a workable definition of what a school leader should and ought to be. These issues are addressed in the context of the literature on values in education. Arguably, purpose and meaning are essential in helping a school become an effective learning community, i.e. a community of minds and hearts.

As Greenfield\textsuperscript{124} asserts:

\textit{What many people seem to want from schools is that schools reflect the values that are central and meaningful in their lives. If this view is correct, schools are cultural artifacts that people struggle to shape in their own image. Only in such forms do they have faith in them; only in such forms can they participate in them.}

In 1984 Greenfield, cited in Sergiovanni & Corbally\textsuperscript{125} and paraphrased as follows, said
that the task of leadership was to create a moral order that binds a leader and others together. In the context of schools, it is important to remember that they exist in order that young people get educated and not to provide leaders with opportunities to lead. However, leadership is also an important component of successful teaching and learning and, arguably, an essential component of school effectiveness. Leadership is particularly important in a period of intense change and development.

As Thompson \(^{126}\) asserts:

\[\text{As demands grow on schools for improved quality and broader services, a new leadership emerges. No longer managers of routines, school administrators need increasingly to take initiative. They must understand change as well as manage it. They must involve and motivate staff, create a positive culture, build a group vision, develop quality educational programmes, provide a positive instructional environment, encourage a high performance, apply evaluation processes, analyse and interpret outcomes, be accountable for results and maximize human resources. They must also stimulate public support and engage community leaders.}\]

In 1957, a number of relevant points were made by Selznick which indicated that the institutional leader is primarily an expert in the promotion and protection of values. Selznick \(^{127}\) says that, "The art of the creative leader is the art of institution building, the reworking of human and technological materials to fashion an organism that embodies new and enduring values".

Thinking of this nature places the values domain at the centre of a school and makes it the principal driving force, pushing everything else to the periphery.

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This may result in more dynamic and vibrant institutions and when values are important they become sources of deep meaning and significance and become ends in themselves. In an ideal world, one of the school leader's fundamental objectives may be to raise the consciousness of followers/colleagues so that their definition of their own values in a professional context inspires them to purposeful action.

More recent literature supports the idea that values and meaningfulness are sources of identity and elevate levels of commitment from all partners. Bryk & Driscoll.¹²⁸ Meier ¹²⁹ and Darling-Hammond ¹³⁰ argue these points and see culture, meaning and significance as part of the life-world of schools. Therefore, in the context of leadership, which is the focus of this thesis, schools ought to be driven by meaning, not by systems, and leaders must learn to make value-driven choices.

Many of the issues raised in the literature with regard to values in educational leadership underpin the range of skill/competencies which are included in the quantitative research aspect of this research. These skills are applicable to many of the aspects of leadership which are explored in the quantitative research and issues such as motivation, staff development, vision, empowerment, delegation, conflict management, human resource management, assessment, curriculum development and ethos are fundamental to value issues in education as trust and commitment require demonstrated competence on the part of leaders.

These issues are fundamental to many aspects of the work of the school leader and the literature suggests that administrative, managerial and leadership aspects of the leader's work are inter-dependent and overlap in many of their fundamental aspects.

The opinion of Habermas\(^\text{131}\) is also both interesting and relevant to the issue under review, in that he warns against the dominance over the life-world of schools by the systems demands, in an era of change. In other words, if the system is allowed dictate the purposes and values of schools, the result will be 'colonization of the life-world' of schools, i.e. the system will dominate by a gradual process of top down change and school goals, purposes, ideals and values may be imposed from without.

This process, some would argue, is currently underway and in order to restore balance between system needs and school values, there is a need for leadership. Therefore, a cultural and value driven leadership view which will emphasise the role of leaders in developing shared ways of thinking and feeling and conveying them to all partner members of the organization, is required.

It is worth remembering the words of Tyack & Cuban, quoted in Sugrue,\(^\text{132}\) in whose view, "educational reforms are intrinsically political in origin".

The Education Act has provided clear guidelines in terms of the relationships between the educational partners and their respective future roles are clearly identified. but without strong school leadership, incorporating, as it should, the administrative, managerial and leadership aspects of the role which is built, in large measure, on the key skills and competencies of the role as indicated in the literature, the quality of the bureaucracy in


terms of system needs may well emerge as the defining feature of Irish education in the 21st century.

This would be unfortunate, especially, if leadership were not to be included as a key indicator of managerial efficiency.

2.8 Management versus Leadership:

The word manager indicates a concern with resource allocation, value for money and administrative detail.

Leaders are, on the other hand, seen as having internal qualities with which they were born.

History is often kind to leaders whilst, at the same time, being less well disposed towards managerial deficiencies. Many great leaders are enigmatic, iconic figures. Take Martin Luther King who did not live to see the fruits of his work. Some would argue that he and others like him were simply caught up in a great historical moment and voiced the view of society at that time.

Likewise, Churchill in Britain, who had a chequered political career with many ups and downs, forged an international reputation as the man who led Britain from the brink of defeat during World War II, when, arguably, circumstances created the ideal conditions for his brand of uncompromising rhetoric which roused a nation to heroic levels of endeavour.

Therefore, it may be argued that historical situations often create leaders and, of course, many of these leaders can and do, subsequently, influence history.
It is possible, based on the above assumptions, to argue that managers are more tightly linked to an organization than leaders are. The good manager usually accepts systems and structures and tends to work in support of them unlike the leader who may, and often does, tend to rise above the rules that bind him/her. The positions of manager and leader are not mutually exclusive and leaders can be good managers and vice versa. In schools it may be necessary to be both, due to the variety and diversity of issues pertaining.

Therefore, in the educational context, there is no currency to be gained from looking for people with ideal traits to be leaders in our schools and traditional views, such as Bernard's, which explained leadership by the internal qualities with which people were born are, arguably, flawed. This view had, at its core, the idea that leaders could be identified and developed and that they were born with clearly identifiable personal characteristics.

Conversely, for much of the twentieth century management thinking has been dominated by 'scientific management' theory. This has been influenced by Taylor and the core argument is that there is one right way of doing a job which can be identified, introduced and executed by good managers. The ideas of direction and control underpin this theory.

Adair, in the eighties identified the manager's role as being concerned with keeping the tensions between the team, the individual within that team and the task in balance in order to produce the best possible results for the organization.

A key dimension to the work of schools is the need, for leaders, to motivate educational

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partners and stakeholders in pursuit of agreed objectives. This requires that individual and organizational objectives are reconciled where possible. As Mintzberg \textsuperscript{136} asserts, "formal authority vests (managers) with great potential power; leadership determines in large part how much of it they will realize."

In fact Mintzberg suggests that our understanding of management is often too simplistic and, to break down a position into a series of tasks, undermines the human holistic face of management, which can and does, incorporate leadership. In a school setting management has to incorporate the necessary skills but in a human holistic context where values and process are more important than product or profit. School principals need to be both leaders and managers and schools, without the commitment of staff to the vision articulated, are sometimes bereft of strong leadership.

Bennis \textsuperscript{137} described leaders as people who know what they want, why they want it and are able to communicate that to others in a way that gains their support. Lappas \textsuperscript{138} states that, "the leadership focus of knowing what you want and when you want it distinguishes exceptional from average leaders."

Drath & Palus, \textsuperscript{139} suggest that leadership requires participation from everyone so that all members are engaged in creating meaning, and acting on that meaning. This focus on leadership as a process and, not as an individual or an office, is relevant to school where,


\textsuperscript{138} Lappas, G. E. (1996). A Comparison of the Transformational Attributes of Community College Presidents with Selected American Corporate Chief Executive Officer. University of Texas: Austin, p.14

in theory at least, professionals work as a team in a collaborative, supportive way. In
schools, all staff members have the potential to add to the leadership of the team, and
arguably at least, the line between leaders and followers is less clear and more flexible
than in other institutions. Successful school principals need to be successful team leaders
and team leadership may take on a multiplicity of shapes and forms.

According to Drath & Palus\textsuperscript{140} the applications of team leadership are as follows:

\begin{quote}
Instead of focusing leadership development almost exclusively on training
individuals to be leaders, we may, using this view, learn to develop leadership by
improving everyone’s ability to participate in the process of leadership
\end{quote}

Arguably, schools are currently too deeply immersed in a rationalization process for an
individual, no matter how gifted, to manage. Therefore, school leaders need institutional
supports and dispersed leadership within their school communities. Some would argue
that these already exist, in the form of the DES administrative supports, school middle
management structures and school communities.

An interesting study on various leadership qualities by Donnelly & Kezsomb\textsuperscript{141} found
that managerial competence was the most important attribute followed by collaboration,
analytical competence, communication and interpersonal skills.

Therefore, schools may already be well placed in terms of structures and systems to
develop a collaborative model of leadership, which includes management as a key
component. Consequently, the answers to the questions and issues which currently
occupy the minds of principals may be closer at hand than is believed.

As Fullan\textsuperscript{142} asserts:

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., p.6
Investigation of Effective Project Team leadership for a New Decade,” Cost Engineering, 36(5), pp. 33-41

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A good starting point is to develop a more relaxed attitude toward uncertainty; not to have expectations of the system that it is incapable of meeting, and then to work on those more subtle, more powerful change forces that can bring greater results over time.

Coping may be all that is possible, in the short term, for the principal, and system change that will provide greater support to the school principal may be a longer term objective.

Heifetz & Linsky¹⁴³ address the issue of management versus leadership in the language of technical change as opposed to adaptive change and, in the process, challenge school principals to be pro-active leaders.

Every day, people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know-how and procedures. We call these technical problems. But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. They cannot be solved by someone who provides the answer from on high. We call these adaptive challenges because they require experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community. Without learning new ways-changing attitudes, values and behaviours—people cannot make the adaptive leap necessary to thrive in new environments. The sustainability of change depends on having the people with the problem internalize the change itself.

Currently, schools in the Republic of Ireland are undergoing sustained change. School principals are being asked to manage new challenges in uncharted waters and, as a result, new pressures on them, as a result.

Heifetz & Linsky¹⁴⁴ describe it this way:

Adaptive change stimulates resistance because it challenges people’s habits, beliefs and values. It asks them to take a loss, experience uncertainty, and even express disloyalty to people and cultures. Because adaptive change forces people to question and perhaps redefine aspects of their identity, it also challenges their sense of competence. Loss, disloyalty, and feeling incompetent: That’s a lot to ask. No wonder people resist.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p.30
However, despite the challenges there is not an alternative for principals and they must. in their leadership role within a school, show that there is a genuine commitment to the institutional needs of the school by serving its ethos, its purposes and its integrity.

Consequently, there is an urgent need to address the structural anomalies which, arguably at least, inhibit the emergence of real leadership in the Irish primary school system.

In the context of this research, the literature review suggests that management and leadership are but opposite sides of the same coin and that as the multiplicity of managerial skills grows, so does the need to lead. Conversely, the good leader creates structures which require specific skills in terms of their successful maintenance and/or development. Therefore, many of the specific skills and competencies included in the list of final questionnaire items are fundamental to both the management and leadership roles of the primary school principal.

In order to create and maintain an environment which encourages and supports everyone in maximizing their potential contribution to school objectives management and leadership may need to be viewed as inter-dependent and mutually inclusive and, in many cases, the common interests of a group are defined in terms of simple, shared management tasks which leaders persuade followers to do in the interest of group goals and objectives. All of the questionnaire items included in the quantitative research are, arguably at least, relevant to the leadership versus management debate in education and indicative of a leadership view which respects the need for people to complete a multiplicity of lower and/or higher order tasks which serve shared common, interests in an effective supportive environment.
2.9 Training for Leadership

Olson identified lack of quality training programmes as a key factor in the shortage of candidates for school leadership positions in the U.S. In that respect, it is foolish to expect that, in the Republic of Ireland there exists a large pool of potential school leaders, i.e. all qualified teachers. Evidence from Chapter 1 points to the opposite being the case and the number of applicants for such positions is at an all time low level. Furthermore, there is no formal national training programme available for aspiring principals within the Republic of Ireland.

Many other jurisdictions offer competency-based training schemes and in Britain there has been, since 1997, the National Professional Qualification for Headteachers (NPQH). This is a centrally determined and accredited training programme.

The National Standards for Headteachers contains a list of essential criteria in terms of training for headship and included, inter alia, are:

Core purpose of the role of the headteacher

Key outcomes of headship

Professional knowledge and understanding

Skills and attributes

Key areas of headship (Strategic direction, school development, teaching and learning, leading and managing staff, efficient staff and resource deployment and accountability)

There is a clear emphasis on organization, management in the above training programme and this has resulted in some criticisms. For example, Gunter argues that:


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...we have moved radically, perhaps tragically, from what traditionally has been known as the preparation of headteachers to the training of headteachers and in doing so all the debates that have gone on nationally and internationally about pedagogy and purposes are being marginalized.

Furthermore, it has been argued by Fullan, 148 who is paraphrased here, that the management of change in education is now so complex that setting predetermined pathways is no longer sufficient.

Therefore, leaders in the 21st century will need to be flexible, responsive and adaptive and it is difficult to see how skills such as these can be made compatible with a universal competency-based model of training such as the NPQH as it currently exists.

It is also naive to "separate performance from the context in which it occurs" 149 and difficult to determine acceptable levels of any skill. In the opinion of many you either acquire the skill or do not.

An alternative approach has been attempted in Victoria in Australia, which focused on developing an understanding of, the range of performance within the principal's work.

Louden & Wildy 150 favoured this approach because, rather than listing duties and responsibilities as competencies, "they abstract from commonly shared experiences and familiar dilemmas those international skills and moral dispositions that appear to differentiate the quality of headteachers' performance".

In Hong Kong, the role of the principal is reduced to three domains for training purposes.

150 Ibid., p.118
These are:

- The principal as school leader.
- The principal as leader of teaching and learning.
- The principal as leader of the wider educational community.

Sweden, on the other hand, has a two year induction programme for principal teachers which involves a mentoring system. Within that system groups of newly appointed principals are mentored by experienced colleagues. They are released from their normal responsibilities for a month in order to facilitate this process. This two year period is followed by a three year 'deepening' period when newly appointed principals study leadership in schools and in other organizations. This is a significantly different approach from earlier models due to the attempt to acquire and sustain the capacities of leadership over a longer time-frame.

Gronn identified four stages of leadership which include Formation: Accession; Incumbency; Divestiture.

Formation is understood in this model as preparation for the role.

Accession is the stage of rehearsal where aspiring principals test their capacities.

Incumbency is leadership in action which can lead to further growth and mastery.

Divestiture is the process of letting go.

In the context of this research, it is clear that the training opportunities for aspiring or recently appointed principals, are inadequate.

School leadership practice in the Republic of Ireland is still based on a historical model as explored in Chapter 2 and this may, arguably, no longer be relevant. A fundamental

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restructuring of the school system, to enhance the opportunity of principals to be leaders is necessary, or the demands on principals to manage may well dominate the future educational landscape. Leadership needs a future orientation to survive and flourish going forward in an environment which is complex, dynamic and fluid. Schools will undoubtedly remain centralized in terms of bureaucracy and control but it is important to avoid what Guthrie cited in Wang and Walberg referred to as the assumption that schools were, “nodes in an administrative neural network” and mere, “operational recipient(s) of these good policies”.

Sergiovanni has referred to the dilemma of continuing to persist with a familiar view of the role of school leader in a time of change and said, “changing our metaphors is an important prerequisite for developing a new theory of management and a new leadership practice”.

In the Irish educational context, it is likely that, unless stronger professional leadership is exercised within our school, a management orientated accountability framework will define the role of the school principal in the future.

Anecdotal evidence would support this view and it is apparent that, at present, there is considerable role ambiguity and role overload for school principals. This may be leading to what Murphy referred to as, “a personal sense of loss for principals, a loss of control and a loss of professional identity”.

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In the context of this thesis, all of the questionnaire items which comprise the quantitative research element of the research are concerned with framing the development of skill related accountability procedures in school leadership in the context of fundamental training in these skills.

2.10 School Leadership in the Future

As we enter a period when school boundaries grow increasingly porous and the need to satisfy customers increases, pressures on principals continue to grow. Schools are re-positioning themselves as a result of current social, political and economic trends and new strategic partnerships are being sought, which must carry implications for school leadership. The old role of the principal, as the solitary instructional leader will be inadequate in this new context, and he/she will have to have considerable insight into education and be able to manage the process of change.

Sergiovanni,\(^{155}\) paraphrased here, speaks of this transformational leader as one who can raise expectations of leaders and followers in a complex learning organization which embraces change. However, leaders also have agendas, and according to Nanus.\(^ {156} \)

*Effective leaders have agendas; they are totally results orientated. They adopt challenging new visions of what is both possible and desirable, communicate their visions, and persuade others to become so committed to these new directions that they are eager to lend their resources and energies to make them happen.*

Schools as organizations are described by Fullan, paraphrased here.\(^ {157} \) as places where

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moral passion, rather than objectives, are the basis for their existence.

These learning organizations are communities of inter-connected relationships in which all processes are reciprocal. See Caldwell & Spinks 158 on the self-managing school and Odden 159 for an American perspective on school leadership.

Generally, the image of these new schools in the literature is one of empowerment and capacity building and, in them, the emphasis on acquiring new skills becomes a matter of culture with values and skills seen as means to an end, rather than an end in themselves.

Within this conceptual framework, individual schools may experience difficulty in defining their view of the direction they would like to take. as Marsh 160 has indicated. They may recognize the need for fundamental change and the need for an organizational strategy to respond, but find it difficult to redesign the work and structure of the organization, or change the vision. All of these issues have implications for leadership and in the Irish context, with new perspectives on teaching and learning being imposed on schools, there is a clear requirement for school reorganization in the interest of resolving emerging tensions.

Mohrman 161 suggests that principals will need to show a willingness to challenge professional practices and create new ones in the interest of client needs. This cannot happen without ongoing professional development and training. Nor, is it likely that

definitive answers will be reached and, in a learning organization such as described, the advice of Odden\textsuperscript{162} is both practical and wise:

\begin{quote}
*The vision created should be viewed as tentative, as something with high potential that will be tried, but more likely will need to be redesigned and modified more than once over time* 
\end{quote}

Principals in schools of the future will need to be both managers and leaders. They will need personal and positional power within their schools. On a personal level they will need to be able to persuade others through mentoring, planning and by virtue of their deep understanding of teaching and learning and the way it relates to student outcomes. Positionally, they will need to be able to restructure schools and create leadership at all levels with a clear emphasis on school culture, school community and academic results. To exercise leadership in the future, principals will need to institutionalize their leadership because due to the complexity of the issues, no leader, no matter how gifted, will be able to solve everything.

Leadership has to be systematic, yet team orientated in order to be successful in times of change.

It must not be confused with status, power or even official authority and, even though leadership is comprised of these characteristics, it must also transcend them because though all school leaders have subordinates, it does not follow that subordinates are followers.

\textsuperscript{162} Odden, A. R. (1995), op. cit. p.29\textsuperscript{7}
2.11 Women in Leadership

Gender is clearly a factor in educational leadership and in an Irish context there is a predominantly female teaching profession but a higher ratio of male to female principals. From Chapter 1 it may be deduced that there is an underlying assumption that leadership requires male characteristics. This is alluded to by Brown \(^{163}\) who concluded that:

"one of the popular reasons given for the different treatment of women in management stems from stereotyping females as ineffective leaders...trait studies consistently supported the traditional attitude that women lack adequate leadership characteristics"

Some studies have however identified differences in leadership styles and in an analysis of a large number of studies comparing leadership styles of male and female principals, Eagly et al. \(^{164}\) found some evidence of different styles. They concluded that there was a tendency for women to have a more democratic and less autocratic style of leadership. Furthermore, females were more tasks orientated than males but no better in terms of interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate.

However, Vinnicombe \(^{165}\), in a study of managers in England, developed a more differentiated view of leadership styles and in a range of possibilities which included, traditionalists, catalysts, visionaries and negotiators, she found a marked absence of female traditionalist leaders and more visionaries and catalysts than amongst males, i.e. 40\% versus 28\% respectively.

This suggests that females are better transformational leaders than males.


\(^{165}\) Vinnicombe, S. (1987), “What exactly are the Differences in Male and Female Working Styles?”, \emph{Women in Management Review} 3(1). pp.13-21
The general evidence, according to Powell, \(^{166}\) is that female and male leaders "differ in some ways (in their leadership traits) and at some times, but, for the most part, they do not differ".

There is little reason to believe that either female or male leaders are superior in carrying out their leadership roles or that because there are more male principals that they are necessarily any better at the job.

There is ample evidence, on the other hand, that women are denied equal opportunity in terms of leadership positions within schools. For example, Weindling & Earley \(^{167}\) have asserted that women tend to spend longer in achieving promotion and their careers tend to be more meandering than males.

In fact males, are according to Evetts \(^{168}\), generally, "more highly visible and manage through flair, forceful personality and the ability to know when opportunities present themselves to secure unusually rapid advancement".

In addition to male characteristics, another powerful influence is the way in which women have been traditionally viewed in a patriarchal society and the lack of female role models within education has been a feature of the Irish primary school system.

Therefore, despite the fact that education is a female dominated profession, it appears that female principals are not representative of that dominance and a shift in thinking will be required for females to occupy their proper place in the hierarchy of leadership within our schools.

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In a new educational era, leadership, in which values, collegiality and team orientation are set to challenge traditional understanding of leadership which emphasized assertiveness and masculinity, women appear set to be the primary source of authority. This is particularly true in an era when men are not being attracted into education and where the ratio of males to females continues to fall to unprecedented low levels. Furthermore, the role of women as leaders needs to be understood in the context of changing societal expectations. Underpinned by equality issues, it is likely that women will assume a far more central role in educational leadership in the future.

2.12 Leadership and Change:

Leadership in education has always been a pivotal concept but it is, arguably, now in crisis as the transformational forces in education bring increased demand for a new definition of it. Schools no longer have a monopoly on knowledge and learning and now exist in a competitive arena which requires future and strategic planning. Age old assumptions about the meaning of education, which favoured the notion that knowledge was learning, are being challenged by the notion that education is a lifelong process. In addition, knowledge is no longer viewed as fixed or accessible only through institutions which define it, and available to only select groups in society. We live in the information age which has made globalization an aspect of education and school communities need to build conditions for professional and institutional growth and as Levine and Crom suggest, the emphasis has shifted from "total quality management which was largely technically driven, to an emphasis on total quality leadership, which takes the technical side and marries it with the human side."
This shift in thinking will require consideration. empathy, motivational skill coupled with drive, imagination and innovation on the part of leaders. In addition, conceptions of leadership will need to embrace the definition of leadership as collegiality, in preference to one of power or position.

In the words of Murphy\textsuperscript{170}, "leaders have to lead not from the apex of the pyramid but from the centre of the web of human relationships" and this idea of community leadership as opposed to formal leadership is the challenge that currently faces school communities.

In the context of this research, which was initiated in a period of great challenge for principals, it was expected that tensions would emerge from the data in relation to the former traditional view of school leadership and the emerging uncertainty about the parameters and definition of effective leadership in times of change and partnership. This likely conflict is well described by Grace\textsuperscript{171} who stated:

...the idea that transformative leadership could be exercised by a community of leaders rather than by the formal and hierarchical leader would require a significant transformation of consciousness among teachers, parents and pupils

However, the task for leadership remains one of building conditions in which partnership can be accommodated and concepts of learning broadened and enhanced. This will require cultural understanding and rejects, to an extent, the notion that leadership models are totally transferable between schools. Certainly, many of the skills are common but school communities remain unique cultural entities.

\textsuperscript{170} Murphy, J. (1994), "Transformational Change and the Evolving Role of the Principal" in Murphy, J. & Seashore, L. K. (eds.) Reshaping the Principalship: Insights from Transformational Reform Efforts. Corwin: Newbury Park. p.26
Nor, are effective school leaders simply good managers and evidence from Moos & Dempster cited in McBeath suggests that models of leadership differ from culture to culture:

In England heads are expected to act as behavioural role models; in Scotland, they are expected to be directly involved in supporting teaching and learning in the classroom with extensive curriculum knowledge; in Denmark they must have pedagogical insight but provide support at a distance for their teachers; in Australia, they are expected to demonstrate the strength of their personal qualities as they extend leadership and management opportunities to their teachers.

In general, the trend appears to be one of replacing bureaucratic leadership approaches with a more distributed one and to expect that a generally applicable model of leadership exists is, perhaps, naïve.

However, these changes are compounded by market forces which put the school principal in a difficult situation and calls on them to establish efficiency as a cornerstone of school activity. This may conflict with the ethos and values of many schools.

As Boylett and Finlay have indicated, that dilemma is becoming a recurring theme of school leadership and they have pointed to the past when distinctions were clearer:

...public sector management’s prime objective was recognized as a moral absolute to ‘do good’ rather than prioritizing objectives in relative economic terms. But the changes imposed by parental choice and outcome-led performance measurement of school efficiency and effectiveness have turned the philosophy of school management on its head.

In terms of the above comments, the leadership challenge has a number of equally important aspects. In the first place there is a need to decide on what kind of leadership

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is most appropriate for our schools and secondly there is a need to understand and articulate the values that underpin the role of the principal in a particular school setting. Effective leadership in schools in a time of change is as much about sustaining community relationships and ensuring that all stakeholders are heard as it is about responding to external forces. Good principals will prioritise their time depending on circumstances and endeavour, where possible, to keep the internal and external aspects of school life in balance. In the words of Riley & MacBeath 174, "Effective leadership is about making those choices and about managing the 'fit' between the external world and the internal world of the school".

However, there is always the possibility that, despite the contextual nature and the variety of school leadership models, good school leaders are identifiable.

As Riley & MacBeath 175 suggest:

_They are distinguished by their vision and passion and by their capacity to bring a critical spirit into the complex and demanding job of headship, whilst at the same time focusing on staff and pupil performance, and on classroom pedagogy._

In concluding this review of the literature, it is worth mentioning the seven heresies of leadership as outlined by McBeath 176. He identified the following possible characteristics of future school leaders and suggested that, in a culture of change which requires new models of leadership, the following characteristics, paraphrased here, might be essential.

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175 Ibid., p.151
176 Ibid., pp.1-17
Leaders need to break rules, set unattainable goals, be excellent followers as well as good leaders, allow themselves be managed in order to avoid chaos, behave like grown-ups, be democratic and less hierarchical, be supportive to all stakeholders and have enough self-awareness to accept the need for training. The final characteristic, according to MacBeath is, a realization that all leaders may need to be ‘locked up’ which is an interesting, but unexplored hypothesis, in McBeath’s book.

2.13 Literature in the context of the Quantitative Research

In this research thesis the literature review had a broad focus which explored common conceptual definitions and understandings of leadership. The challenge, in the context of the empirical research, was to relate the literature to concrete leadership exemplars and solid observable phenomena in schools.

Therefore, a skills/competency approach was decided upon and within that framework it is implicit that leadership, as an aspect of the work of the school principal, is an observable phenomena in a range of specific situations and contexts within the broader parameters of the work of the school leader which includes leadership, administration and management as core and, arguably, inter-dependent variables.

Having carefully considered the literature, in the context of the research question which sought to explore the attitudes of principals to key aspects of their work, it was decided to frame the empirical questions in the context of essential operational examples of leadership theory in action. As a result, the final list of quantitative research items are concrete operational manifestations of the concepts reviewed in Chapter 2 of the research and are essentially a bridge between theory and practice, given that, it is in the
application of skills/competencies that leadership is exercised within our primary schools. The literature review points to a body of existing work which addresses the concept of leadership in a theoretical framework and in this thesis those leadership theories are evaluated in the context of their application vis-à-vis the core work of the school principal which is administrative, managerial and leadership orientated. In the context of this research, it is hoped that the theoretical framework evident in the literature will provide the reader with:

- An understanding of the key importance of school leadership
- A broad overview of important issues in school leadership.
- A conceptual framework in which the research may be located.
- A bridge between the literature and the quantitative research undertaken in terms of the literature review having a direct impact on the final list items included in the questionnaire.

The following core skills and competencies which are defined, in the context of this research, as concrete operational manifestations of leadership in practice are in line with the theoretical framework outlined in the literature review are included in the questionnaire under the following general headings. All of the skills/competencies included in the final questionnaire were considered to be concrete manifestations of leadership in practice and a bridge between theory and practice in the context of this research thesis

- Organisational leadership (Vision and Empowerment)
- Cultural Leadership (Ethos and Public Relations)
- Political Awareness (Negotiation and Policy Reconciliation)
- Educational Management (Teaching, Staff Development, Assessment, Curriculum Change)
- Organisational Management (Communication and Interpersonal Skills)
- Educational Management (Decision Making and Pastoral Care)
- Professional Knowledge (Ability to Lead and Ability to Deliver)
- Client Satisfaction (Availability and Networking)
- Promotional Skills (School Profiling and School Pride)
- Resource Management (Financial Management and Budgeting)
- Job Satisfaction (Stress Management and Staff Appraisal)
- Policy Development (School Planning and Policy Development)
- Administration (Record Keeping and Staff Selection)
- Induction (Training and Role Clarity)
Chapter 3.

Research Methodology.

3.1 Introduction.

In this section of the research project various research methods are evaluated and a rationale is given for choosing a particular method, i.e. postal questionnaire in this instance. The objective of the research was to come to a deeper understanding of the role of the primary school principal by applying a systematic and reliable means of data collection and, in order to do so, it was necessary to establish the most appropriate research method from the range of possibilities available.

A relevant quote from Allyn and Bacon though old, in comparison to modern literature in this area, succinctly describes the research process as follows:

"Research is best conceived as a process of arriving at dependable solutions through the planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data. It is a most important tool for advancing knowledge, for promoting progress and for enabling man to relate more effectively to his environment, to accomplish his purposes and to resolve his conflicts."

Cohen, Manion and Morrison defined methods to mean, "...that range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction".

Considering the need of a researcher to use the most appropriate research technique, consideration was given to all methods at the outset. Included in these deliberations

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were the two main research paradigms, i.e. quantitative (positivist, longitudinal and cross-section surveys, questionnaires, standardised interviews) and qualitative (phenomenological, action research, case studies, documents, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, participant observation).

In terms of research paradigms, the dilemma lay in choosing between quantitative or qualitative methodologies. These are fundamentally different approaches in terms of epistemology and philosophy with one being driven by a positivist agenda and the other a phenomenological life-view. However, modern literature has suggested that the relationship between quantitative and qualitative research methods can be complementary. This is a fundamental shift in thinking from the pure paradigm approach of earlier theorists. Within the pure paradigm philosophical approach different definitions of quantitative and qualitative research methods are emphasised and the opposing view ideas are defended. The following definitions, offered by Bell, are indicative of the pure paradigm approach.

Bell defines quantitative methodology as follows,

**Quantitative researchers collect facts and study the relationship of one set of facts to another. They use techniques that are likely to produce quantified and, if possible, generalizable conclusions.**

This positivist research philosophy involves working with observable social reality. The emphasis is on a highly structured methodology to facilitate replication and the end product will normally be generalisations similar to those produced by the physical and natural sciences. Quantitative researchers, who remain removed from the process of data collection, would argue that the facts they gather are completely...
objective and devoid of any researcher bias and that the whole of their findings are equal to the sum of all the constituent parts, no more.

However, this has long been the subject of much debate and even as far back as 1839 the following comments on quantitative methods, in particular postal questionnaires, were made in a report\(^\text{180}\) of that time:

\textit{It is impossible to expect accuracy in returns obtained by circulars, various constructions being put on the same question by different individuals who consequently classify their replies upon various principles.}

Many have since joined the chorus of dissatisfaction with quantitative methods of data collection and questions of validity, epistemological underpinnings and reliability are some of the issues in current debate between exponents of quantitative research and their qualitative counterparts. Notwithstanding these issues, it is clear that postal questionnaires, the preferred methodology of the researcher in this case, are a frequently used mechanism of data collection due to cost-effectiveness and the lack of necessity to devote huge human resources. Time advantages are also an attraction to the part-time researcher. That is not, of course, an argument in favour of quantitative research above all other methods but it is fair to say that, when it comes to gathering simple, factual information, a well organised questionnaire can sometimes be a suitable research instrument. Nor. does suitability mean effectiveness and many other issues have to be considered. For example, it is arguable, that all research tools are flawed and that the chances of producing a perfect data collection instrument are limited because it is virtually impossible for any researcher to ask a completely neutral question in the first place.

\(^{180}\) Report of a Committee of the Manchester Statistical Society on the state of Education in the County of Rutland (1839), \textit{Journal of the Statistical Society of London} 2, p.303
Because questionnaire items will be theory led and derived from a subjective researcher-led point of view it may be claimed that quantitative researchers gather evidence to support a personal and/or paradigm view which may undermine, for some at least, the value of this research instrument. In the context of this research it was felt that, notwithstanding the point raised above, that the status of the questionnaire as a research tool could be maintained by careful design and the view of the researcher remained that questionnaires, as a means of gathering particular information at a specific point in time, were a suitable instrument of data collection.

The phenomenologists who view social phenomena as socially constructed and are particularly concerned with gaining insights would not agree with the use of questionnaires in this context and their stance is well described by Bell. 181 who defined qualitative research as follows:

Researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are more concerned to understand individual's perception of the world; they seek insight rather than statistical analysis.

Qualitative researchers believe that the whole is, arguably much greater that the sum of all its parts and believe that rich insights may be lost if you simply compress data into a series of law-like generalisations. This is anathema to phenomenologists who seek to discover what Remenyi et al 182 call "...the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a working reality behind them".

181 Bell, J. (1999), op. cit. p.7
It would be easy to fall into the trap of thinking that one research approach is better than another. That would miss the point and perhaps various approaches are just better at doing different things. Research rarely falls neatly into either paradigm and many writers suggest comparisons between qualitative and quantitative research paradigms are not entirely impossible and that the possibility of them being complementary may also exist. The complementary view which is both practical and realistic was expressed as follows by Best and Kahn.183

*Quantitative research is based more directly on its original plans and its results are more readily analysed and interpreted. Qualitative research is more open and responsive to its subject. Both types of research are valid and useful. They are not mutually exclusive. It is possible for a single investigation to use both methods.*

This technique of combining methods of research is often referred to as ‘triangulation of methods’. Cohen and Manion184 consider this technique to be particularly appropriate in the field of education. They believe that the teaching-learning process is so complex and involved that a single method approach to research philosophies results in limited and sometimes misleading data.

Notwithstanding the above arguments it was decided that a positivist/empiricist approach as defined by Usher185 would be an appropriate method of data collection in the context of this research which sought information from a large cohort of school principals (123) in the West Cork area. The aim of this research was to obtain information from which

patterns of responses, might be extracted. Survey methods were considered appropriate. Cohen and Manion (1994)\textsuperscript{186} describe the survey as the most commonly used descriptive method in educational research and state that:

\textit{Surveys gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, of identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or determining the relationships that exist between specific events.}

Survey methods were seen as the most appropriate by the researcher because questions could be designed so that individuals' answers could be added together to produce results which applied to the whole sample. In addition, data could be easily broken down to facilitate analysis and interpretation.

Therefore, it was decided to collect the primary data using quantitative methodology, employing a series of precise and pre-structured written questions, i.e. a postal questionnaire with each respondent being asked to answer the same set of questions in the same order. This provides an efficient means of collecting data from a large group of respondents prior to quantitative analysis. The research being undertaken was essentially descriptive and, because the research objective was to identify and quantify the attitudes of principal teachers to a range of aspects of the work they commonly undertake, the use of questionnaires was considered appropriate because it enabled the identification and description of the variability in the different areas under review. That is not to say that a qualitative approach would not allow the same information to be gathered which, clearly, it would. However, because of practical considerations of time, human resources and the

\textsuperscript{186}Cohen, L. and Manion, L. (1994), \textit{op. cit.} p.89
fact that this research was conducted by a part-time post-graduate student it was decided that a postal questionnaire was an appropriate research tool given the philosophical and practical arguments to the contrary.

Furthermore, and strictly within the quantitative field of research, the postal questionnaire was also preferred above a range of other quantitative alternatives. Among these alternatives were telephone questionnaires, structured interviews, on-line questionnaires, longitudinal studies and case studies, all of which can be considered quantitative in terms of epistemology and philosophical underpinnings.

The researcher was also cognizant of the fact that within this research project the sample included a mixture of different genders, ages, educational levels, experience and attitude and could thus, arguably, be considered a cross-sectional study. However, it was felt that the use of the postal questionnaire was not inconsistent with that information and that its use would in no way inhibit the collection of data or its subsequent quantitative analysis. To a large extent the demographic variables within the sample could be analysed and identified within the quantitative and statistical analysis.

At all times the researcher was confident that he understood the advantages and disadvantages of the questionnaire as a data collection tool, was fully aware of the range of questionnaire options open to him, understood the philosophical divide and the possibility of triangulation of methods, had the ability to design, pilot and administer a questionnaire which would address the research question and meet the objectives of the project which were to measure and quantify a range of aspects relevant to the current workload of the primary school principal in the West Cork area.
3.2 The questionnaire as a data collection tool.

The collection of data by the survey method often has been criticised but remains popular for many reasons. Among these is the ability to collect a large amount of data from a sizeable population in an economical way. In addition, the survey method is seen as authoritative by people in general because it is familiar to them, easily understood and a common means of reporting on attitudes of people to all aspects of life in the popular media.

Using survey methods also gives the researcher a measure of control over the research process and, though large amounts of time are required to design, pilot and analyse questionnaires, it can be at the discretion of the researcher to a large degree. In practice most of the major stages of questionnaire research strategy are under the control of the researcher with the exception of the number of questionnaires returned and, arguably, even that aspect will have been influenced by the quality of the design phase itself.

Therefore, to some extent the researcher using questionnaires will remain free from undue dependence on others for information and/or expertise as the project unfolds.

Unfortunately, the data collected by questionnaire strategies may not be as wide ranging as those collected by other methods and there is a limit to the number of questions that can be included before the goodwill of respondents is presumed on too much.

In addition, the possibility of badly designing a questionnaire, a distinct possibility in the case of amateur researchers, is always there and this negative view of the questionnaire as an instrument of research has been highlighted by many in the field.
Nor is this a recent phenomenon and Thorndike\textsuperscript{187}, as far back as the start of the twentieth century, expressed this when he said, "one vice of statistical studies in education today is the indiscriminate use of lists of questions as a means of collecting data by correspondence"

Many issues around the use of quantitative methods of data collection amongst which are questions about validity, epistemological underpinnings and reliability require consideration. These issues, which were alluded to in the previous section of this thesis, inform the current debate between exponents of quantitative research and their qualitative counterparts.

Notwithstanding these reservations however, it was the view of the researcher that the postal questionnaire method was the most appropriate in the context of the research being undertaken which was motivated, in the first instance, by the views of the researcher himself, and was simply a means to gather evidence in support of, or contrary to, the view of the researcher that principals of primary schools in the West Cork area had a very difficult, if not an impossible, job.

Therefore, in the context of the research project the questionnaire was used as Cohen et al\textsuperscript{188} said, "to gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions".

\textsuperscript{187} Thorndike, E. L. (1911), "Quantitative Investigations in Education" School Review Monograph Vol. 1 p.43

The advantage of questionnaires, according to Hopkins (1998) who is paraphrased here, are, that they are easy to administer and not difficult to complete in the majority of cases. In addition they provide feedback on a range of issues and attitudes, provide quantifiable data and eliminate the effect of personal interaction between researcher and respondents.

The disadvantages to questionnaires, and I paraphrase Hopkins, were the time consuming nature of the statistical analysis, the extensive preparation required to get clear and relevant questions, the difficulty of exploring issues in depth, the assumption that all respondents will have the necessary literacy skills and the lack of opportunity to check the truth of the responses as some respondents may not answer candidly or truthfully.

Anderson offered important words of advice on the construction of questionnaires, when stating, "...if well constructed, a questionnaire permits the collection of reliable and reasonable valid data, relatively simply, cheaply and in a short space of time". However, Anderson further stated that, "...there are many sloppy questionnaires and these yield unreliable data of limited validity and utility".

Therefore, it may be argued that questionnaires, if properly constructed are not necessarily less valid than other forms of data collection such as interviews, which were one of a range of alternative options considered by the researcher.


\[^{191}\text{Ibid., p.207}]

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Cohen and Manion\textsuperscript{192} supported this point of view by stating:

\textit{Response levels to postal surveys are not invariably less than those obtained by interview procedures: frequently they equal, and in some cases surpass those achieved in interviews. Nor does the questionnaire have to be short in order to obtain a satisfactory response level.}

McKernan\textsuperscript{193} described the questionnaire as a data collection method which is, \textit{“easy to administer and provides direct responses of both factual and attitudinal information”}.

Having given due consideration to all of the above points of view the reasons for selecting postal questionnaires as the most suitable data collecting techniques in the context of this research project, were as follows:

- Large amounts of data could be collected in a short space of time and relatively cheaply.
- Respondents had high literacy and comprehension skills as all were educated to third level.
- Researcher had lots of qualitative information, having been a principal in the area under review a number of years previously, on which to base the questions included in the postal questionnaire.
- The sample was geographically dispersed across a region of 80 mls in length and 100 mls in width.
- Anonymity of respondents was guaranteed and likelihood of contamination or distortion of respondents’ replies was low.

• Financial and resource implications made the postal questionnaire an attractive option.

• Time constraints did not allow the researcher the luxury of long interviews on a wide range of issues with a large number of respondents.

In addition to the use of a large cross-sectional sample and the need to standardise the measurement of questionnaire items, the objectives of the research, which were based on identifying, describing and quantifying the attitudes of local principals to a range of skills and competencies which they need and use in their daily work, were well served by that particular research instrument, i.e. quantitative methods using the postal questionnaire as a tool of data collection.

3.3 Questionnaire Design

In this research project, the questionnaire developed from broad aims and hypotheses. The basic research question had sprung from the experiences of the researcher as a primary school principal in West Cork and data was being sought in order to test and evaluate a personal and/or paradigm view which perceived the life of the school principal, particularly the teaching principal, as chaotic, stressful and often unsupported at systems level.

Therefore, the selection of appropriate questions became an issue of major importance to the researcher and, by examining the many issues in the working life of the principal in the context of the literature review, about which the researcher had first-hand experience, a number of key concepts were defined and used as the basis for actual questions. These concepts were broadly based on the administrative, management and leadership

responsibilities of the school principal and included areas such as organisational leadership (vision and empowerment), cultural leadership (ethos and public relations), political awareness (negotiation and policy reconciliation), educational leadership (teaching/learning, staff development, assessment, and curriculum change), organisational management (communication and interpersonal skills), educational management (decision making and pastoral care), professional knowledge (ability to lead and ability to deliver), client satisfaction (availability and networking), promotional skills (school profile and school pride), resource management (financial management and budgeting), job satisfaction (stress management and delegation), human resource management (motivation and conflict management), human resource management (staff management and staff appraisal), policy development (school planning and policy development), administration (record keeping and staff selection) and induction (training and role clarity). (See complete questionnaire in appendix III, page 277.)

Cognisant of the words of Punch 194, who reminded us of the critical nature of good questions when stating, "the focus of this question must almost always show that there is much more than meets the eye", questions on the key skills/competences of the principal were devised and presented in the following pattern.

In each area included in the questionnaire five questions on the practice of, time devoted to, the acquisition of, the level of competence and the training need were included.

A similar pattern of enquiry was followed in a range of issues relating to the administrative, managerial and leadership role of the principal and it was felt that these questions were appropriate for the following reasons:

- They were at the right level of detail to answer the investigative purpose of the research, i.e. the experiences of the researcher as a principal in the area and his knowledge of the issues ensured that the questionnaire items review were appropriate to the topic.
- Respondents had the necessary knowledge to answer all questions. i.e. all respondents were working as principals and faced the issues discussed on a regular basis.
- There was no use of jargon or emotive language.
- Questions were inoffensive and unthreatening.
- Questions were not unduly complicated and easy to interpret.
- There were no negatives or ambiguous sentence structures in the questionnaire.
- There were no leading questions.
- Questions did not prevent certain answers being given by respondents.
- Questions did not embarrass or attack the professional competencies of the individual respondents.

According to Bourque & Fielder (1995), there are four classifications of a research

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question which makes it effective. These are, and I paraphrase, a contained topic, a focus on the present, a well structured sequence of questions set in a clear field and a clear research objective set in strictly defined parameters.

The researcher was satisfied that the postal questionnaire used as a data collection tool in this thesis was in conformity with the above characteristics of good research questions. Ideal questionnaires will have questions framed in the same way that laws are enacted and a quote from Davidson cited in Cohen, Manion and Morrison was the standard to which this research project aspired. Davidson said that a good questionnaire is as follows:

\begin{quote}
It is clear, unambiguous and uniformly workable. Its design must minimize potential errors from respondents...and coders. And since people’s participation in surveys is voluntary, a questionnaire has to help in engaging their interest, encouraging their co-operation, and eliciting answers as close as possible to the truth
\end{quote}

At all times the researcher felt that the research topic, in which he, as a former school principal, had a personal interest, could be successfully explored using the questionnaire as an appropriate research tool in a quantitative framework.

In addition, all of the issues raised were, arguably, of a common interest to principals everywhere and not particular to the Irish educational context, let alone the narrower West Cork educational one.

Because there exists a vast literature in the area of school leadership, it was the intention of the researcher to provide, where possible, fresh local insights into this field of academic study.

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Furthermore, it was the intention of the researcher to go beyond mere description of the facts gathered in this survey of principal’s attitudes to their work and offer in the words of Phillips and Pugh\textsuperscript{197} "... explanations, relationships, comparisons, predictions, generalisations and theories"

In other words, although intelligence gathering would be a central part of this research, there would also be an effort to explain phenomena, to analyse and to compare and where possible, to generalise. Nor. was it expected that the research would be ground-breaking or that new wonderful theories of educational leadership would result. Rather, there was an emphasis on substantive theory and this would be, in the words of Creswell\textsuperscript{198} "... restricted to a particular setting, group, time, population or problem"

Given the reality of the setting and group as mentioned above, it was not realistic to expect that some grand theory would emerge but, that is not to say, that any emergent theory, however modest, could not contribute to the understanding of the issue under review or assist school principals in achieving a better understanding of their work and/or the supports they may need in the future.


3.4 Population Studied/Sampling

The target population in this thesis was the principals of all the primary schools in the West Cork area. The area in question is one of 21 such designated areas by the Department of Education & Science, all of which have as a focal point an Education Centre which is dedicated to the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers (See map in Appendix I, page 270).

Education Support Centres are defined in the Education Act of 1998 as follows:

...a place in which services are provided for schools, teachers, parents, boards and other relevant persons which support them in carrying out their functions in respect of the provision of education which is recognised for that purpose by the Minister...

Being cognisant of the advice of Cohen et al. who said that "...a piece of research not only stands or falls by the appropriateness of methodology but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy that has been adopted" the question of sampling was given considerable attention. Having considered the size of the area under review, which was small in terms of numbers of schools, it was decided that it would be appropriate to target the whole population of principal teachers in the West Cork area.

Therefore, 123 questionnaires were issued, one to each school within the catchment area of the West Cork Education Centre. Within the area surveyed, the total population of principals was included in the questionnaire and the researcher was therefore aware that results would be limited in terms of applicability to other Education Centre areas without further research outside of West Cork.

However, that is not to limit completely the possibility that results might be significant in

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200 Cohen et al. (2000), op. cit., p.92
different areas considering the similarities between the work of principals in all schools regardless of location, but, from a research perspective this study does not claim that results are generalisable beyond the sample group, i.e. the 123 principal teachers in the West Cork Education Centre area.

It is also true that the number of principals in West Cork is a less than 5% of the total number of primary school principals in the Republic of Ireland which restricts the possibility of generalising results but there remained the possibility that some of the information gathered from the area in question would be representative of the total population of school principals in the Republic of Ireland.201

However, in terms of the sample being representative of the population involved in this research, it was the view of the researcher there was an accurate population representation considering that the sample was in fact the whole population in this case. In short, this research was confined to a specific group of individuals, i.e. school principals, within a defined geographical area and that results which emerged could only apply to that given sample, though, the possibility exists that similar groups of professionals doing similar jobs in similar schools might be interested in applying the results to their similar professional circumstances.

In the context of the research analysis which was achieved using SPSS 202 it was felt that sufficient numbers were involved to make meaningful comparisons between sub-groups within the whole sample and, in reality, it would have been nigh on impossible for the researcher, a part-time post-graduate student, to consider a larger sample due to resource constraints.

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201 See Cohen, L. & Manion, L. (1994). op. cit. (p.87) for a similar view on the possibility of results being relevant to a broader population than intended.

202 Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was the preferred means of data analysis in this research project and will be referred to simply as SPSS in the remainder of this thesis.
and time constraints. Nor, would a larger sample have improved the possibility of examining relationships within the whole sample in the view of the researcher. Large samples are not a guarantee of representativeness, and, in this particular study, part of the objective was to identify the actual sub-groups in terms of gender, experience, etc. and compare their responses. There were many factors which could exercise a disproportionate effect on the study even though the sample represented the whole population of the principals under review and was, arguably at least, representative of school principals in a national context.

Among these was the possibility that respondents were having a ‘bad day’ and the actual length of the questionnaire may have been a negative factor in obtaining a genuine response from some busy respondents. However, despite the obvious length of the questionnaire and the repetitive question format it was the view of the researcher that the content under review would be relevant enough to the respondents and the response format, though repetitive, would be simple and easy enough for all respondents to guarantee full completion and a high response pattern. This was in fact the case and a 60% + response rate resulted.

Therefore, it is fair to conclude that this sampling element of the study was planned and deliberate, whilst at the same time mindful of the purposes of the research, the time-frame and the resource constraints of the project.

It was also the view of the researcher that the research techniques employed were both valid and reliable and, consequently, it would be possible to make predictions to a larger population, i.e. primary school principals in the Republic of Ireland.
Reliability was assessed by posing a number of key questions which according to Easterby-Smith et al.\textsuperscript{203}, whom I paraphrase, provided the probability of similar results being generated at different times or by different observers and the transparency around the procedures employed in making sense from raw data. It was felt that in those key areas the research project would stand up to scrutiny.

With regard to validity, which is concerned with whether the findings are really about what they appear to be about or are merely casual coincidences, it was felt that the sample under review would respond in a balanced way to the questionnaire items as they were relevant to them and would not disadvantage or embarrass them in any way with regard to their performance as principals. In that regard anonymity was guaranteed and there was no need for the researcher to know who participants were in order to begin the process of data analysis. It was helpful to be able to categorise people in terms of sub-groups and information was collected with that in mind without compromising the complete anonymity of all respondents in terms of findings.

Throughout the process of designing, administering and analysing data there was a high level of confidence that the research was both reliable and valid. It was felt that the methods in use were replicable and would produce similar results in other education centre areas.

According to Bell (1999)\textsuperscript{204} "reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions..." 


\textsuperscript{204} Bell, J. (1999), op. cit. pp.50-51
and Sapsford and Evans (1984) had suggested that reliability applied to people involved in research as much as to the instruments of data collection.

They stated the following:

*Reliability is the consistency of the results obtained when using a measure in research. It is a word used measuring instruments, including the human observer... and refers to the basic scientific requirement that it should be possible for another worker to duplicate one's results or produce comparable evidence, at least in principle.*

The researcher was confident that the research methods were reliable and aware that this reliability may be at the expense of validity which is used to judge whether the research accurately achieves what it sets out to achieve.

According to Bell validity tell us,

*...whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe. If an item is unreliable, then it must also lack validity, but a reliable item is not necessarily also valid. It could produce the same or similar responses on all occasions, but not be measuring what it is supposed to measure.*

However, such was the careful formulation of the questionnaire items, the researcher was confident that, both he and the respondents, related to the content of the survey and the need to gather quantitative data in relation to the working life of the school principal.

All respondents completed the questionnaire accurately and their high level of response indicated that the internal validity of the research was high and the research findings adequately represented the topic under investigation. in the view of the researcher. On the issue of external validity which is concerned about the degree to which findings can

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206 Bell, J. (1999), op. cit. p.51
be generalised to other settings, it was the view of the researcher that in the majority of education centre areas throughout the Republic of Ireland similar results could occur although no claims are made that any of the results of this research are valid beyond the population sample included, i.e. the principal teachers in primary schools within the West Cork Education Centre area.

The researcher was at all times aware of the value of both reliability and validity and mindful of the words of Easterby-Smith et al.\textsuperscript{207} who offered the following advice.

\begin{quote}Provided the research is committed to providing a faithful description of others understanding and perceptions, then ideas such as validity and reliability can provide a very useful discipline.\end{quote}

In terms of external validity which is concerned with the issue of producing theories that are generalisable, the purpose of this research was not to do that, but to explain what is going on in the research setting outlined. Consequently, there is no claim being made that generalisability is likely, though it remains a possibility. Considering the boundaries of the professional role of the school principal and the likelihood that areas with similar social structures develop all over the country which may have resulted in common practices at local school level.

Overall, the researcher was confident that the sample chosen was representative and that the research strategy was appropriate for this descriptive study which sought, "... to portray an accurate profile persons, events or situations"\textsuperscript{208} within the world of the primary school principal in the West Cork Education Centre area.


3.5 Piloting the Questionnaire

Piloting is "a small scale application of the main method" according to Youngman\(^{209}\) and in this research project, the purpose of the pilot test was, to refine the questionnaire so that the respondents would have no problem in answering the questions and, consequently, there would be no major difficulties in recording their responses.

The questionnaire was piloted at a local principals' support group meeting by prior arrangement and with the agreement of all 5 principals who were in attendance. Initially, these principals were asked to comment on the representativeness and suitability of the questions and their responses were positive. All agreed that the major issues in the working life of the school principal were addressed and that the questionnaire appeared to make sense, i.e. it had face validity.

Each complete pilot questionnaire was checked by the researcher in order to ensure that the respondent had no difficulty understanding or answering questions. It was the case that most respondents took considerable time (up to 40 minutes in one case) filling out the questionnaire but none complained about this and no-one experienced difficulty in following all the instructions.

There was one minor issue concerning the aspect of each question which dealt with the issue of the level of competency of each particular skill. Five categories of response were possible. Very high, high, average, low or very low and, in a general discussion with the pilot respondents, they suggested that 'non-applicable' would be more appropriate than 'average' given that some respondents might not consider that a particular

skill/competency was their responsibility in the first place. In this discussion particular
mention was made of staff appraisal and it was the view of some of the respondents that
formal staff appraisal was the work of the Inspectorate. Notwithstanding the above
discussion, it was decided to retain all the questions as initially planned but to change the
‘average’ to ‘non-applicable’ in part (iv) of each of the questionnaire items. Strictly
speaking ‘non-applicable’ does suggest a category of response that is fundamentally
different from that based on a spectrum of competence, but, considering the point that in
the view of some principals aspects of the work included in the questionnaire items might
not be considered their responsibility due to a lack of clarity vis-à-vis the definition of
their role, it was decided to go with the recommendation of the pilot group and include
the ‘non-applicable’ category.

Having completed the pilot, albeit with a smaller group than had been anticipated, the
research continued with confidence that the questionnaire was easy to complete, had clear
instructions, did not include ambiguous questions, was inclusive of all the major issues in
the life of a school principal, had a clear and user friendly lay-out and did not create any
uneasiness among respondents vis-à-vis the information being sought. However, despite
lack of need to make significant changes to the planned questionnaire, the pilot phase was
important in that it instilled a measure of confidence in the researcher that the
questionnaire was a suitable means by which to gather the information required. Having
completed the pilot phase the researcher could identify with Bell (1999) who said that

"however pressed you are for time, do your best to give the questionnaire a trial
run". and it was greatly affirming to have completed a pilot test without having major

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210 Bell, J. (1999). op. cit. p.128
flaws identified by either the respondents or the researcher.

On completion of the pilot phase, the researcher began to focus on the use of the questionnaire for the purpose of collecting data, in support of the research objective which was to gather relevant information on the working life and the associated complexities of being a principal of a primary school in the West Cork area.

3.6 Administration of the Questionnaire

Having completed the pilot phase and tested 'everything' as Oppenheim suggests, the questionnaire, with a covering letter attached was posted to all school principals in the West Cork area. These totalled 123 (see list of schools in Appendix II) and included all schools within the catchment area of the West Cork Education Centre. The covering letter outlined the objectives of the project and requested the respondents' co-operation and was attached to the questionnaire which was 18 pages in length and contained a total of 199 variables on a range of issues relevant to the working life of the primary school principal.

All correspondence was addressed to the principal of each school and issued in early May 2004 with a request that they be completed and returned before May 26th 2004 which allowed respondents a minimum of three weeks in which to co-operate.

Included with each questionnaire was a stamped addressed envelope and it was hoped that the pertinence of the issues raised and the anonymity of the research would not lead to what Sudman and Bradburn termed "over-reporting or under-reporting".


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Fortunately, the actual response was excellent and a total of 76 questionnaires were returned out of 123. Seventy four of these were included in the final data analysis. This amounted to a response of 60% approximately which was both satisfactory to the researcher and bore out the words of the words of Cohen and Manion, quoted earlier in the research, who stated that in order to guarantee a good response questionnaires need not be overlooked in favour of interviews, or, be short and concise in form.

When returned each questionnaire was checked and data was coded for inputting into the Statistical package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software package which was the preferred tool of data analysis. This research was descriptive or explanatory in essence and SPSS provided ample opportunity for cross-tabulation of data and much debate resulted. It was obvious that questions had been interpreted in the same way by all respondents and a high measure of consistency, with regard to the format of the questions, was evident from an early stage of the analysis.

At this stage the focus of the work began to change to data analysis and the words of Robson\(^{213}\) began to inform the process. He stated that data analysis was:

\[\textit{A field where it is not difficult to carry out an analysis, which is simply wrong, or inappropriate for your purposes. And the negative side of readily available analysis software is that it becomes that much easier to generate elegantly presented rubbish.}\]

Therefore, as the process of data analysis became the focus of the work of the research, the theories which encouraged the research, in the first instance, were tested against individual and aggregated raw data.

As Bryman\(^{214}\) reminded us:

\(^{213}\) Robson, C. (2002). \textit{op. cit.} p.31

...once the survey or experimental data have been collected, they are then analysed so that the causal connection specified by the hypothesis can be verified or rejected. The resultant finding can then feed back into, and is absorbed by, the theory that set the whole process going in the first place.

It was never the case that the researcher considered that qualitative analysis was inappropriate for this project but, given the number of respondents, the time-frame and past research experience, albeit limited, it was felt that the use of quantitative methods was more suited in this particular instance.

Brown and Dowling \(^{215}\) asserted that "... statistical techniques themselves will not guarantee the quality of the work" and this present research was underpinned by the understanding that other research approaches would have been possible if other design decisions had been made.

Before embarking on the statistic analysis of the data collected it is worth reminding ourselves of the analogy suggested by Hammersley \(^{216}\) who evoked the image of the research journey by stating:

> What is involved here is not a cross-roads where we go left or right. A better analogy is a complex maze where we are repeatedly faced with decisions, and where paths wind back on one another.

In the context of this particular research, the decisions taken regarding philosophical positions, research strategies, population sampling, piloting and data analysis were as outlined previously. The project was essentially positivist in its world view and concerned with recording descriptive facts using a questionnaire as the preferred method of data collection. All of these decisions were taken with the

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full knowledge of the range of possibilities available and with the research questions and project objectives firmly in mind.

Particular consideration was given to the research when choosing methods and as the exact question under review was, the ability of the primary principal to be successful at his/her job in the current context of hugely increased levels of responsibility and growing accountability. It was the aim of the researcher to make standardised and systemic comparisons which lent themselves to a quantitative approach. It was never the intention to study the phenomenon in depth but to get a flavour of the principals' perception of their role at a particular point in time and in a particular geographical context.

Practical issues of time, money, experience and resources also played a part in the final decision to use quantitative methods. Furthermore, it was considered that, in this instance when the focus of the research was to get a snapshot of the current working life and conditions of the average principal, that a questionnaire, which is the preferred research approach of the researcher, was an appropriate research instrument within a quantitative framework.

It was also understood by the researcher, that, because of his understanding and personal experience of the role of school principal, there existed a strong possibility that his personal opinions would find expression in the questions posed and even predict, to some extent, possible responses.

However, it was the view of the researcher that, despite these issues, he could remain detached, if not wholly objective, and at all times was confident that personal beliefs and attitudes would not cloud researcher objectivity to the
detriment of the objectives of the project which were fundamentally to describe and quantify the issues which created difficulty for the school principal. This is the concept of reflexivity and this writer was acutely aware of the need to be alert to the possibility that his background as a teaching principal would cloud his judgement.

Reflexivity has been defined as follows by Morley as follows:

Reflexivity demands a type of emotional literacy on the part of the researcher, who can sensitively engage with the research study because s/he is aware of her/his own responses, values, beliefs and prejudices

In this research project there was an acute awareness on the part of the researcher that the working conditions of the school principal were unsatisfactory and the questionnaire items included were chosen in order to gather evidence in support of the need for system reform which might address the principal issues of concern to school leaders. However, at no stage was the writer incapable of dealing with the facts that emerged regardless of how they may have conflicted with his personal views on the role of the principal in the Irish primary school system.

The final questionnaire, though incomplete, addressed many of the issues of concern to principals and was a competently prepared document well suited to the research objectives and relevant to the practical realities of the life of a part-time researcher.

3.7 **Triangulation: Follow-up Group Interview.**

Having processed the quantitative data and conducted an analysis it was felt that the thesis would benefit from a number of follow-up interviews with principals in order to evaluate the significance of some of the major issues that emerged from the quantitative research.

Consequently, a group interview, at which a representative group of principals was invited to attend was organised. Those invited to attend were a representative group based on the demographic breakdown of schools in West Cork. Three were representatives of rural schools, one worked in an urban setting and another was principal in a Gaelscoil.

All invited principals had been included in the initial survey and were aware of the focus of the research and the approach being taken. However, only three attended for interview. One of these rang on the appointed morning to excuse her non-attendance and the other did not show up despite having agreed to attend when telephoned about the date and objectives of the meeting. All present came from a rural school background, but, as rural school principals accounted for 81% of respondents in this research (rural, rural disadvantaged and gaeltacht school are all in rural settings) it was felt that, for the purposes for which this group interview was intended, i.e. to test the significance of some of the major issues emerging from the quantitative research element of the thesis, the sample was representative.

In attendance were one female with an N.T. qualification, of considerable experience, but who had not undergone any additional training since commencing as a principal many years previously. Both males were B.Ed. degree holders who had been school principals

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for more than 5 years and one of these was currently studying for a Diploma in Educational Administration in University College Cork in his own time.

The final group was therefore two-thirds male which did not unduly concern the researcher as initial quantitative analysis had not identified gender as a significant factor in the ability of principals to be successful in their work.

This was a semi-structured interview, and, although a carefully worded schedule was prepared by the researcher, latitude was permitted in terms of the responses of participating principals.

Respondents were encouraged to express themselves at length and the following areas were the focus of the research questions.

(i) The changing role of the primary principal.
(ii) The issue of time and the conflict between teaching and administration for school principals.
(iii) The need to make the position of primary school principal more attractive to potential leaders.
(iv) The need for systems change to facilitate school leadership.
(v) New models of leadership.

A group interview approach was considered suitable for a number of reasons.

In the first instance, the purpose of the research and the content material was not new to respondents, as all had been included in the quantitative survey which was the principal means of data collection and analysis in this thesis. Therefore, respondents were relaxed.
about the interview, being aware of its purpose, content and scope, and, personally known to each other as well as to the researcher.

Issues raised were, as a result, discussed freely and at length, without fear of disclosure. and in the knowledge that anonymity and confidentiality were assured at all times. Rapport was easy to establish and the discussion that followed was productive with lots of ideas being generated. Consequently, the researcher was, at all times aware of the need to manage the rich flow of ideas, in order that each respondent had sufficient opportunity to speak given the limited opportunities offered by group interview situations to build individual levels of rapport with each participant compared to what is possible in a one-to-one interview situation. This was challenging for the researcher and it was, at times, difficult to maintain the group interview focus without allowing any individual to dominate the exchanges whilst, at the same time, encouraging participation by each respondent. Interview notes were taken by a colleague using shorthand techniques. However, despite the challenges outlined, a number of advantages were apparent throughout this group interview. The group discussion led to a variety of points of view which generated further discussion, evaluation and exploration of the concepts under review. Points of view were challenged and solutions explored which would be less likely to occur in a discussion limited to the interviewer and a single interviewee. The group interview was also in many ways less intimidating and formal that the alternative one-to-one situation because respondents were clearly very comfortable with the topic and with the presence of fellow principals who were well known to them and with whom they had, quite possibly, discussed many of the issues raised in the interview, previously.
Furthermore, the topics covered were of relevance to them in their work and topical in the current educational context where the role of the principal is being evaluated by current educational stakeholders at many levels. In addition, the informed consent of each participant was a feature of this process as was their guarantee of confidentiality and their acceptance that the interpretation of their point of view would not be included in the final thesis without their prior approval.

Group interviews were considered to be of added value to the primary quantitative research in that they would personalise the more abstract quantitative data and evaluate some of the major issues as they were being lived or experienced by respondents. The intention was to explore 'depth' rather than 'breadth' and it was felt that smaller numbers would be sufficient to gain a flavour of the depth of feeling and illuminated by the personal responses of a small number of participants to a series of issues related to the major component of this thesis, i.e. the quantitative analysis.

A semi-structured approach was favoured in this instance as the themes under review were broad areas which had emanated from the initial quantitative analysis of the questionnaire results. It was not felt necessary to develop a series of structured predetermined questions to be delivered in a monotone, thus avoiding researcher bias, as it was the view of the researcher that this method may in fact limit the potential for discussion between respondents in as much as it would be difficult to manage in a group environment. Nor was the possibility of using an unstructured approach given any real consideration, as the themes under review which had been identified following the quantitative analysis, were more likely to be personalised in a directed environment.
There would have been no value for the researcher to allow this type of 'informant interview' take place in which he would, possibly be dominated by the interviewee's opinions, which may not have fitted-in with the research objective to explore a number of particular issues that had emerged in the preceding quantitative analysis.

Therefore, for the above considerations group interviews were considered more appropriate than face-to-face or telephone interviews and a semi-structured approach was adopted. In addition, because the respondents were people who worked in similar situations and had a common purpose, with the potential to generate a wide range of responses, and because the list of questions was both short and open-ended with the possibility of presentation in any order, the semi-structured group interview was considered appropriate, in this particular instance.

The interview was managed by the researcher who was aware of the necessity to be open to the subjectivity of respondents and was prepared to allow departures from the prepared questions and spontaneity on their part. Furthermore, every effort was made to respond to the responses of the respondents in an effort to gather rich, unique and varied data. Responses, as outlined earlier, were recorded by the researcher with the assistance of a colleague with short-hand experience. Immediately following the interview the material was relayed to the researcher who summarised the content of the exchanges recorded.

This method was an efficient means of recording the interview results as the subtleties of language, tone and body language could easily be incorporated into the final transcripts. It was the view of the researcher that the alternative method of recording the interview and producing subsequent full transcripts would not have an advantage over the method used in this particular instance.
The results of the qualitative analysis may be viewed in Chapter 4 and the full interview transcripts are included as Appendix IV.

Having triangulated the quantitative data using qualitative methods it was further deemed necessary to examine the statistical significance of the data and a statistical report was commissioned. The results may be viewed at the end of Chapter 4.
Chapter 4

Data Analysis: Presentation of the Findings

4.1 Introduction

The results of the research are presented in this Chapter and, as indicated previously, a quantitative questionnaire based survey of principals, was undertaken. The current Chapter describes the detailed findings of the research survey undertaken. As previously outlined, data was collected by means of a postal questionnaire comprising 199 variables relevant to the topic under review. A 60% response rate was recorded which meant that there were 74 out of 123 possible respondents included in the final data analysis. This provided a rich and meaningful source of data and gave much opportunity for cross-tabulation and exploration of relationships between variables. The research was exploratory in that it sought new insights into the working conditions of the school principal and no similar study had previously been done in the area. nor. did the researcher have any evidence that other similar studies had been done in this area or, other areas, by other researchers. Many studies \( \text{218} \) have been done in the area of the role of the principal but none with a focus on the perceptions of principals vis-à-vis their role, which is the hallmark of this particular study.

Essentially, the research was concerned with the collection of data and the relationships between them and how they might produce quantifiable and possibly generalisable

\[ \text{218} \text{ Much research has been conducted in recent years by the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPP\textsubscript{N}) focusing to a large extent on the work of the principal and alternative models of leading schools in a culture of change.} \]
results. Because of the large scope of the survey, the possibility of numerous cross-references and the ordinal nature of the data collected using the Likert-style rating scale, the use of descriptive statistics was considered appropriate for the substantial part of the analysis. Descriptive statistics are concerned with describing variables and research of this nature was considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was to accurately describe events and situations as they were at the point when this research was conducted.

In addition, quantitative data analysis was triangulated with qualitative and statistical methodologies in order to enhance and deepen the understanding of the researcher and add to the depth and breadth of the thesis.

Qualitative analysis involved using focused interview techniques, i.e. a group interview on a number of major themes resulting from the quantitative data analysis and subsequent analysis supported the main findings of the thesis.

Statistical reporting techniques were utilized to support and further triangulate the evidence gathered and this analysis added depth to the initial understanding and was strongly in support of that principal thesis that leadership was a key component in releasing the potential of school principals to lead.

The analysis was undertaken in a structured and logical manner and all of the relevant issues were addressed. These were denominational status, geographical location, size, status and gender profile of schools. In addition the gender profile, educational qualifications, experience and classes being taught by respondents were cross-referenced with relevant variables. These variables included educational knowledge, pre-service training, role clarity, ability to deliver, school ethos, vision, teaching and learning.
assessment, curriculum development, interpersonal skills, communication, financial management, budgetary reconciliation, staff selection and appraisal, motivation, delegation, staff management, conflict management, negotiation skills, decision making ability, availability, networking skills, public relations, pastoral care, school promotion, legal issues, school planning, policy development, record keeping and administration.

The above issues are considered in light of responses regarding the possession of each skill/competency, the level of competency of respondents with regard to each skill possessed, the origin of that skill level and their further training needs.

Within each item there are five types of questions and this pattern is consistent across the 34 major skill/competencies which are included within the questionnaire.

The initial dichotomous question which yielded categorical data with no underlying continuum was included in order to measure the perception of each principal with regard to their possession of that particular skill/competency. It also indicated acceptance/rejection levels of the skill/competencies included in the questionnaire.

The second question within each item requested information on time devoted to each particular skill/competency. This question which yielded ordinal data was included to encourage respondents to think about the implications of their work within their job constraints and to enable the researcher to gauge levels of stress resulting from that particular skill/competency. The results were scored using a Likert type scale within each of the four response options (constantly, often, seldom, never) and ratings from 1 to 4, with 1 as the highest indicator of time spent, pertained.)
The third question within each item related to development of each skill/competency had five response options and yielded categorical data as there was no underlying continuum. Responses were scored as above with answers ranging between 1 and 5 and this question was central to the fundamental development of discussion around the perceived need for training for school principals.

The fourth question which focused on respondents perceived skill levels, yielded ordinal data due to the underlying continuum (very high – very low) and was included to gauge respondents views of themselves and to contrast these with anecdotal evidence.

The final fifth question in each item was fundamental to the research objectives to present solid evidence in support of proper formal training for school principals. This was a five response item using a sliding scale (1-5 with 1 indicating highest need) which yielded ordinal data.

At the end of the questionnaire a shorter list of 19 items relating to principals’ perceptions of their performance in a range of important aspects of their work was included. This was initially included as a means to cross-reference information in the main section of the questionnaire and it was the intention of the researcher to do so in order to consolidate emerging theory. However, as the categories were neither as extensive or did not relate in detail with the substantive analysis (34 questionnaire items) this exercise proved futile and, consequently, these variables were not included in the final analysis of data. An exception was variable 191. This requested respondents to score their perceived level of educational knowledge ranging between very high and very low and was included in the initial stages of the data analysis in order to facilitate an initial overview of quantitative data.
Essentially, analysis occurred in a number of ways. Demographic variables were analysed, the main body of the questionnaire (the 34 items pertaining to the skill/competencies included), the follow-up qualitative focus interviews data and the statistical significance report.

Initially, the demographic characteristics of the sample were identified and these will be the focus of the next section of the thesis

4.2 Demographic Analysis

In this section of the analysis the demographic profile of the sample are identified beginning with the denominational status of the West Cork schools included in the analysis. As may be viewed from Table 1 the overwhelming majority of the respondents were denominational in status.

Table 1. Denominational Status of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denominational</th>
<th>Non-denominational</th>
<th>Multi-denominational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>96% (71)</td>
<td>3% (2)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, these results conflict with the schools database in the West Cork Education Centre, which does not list any non-denominational schools in that area. This anomaly may be explained by the practice of schools to be non-denominational. Local schools tend to serve as education providers to their communities, without discriminating, in terms of the individual religious beliefs of the individual student with regard to enrolment. Nevertheless, it highlights the fact that a number of principals are seemingly
unaware of the denominational basis of the school in which they work. However, it is a minor statistical discrepancy and, for the remainder of this research project, the results recorded in the survey will be accepted as the difference between the reality and the perception of a minority of principals (1%) is minimal, in any case. On the other hand, as all recognised schools are ascribed to one patron or another, this lack of clarity in the minds of some school principals about their school status, were it to become public, would certainly be a cause for some concern among school communities.

A clearer picture emerged with regard to the geographical location of schools.

**Table 2. Geographical Location of Schools**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural Disadvantaged</th>
<th>Gaeltacht</th>
<th>Gaelscoileanna</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(51)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority (69%) of schools surveyed are rural, denominational schools but in addition, the category ‘Rural Disadvantaged’ and ‘Gaeltacht’ may be included as rural as they are located in exclusively rural areas, which gives a total percentage in excess of 80% rural.

It may also be argued that, all schools in West Cork are rural, because, within that region, no major centres of population exist. However, for the purposes of this research it is proposed to distinguish between schools in centres of dispersed population and those in rural towns. This is an important distinction, as traditionally, all single-sex schools were
located in these towns whilst exclusively rural schools were always co-educational. In addition, the relatively new Gaelscoileanna, which are co-educational schools teaching through the medium of Irish, feature only in urban settings in West Cork.

For the remainder of this thesis, all schools located in the West Cork towns of Kinsale, Bandon, Clonakilty, Dunmanway, Macroom, Bantry and Skibbereen are to be considered urban.

Therefore, it is assumed that the 14% urban schools recorded in Table 2 are schools from these towns with the remainder being from exclusively rural locations within the area surveyed. The majority are obviously rural which points to an area populated by smaller schools, teaching principals, possible professional isolation and other disadvantages which will become clearer as the data analysis progresses and deepens. In pursuance of further information on the schools surveyed it is proposed to examine the issue of school size in relation to the numbers of staff and the numbers of pupils in different categories of schools in the area.

Table 3 Size of Schools (Number of Teachers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 - 5</th>
<th>5 - 10</th>
<th>10 - 20</th>
<th>20+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65% (48)</td>
<td>24% (18)</td>
<td>11% (8)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of school principals in the West Cork area work in schools with less than 5 teachers and an overwhelming majority of 89% work in schools with 10 or less teachers. These staff numbers relate directly to pupil numbers in these schools and in general the pupil teacher ratio is based on the average class size of 29. The detailed enrolment
figures as per Department of Education and Science circular letter \(^{219}\) to school boards are as follows:

Principal + 1 teacher – 12 pupils
Principal + 2 teachers – 50 pupils
Principal + 3 teachers – 82 pupils
Principal + 4 teachers – 116 pupils
Principal + 5 teachers – 146 pupils
Principal + 6 teachers – 175 pupils
Principal + 7 teachers – 180 pupils (administrative principal is appointed at this level)
Principal + 8 teachers – 209 pupils
Principal + 9 teachers – 238 pupils
Principal + 10 teachers – 267 pupils
Principal + 11 teachers – 296 pupils
Principal + 12 teachers – 325 pupils

For all additional appointments beyond this level add 29 pupils.

There is a more advantageous staff schedule on offer to Gaelscoileanna because of the Constitutional status \(^{220}\) of the Irish Language as per article 8.1 of the Constitution which results, for them, in an additional staff number at all levels of the above schedule. Furthermore, they enjoy a lower level of appointment of administrative principals, i.e. 153 pupil which compares favourably with the 180 level in all other schools.

\(^{219}\) Department of Education and Science (2002). Circular Letter 09/02. Appendix A

Based on the above figures it is safe to assume that the majority of principals within the area surveyed are teaching full-time and that only a minority of the schools have an administrative principal.

Administrative principals are appointed when school staffs exceeds 8 members and there are at least 180 children enrolled and according to DES statistics of 2001/02 there are 849 administrative out of 3,157 nationally which is 27%, more than double the West Cork allocation of administrative principals which, stands at 12%, at the time of this survey. The numbers for West Cork are represented in graphical form in Figure 1.

**Figure 1  Position in Schools**

![Bar Graph showing administrative, teaching, and acting positions in schools](image)

It is clear that the West Cork educational environment is different from the national context in that there is a greater number of smaller schools and fewer administrative principals. It is also significant that when school type and school staff numbers are cross-tabulated that only one school with more than 10 teachers is located in a rural area in West Cork.

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221 DES (2001/02) op. cit. p. 30
It is also clear from the above graph that, the overwhelming majority of schools surveyed are co-educational, with a small percentage being either single-sex girls or single-sex boys. Once again the 8% of single-sex schools in West Cork is much less than the 14% recorded in the DES report of 2001/02, which again confirms the rural location of schools in the area surveyed.

It is also true to say that single-sex education is a feature of urban schools, particularly urban schools which were traditionally run by religious orders. Ironically, in rural towns, it was normal to have mixed junior schools with all children attending the local Convent until aged seven. This was followed by separate schools for primary boys and girls, who having had four years of co-education completed their primary education in single-sex

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222 Ibid., p. 19
schools. Therefore, children in towns generally had four years of co-education followed by four years single-sex schooling up to age twelve. At that point they transferred to second level education for a further five or six years after which the majority joined the workplace or went on to third level education. This tradition still remains a feature in most of the rural towns in West Cork to this day, but, is coming under pressure from competing Gaelscoileanna which offer co-education possibilities for urban dwellers in some areas.

4.3 Profile of West Cork Principals

In section 4.1 the demographic profile of the schools surveyed indicated an area with a predominance of small schools, the majority having fewer than 5 staff members resulting in the necessity for the overwhelming majority (See Figure 1) of principals to have full-time teaching responsibilities in addition to their other responsibilities and duties. It is now proposed to look at principal demographics, in order to build a more complete context, before embarking on more detailed analysis of variables beginning with their gender profile. An analysis of the gender profile of primary principals in the West Cork area surprisingly resulted in a majority of female principals. This information is presented graphically in figure 3 on the next page.
There are more female than male principals in the area surveyed and this is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, from a historical perspective it was traditional for smaller rural schools to have, where possible, a male principal and this is clearly not the case any longer. This tradition has been challenged by the current equality laws, which no longer restrict the educational leadership ambitions of female teachers. It is worth remembering that, at one stage, female teachers in this country had to resign their posts on getting married – a condition of employment which survived until the 1960s.

Secondly, considering the 4:1 ratio of females to males in the teaching force generally, one might currently expect a similar ratio in terms of principalships, which should have resulted in a greater number of female principals than that recorded.

Based on the DES statistics above, one would expect that 25% of West Cork principals would be male but, the recorded number is more than double that figure.

However it is clear that, the ‘feminisation’ of educational leadership is also underway in West Cork where 56% of principals are female. This point of view can be supported by

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223 Ibid. p.32.
evidence from a parallel report, commissioned by the West Cork Education Centre, which found that 95% of deputy principals are female. That statistic, coupled with the number of female principals in the area, clearly points to a well advanced process of change in terms of leadership within the primary schools in the West Cork area.

The educational background of these principals is also interesting and may be viewed graphically in Figure 4.

Figure 4 illustrates the variety of different entry routes to teaching undertaken by the current cohort of principals in West Cork schools. For example, the majority (39%) have the traditional N.T. qualification which is an indication that there is a

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225 N.T. qualification was a two year Diploma entry route to primary teaching up to the mid 1970's. The equivalent award today is the B. Ed. degree.
significant level of experience amongst these principals as these would have received
their initial training over 30 years ago. The second largest group is B. Ed. Degree
holders, who, like N.T. holders, are trained exclusively to become primary teachers in the
Colleges of Education. This is now a three year degree programme being offered by
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; St. Patrick’s College Dublin; Froebel College:
Rathmines College and Marino College which replaced the original two year N.T.
training programme for teachers which existed prior to 1973.
It is significant that 76% of principals had not engaged in further study or. specialised in
any aspect of education, in order to achieve positions of authority in their schools. As is
evident from the data collected, only 5% of principals have higher degrees and, for as
long as it is not a pre-requisite for principals to undertake further study or to achieve post-
graduate qualifications, it is likely that seniority will remain a factor in the promotional
prospects of teachers, all other things being equal.
There is, however, a significant minority, (19%) who have degrees, other than B.Ed.
Degrees, with additional post-graduate qualifications. These principals initially trained in
a different discipline and transferred to primary teaching through an official post-
graduate route, such as the 18 month programme on offer through the Colleges of
Education, or. comparable post-graduate courses available in Britain. This indicates that
not all principals share the same educational background and there now exists a
significant group (19%) who received general training in a related discipline and later
transferred to the field of primary education through an alternative route. Some of these
may not have achieved the necessary points in the Leaving Certificate examination to
gain a place on the B.Ed. programme, as the entry level at 460 points is significantly higher than many of the degree programmes on offer from the National University of Ireland. But, whatever the reason, these principals will have come through a five year third-level programme and should have gained a broader educational perspective. Nonetheless, the major entry route to primary teaching has been through the Irish Training College system and if N.T. and B. Ed. graduates are combined they make up (76%) of the current cohort of school principals in the area surveyed.

If educational qualifications and the number of years as a principal are cross-tabulated many interesting, related facts emerge.

Table 4   Educational Qualifications/Years as a Principal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-5</th>
<th>5-10</th>
<th>10-15</th>
<th>15-20</th>
<th>20-25</th>
<th>25+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B. Ed</td>
<td>7 (10%)</td>
<td>7 (9%)</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.T.</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>13 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree &amp; P.G.</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(23%)   (19%)   (11%)   (12%)   (9%)   (26%)

It is evident from this cross-tabulation that 68% of principals with 25+ years of experience are N.T. trained and consequently do not have degrees. They trained in a
different era when a different model of teacher training was in vogue but satisfied the criteria with regard to their appointment as principals in schools (See Chapter 1). In fact, it is clear from Table 4 that the traditional N.T. qualification is recognised as being an excellent training model and many are still being appointed as principals. In point of fact 30% of principals appointed in the last 5 years in West Cork were N.T. holders. However, it is also evident from Table 4 that in the past 20 years there have been more B. Ed. degree holders than N.T. holders appointed to the position of principal in West Cork schools. This recent trend may be understood in the light of a decrease in the number of N.T. trained teachers due to retirements and natural wastage, but, it may also be reflective of the new child-centred philosophy which currently permeates Irish education, in place of the pre-1972 philosophy, which saw Irish schools as being a key factor in the restoration of our national identity in a post-colonial context. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assume from the data that experience may be a significant factor in the appointment of principals and that, beyond the essential requirements for the position, additional qualifications are not essential in gaining an employment advantage within the area surveyed as part of this doctoral thesis.

What is also clear is that formal professional development ceases for the vast majority of principals on graduation, and, that additional academic or professional qualifications are not a prerequisite in the context of promotion to positions of responsibility within schools. Therefore, in West Cork many principals have been in position for quite a long time, i.e. 26% have more than 25 years experience and a further 10% have 20 years experience or more. This is a significant group of 36% who were appointed prior to
1980. At the other end of the scale, 42% of principals have been appointed in the past 10 years. This is interesting and it confirms the anecdotal evidence of a perceived lack of mobility in education during the 1980's and into the 1990's. This was a period of mass emigration by Irish graduates (brain drain period) and a time when mobility and/or opportunity in education were limited. This was changed when the ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy of the 90’s led to increased need for graduates and became a catalyst for a major overhaul of the Irish Education system culminating in the Education Act of 1998.

Therefore, it is logical to conclude that principals, considering their training and lack of career development may be experiencing some difficulty in a period of relentless educational change. There is, as Fullam stated in the Josey-Bass book on educational leadership a “... lack of attention to cultivating the next generation of leaders. The result is a shortage of qualified leaders at all levels in the education system”. That is not to say that they the current crop of leaders do not satisfy the official criteria as outlined in DES circulars but there remains the fundamental issue that, these criteria belong to a different era. An era when the national perspective was more important than the child, and, when the range of educational stakeholders was limited, unlike the current context which has, through the Education Act, given education a whole new set of operational guidelines.

It is also interesting that, in terms of their educational/academic backgrounds, there are differences between male and female principals. For example, the majority (46%) of

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228 DES (1998), Circular 02 02, Government Publications
229 Ibid.
female principals have a B.Ed degree or an N.T. qualification whereas a more diverse pattern of training is evident amongst their male equivalents.

Based on this information which indicates a greater variety in terms of training and a longer period spent in pursuit of third level qualifications there may be a greater depth and breadth of educational experiences amongst male principals.

The statistical differences are illustrated graphically in Figure 5 on the next page.

**Figure 5  Gender/Ed Qualifications**

By cross-tabulating gender with school type it emerged that approximately 42% of rural schools have a female principal, (28 rural + 3 rural disadvantaged + 1 gaeltacht school out of 74 respondents) and, as a logical consequence of that, it is reasonable to assume that, because male principals are in short supply as are male teachers in general, there are a lot of rural schools which do not have a male staff member.

These figures are illustrated in table 5.
Table 5  
Gender/School Type (Cross-tabulation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Rural Dis.</th>
<th>Gaeltacht</th>
<th>Gaelscoil</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51(69%)</td>
<td>10 (14%)</td>
<td>4 (5%)</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>74 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>23 (31%)</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>34 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>28 (38%)</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>40 (56%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on national statistics which indicate a 4:1 ratio of females to males it would be logical to expect approximately 15 male principals in West Cork and, in reality, there are more than twice that amount. Therefore, because a lot of the male teachers in West Cork are principals and because the national average is a 4:1 female to male ratio, there may well be a shortage of male teachers in schools in the West Cork area.

This is particularly obvious when gender and staff numbers are cross-tabulated and it becomes apparent that a significant 41% of the whole sample were female principals working in schools of less than 5 staff members. As school size increases, the proportion of male principals rises and, in 5-10 teacher schools, 72% of principals are male. This trend is reversed in schools over 10 teachers but this can be explained in terms of the tendency for larger urban single-sex girls' schools to employ female principals.

Table 6 illustrates the results of the analysis with regard to the cross-tabulation of the gender and staff number variables.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0-5</th>
<th>5-10</th>
<th>10-20</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18 (22%)</td>
<td>13 (18%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
<td>34 (44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30 (42%)</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>40 (56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48 (64%)</td>
<td>18 (25%)</td>
<td>8 (11%)</td>
<td>74 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are twice as many female as male principals in small schools whilst, in larger schools, the reverse is true. It would appear that smaller rural schools do not, or cannot, attract male principals as easily as larger ones and, consequently, many children in these areas are being deprived of male educational role models throughout their primary school years.

It is also relevant that the majority (97%) of the principals surveyed work in co-educational schools and, of these who have full-time teaching responsibilities, 57% take responsibility for senior classes. This is consistent with both the perception, whether mistaken or true, that the best teachers make the best principals, and with the traditional understanding that the pre-requisites to becoming a teacher are enough to become a principal teacher and sufficient to manage the additional responsibilities of that job.

This trend is most common in rural schools and as may be seen in Table 7, on the next page, where 77% of the sample were rural principals teaching senior or multi-grade classes.

A smaller cohort of principals, within the sample, teach senior or multi-grade classes (40%) in urban settings.
Table 7  School Type/Classes Taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type/Classes Taught</th>
<th>Infants</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Senior</th>
<th>Multi-grade</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>7 (10%)</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
<td>28 (38%)</td>
<td>11 (14%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>51 (69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (2%)</td>
<td>10 (13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural dis.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaeltacht</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>2 (3%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>5 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaelscoil</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>3 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>1 (1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11 (15%)</td>
<td>7 (9%)</td>
<td>37 (50%)</td>
<td>15 (20%)</td>
<td>4 (6%)</td>
<td>74 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These statistics are confirmed by a multi-variate analysis of school type, number of teachers and classes taught which show that, regardless of school size, a large majority of principals take responsibility for senior or multi-grade classes.

In all of the above categories there is a high percentage of the total number in each category which teach senior or multi-grade classes. For example, in the rural school context which accounts for 69% of the sample, 38% of principals teach senior classes and a further 14% teach in multi-grade class environments. Similar high proportions are evident in the other categories of school, i.e. gaeltacht schools which show a percentage of 6% out of a possible 7% which translates to over 85% in reality.

An exception is administrative principals who may engage in teaching, out of necessity or by choice, on occasions.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 - 5</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Infants</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Multi-grade</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>7(10%)</td>
<td>3(4%)</td>
<td>20(27%)</td>
<td>11(15%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>41(55%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Dis.</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>2(3%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>2(3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaeltacht</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>2(3%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>4(6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(01%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total(0-5)</td>
<td>8(11%)</td>
<td>3(4%)</td>
<td>22(29%)</td>
<td>15(20%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>48(65%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>2(3%)</td>
<td>7(10%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>9(12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>2(3%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>4(5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Dis.</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>2(3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaeltacht</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaelscoil</td>
<td>2(3%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>2(3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total(5-10)</td>
<td>3(4%)</td>
<td>3(4%)</td>
<td>12(17%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>18(24%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>2(3%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>2(3%)</td>
<td>6(9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaelscoil</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total(10-20)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>1(1%)</td>
<td>3(4%)</td>
<td>0(0%)</td>
<td>3(4%)</td>
<td>8(11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Overall</td>
<td>(16%)</td>
<td>(9%)</td>
<td>(50%)</td>
<td>(20%)</td>
<td>(5%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All the analysis to date indicates that the geographical area researched is an area with a proliferation of small rural denominational schools. These are staffed by a predominantly female staff, most of whom have been trained in the traditional colleges, and the majority of whom have not engaged with formal education/learning since graduation (See section 4.2 on principal demographics). The percentage of male principals in West Cork is high but, throughout the area, it is also true that there are many small rural schools with female principals, which do not have a male member of staff. The significance of these and other facts will become more evident in the next section of this analysis which begins to evaluate the core skills and competencies of principals in West Cork with particular reference to their level of skill, the origin of their skill if any, and their training needs vis-à-vis some of the core skills and competencies of the school principal, in a period of sustained educational change.

Initially, it is proposed to view the responses of principals to the first part of each question which requested respondents to record the degree to which they believed they possessed a series of key skills and competencies related to the position of school principal. This was the initial dichotomous question in each of the 34 items around which the substantive quantitative analysis was conducted.

4.4 **Summary of responses to Skills/competencies:**

This information is included in order to give the reader an initial overview of the responses recorded with regard to the key skills and competencies of the principal as included in the questionnaire distributed to all the primary schools in the West Cork area.
It is apparent that, in the majority of cases, principals do consider that they possess some or all of these skills in varying measures. Individual responses varied from a positive 31 yes, 1 uncertain, 2 no, to a more reserved 14 yes, 14 uncertain and 6 no but every principal had a reasonable measure of these skills in their own opinion and in overall terms, 75% of West Cork principals considered that they possessed all or some of the skills included in the questionnaire (See appendix III for a full list of questionnaire items).

The following list is a record of the male female breakdown in terms of the 75% who claimed to have some or all of the skills included in the questionnaire. This outline of the results will preface a more in-depth analysis of the collected data and will briefly discuss the findings with reference to gender differences. Though this is not the core objective of the thesis, it is an interesting starting point for deeper discussion on the role of the principal and his/her understanding of that role.

All of the following items were included in the questionnaire and, respondents were asked to decide whether a 'yes', 'no' or 'unsure' response best suited, in their particular instance.

For example, the following list records the positive response to part (i) of each variable and, in the case of vision, for example, the question was:

'Do you have the vision to work co-operatively with colleagues in pursuit of common objectives?'

Results, which record only the positive responses to each question, i.e. yes responses, are illustrated on the next page as an initial opportunity for the reader to get a brief overview
of the perceptions of the principals with regard to the list of skills/competencies included within the questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes (M)</th>
<th>Yes (F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>M(46%)</td>
<td>F(52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>M(48%)</td>
<td>F(52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethos</td>
<td>M(26%)</td>
<td>F(48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.R.</td>
<td>M(39%)</td>
<td>F(48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>M(20%)</td>
<td>F(30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Reconciliation</td>
<td>M(20%)</td>
<td>F(30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching/Learning</td>
<td>M(34%)</td>
<td>F(52%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Development</td>
<td>M(40%)</td>
<td>F(50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>M(40%)</td>
<td>F(50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Change</td>
<td>M(45%)</td>
<td>F(50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>M(25%)</td>
<td>F(40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal skills</td>
<td>M(45%)</td>
<td>F(45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>M(42%)</td>
<td>F(42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Care</td>
<td>M(33%)</td>
<td>F(44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>M(44%)</td>
<td>F(53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to deliver</td>
<td>M(40%)</td>
<td>F(53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client satisfaction</td>
<td>M(21%)</td>
<td>F(23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>M(42%)</td>
<td>F(46%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School promotion</td>
<td>M(40%)</td>
<td>F(53%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School pride</td>
<td>M(21%)</td>
<td>F(29%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From this breakdown of data it is clear that, in general terms at least, there is a greater level of confidence amongst female principals with regard to their jobs than amongst their male equivalents. Average levels of confidence are 40% for females and 31% for males. That is not to say that confidence is high, and, there is a distinct lack of confidence with regard to many of the skills and competencies included in the questionnaire as can be seen from the above figures.
This lack of confidence is particularly obvious with regard to the skills of negotiation, policy reconciliation, communication, satisfying clients, promoting their school, financial management, conflict resolution, staff appraisal, school planning and record keeping. Another significant fact is that only 3% of males and 12% of females appear to have undertaken any specific training for their role as a school principal and 18% of males and 35% of females are dissatisfied with the current understanding of the role of the principal and the guidance it offers them in their daily work.

However, there is a consistency in an overall context with regard to skill levels of male and female principals. Exceptions are the areas of communication where a 15% discrepancy occurs, articulation of ethos where a 22% discrepancy occurs, teaching and learning where an 18% discrepancy occurs and understanding of the role of the principal where a discrepancy of 17% occurs.

These figures point to a situation in which female principals are more confident in their ability to communicate, articulate ethos, teach effectively and come to terms with the implication of their leadership role, than their male equivalents are.

There is one notable exception in the matter of financial management, where males marginally outscore females, (25% vs. 23%) in their view of their ability to manage school finances.

However this information, though interesting in itself, is not the core work of this thesis and is included as an aid to gaining an understanding of the reality before embarking on more detailed analysis of the data collected.
Throughout this chapter some demographic cross-tabulations with other variables were used, but, the overwhelming type of analysis used was whole sample univariate analysis. Bi-variate and multi-variate analyses included were as a result of the researcher’s personal perspective on their importance in comparison to other possibilities.

Initially, the professional knowledge base of the principal was analysed and commented on and this will be the focus of the next section of the data analysis. In an effort to simplify the data analysis, similar items were grouped together and, in the case of the professional knowledge base of the principal, four variables were analysed, i.e. educational knowledge, pre-service training, role clarity and the ability to deliver.

4.5 Professional Knowledge Base of Principals

In times of challenge and change it becomes more important for every school to have a competent professional principal with an array of skills and competencies appropriate to the position which is now, arguably, more important to the educational process than ever before. As Riley and MacBeath, quoted in Bennett et al.\(^{230}\), have said:

*Leadership has become an urgent policy issue, an integral component of the drive for more effective schools, raised achievement and public accountability. From a policy-maker's perspective, ‘effective leadership’ could perhaps be seen as holding the key to resolving many of the problems which appear to be facing schools*.

In an effort to assess the professional competency of the principals in this research project, a number of variables were included in the final questionnaire, which sought information on pre-service training, role understanding, ability to deliver and ability to provide leadership. These questions were deemed relevant in terms of the professional

competency of school leaders in the area surveyed and the following data analysis is based on the recorded responses of principals to the above items.

We begin with the response to a single question on how principals rated their own level of educational knowledge. Variable 191 in the questionnaire is included in the list of items which follow the substantive list of skills/competencies but, because these did not overlap the main items within the questionnaire, they were excluded from the analysis.

**Table 9  Educational Knowledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14% (10)</td>
<td>47% (35)</td>
<td>37% (27)</td>
<td>2% (2)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, a significant percentage of principals (61%) consider that their knowledge of educational matters is high or very high. A further 37% are happy that their knowledge base is adequate and only a minority 2% are concerned that their knowledge base does not equip them properly for the job they hold. This is an interesting statistic, especially when compared to the response to Q.120, which related to pre-service training. (See Table 10)

**Table 10  Pre-Service Training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15% (12)</td>
<td>3% (2)</td>
<td>82% (60)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

82% of principals did not receive specific training for the role and were to all intents and purposes trained only to be teachers. More surprising, in this instance, is the 15% which claim to have received specific training for their role and it can only be assumed, from
this, as this information was not directly sought by the questionnaire, that, before they were appointed as school principals, some of those surveyed were in positions of responsibility in schools and this may have served as a guide to them in terms of the role of the principal.

There is also a level of ambiguity about the role of the principals and the responses to a question, on to what extent their current understanding of the principal’s role helped them in their work, resulted in the following percentage breakdown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 11</th>
<th>Role Clarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49% (36)</td>
<td>30% (22)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Significantly, 21% of the sample did not consider that their current personal understanding of the role of the principal was a guide to them in their work with a further 30% unsure of the parameters within which they operated.

Therefore, there appears to be, at the very least, ambiguity about the role of the principal and the pre-service training process involved. Evidence to that effect is clear from the preceeding table of results and, in particular, the issues of pre-service training and understanding of the parameters of the job.

In Table 12 responses to variable 86 on principal’s views of their ability to deliver in their jobs are recorded and are interesting when compared to earlier results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 12</th>
<th>Ability to Deliver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92% (69)</td>
<td>7% (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

145
In stark contrast to previous uncertainty, the overwhelming majority of principals consider that they are doing a good job in meeting deadlines and achieving their educational and other objectives.

This emphatically positive result is inconsistent with responses to variable 80, which referred to the ability of respondents to lead.

Results in that instance were as follows and are illustrated in table 13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 13</th>
<th>Ability to Lead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43% (32)</td>
<td>27% (20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A high degree of uncertainty with regard to the leadership ability of principals is evident from Table 13 and 30% of principals do not consider they have this core ability with a further 27% unsure about their level of expertise in terms of leadership.

Notwithstanding the above inconsistencies, it is becoming obvious at this stage that despite a lack of training, an uncertainty about their leadership role and a lack of clarity about the parameters of the job, principals who responded to this survey are generally confident that they manage to do an effective job. This thinking appears to be, at least inconsistent, and will be explored further as the analysis progresses and deepens.

At this stage the focus of the data analysis is on the area of the professional knowledge base of the principal shifts in order to gain some insight into the origin of these core skills and competencies. For example, with regard to training it is significant that the majority
of principals have acquired whatever measure of skills they possess informally, as no
training programme is available for principals and the criteria for selection as a principal
does not demand that a training programme of this nature be done by applicants.

### Table 14 Origin of Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-taught</th>
<th>Formal Study</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>72% (54)</td>
<td>8% (6)</td>
<td>10% (7)</td>
<td>10% (7)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is obvious that informal means of skill acquisition, which includes reading, learning
from peers or from experience, are the principal means by which principals are trained
and in this instance account for 92% of all training.

This is also the case with regard to principals' understanding of their role, and, an
overwhelming majority of 90%, (See Table 15) has learned about the parameters of their
job through experience, reading or from peers.

### Table 15 Role Clarity/Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-taught</th>
<th>Formal Study</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>46% (34)</td>
<td>10% (7)</td>
<td>31% (23)</td>
<td>13% (10)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, the ability of principals to deliver in their jobs (93% positive - see Table 12)
has been acquired by themselves according to the data gathered. Results are recorded in
the following table.
This is also true in terms of leadership ability and once again, it is apparent that most school leaders are self-taught or have their ability to lead acquired informally. (See Table 17)

Table 17 Leadership/Skill Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-taught</th>
<th>Formal Study</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>54% (40)</td>
<td>12% (9)</td>
<td>23% (17)</td>
<td>4% (3)</td>
<td>7% (5)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, from Table 16 only 4% of respondents claim to have acquired their leadership skills from peers, which is indicative of school communities in which opportunities for professional interaction are minimal. This is understandable in an educational context in which schools are obliged to have students present on each of the 183 school days and where the majority of principals are full-time teachers. (See Table 8) Nor, is there a tradition which encourages school staff members to attend for school planning days above and beyond the minimum required attendance of 183 school days, i.e. minimum attendance is maximum attendance in the Irish primary school system and all planning is done within the 183 school days which is the minimum number of days students are required to be present.
Despite the fact that 82% of principals did not benefit from specific training (see Table 10) the majority still consider that their training is adequate as may be seen from the following table, which examines the level of competency of respondents.

**Table 18  Training/Level of Competency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3% (2)</td>
<td>61% (45)</td>
<td>22% (16)</td>
<td>13% (10)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority (85%) consider they have average or better levels of training vis-à-vis their job despite having acquired these skills informally (See Table 14). The majority also believe that their understanding of the role of the principal is adequate and 60% responded positively as may be seen from Table 19.

**Table 19  Role Understanding/Level of Competency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3% (2)</td>
<td>57% (42)</td>
<td>22% (16)</td>
<td>17% (13)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data is in conflict with earlier results which indicated that only 49% of principals adequately understood the boundaries within which they operated (See Table 11) which suggests that there may be high levels of misunderstanding. This is an important finding in itself and will be discussed at length in the concluding Chapter of this research.

With regard to being able to deliver in the job the result is positive and a clear majority consider they have the necessary level of expertise.
There is also a positive response with regard to the ability to lead and results were measured as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 20</th>
<th>ability/Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>7% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>76% (57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>8% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>9% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is also a positive response with regard to the ability to lead and results were measured as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 21</th>
<th>Leadership/Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>8% (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>66% (49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>15% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>11% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, the 74% which recorded high or very high levels of confidence with regard to their leadership ability is once again in marked contrast to the lack of confidence recorded earlier in the report (See Table 13).

With regard to the variables under review it is interesting to note the recorded responses of the sample in terms of the training needs of the respondents. For instance, the response to variable 174 which asks respondents to identify their training needs with regard to the role of the principal were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 22</th>
<th>Training Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>15% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>50% (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>16% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>18% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority (65%) have very high or high training needs, which is consistent with the 82% who did not receive pre-service training (See Table 10) and the 90% (response to
variable 171) who consider that they would have benefited from specific training before becoming a principal.

However, it is noteworthy also that these same respondents consider that their own personal training, which was acquired informally by 80% of respondents, is adequate in that 63% of them scored high or very high in response to a question (Variable 173) about the quality of their training.

This information appears contradictory but, is best understood in the context of survival, where principals learn coping skills in order to manage their work whilst, at the same time, recognising that these skills, informally learned, will need to be developed in order to adapt to major educational change at system level. It is also testament to:

- The ability and calibre of people in primary teaching in the first place.
- The utility of what might be termed ‘implicit mentoring’.
- The utility of learning on the job.

Conventional wisdom would suggest that pre-service and continuing professional development are essential components of success in terms of management and leadership positions but, in the absence of these opportunities for principals, they appear to have developed high levels of ‘coping skills’.

This paradox is also evident in the case of role clarity for which (69%) of respondents have high or very high training needs. These are recorded in Table 23.
Table 23  Role Clarity/Training Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24% (18)</td>
<td>45% (33)</td>
<td>12% (9)</td>
<td>18% (13)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is consistent with the uncertainty around the boundaries of the job (See Table 11) but at variance with the 60% who believe they have a high or very high understanding of the role of the principal.

With regard to the personal qualities of the principal vis-à-vis leadership and getting the job done the following results were recorded.

Table 24  Leadership/Training Need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10% (8)</td>
<td>50% (34)</td>
<td>10% (8)</td>
<td>30% (24)</td>
<td>0% (0)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

60% of the sample have high or very high leadership training needs which is not inconsistent with the 43% who expressed confidence in their leadership skills (See Table 13) and clarifies, to some extent, the high 70% of principals who devote time constantly or often to the issue of leadership in their schools. A high level of confidence (93%) was also expressed by respondents in their ability to get the job done (See Table 12) and this is reflected in Table 25 which records the training needs of respondents with regard to delivering in the job.
Table 25  Ability to Deliver/Training Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ability to Deliver</th>
<th>Training Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>11% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>28% (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>18% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>39% (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>4% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this particular case it would appear that the perceived high skill level is matched by a lower (39%) training need.

At this stage, the analysis appears to be complex, which is not surprising, given the role of the principals and the parameters within which they operate. They work in a turbulent environment and are often trapped between the official demands of a global society, which celebrates the individual and the local traditions and expectations of a school community. Educational leaders of the future will need to be people-centred but also achievement orientated. They will need knowledge, wisdom, powers of persuasion and be able to handle a complex rapidly changing environment which presents many tensions and dilemmas. (See section 2.2 in Chapter 2).

It is not clear at this stage if the professional knowledge base of the principals surveyed fully equips them for this anticipated future. What is clear is that they have learned coping skills, but, there remains a strong demand for these skills to be made an integral part of the preparation for, and, the execution of the role of the principal.

In the next section of the analysis, which looks at the area of organisational leadership, it is proposed to examine responses to variables that sought information about that important aspect of the principal’s role.
4.6 Organisational Leadership

It may be argued that, without a clear vision of what a school represents, any principal will find it next to impossible to balance customer and professional expectations with reality, and the consequences of this indecision is often obvious in stagnation on the part of school communities.

Therefore, with a view to gathering data around the issue of organisational leadership, variables 20 – 24 and variables 10 – 14, which addressed the issue of ethos and vision respectively, were examined.

Variable 20, for example asked if principals had a basic appreciation of the ethos of the school in which they worked and the following results were recorded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84% (62)</td>
<td>12% (9)</td>
<td>4% (3)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, an overwhelming majority of principals (84%) felt that they were fully conversant with the ethos of their school. Furthermore, a significant majority of these devoted time to ethos issues and felt themselves to be guardians of tradition.

With regard to time spent on matters relating to ethos the following percentages resulted:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constantly</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16% (12)</td>
<td>49% (36)</td>
<td>31% (23)</td>
<td>4% (3)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Table 27, it is apparent that 65% of respondents pay attention to ethos regularly with 31% doing so on a less frequent basis. Only 4% did not consider ethos to be a significant area of concern, which, presumably, corresponds to the 4% who admitted to having little knowledge of local traditions in the first place (See table 26).

There is not a discrepancy of note between male and female respondents and when gender and ethos were cross-tabulated it emerged that 82% male and 80% female principals were happy that they had sufficient knowledge and understanding of the ethos and traditions of their school. This local knowledge was acquired by personal effort on their part rather than by any formal training process which is evident in Table 28. This raises the possibility that the characteristic spirit which should inform the "...moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students" 231, may not be seen to be an important issue in some schools which is regrettable, to say the least.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 28 Ethos/Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% (37)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to the question, "Where did you develop the skill to promote the ethos of your school?", only 7% acquired it formally and the 23% who felt it was not applicable to them, may have had this knowledge already, being local community members, possibly.

The remaining 70% learned about ethos through observation, reading or interacting with their peers.

Table 29 Ethos/Training Need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5% (4)</td>
<td>45% (33)</td>
<td>18% (13)</td>
<td>31% (23)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A high percentage of respondents (50%) felt that their training needs with regard to understanding the characteristic spirit of their school were low, very low or not applicable as evidenced from the above table of percentages. However, the remaining 50% expressed a training need and 5% of these recorded a very high response. These figures are consistent with the minimal percentages who neither understood ethos nor devoted time to reflection on it, or related matters.

With regard to vision, (Variables 10 – 14) requested information on skill levels, origin of these skills and training needs and respondents, regardless of gender, emphatically believed that they possessed vision and could work co-operatively with colleagues in pursuit of common objectives.

Table 30 Vision/Gender (Cross-tabs)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>100% (34)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>98% (39)</td>
<td>2% (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are no significant differences between male and female respondents with the overwhelming majority of the opinion that they possessed vision. It is also apparent that they believed they devoted considerable time to the articulation and communication of vision and 84% of them are constantly or often involved in work of that nature.

Table 31 Vision/Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Constantly</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34% (25)</td>
<td>50% (37)</td>
<td>15% (11)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As was the case with ethos, the majority of respondents acquired their ability to articulate and communicate vision informally, by self-teaching (77%), reading (8%) and interacting with peers (8%). Only (3%) did so through formal study with a minority (4%) of the view that they had this vision through study, or, had no need for it in the first place.

In terms of training need vis-à-vis vision skills (Variable 14) the following picture emerged:

Table 32 Vision/Training Need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3% (2)</td>
<td>31% (23)</td>
<td>17% (13)</td>
<td>45% (33)</td>
<td>4% (3)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the majority have low (45%), very low (41%) or no training need (17%) there remains a significant minority of (34%) who would like to develop their skills further. It is possible that those, for whom further study is an option, consider that changing times require new and better responses from those who articulate vision.
From the above analysis, a coherent picture is emerging with regard to the abilities and needs of principals in the area of organisational leadership. It is clear that while, in general, principals have high levels of confidence with regard to the skills of understanding and articulating ethos there is also a need for further training. This is a reflection of the reality of being a principal (See section 1.2 in Chapter 1 which discusses the role of the principal as per DES guidelines) and while individuals have worked hard to up-skill themselves, informally, they now find themselves in a situation where constant, relentless change requires that skills be updated and put on a more professional level. It is particularly interesting that when administrative principals are looked at in isolation, their training needs in respect of the articulation and communication of vision are very similar to whole sample proportions.

This may be seen in the following table 33.

Table 33 Training Need/Vision/Position in School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position in School</th>
<th>Vision/Training Need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table, it is evident that administrative principals have a greater training need than teaching principals and are above whole sample proportions in terms of their
need for training with respect to the articulation and communication of vision in support of educational objectives.

Acting principals who responded to the survey (4) are not included in the above calculations.

Similar results are recorded when ethos and training needs are cross-referenced with position in school. These results are recorded in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>ETHOS</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>45% (27)</td>
<td>23% (14)</td>
<td>32% (20)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100% (61)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>7% (1)</td>
<td>44% (4)</td>
<td>16% (1)</td>
<td>30% (3)</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>100% (9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are, once again, no significant differences between administrative principals and teaching principals’ perception of their need for training in matters relating to ethos. This is surprising and, notwithstanding the fact that administrative principals have more time and opportunity to reflect/engage in these matters, they appear to be as challenged as their counterparts with full-time teaching responsibilities. This is an indication that all principals may be lacking in training vis-à-vis some of the core skills of their job, or may not have the necessary clarity about the nature of their work or indeed the professional skills or the personal qualities to be successful in that work. It is arguable, that without
vision and an appreciation of tradition and ethos, schools will not be successful. Strong ethical underpinnings need to inform all schools if they aspire to being values-led, people centred communities of learning in which ongoing tensions and new challenges can be managed successfully.

This principle of a values led organization is developed in Chapter 2.

It is, therefore, a matter of some concern that principals appear to acquire their understanding of organisational leadership informally and that despite an apparent confidence in this aspect of their work, there remains a strong demand for further training. This is both a reflection on lack of initial training for principals and a realisation by them that the coping skills which they acquire through experience, are no substitute for the professional skills that changing and challenging times require. For a detailed account of this read Fullan who presents a leadership model which embraces change.

These, and other emerging facts, are explored further in the next section of the data analysis, which deals with the area of educational leadership.

4.7 Educational Leadership

Education leadership in the future will arguably, come from knowledge, wisdom and the ability to influence others and only principals who are equipped to handle rapidly changing environments will be able to implement curriculum reforms that will result in sustained improvement in teaching and learning and associated student achievement. (See footnote entry 59 in section 2.3 on leadership as an organisational quality.)

Educational leadership in schools is a particularly complicated area because it is often difficult to exercise formal authority amongst your peers and, in the majority of schools, principals will have no extra training and be equal to all staff members in terms of academic qualifications and formal training. The authority of the principal is based on statute and the contract he/she will have under the Education Act of 1998, \(^{233}\) "... all such powers as are necessary or expedient in that regard" but, it is fair to say that some school leaders may be struggling in their endeavours to influence colleagues in order that, the mutually agreed objectives of their school community might be achieved. This is a historical legacy and was discussed in length in Chapter 1 of this exploratory study. (See section 1.3) Schools are, in turn, supported by a large mix of people who are, in an ideal world, positively disposed towards the school principal, whom they see as leading them towards their agreed goals. Therefore, leadership is made up of many parts and in all successful organisations there is a dynamic at work, which allows the whole to be much greater than the sum of all its parts. However, leadership also brings responsibility and within this questionnaire a number of specific items were included in order to gain an insight into the understanding of West Cork principals of the leadership role they have in the schools in which they work.

The first of these items referred to was, the acceptance of responsibility for teaching and learning within their schools. Results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>85% (63)</td>
<td>8% (6)</td>
<td>7% (5)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{233}\) DES (1998), *Education Act, Sec.23r3*. Government Publications. p.24

161
The overwhelming majority of principals accept responsibility for this aspect of their work and devote considerable time to it (See Table 36).

Table 36 Teaching and Learning/Time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constantly</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>46% (34)</td>
<td>46% (34)</td>
<td>8% (6)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, only 19% are recorded as acquiring their teaching/learning skills formally and the majority (69%) claim to have done so through experience or by reading (5%) or from peers (3%). A minority, (4%), considers this aspect of the job is not acceptable to them but these may be administrative principals, although the possibility remains that there may be a few principals who do not accept responsibility for teaching and learning within their schools.

There is a national issue emerging, driven by the IPPN, on the need to address the issue of the teaching principal. This campaign is particularly focused on the need to allow principals sufficient reduction in teaching duties as will allow them discharge their administrative duties effectively, efficiently and without undue stress.

However their remains, at all times, the issue of responsibility for instruction and according to the Education Act: 234

"The Principal of a recognised school and the teachers in a recognised school, under the direction of the Principal, shall have responsibility in accordance with this Act, for the instruction, provided to student in the school and shall contribute, generally, to the education and personal development of students in that school"

With regard to the training needs of respondents’ vis-à-vis teaching and learning in the schools they lead the following facts emerged.

**Table 37 Teaching and Learning/Training Need**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7% (5)</td>
<td>35% (26)</td>
<td>20% (15)</td>
<td>35% (26)</td>
<td>3% (2)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

58% of respondents do not need or have low or very low training needs in relation to managing standards of teaching and learning, although a significant 42% would welcome further training which is, once again, indicative of the challenging times in which principals work and consistent with earlier results. In the future, the notion that the principal is the sole ‘instructional leader’ in the school may be insufficient. Furthermore, it is unlikely, in the Irish educational context, if that role was ever properly assumed by principals and indeed it may no longer even be appropriate for the contemporary school. (See literature review in Chapter 2)

Administrative principals’ results are again consistent with the main sample with 80% accepting responsibility for teaching and learning and 90% of them devoting time to this aspect of their work. 50% of administrative principals do not, in their view, have an urgent need for further training in this area, which is almost indistinguishable from whole sample proportions (See Table 38).

Variable 50, on the critical issue of assessment for learning, yielded the following results when cross-referenced with gender.
It is apparent that, the overwhelming majority of principals, develop and evaluate assessment policies and practices in their schools and there are no significant differences between male and female respondents.

Similarly, principals, regardless of gender, spend considerable time on assessment issues, i.e. males spent (74%) constantly or often, as opposed to (78%) of female respondents, who do likewise. In terms of how these particular skills were acquired the following table is consistent with earlier results, which indicated informal means of skill acquisition.

In terms of training needs vis-à-vis assessment for learning the following results were recorded.

Table 38
Assessment for Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>85% (29)</td>
<td>9% (3)</td>
<td>6% (2)</td>
<td>100% (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>88% (35)</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
<td>2% (1)</td>
<td>100% (40)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 39
Assessment/Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-taught</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>Formal Study</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40% (30)</td>
<td>20% (15)</td>
<td>10% (7)</td>
<td>20% (15)</td>
<td>10% (7)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 40
Assessment/Training Need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8% (6)</td>
<td>49% (36)</td>
<td>11% (8)</td>
<td>28% (21)</td>
<td>4% (3)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both origin and training need with regard to assessment were cross-referenced with gender and no significant difference with whole sample proportions resulted. However, when training needs in terms of assessment and position in school were cross-tabulated, the following results emerged.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>100% (61)</td>
<td>100% (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is apparent that administrative principals are more interested in training in the area of assessment for learning than teaching principals. This is a clear indication that the demands on the time of the teaching principal are such that he/she cannot devote sufficient time to this aspect of their work. Administrative principals, who have the opportunity develop a broader and whole-school perspective on assessment for learning, are clearly more inclined to develop their skills in this regard. However, it must be remembered that the number of administrative principals in the sample was small in the first instance (See figure 1) and these results, though interesting, must be interpreted with that reality in mind.

Variable 55 on curriculum planning and implementation which is a key aspect of educational leadership yielded the following results when cross-tabulated with gender.
It is evident that the overwhelming majority of respondents plan and implement curriculum initiatives in their schools with no significant differences apparent in terms of gender. A further univariate analysis of time spent on curriculum issues indicates that much time is devoted to these issues in general.

90% of respondents devote time constantly or often to curriculum matters. The ability of principals to manage the curriculum is of interest also and 24% of respondents claim to have acquired this ability formally with a further 24% having done so by reading. Only 7% have learned from peers in this particular instance and the remaining (44%) claim to be self-taught.

This is a subtle but interesting change in emphasis and, whereas earlier skills as discussed in this Chapter were predominantly acquired informally, in this particular instance, a measure of learning took place during the formal teacher-training period, which is an interesting change in terms of respondents’ perceptions of their role. Training needs with regard to curriculum matters were recorded as follows:
Over half (51%) of respondents have high training needs but a significant 49% have either low, very low or no training needs with regard to the planning and implementation of curriculum change.

When training needs in terms of curriculum change were cross-tabulated with gender the following results emerged.

**Table 44  Curriculum/Training Needs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>5% (3)</td>
<td>46% (34)</td>
<td>12% (9)</td>
<td>28% (21)</td>
<td>9% (7)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6  Curriculum Training Need/Gender**
From the above graphical illustration there appears to be a greater than whole-sample need for training amongst male respondents but in reality differences from whole sample proportions are so small as to be insignificant. Gender, it appears, is not an issue when it comes to the training needs of principals’ vis-à-vis the skill of managing the curriculum.

Conversely, when position in school is cross-tabulated with training need differences are more apparent. For example, the perceptions of principals with regard to their training needs are higher (78%) among administrative principals than among teaching principals (48%). That is not to suggest that administrative principals are less competent but clearly they have more time and opportunity to reflect on curriculum matters in a whole school context and are not, unlike teaching principals, concerned only with delivering the curriculum to a specific class grouping.

Table 45 Curriculum/Training Needs/Position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Curriculum/Training Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>3 (5%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, educational leadership may well be an issue in school, but it is conceivable that only administrative principals have the time to reflect on its implications for whole-school development. It is conceivable that, in the critical aspect of educational leadership, school leaders may not be in a position, due to time and other constraints, to
be able to enable themselves and/or their colleagues reach their potential. In terms of being an instructional leader which has been referred to earlier (See Chap 2) it is, to say the least, going to be difficult for any principal to define the mission of a school, manage and co-ordinate the curriculum, promote an academic learning climate by establishing high expectations and standards and develop a strong inclusive school culture without being afforded the necessary time to do so.

Allied to educational leadership is the area of organisational management, and, the next section of the analysis proposes to focus on the variables included in the questionnaire which gathered data about this aspect of the work of the school principal.

4.8 Organisational Management

Two items in the questionnaire referred to the area of organisational management. These dealt with the associated skills of communication and interpersonal skills without which successful organisational management would be, at the very least, difficult. There is not a statutory or contractual onus on any principal to be a great communicator or, have highly honed interpersonal skills, but they can be of assistance in the work, much of which is team based and client orientated.

In response to the question on interpersonal skills and the ability to work effectively with pupils, staff, parents and the wider educational community in the interest of good organisational management, an overwhelming majority (89%) of respondents considered themselves to be competent.
The vast majority (96%) also devoted time to working effectively with all partners and regarded their skills in this regard to be self-taught (89%), acquired through reading (5%) or from peers (4%). Furthermore, 91% of respondents considered their interpersonal skills to be average at least and a significant 70% were of the opinion that their interpersonal skills were high or very high. In terms of the extent of their need for training, the following response was recorded:

Notwithstanding the positive response to earlier questions on interpersonal skills, there remains a significant 41% who expressed a high or very high need for further training in this area. With regard to administrative principals, 60% had high or very high training needs vis-à-vis interpersonal skills and, surprisingly, there was a much lesser need, 40% in this respect, recorded from teaching principals. Again, the difference between administrative principals and teaching principals and the significantly higher than whole sample response of administrative principals, suggests that the greater opportunity they have for interaction with all educational partners necessitates a higher level of competence in terms of interpersonal skills. Administrative principals are obviously more available for meetings with a wide range of partners and stakeholders and.
consequently, may need higher levels of interpersonal skill in order to survive. In terms of the male/female divide there is a (45%) high or very high need for training for female respondents, which is above whole-sample proportions (See Table 47) and above the training needs of male respondents who, at 36%, are below whole-sample proportions of 41%.

From the questionnaire item dealing with the ability to communicate effectively, which is closely related to interpersonal skills, the following pattern of response emerged. In response to variable 60, which requested data on the opinion of the individual principal on his/her ability to communicate effectively in furtherance of educational goals, the following results were recorded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 48 Communication Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66% (48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority consider themselves effective communicators, but, a significant 30% express a degree of uncertainty with regard to that basic skill. In addition to the above information on communication skills, it is noteworthy that 74% of respondents claim to devote time constantly or often to communication. Furthermore, and with regard to the level of respondent ability to communicate, a significant 28% were of the opinion that the level of their ability to communicate effectively in furtherance of educational goals was low or very low. Conversely, of course, there was a 74% majority who consider their communicative abilities to be average or higher.
Table 49 Communication Skills/Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-taught</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Formal Study</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>76% (56)</td>
<td>7% (5)</td>
<td>4% (3)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>12% (9)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once again, a pattern of learning from experience emerged and only 4% believed they acquired their ability to communicate formally. The 12% who considered the question to be not applicable to them, were, possibly of the opinion that sufficient emphasis was placed on communication skills during their teacher training period to enable all principals communicate effectively. In terms of training need, it is evident once more, that, despite high levels of confidence with regard to the ability to communicate, there remains a significant minority (49%) who would appreciate further development of their skill in this regard.

Table 50 Communication/Training Need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12% (9)</td>
<td>37% (27)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>37% (27)</td>
<td>13% (10)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

49% of respondents have a high, or very high, need for further training, which is an indication that the increased need to communicate effectively is a challenge to many principals. Male principals have a 50% need for training in communication whereas female respondents have a 47% need, which is slightly under whole-sample proportions. However, the proportion of administrative principals requesting training (75%) was much higher than the whole sample (49%) or teaching principals (44%). There appears to be a greater concern amongst administrative principals about their need for up-skilling in a range of issues relevant to their role as leaders in school communities. This is a recurring
theme in the analysis so far and indicative of an acceptance by themselves and other educational partners that teaching principals are, primarily, teachers with additional responsibilities and duties.

Amongst these additional duties is a need to manage the resources of the school be they human resources or otherwise. In the next section of the analysis the area of resource management is analysed and emerging patterns of response are recorded and commented on.

4.9 Resource Management

Resource management is a much-needed skill for principals today and given that the Education Act places a responsibility on the principal to be:

...responsible for the creation, together with the board, parents of students and teachers, of a school environment which is supportive of learning among the students and which promotes the professional development of all teachers

Within the questionnaire a number of items sought information on the ability of principals to do this work effectively.

In response to item 110, which requested information on the ability of principals to manage school finances, the following results emerged.(See table 51).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 51</th>
<th>Financial Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes 46% (34)</td>
<td>Unsure 27% (20)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

235 Ibid., p.24
The majority of respondents (54%) were unsure if they had the necessary skills to manage school finances or were, in their own opinions, unable to do so. That is not to say that financial matters do not concern them and 77% of respondents claimed to spend time constantly or often dealing with such matters despite having received no formal training (See Table 52).

**Table 52  Financial Management/Origin**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-taught</th>
<th>Formal Study</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69% (51)</td>
<td>3% (2)</td>
<td>5% (4)</td>
<td>8% (6)</td>
<td>15% (11)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the training needs of principals it is significant that 60% of respondents have high or very high training needs (See Table 53).

**Table 53  Financial Management/Training**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>27% (20)</td>
<td>33% (24)</td>
<td>15% (11)</td>
<td>20% (15)</td>
<td>5% (4)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This high demand for training is consistent with a lack of confidence amongst respondents with regard to financial management and not surprising in light of increased levels of school funding which have brought them into more direct contact with budgetary issues and associated high levels of accountability.

It would appear, from the analysis to date that, though principals consider that are effective enough on average, they would welcome dedicated guidance in the discharge of their financial responsibilities as school principals responsible for resources in their schools.
In terms of gender differentiation there is a slightly higher need for training amongst female respondents with 63% scoring high or very high as opposed to 50% for males. These are illustrated in Table 53 which cross-tabulated gender and financial management training need.

Table 54  Gender/Financial Management/Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24% (8)</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9% (3)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30% (12)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>2% (1)</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When position in school is cross-tabulated with training need in the area of financial management, the following results emerged:

Table 55  Position/Finance/Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>100% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>100% (61)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

66% of administrative principals have high or very high training needs as opposed to 58% of teaching principals. This is not a huge difference but part of a recurring pattern which is indicative of a more acute awareness of their need for training in a range of issues amongst administrative principals than is evident from their colleagues in smaller schools who have full-time teaching duties.
This may also indicate that teaching principals, in view of their actual working circumstances, have opted to ‘cut their losses’ by focusing on what they must and can realistically do, i.e. teach well and deal with pressing issues in terms of the educational priorities of their school communities.

With regard to budgetary reconciliation, (Variables 115-119), the questionnaire sought information on the perceived difficulty in reconciling teaching and learning objectives with budgetary realities. Many schools are habitually forced to fund-raise locally because of limited budgets and lack of Government spending on school infrastructure over the years. Results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 56 Budgetary Reconciliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% (37)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Half of the respondents were happy that they had the ability to direct learning effectively within the budgetary restrictions of their school. However, a significant 38% believed they did not manage that aspect of their work very well with a further 12% uncertain. In other words, lack of adequate funding was impacting negatively on teaching and learning in some schools. In addition to the above, 24% of respondents stated they had low levels of skill with regard to budgetary reconciliation and 51% were spending time constantly or often dealing with budgetary issues.
The majority also believed that whatever skills they possessed were self-taught (57%) or acquired through reading (27%). In terms of their training needs vis-à-vis school budgets, the following pattern of response emerged:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 57</th>
<th>Budgetary Reconciliation/Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18% (13)</td>
<td>26% (19)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting in this case that only 44% expressed a high or very high training need which is either, an implicit cry for help, or, a lack of acceptance by principals that this is their job in the first place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 58</th>
<th>Gender/Budgetary Reconciliation/Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100% (34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a much higher training need amongst females (53%) than amongst males (32%) in this regard. This is an indication that female principals worry more than their male colleagues about school finances and males score significantly lower than whole sample proportions (44%) in terms of training needs vis-à-vis budgetary issues in schools.

If training needs are cross-tabulated with years experience there is a much greater need amongst principals with less than 10 years experience (55%) and it would appear that greater levels of experience lead to less concern about budgetary issues amongst
principals. For example, principals with 25+ years experience record a 10% need for
training in budgetary reconciliation issues.

This is an interesting statistic in that it supports earlier findings that skills are generally
acquired through experience and is indicative of a culture which allows or expects
principals to grow and learn in the job. However, that is not to say that skills could not,
or should not, be acquired earlier by principals.

The issue of managing human resources and some of the associated key skills are the
focus of the next section of the analysis.

4.10 Human Resource Management

With regard to the critical issue of human resource management, a number of relevant
items were included in this survey. They related to staff management, staff appraisal,
staff selection, motivation, delegation and conflict management. Managing these areas
successfully is the focus of much of the work of the principal. In doing so they are
constrained by many forces and their freedom to act is conditioned by labour law, DES
guidelines as to the role of the principal and custom and practice. (See Chapter 1 on the
official role of the principal)

Responses are, in this instance, informed by the regulations to a large extent and the
following results emerged:
The overwhelming majority (91%) of principals are involved in staff selection, which is their right, according to the Education Act 236. However, the 4% who are unsure and the 5% who are not involved in the process according to them raises a number of issues. The only likely answer is that some of the respondents have not yet had the opportunity to be involved in staff selection procedures.

However, more worrying than the minority who do not or have not, as yet been part of the staff selection process in their schools, is the fact that interview skills appear to have been learned by experience as may be seen from Table 60.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 60</th>
<th>Interview Skills/Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-taught</td>
<td>Peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69% (52)</td>
<td>11% (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

236 Ibid., Section 23 (4), p.24
As might be expected from the above statistics, there is considerable demand for training in interview skills. In fact, 50% of respondents have a high or very high need for training in interview techniques with no differences in terms of gender.

As well as selecting staff, it is incumbent on principals to motivate them in the interests of quality teaching and learning. In response to item 130 of the questionnaire, which sought data on the ability of principals to motivate others in pursuit of educational objectives the following results were recorded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 61</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78% (58)</td>
<td>19% (14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, in the interests of school morale the vast majority (78%) of principals engage in motivational duties and devote considerable time to this issue, i.e. 80% devote time constantly or often, which is praiseworthy considering their lack of formal training (0% acquired this ability formally). Not surprising then, 49% of respondents have a high or very high need for training in this aspect of their work. This need is slightly higher amongst female principals (50%) than amongst male principals who are slightly lower than whole sample proportions at 47% training need.

When training need vis-à-vis motivation is cross-referenced with position in school the following results apply.
Teaching and administrative principals have different degrees of need which is consistent with previous findings about other key skills and competences of the primary school principal. Administrative principals do, of course, have much more opportunity to interact with colleagues, which may be a factor in the greater need for them to be good motivators of others.

A closely related skill to motivation is the skill of conflict management, and, as in all workplaces, individuals and/or ideologies may from time to time, clash in schools. This tendency may even be accentuated in schools where professional autonomy and territory are guarded by individual teachers and where lines of authority may from time to time be blurred, i.e. some teachers resent interference in their classroom and there is a professional autonomy based on qualifications, experience and historical legacy in existence in Irish schools.

However, effective principals will recognise political realities within their schools and will negotiate effectively with those who support and oppose their agenda. They will learn when to adopt strategies that are open and collaborative, and, when to choose more
adversarial approaches. In doing that, they move from vision to reality. and at all times, need to remember the importance of long-term relationships within the school value system which they support and endorse.

With respect to conflict management variable 135 in the questionnaire requested information on the ability of respondents to negotiate in order to achieve consensus and results were as per summary in Table 59.

The majority (62%) say they do negotiate in order to minimise conflict and 93% of principals devote considerable time to that end. Once again, this skill has been acquired informally and 91% of respondents did so through experience, reading or peers. The nationally agreed procedures as per conflict management and school grievance procedures will have conditioned responses in this regard. Consequently, 66% of principals consider that they have high or very high training needs in conflict management. Females have slightly higher than whole sample proportion needs at 65% but this is not a significant statistical disparity. However, there is a significant difference between the training needs of administrative principals (80%) and teaching principals (65%).

Variable 145, on staff appraisal skills was particularly interesting, in that there appears to be reluctance by principals to engage in informal appraisal of staff members in their schools. This is understandable in an industrial relations context, but nevertheless, it
remains important that a principal be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of all staff.
in order that resources are effectively deployed in support of school learning objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 63</th>
<th>Staff Appraisal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35% (26)</td>
<td>12% (9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly, only 35% of principals said they engaged in staff appraisal. In support of
this stance 79% said they seldom or never allocated time to this aspect of their job or
perhaps didn't consider it their role. This point of view is supported by the statistical
analysis because in terms of their skill level a significant (43%) believed that this skill
was not applicable to them. Nonetheless, 63% of respondents had a high or very high
training need in the area of staff appraisal.

It is also noteworthy that no significant differences occurred with regard to the training
needs of administrative and teaching principals.

Conversely, the majority of respondents (88%) claim to encourage staff development in
their schools and to have high levels of skill (70%) in that regard which they have
acquired through experience (62%), reading (15%) or from peers (81%). In addition, it
appears that principals spend considerable time (65% constantly or often) encouraging
the professional development of colleagues but nonetheless 57% had high or very high
training needs with regard to this aspect of their work. There was a higher training need
amongst females than males but, in terms of administrative versus teaching principals, no
significant differences apply in this case.
Overall, in terms of staff management and staff appraisal there are some interesting statistical anomalies in the data analysis. For example, principals encourage staff development without recognising the need for staff evaluation. This is inconsistent but perhaps understandable in the context of a belief that the inspectorate alone has responsibility for evaluation in schools and because principals are, first and foremost teachers, they might be reluctant to be part of that evaluative process.

In general, with regard to human resource management it is obvious that principals, be they administrative or teaching, male or female, are aware of the skills required to be competent in that area. They have developed these skills over time on the basis of need, but would clearly appreciate further formal training opportunities were they to be made available to them in order to enhance their existing homegrown skills.

In an effort to empower colleagues in the interests of human resource management 93% of respondents perceived themselves to be delegates of responsibility when appropriate. However, 49% still have high or very high training needs vis-à-vis delegation. This is not surprising considering the seniority aspect of promotion in the Irish primary school system and the middle management structures that exist in schools which means that delegation opportunities must conform to agreed practices and procedures in terms of promotional opportunities for teachers.

Notwithstanding the above considerations, 100% of principals perceived that they share power in their schools (See variables 15-19 in the questionnaire). This was a task to
which 90% of principals devoted time constantly or often and for which the majority (55%) didn’t need, or had low or very low, training needs.

This is particularly interesting because, if 50% needed training in delegation and 55% didn’t need training in empowerment, there appears to be a discrepancy arising. This may, of course be explained in terms of the traditional view that the principal is a teacher with extra duties – a view that many principals accept too, let it be said. They appear willing to share power without delegating responsibility and this is indicative of a worrying lack of clarity about the parameters of the role of the principal in the Irish primary school system.

In many ways, it is easy to understand how the school principal has come to be recognised as a “buffer zone” between teachers, the school and other interested parties and how this perception has limited thinking about preparation for the job of school principal not to mention the actual successful execution of that role.

4.11 Educational Management

In an ideal world it would not be unreasonable to expect school principals to be values-led achievement orientated individuals who are able to successfully manage ongoing tensions within their school communities. It may also be argued that only principals who can handle a rapidly changing environment can develop sustained improvements in student achievement in their schools. In order to do this, they must, ideally, be politically
aware, realistic, available, decisive yet tolerant and be able to build support structures to support them in their work.

A number of key items in this questionnaire focused on these aspects of the work of the school principal and in response to the question, “Do you have the skills to engage with and mobilise all the educational stakeholders in nurturing a learning community?”, recorded results were as follows:

Table 64 Negotiation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|     | (36) | (29)   | (9)   | (74)  |

There is a level of uncertainty from respondents about their ability to negotiate successfully but this is more pronounced in male principals as is evident from Table 65 which is a cross-tabulation of negotiation skills and gender.

Table 65 Negotiation/Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(34)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Female| 53%  | 35%    | 12%   | 100%  |
|       | (21) | (15)   | (4)   | (40)  |

A higher proportion of females are confident about their negotiation skill and it is also the case that administrative principals have a more pronounced training need than teaching.
principals in terms of training in negotiation skills. It is also interesting that when gender, position in school and ability to negotiate are cross-tabulated, male administrative principals (66%) score higher than female administrative principals (33%). Therefore, although female principals are more confident of their ability to negotiate, and administrative principals appear to have fewer concerns than teaching principals about that particular skill, it is also true to say that amongst administrative principals, males are more confident than females, in terms of negotiation with educational stakeholders.

With regard to training needs in respect of negotiations the following results were recorded:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 66</th>
<th>Negotiation/Training Need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12% (9)</td>
<td>40% (30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

52% of respondents have high or very high training needs which is consistent with the 51% (See table 64) who were uncertain about their ability to negotiate successfully in order to nurture a learning community.

Another related skill is the ability to make decisions and the responses are recorded in Table 66, i.e. the views of principals about their ability to be decisive.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 67</th>
<th>Decision Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84% (62)</td>
<td>13% (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of respondents consider they are capable of making high quality consultative decisions with this being more pronounced for males (92%) than females (78%). With regard to administrative principals, 78% were happy that they possessed the necessary skills, whereas their arguably busier teaching counterparts record an 87% positive response to the same question.

In overall terms, results are positive in this instance, but subtle distinctions do exist between male and female respondents and between administrative and teaching principals. Associated questions of client satisfaction were addressed and item 90 in the questionnaire requested information on responsiveness to client concerns and demands. The results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 68 Availability/Client Needs</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>96% (71)</td>
<td>3% (2)</td>
<td>1% (1)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overwhelming majority of respondents were available and responsive to client needs and no significant differences were evident from cross-tabulation with gender and position in school. This is obviously an issue with which principals endeavour to comply with the spirit of the Education Act which lists among the duties of the school principal and teachers, the responsibility to "...collectively promote co-operation between the school and the community which it serves". In terms of category of

---

237 Ibid., Section 2 (c), p.23
principal, the availability of teaching principals (95%) is only slightly less than the availability of their administrative counterparts (100%).

However, with regard to the training needs of respondents, 38% had high or very high categories of response which is indicative of a willingness to learn and/or an acceptance that higher levels of availability will be necessary in the future in order to keep clients happy.

On the related issue of networking (item 95), it is clear that, principals make huge efforts to maintain links with all sectors of their school communities. For example, in response to the question, “Do you make yourself available and maintain links with all sectors of your school community?” the following results emerged:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>88% (65)</td>
<td>9% (7)</td>
<td>3% (2)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, it is clear that principals are very concerned with managing relationships within the educational communities they serve and strive to be influential in terms of managing educational partners by interacting positively with them, where possible, and, by adopting, a collaborative but decisive when necessary, style of leadership. This applies regardless of gender or status and though confident of their ability to manage educational communities there remains a significant (38%) need for further professional
learning opportunities in this area of networking which is possibly a more important skill than heretofore, considering the increasingly porous boundaries of schools today.

4.12 Public Relations

In the modern era, school catchments areas have become less defined than heretofore and many parents exercise choice in terms of their choice of schools. In terms of the school ‘catchment area’ custom and practice may indicate that the local school is best suited to any parent or guardian but there is no legal obligation to attend and parents and guardians may at all times exercise choice in terms of where they want their child to be educated.

In fact, one of the objectives of the Education Act\textsuperscript{238} is:

\begin{quote}
To promote the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents’ choice having regard to the rights of patrons and the effective and efficient use of resources
\end{quote}

Good public relations have consequently become an issue for schools who strive, at all times, to maintain or improve their enrolment statistics in the interests of staff numbers.

This is also the case in West Cork and, within the time-frame of this research project, a rural co-educational schools has closed due to falling enrolments and another has amalgated with a neighbouring school for similar reasons. Therefore, it was felt that questionnaire items referring to Public Relations issues would be appropriate and in response to a question requesting information on the extent to which principals conveyed positive images of their school the following responses were recorded.

\textsuperscript{238} Ibid., Section 6(e). p.10
In addition to the positive response in Table 69, it also emerged that, 85% of principals devoted time constantly or often to public relations issues for which only 3% had received any formal training. However, despite a clear lack of training, 70% of respondents believed they had high or very high PR skills and the majority (55%) didn't want, or had low or very low training needs, in relation to school promotion issues.

Behaviour management in schools is also a very important issue and, consequently, a number of items relating to pastoral care issues were included in the questionnaire.

The majority of respondents took time to develop pastoral care programmes with a view to positively impacting on pupil behaviour in their schools and results may be viewed in Table 71.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>77% (57)</td>
<td>15% (11)</td>
<td>8% (6)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority devoted time to pastoral care issues and 80% of respondents were in the constantly or often categories. There was a slight ambiguity in terms of the origin of these skills as may be viewed in the following statistical table.
Table 72 Pastoral Care/Origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-taught</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Peers</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Formal Study</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45% (33)</td>
<td>24% (18)</td>
<td>12% (9)</td>
<td>15% (11)</td>
<td>4% (3)</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is apparent that pastoral care skills were not learned through experience to the same extent as many other skills were and this aspect of the work of the principal may be problematic in the light of major social change, and its impact on school communities. Paradoxically, only 47% of respondents had high or very high training needs vis-à-vis pastoral care which is an indication that schools are managing, albeit with great effort, to curb the impact of social change in their school communities.

Notwithstanding the above general comments, there were significant differences between schools in terms of their attitude to the issues of public relations, pastoral care and school promotion in general. For example, rural schools have a 45% training need as compared to a 40% need in urban schools in terms of public relations. Gaeltacht school principals have no recorded need for training in this regard as these schools serve distinct communities with a common objective to safeguard the integrity and secure the future of their Irish speaking areas. Gaelscoileanna, on the other hand, are striving to develop Irish in English speaking areas and are acutely aware of the need to promote their image. Consequently, principals in these schools have a 100% high or very high need for training in public relations skills.

A similar pattern of response is obvious with regard to pastoral care issues. Rural schools have a 45% training need which is equivalent to whole sample proportions whereas urban
schools have a 60% need. This is not surprising considering the increased density of population and the greater social stratification of communities in urban settings which creates the perception, at least, that social upheaval will be more likely.

Gaeltacht schools (25%) and Gaelscoileanna are also at polar opposites in terms of their need for training in pastoral care issues. This is, no doubt, due to the fact that all Gaelscoileanna are located in urban settings and, because of their inclusive ethos and the spirit of partnership which underpins their work, they require principals with a range of skills that may not be as important in other types of schools.

What is clear from the analysis is that certain issues impact more seriously on certain schools and these schools may require more competent leaders.

The overwhelming majority of principals engaged in showing pride in the achievements of their school communities as may be viewed in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97% (72)</td>
<td>3% (2)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100% (74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the 97% who promote the achievements of their school, 82% of respondents claimed to devote time to this aspect of their job. Their skills in this regard came from experience, reading or peers (92%) and the majority (61%) felt they did not require training in how to celebrate the achievements of their school communities.
There was a higher need for training among female respondents (45%) than male respondents (32%) and administrative principals score higher (45%) than teaching principals (39%) in terms of their respective need for training in school promotion issue.

4.13 School Administration

According to the data, school administration is a particularly problematic area for smaller schools, many of which have little or no secretarial support. Currently the funding available is based on enrolment figures and, based on the current €60 per child level of funding, the average West Cork school would not be able to afford a full time secretary. However, lack of time or lack of administrative support does not absolve the principal of any school from responsibility and teaching principals need to maintain the same high standards as their non-teaching colleagues in terms of school administration.

Take school planning, for example, which is an issue for all schools and particularly relevant in the context of the Education Act which in Section 21(1) states that:

\[
A \text{ board shall, as soon as may be after its appointment, make arrangements for the preparation of a plan (in this section referred to as the 'School Plan') and shall ensure the plan is regularly reviewed and updated.}
\]

It is evident from the data that this is an area of concern for many principals. For example, in response to item 150 in the questionnaire, which requested information on the ability of principals to keep abreast of new legislation regarding schools the following results were recorded.

\[^{239}\text{DES (2001), Primary Circular 21.01.}\]

\[^{240}\text{DES (1998), op. cit., Section 21(1). p. 22}\]
Table 74 Legal Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(26)</td>
<td>(28)</td>
<td>(20)</td>
<td>(74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents are clearly not happy with their skill level in this area of their work. Nor, is there a confidence that they will acquire this ability over time, and only 32% of respondents claim to be self-taught with a further very significant 70% claiming to have low or very low levels of skill in this regard. It is not surprising, therefore, that 81% of principals have high or very high training needs in terms of this specific skill (See Table 75)

Table 75 Legal Change/Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(29)</td>
<td>(31)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike other skills this deficit in terms of training is a feature of rural (80%), urban (70%), Gaeltacht schools (80%) and Gaelscoileanna (100%). It is noteworthy that Gaelscoileanna score higher than other types of schools and appear to be more acutely aware of the need for transparency and accountability in all matters. There is also a marked difference in terms of gender and males (53%) and females (80%) have different levels of confidence, in terms of school planning.

Administrative principals (90%) also have a higher training need than teaching principals which is, once again, indicative of a greater awareness amongst them of the need to be professional in all aspects of their work.
There also appears to be a correlation between training needs and the level of educational achievement of respondents. For example, the highest training needs was amongst traditional N.T. holders (89%) who had a 2-year initial training period. In second place were 3 year B.Ed. degree holders (85%) whereas, those who had spent longer at third level and completed post-graduate courses, had a 60% training need.

The analysis also revealed that certain class responsibilities were more demanding than others and in terms of training for school planning the following situation pertained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infants</td>
<td>28% (3)</td>
<td>36% (4)</td>
<td>28% (3)</td>
<td>8% (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>15% (1)</td>
<td>45% (3)</td>
<td>25% (2)</td>
<td>15% (1)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>38% (14)</td>
<td>44% (16)</td>
<td>3% (1)</td>
<td>10% (4)</td>
<td>5% (2)</td>
<td>100% (37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-grade</td>
<td>60% (9)</td>
<td>40% (6)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100% (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>50% (2)</td>
<td>50% (2)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100% (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The highest need is among principals with responsibility for multi-grade classes (100%) with those who teach senior classes (82%) next in line. Principals with responsibility for infants score third (74%) in terms of training needs whereas those with responsibility for middle classes have the least need for training in school planning issues (60%). That is not to say that a 60% training need is insignificant but, in comparative terms, principals
with responsibility for middle classes appear to be less stressed in terms of staying abreast of the legal implications of being a principal vis-à-vis school planning.

Teaching principals in small schools with multi-grade classes are the most likely to be stressed with regard to this aspect of their work. In an effort to alleviate stress, 82% of these principals delegate responsibility for school policy development although 77% of them still devote considerable time to this task. However, only 50% of respondents to item 158 of the questionnaire consider themselves to have high or very high levels of skill with regard to policy development and a further significant 63% have high or very high training needs in that regard. (See Table 77)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Development/Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20% (15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the skill of maintaining school records to an acceptable level of efficiency respondents recorded the following results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Record-keeping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62% (46)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents feel they achieve an acceptable level of efficiency with regard to school records but 84% devote a lot of time to this aspect of their work and 66%...
consider their skill level to be high or very high. However, a significant 55% have a need for further training in this regard (See Table 79)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 79</th>
<th>Records/Training Need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18% (13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Males have a higher training need than females with regard to maintenance of school records, i.e. 68% vs. 43% respectively, and this is perhaps indicative of a greater concern by female principals about record-keeping in general, or a better appreciation of the parameters of the job in the first place.

It is also noteworthy that when asked to note their performance in terms of administration (Variable 199) the recorded responses were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 80</th>
<th>Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Very High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11% (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results are consistent with items 160-169 in the questionnaire, which dealt with the issue of record keeping (See tables 78 and 79).

It is noteworthy also that the average positive response to questionnaire items 180-199 was 60% high or very high in terms of respondents opinion of their own performance in
terms of the personal and professional aspects of their work surveyed in this part of the overall questionnaire.

4.14 Recurring Themes in the Quantitative Data Analysis:

There are many recurring themes in evidence in the data analysis and even though some inconsistencies were apparent they were a consistent feature in the patterns of response that emerged from this quantitative research project.

Some of the major points of discussion were as follows:

- Response patterns were consistent throughout the research.
- The majority of the skills/competencies about which information was sought were acknowledged by principals as essential parts of their work.
- Principals do not receive training for the multi-faceted role they perform and are essentially teachers with extra responsibilities.
- The majority of principals have developed coping skills and are satisfied that they are doing a reasonable job. albeit, in difficult and stressful circumstances.
- The skills and competencies levels acquired by principals have been achieved through experience and by growing in the job.
- There are no significant differences between male and female principals though females overall exhibit marginally higher levels of confidence re. the parameters within which they operate as school principals.
- All principals have high training needs vis-à-vis their role and there is an acceptance that coping skills are no substitute for professional training.
There are significantly higher training needs amongst administrative principals which is indicative of a need for them to have a broader range of skills considering the opportunity they have in expanding the parameters of their role beyond the teaching aspect.

- Different types of schools provide different challenges to the principal and training needs to address this.
- Principals with different training and levels of experience have different training needs.
- The most difficult schools to lead are small rural schools with multi-grade classes.
- The position of school principal is more attractive or more easily attained by males than by females.
- Seniority appears to be a significant factor in becoming a school principal.

4.15 Qualitative Data Analysis:

The following qualitative analysis was conducted in order to triangulate quantitative results and is based on the interview transcripts included in appendix IV. Group interview transcripts which are included as Appendix IV should be read in order to facilitate interpretation of these results. Qualitative data is based on meanings expressed using words and this requires classification and analysis through the development of data categories known as coding. For the purposes of this research triangulation exercise the challenge was to work through
the interview transcripts and seek to identify categories of response related to the research purpose.

A system of inductive open coding was used initially on the raw data with the objective of allowing emergent theory to be led by, and be solely dependent on, the data generated during the group interview process. The objective was to categorise responses into significant themes and issues arising with the further objective of linking these themes into major areas of concern as the data was processed using this open coding method. Following the initial open coding stage axial and selective coding were used to generate more generalised codes based on the initial codes used during the open coding process.

In relation to the first question which asked respondents to comment on the changes in the role of the principal the following themes developed from the initial open coding stage of data analysis:

Categories of response included the following:

- Unrelenting change.
- Increased workload.
- Increased behavioural problems.
- Lack of financial reward.
- Change in the role of the Board of Management.
- Lack of support from Priests.
- Increased stress.
- Challenges of curriculum review.
- New demands in the workplace.
- Decline of rural traditions.
- Poor job satisfaction.
- Lack of interest in the role of principal as evidenced in falling applicant lists.
- Unmanageability of the job compared to the key-holder role of former years.

At this stage relationships between the categories of data were sought and using axial coding procedures and the main issues were summarised as:

- Societal change.
- Poor job satisfaction.
- Increased workload.

Subsequently, the central or core category of concern to respondents and the greatest indicator of change in the role of the principal was identified selectively as continuous and unrelenting change.

The second major theme on which this qualitative research was focused. sought responses on the difficulties principals face in managing their time effectively, and resulted in the following categories of response being identified using an inductive system of open coding:

Categories of response included the following:

- Staff competency/professionalism.
- Successful delegation, networking.
- The role of the administrative principal.
- Optimal school size.
- Principals' allowances.
- DES structures.
- Accountability and transparency issues.
- Constant interference by outside agencies.
- Administrative duties.

Middle management systems and the teaching aspect of the job.

At this stage the potential relationships between these categories of data were reflected upon and the main issues were summarised as:

- School structures.
- The teaching role of the principal.

Following the open and axial coding stages of analysis the selective coding stage was initiated and the greatest level of concern with regard to the time pressures faced by the average school principal was identified as poor DES structures and guidelines with regard to actual role and function of the primary principal.

The third question which sought respondents' opinions on how to make the principals' job more attractive to potential applicants resulted in the following code labels being identified using an initial open coding system:

Categories of response included the following:

- More pay.
- More administrative support.
- Reduction in the entry level requirements for teacher training colleges.
• Less emphasis on Irish.
• Positive action to halt the feminisation of education.
• A more structured and user-friendly system of substitution for administrative days.

Relationship between these major themes suggested a clear focus on:

• More support for principals at all levels within the education system.

This was the central category of concern and the reform at system level was identified selectively as the best method of making the position of principal more attractive to potential applicants as well as current post-holders.

The fourth item on which respondents were asked to concentrate was the actual need for system change in order to facilitate the school principal.

The following were the major conceptual units labelled by the researcher:

• Increased pay.
• A clear definition of the role of the principal.
• Training.
• The principal/teacher divide.
• Coping skills.
• Awareness of the need to change.
• School planning.
• Contractual issues.
• Vocational nature of their work.
• Authority and status of the principal.
The need to re-define the voluntary nature of Boards of Management.

On examination of the relationships between these categories of response the following main issues were summarised as:

- Clarity of definition of roles for all educational partners.
- Training.

The central category of concern for respondents was selectively chosen as a need for role clarity and training.

The final area explored concerned new models of leadership and the following issues were identified using an inductive open coding system:

- Leadership crisis in schools.
- Demographics.
- School catchment areas.
- Community.
- Ethos and characteristic spirit of schools.
- De-centralisation.
- Role definition.
- Review of current policies.
- School based in-service.
- Clustering schools.
- Optimal school size.
- Proper support and training.
Relationships between these labels were reflected upon and summarised as:

- Local community issues.
- Structural reform issues.

However the principal selective theme identified from this process of coding was, in the opinion of the researcher, the need for reform of the system.

In summary, the emergent theory was clearly focused on the need for clarity, training and clearer guidelines for principals supported by system reform as an essential element in the struggle to manage change.

This grounded theory which was built using a bottom-up coding technique is in complete conformity with the research objectives of this thesis and consistent with the principal findings of the quantitative analysis which indicated a need for training in a whole range of skills and competencies relevant to the work of the school principal. This need for training is clearly based on the growing challenges of the job for which no training has been received by the vast majority of questionnaire respondents. In fact, of the thirty four skills included in the questionnaire high levels of training were identified and the need for system reform was clear from the inconsistency which existed between perceived skill levels and the above mentioned training needs. This inconsistency in the quantitative analysis served to indicate the growing levels of awareness of principals to the challenges and demands being placed upon them by constant change. The personal subjective responses of group interviewees, confirms this, qualitatively.

For example, the ability of principals to lead was assessed in the questionnaire and respondents indicated a high degree of uncertainty (57% unsure or incapable) with regard
to that skill and there was a 60% demand for training. This clearly indicates a high degree of dissatisfaction with the current system - a fact which is supported by the qualitative analysis.

Another appropriate indicator could be levels of job satisfaction which were evaluated quantitatively. Results indicated that 93% of principals suffered from high or very high levels of stress and there was a consequent 60% high or very high demand for training in stress management. With regard to the ability to motivate colleagues in pursuit of educational goals, a 50% demand for training existed. All of these quantitative measurements are consistent with and supported by the subjective responses of group interviewees which indicated high levels of concern with the system within which they worked and an inability to cope unless system reform was initiated.

All of the above points of view were of added value to this thesis and served to confirm qualitatively many of the interpretations gleaned from the quantitative data on which the substantive majority of this thesis depends. The qualitative data is generally consistent with the direction of the thesis and the direction of the quantitative data and was interesting for a number of reasons. As well as giving a flavour of some individual subjective responses which added a dimension to the research, not possible using only quantitative analysis techniques, the qualitative data, by indicating the personal concerns of respondents, deepened the level of understanding achieved.

Qualitative analysis searches for understanding rather than knowledge, for interpretations rather than measurements and for values rather than facts and, in that context, the group interview process embarked upon was deemed worthwhile. (See section 3.1 for a more
detailed discussion of the epistemological and philosophical differences between qualitative and quantitative analysis)

In the first place, many of the assumptions of the thesis were confirmed and added to by the comments of these principals. For example, the traditional view of the school as a place where knowledge was imparted to passive students with little or no outside interference was the preferred educative model of at least one of the respondents and implicit in many of the comments of this respondent was a view that that all of the current change was not necessarily in the interests of good education. This period of educational restructuring and the greater need for principals to engage in extra work of a lower order nature as well as in higher order task which improved school efficiency was clearly adding to the stress levels of this respondent. This dilemma of higher order activity resulting in additional lower order tasks is discussed on page sixteen of the thesis and encapsulated in a quote by Dimmock (See footnote 32).

There was also clear indication from all of the respondents that they were not fully in control at all times and were sometimes struggling to cope as evidenced in the comment which mentioned the anxiety created by the occasional visit from an Inspector.

Overall, there was a clear sense that the job was overwhelming and a particularly strong resentment was apparent when conditions of work, pay and secretarial support were mentioned. Nor was there a sense of their own status as leaders in school communities which is in conflict with the traditional view of the local teacher as a community leader and a scholar, a definition to which each of the respondents would have aspired.
In fact the quotation from Pinchot which mentioned people at the top being overworked while everyone else waits for orders (See footnote 55) seemed to define their view of themselves with chilling accuracy.

These principals clearly felt overworked, underpaid and undervalued in the current system and echoed the views of John Carr, General Secretary of the INTO, quoted on page 2 of this thesis and Seán Cottrell of the IPPN (See page 32) who highlighted the lack of adequate rewards as a major disincentive to current and prospective school principals.

As a result of these pressures a sense that they were surviving with some difficulty and with no great help from the system was a tangible feature of these discussions. Consequently, these principals were inclined to blame the system for their difficulties and not look for their own solutions to the problems which they encountered in the workplace and the perception that the system undervalued and didn’t support them was almost an excuse for their own limitations. This mindset, referred to earlier (See literature review), was evident in this group interview and overall there was no sense of personal responsibility for inadequacy in any of the discussions that took place. This is a dangerous mindset and one that may result in minimal action at individual and local level and perhaps mediocrity in terms of educational development until everything is put in place by the system. It is easier for a principal to perform as a teacher with extra responsibilities than to shape the work of his/her school and under performance and/or under-responsibility may be the reality of this point of view which was to an extent underpinning much of the discussion that took place during this group interview. This phenomenon was discussed in the literature review in section 2.4 which dealt with the
issue of organisational leadership and it was interesting to discover that much of what theorists referred to could be detected from the comments and attitudes portrayed during the interview process.

A particularly interesting and unsolicited piece of information which concerned the area of administrative release for principals resulted from the interview. Principals were clearly unhappy with arrangements and had, on occasions, not taken these days because of the difficulty of finding suitable replacements. At least one respondent had not taken these days in the past for that reason and the interruption to normal working patterns that these administrative days created. Consequently, the effort by the DES to alleviate stress by allowing administrative days to teaching principals was becoming, in itself, a source of added stress and was viewed as counter-productive in its current form. This resulted in the worthwhile suggestion that the system would work better if all of these administrative days were restructured as permanent shared posts between neighbouring schools. In that form it was suggested that it would be possible for all schools to have access to an additional teacher for one day per week who would be aware of the school’s ethos, procedures and policies.

This point of view fits in well the overall need to re-structure the education system in order to reflect the realities of today and is consistent with the fundamental need, in the view of the researcher, to re-examine leadership in our schools in all of its manifestations in order that the balance between higher order and lower order skills be re-aligned in the best interest of teaching and learning.
Unfortunately, there was a sense that resistance to change was worthwhile, and, much of the energy of these principals was being expended in simply surviving by hanging onto the traditions and practices which they were accustomed to. This is a futile exercise and, as Bennis and others have warned, the effort to maintain the status quo is an impediment to leadership in our schools today and it is important that school leaders recognise and come to terms with the context in which they work if progress is to be achieved. There was a clear sense from the interview that the respondents were more concerned with managing crises than articulating vision and cultivating followers.

Furthermore, the possibility of allocating real functions to members of Boards of Management and changing their current voluntary status was explored and respondents saw merit in this. However, it was not a comprehensive discussion. Nor, was it made clear that the implications of actions such as those mentioned had been fully thought through.

However, in essence, this group interview supported the quantitative analysis and confirmed many of the emerging hypotheses. It was clear that these principals were under stress, were to a large measure unhappy in their work, felt unsupported in their roles, had developed a learned helplessness and urgently needed training to counteract growing levels of apathy and discontent.

Their personal views were in conformity with the quantitative responses of the survey and the impossibility of the task of school leadership. the demand for training and the limited ‘coping’ view of themselves in their role, as well as their need for affirmation in
their work, were a constant thread throughout the discussions which emanated from the follow-up group interview.

4.16 Statistical Report.

The data was further examined statistically with a view to supporting the quantitative and qualitative analyses. This statistical report was, in itself a quantitative approach and relationships between variables were examined to provide greater depth and breadth of understanding. From the wide variety of statistical techniques (parametric and non-parametric) it became necessary to choose the most suitable method depending on the normality of the data. Parametric tests are normally used on ratio or interval data assumed to be drawn from a wide, normal population. Non parametric tests are generally performed on simple nominal and ordinal data where no particular pattern or distribution pertains, and, they are suitable when smaller data groups are a feature, which was the case in this particular instance.

Initial tests using SPSS examined ‘normality’ which in statistical terms describes the symmetrical bell shaped curve with the greatest frequency of scores in the middle and smaller frequencies at the extremities. Non-normal refers to situations where the greatest frequency of scores occur at the extremities of the bell-shaped curve.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilks tests, which assess the normality of the distribution of scores, showed that the distribution of the data was significantly non-normal (p<.05). A visual inspection of the boxplots further confirmed this. Therefore, non-parametric tests of significance were used to examine the data.
The demographic (independent) variables were a mixture of categorical, nominal and ordinal data rather than continuous, and so frequency tables were drawn up to evaluate the data.

The chi-square test for independence was not suitable for the present sample as it violates the assumption of chi-square concerning the 'minimum expected cell frequency', which stipulates that at least 80% of cells have expected frequencies of 5 or more.

Spearmans Rank Order Correlation (rho) which is a non-parametric test was utilised to calculate the strength of the relationships between the ordinal variables. It should be noted that the strength of a correlation may be delineated using the following guidelines:

- $r = +.10$ to $+.29$ can be considered small,
- $r = +.30$ to $+.49$ medium, and
- $r = +.50$ to $+1.0$ large. The same guidelines apply to negative (-) correlations.

Part iv (competence/skill levels) of each of the 34 skill/competencies which are included in the questionnaire were found to correlate positively with each other, across all domains. The positive correlations ranged between $r = .257^{**}$ and $r = .584^{**}$ with some exceptions where no association (positive or negative) was found.

Strong correlations were found between the following competence/skill levels (part iv):

- 'Vision' and 'empowerment' ($r = .584^{**}$)
- 'Vision' and 'decision making' ($r = .492^{**}$)
- 'Vision' and 'ability to lead' ($r = .418^{**}$)
- 'Vision' and 'networking' ($r = .426^{**}$)
- 'Negotiation' and 'public relations' ($r = .494^{**}$)
- 'Negotiation' and 'policy reconciliation' ($r = .501^{**}$)
- 'Staff development' and 'curriculum change' ($r = .418^{**}$)
- ‘School pride’ and ‘public relations’ \( (r = .555^{**}) \)
- Curriculum change and ‘availability’ \( (r = .455^{**}) \)
- Curriculum change and ‘motivation’ \( (r = .434^{**}) \)
- ‘Teaching’ with ‘staff development’ \( (r = .439^{**}) \)
- ‘Ability to lead’ with ‘policy reconciliation’ \( (r = .510^{**}) \)
- ‘Ability to lead’ with ‘interpersonal skills’ \( (r = .421^{**}) \)
- ‘Ability to lead’ with ‘availability’ \( (r = .468^{**}) \)
- ‘Ability to lead’ with ‘ability to deliver’ \( (r = .502^{**}) \)
- ‘Ability to lead’ with ‘networking’ \( (r = .439^{**}) \)
- ‘Ability to lead’ with ‘stress’ \( (r = .440^{**}) \)
- ‘Ability to lead’ with ‘training’ \( (r = .514^{**}) \)
- ‘Ability to lead’ with ‘decision making’ \( (r = .555^{**}) \)
- ‘Decision making’ with ‘conflict management’ \( (r = .454^{**}) \)
- Decision making with ‘networking’ \( (r = .531^{**}) \)
- ‘Decision making’ with ‘interpersonal skills’ \( (r = .552^{**}) \)

From the analysis strong correlations emerged in a number of variables and it appears that ‘ability to lead’ may be a strong predictor of perceived competence: skill levels pertaining to the role of principal across domains.

These cluster variables were based on part (iv) of each of the 34 items included in the main part of the questionnaire and were selected in preference to parts (i), (ii), (iii) or (v) because of their suitability, i.e. they provided a measure of the confidence of respondents vis-à-vis the particular skills/competencies included.
There was a cluster of variables surrounding this domain, including 'policy reconciliation', 'interpersonal skills', 'availability', 'ability to deliver', 'networking', 'stress', 'training', and 'decision making'.

Furthermore, 'decision making' as a domain, is characterised by a cluster of variables including, 'conflict management', 'networking' and 'interpersonal skills'. The only other domain around which a cluster appears is 'vision'. Vision is characterised by 'empowerment', 'decision making', 'ability to lead' and 'networking'. From these a degree of overlap is evident in which the 'ability to lead' domain appears central.

Targeted training for principals could focus on the aforementioned clusters and educational programmes incorporating these generic attributes would be cost effective and entirely relevant based on the statistical analysis of the collected data.

This statistical evidence confirms the perceived view that a leadership vacuum is now a key issue in education and supports the thesis in its suggestion that the leadership issue in Irish primary schools is in urgent need of redress.

'Multiple Regression' which is a more sophisticated extension of correlation would be necessary to confirm this but there is a clear and positive relationship between leadership ability and success in some of the core competencies/skills as outlined above.

In addition, a negative relationship was consistently found between 'levels of competence skill' (part iv) and 'training needs' (part v) ranging from $r = -.294^{**}$ to $r = -.741^{**}$. This suggests that as the perception of competence/skill level rises, the perceived need for training with respect to those skills diminishes.

This supports one of the principal findings of the thesis that although perceived skill levels are high amongst respondents their training need is also high but, clearly, the
highest levels of perceived skill result in lower levels of training need, a fact which was not clearly evident from the previous descriptive analysis.

However, it is possible that this anomaly is simply caused by a predominance of logical respondents over illogical ones. Logical respondents who claim high skill levels and low training needs (these are responsible for negative correlations) are more frequent than illogical respondents who claim high skills but also have high training needs.

Furthermore, a positive relationship was found across all domains with regard to 'training needs' (part v of each questionnaire item). This suggests that principals who feel they need training in relation to any one particular skill will also require training with regard to many other skills. Furthermore, it is statistically evident that the lower the perception of individual skill/competency level is the higher the need for training across all domains.

Analysis pertaining to the demographic variables and 34 (5 part) items which form the central core of the questionnaire variables was also undertaken using the Kruskal-Wallis test. Again this is a non-parametric test but justifiable in this instance because of the small sub-groups in many of the variables, particularly the demographic variables. This is the non-parametric alternative to a one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA), which enables one to compare the scores on one or more continuous variables for three or more groups. Frequencies are converted into ranks and the mean rank for each for each group is compared. This is a between-groups analysis, therefore different participants must present in each of the groups: e.g. differences in categorical independent variables (position in school – admin principal, teaching principal, etc.) in
relation to continuous dependent variables (stress management training need levels - 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)

If the sig. level is a value less than .05, one may conclude that there is a statistically significant difference in the continuous variable.

You can then inspect the ‘mean rank’ column for the groups presented in your first output table (labelled ‘Ranks’). This will inform you which of the groups had the highest overall ranking that corresponds to the highest score on your continuous variable.

However in this statistical report because of the coding system used the higher ranks will indicate lower scores and vice versa.

Table 81  Position in School/Stress Management/Training Need

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress Man Train N</th>
<th>Pos in School</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admin. Principals</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach Principals</td>
<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td>38.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting Principals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>23.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Test Statistics a,b (a. Kruskal-Wallis Test) (b. Grouping Variable: Pos in School)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stress Man Train N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>2.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig.</td>
<td>.320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the output presented above, the sig. level was .32 which is above the alpha level of .05. Therefore, these results suggest that there is no difference in ‘stress management training need levels’ across the different school positions. An inspection of the mean ranks for the groups suggest that the ‘teaching principals’ group had the highest ‘stress management training need’ scores, with the ‘acting principals’ group scoring the lowest. This is consistent with the picture of overworked undervalued principals which features in both the quantitative and qualitative analyses.

In relation to gender, the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that there was no significant difference between male and female principals regarding perception of ‘competence/skill level’ and ‘training needs’ across all domains in the questionnaire. The only exceptions were in the policy reconciliation competence/skill level domain ($p=.017$) and the budgetary constraints training needs domain ($p=.021$). This supports the quantitative analysis which indicated higher levels of concern amongst female principals with regard to school financial issues but which indicated similar levels of confidence (though marginally higher in the case of females across the full range of variables as evidenced on pages 129 and 130 of the quantitative analysis) with regard to all of the variables included in the analysis. However, it must be noted that the significance tests were
focused on skill levels, whereas quantitative analysis, as mentioned above, recorded responses to the initial part of each variable which sought information of the perception of respondents with regard to whether or not they possessed a particular skill/competency.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the policy reconciliation competence/skill level group suggests that male principals perceive themselves to have a lower competence skill level (mean rank = 43.44) than do their female counterparts (mean rank = 32.45). This is testament to the greater diplomacy skills of females, as mentioned in the literature review and recorded in later quantitative data analysis.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the budget constraints training needs group suggests that male principals (mean rank = 43.57) want a lower level of training in this area than do their female counterparts (mean rank = 32.34). These statistics are consistent with the quantitative data analysis.

Concerning the level of experience of each participant, the Kruskal-Wallis revealed that across the majority of domains, no significant differences between the groups (less 5 yrs, 5-10, 10-15, 15-20, 20-25, and 25+) was found. However, statistically significant differences were found in the 'networking competency/skill level' (p=.046), 'school pride training needs'(p=.008), 'motivation level'(p=.022), 'strategic thinking'(p=.015), 'mentoring'(p=.011), and 'educational knowledge'(p=.030) domains.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'networking competence/skill level' group suggests that those with 25+ years experience perceive themselves to have the lowest level of competency (mean rank = 49.00), 15-20 yrs experience (mean rank = 38.33), 10-15 yrs experience (mean rank = 37.50), 5-10yrs experience (mean rank = 33.14), and those with
less than 5yrs (mean rank = 32.59). Interestingly the group with the highest perception of networking skill are principals with 20-25yrs experience (mean rank = 25.86). This is consistent with the quantitative analysis and supports the traditional view that experience is a relevant factor in school leadership as well as confirming the resistance of traditional principals to what they consider intrusive developments, i.e. partnership, expanding curricula, increased responsibility to mention but a few.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'school pride competency/skill level' group suggests that those with 10-15yrs or 15-20yrs have the lowest perceived skill level (mean rank = 48.44 and 45.72 respectively). Those with 20-25yrs experience have the highest perceived skill level (mean rank = 22.64). Those with less than 5yrs experience (mean rank = 35.68), 5-10yrs experience (mean rank = 33.54), and 25+yrs experience (mean rank = 39.03), fall between.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'motivation level' groups suggests that those with 10-15yrs experience or 25+yrs experience have the lowest motivation levels (mean rank = 52.94 and 44.03 respectively). Those with less than 5yrs and 5-10yrs experience have the highest motivation levels (mean rank = 29.59 and 28.64 respectively). This suggests a changing consciousness amongst younger principals and indicates a willingness to develop new skills which is entirely consistent with initial quantitative and follow-up qualitative analysis.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'strategic thinking' group suggests that those with 10-15yrs experience have the lowest performance (mean rank = 55.63), and those with 5-10yrs experience have the highest (mean rank = 28.75). Less than 5yrs (mean rank =
31.79), 15-20yrs (mean rank = 31.33), 20-25yrs (mean rank = 39.07), and 25+ (mean rank = 43.76) fall between.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'mentoring' group suggests that those with 15-20 or 10-15yrs experience perceive themselves to have the lowest mentoring performance (mean rank = 46.67 and 46.13 respectively) and those with 5-10yrs experience have the highest (mean rank = 19.71). Less than 5yrs (mean rank = 40.29), 20-25yrs (mean rank = 37.14), and 25+ (mean rank = 40.26) fall between.

Finally, inspection of the mean ranks for the 'educational knowledge' group suggests that those with 10-15yrs or 15-20yrs have the lowest perceived level of educational knowledge (mean rank = 47.38 and 46.83 respectively), with those who have 20-25yrs experience having the highest (mean rank = 18.36). Less than 5yrs (mean rank = 36.29), 5-10yrs (mean rank = 32.04), and 25+yrs (mean ranks = 41.08) fall between. This suggest that change is impacting negatively on experienced principals and, is consistent with the underlying thrust of the thesis, which suggests the need for system redevelopment in support of these principals.

Concerning the status of the school presided over by each principal the Kruskal-Wallis revealed that across the majority of domains, no significant differences between the groups (denominational, non-denominational, and multi-denominational) was found. However, statistically significant differences were found in the 'ability to lead training needs' (p=.048), and 'role clarity training needs' (p=.046) domains.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'ability to lead training needs' group suggests that those principals of non-denominational schools have the lowest perceived need for
training (mean rank = 62.50), and those in multi-denominational schools have the highest perceived need (mean rank = 4.00). Those in denominational schools (mean rank = 37.27) fall between.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'role clarity training needs' group suggests that those principals of non-denominational schools have the lowest perceived need for training (mean rank = 67.00), and those in multi-denominational schools have the highest perceived need (mean rank = 9.50). Those in denominational schools (mean rank = 37.06) fall between.

Concerning the position held by each principal within their school, the Kruskal-Wallis revealed that across the majority of domains, no significant differences between the groups (admin. principal, teaching principal and acting principal) were found. However, statistically significant differences were found in the 'budgetary constraints skill level' (p=.029) domain.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'budget constraints skill level' group suggests that acting principals have the lowest perceived level of skill in this area (mean rank = 62.88). Administrative and teaching principals have higher perceived levels of skill in this area (mean rank = 33.39 and 36.44 respectively). These results confirm the quantitative data analysis responses.

Concerning the classes taught by principals, the Kruskal-Wallis revealed that across the majority of domains, no significant differences between the groups (infants, middle, senior, multi grade, and N/A) was found. However, statistically significant differences
were found in the 'financial management skill level' (p=.008), 'budgetary constraints training needs' (p=.048), 'staff management skill level' (p=.009), 'appraising staff' (p=.028), and 'enabling staff' (p=.021) domains.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'financial management skill level' suggests that principals who teach infants or multi grade have the lowest perceived skill level (mean rank = 47.82 and 45.60 respectively), while those who teach middle classes have the highest perceived skill level in this domain (mean rank = 15.86). Those who teach senior (mean rank = 35.09) and those who don't teach (mean rank = 38.88) fall between. This is consistent with the overall analysis and symptomatic of a school culture which has a predominance of female teachers (teaching principals) in infant classes.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'budget constraints training needs' suggests that principals who teach middle or senior classes have the lowest perceived need for training (mean rank = 45.07 and 42.96 respectively), while those who teach multi grade have the highest perceived need for training in this area (mean rank = 25.50). Those who teach infants (mean rank = 30.68) and those who don't teach (mean rank = 37.50) fall between.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'staff management skill level' group suggests that those who teach infants or multi grade have the lowest perceived level of skill in this area (mean rank = 48.27 and 47.13 respectively), while those who don't teach have the highest (mean rank = 23.50). Those who teach middle (mean rank = 26.29) and senior (mean rank = 34.03) classes fall between. This is consistent with the evidence from the quantitative analysis which suggests that administrative principals have greater training needs than their teaching counterparts.
Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'appraising staff' group suggests that principals who teach infants or multi grade have the lowest perceived performance concerning the appraisal of staff (mean rank = 48.23 and 46.97 respectively) with those who teach middle classes having the highest perceived performance (mean rank = 24.71). Those who teach senior classes (mean rank = 27.63) and don't teach (mean rank = 33.96) fall between.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'enabling staff' group suggests that principals who teach infants or multi grade have the lowest perceived performance regarding the enabling of staff members (mean rank = 49.86 and 46.970 respectively), while those who don't teach have the highest perceived performance in this area (mean rank = 20.25). Those who teach middle (mean rank = 31.50) and senior (mean rank = 33.74) classes fall between.

Concerning the different levels of educational qualification obtained by the principals in the present study, the Kruskal-Wallis revealed that across the majority of domains, no significant differences between the groups (B.Ed., NT, Degree + PostGrad Dip. and Masters) were found. However, statistically significant differences were found in the 'availability skill level' (p=.011), 'networking skill level' (p=.045) and 'policy development skill level' (p=.041) domains.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'availability skill level' groups suggests that principals with a Degree+PostGrad Dip. have the lowest perceived skill level (mean rank = 42.61), while those with a Masters have the highest perceived skill level (mean rank = 6.00). Those with B.Ed. (mean rank = 38.07), and NT (mean rank = 36.79) fall between.
Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'networking skill level' group suggests that principals who have a B.Ed. or a Degree+PostGrad Dip. perceive themselves to have the lowest level of competency with regard to networking (mean rank = 41.11 and 40.93 respectively). Those who have a Masters perceive themselves to have the highest level of competency in this area (mean rank = 12.33). Those who have an NT (mean rank = 36.24) fall between. This information suggests that increased academic qualifications result in increased confidence levels. However, it is evident from the quantitative analysis that academic qualifications per se are no guarantee of promotion to the position of principal in the Irish primary education system.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'policy development skill level' suggests that those with an NT have the lowest perceived level of competency in this area (mean rank = 44.10), while those with a Masters have the highest (mean rank = 14.33). Those with a B.Ed> (mean rank = 31.57) and Degree PostGrad Dip. (mean rank = 40.00) fall between. This supports the argument that levels of professional competence may be linked to academic achievement.

Concerning the gender profiles of the schools over which the participants of the present study preside, the Kruskal-Wallis revealed that across the majority of domains, no significant differences between the groups (single sex boys, single sex girls, and co-educational) was found. However, statistically significant differences were found in the 'record keeping competency level' (p=.027), 'conflict management training needs' (p=.035), ‘training training needs' (p=.017), 'role clarity training needs' (p=.039), and 'strategic thinking' (p=.046) domains.
Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'record keeping competency level' group suggest that principals of girls schools have the lowest perceived level of competency with regard to this skill (mean rank = 61.50), while those who preside over boys schools have the highest competency (mean rank = 27.50). Co-educational school principals (mean rank = 36.38) fall between.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'conflict management training needs' group suggests that principals of boys schools have the lowest perceived level of competency with regard to this skill (mean rank = 65.50), while those who preside over girls schools have the highest (mean rank = 20.25). Principals of Co-Ed. schools (mean rank = 37.59) fall between.

This is consistent with the literature on the positive attributes which females possess in terms of school leadership (See literature review on women in leadership)

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'overall training needs' group suggests that principals of boys school have the lowest perceived need for training (mean rank = 67.00) while those who are principal of girls schools have the highest (mean rank = 18.00). Those who are principal of Co-Ed. schools (mean rank = 37.78) fall between.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'role clarity training needs' group suggests that principals of boys school have the lowest perceived level of training needs in this area (mean rank = 67.00), while principals of girls schools have the highest (mean rank = 22.25). Those who are principal of Co-Ed. schools (mean rank = 37.53) fall between.

Inspection of the mean ranks for the 'strategic thinking' group suggests that principals of girls school have the lowest perceived level performance in this area (mean rank =
58.25), while principals of boys schools have the highest (mean rank = 20.50). Those who are principal of Co-Ed. schools (mean rank = 36.78) fall between.

In conclusion, it is clear that the statistical report undertaken supports the evidence gathered from the substantive quantitative analysis and the follow-up qualitative analysis. In addition it has clarified further the view that leadership is central to a successful school in that it has identified the 'ability to lead' to be a crucial variable in the professional life of the primary principal.

The centrality of the 'ability to lead' variable was then checked using factor analysis techniques and the results were interesting in that it suggested that much of the data was highly inter-correlated in the first place.

In terms of factor analysis the 34 variables which related to skill/competency levels of respondents were included. These related to respondents perceived levels of skill with regard to each of these variables, i.e. part (i) of each of the five item variables which constituted the main body of the research questionnaire.

Initially, the suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed and inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of .3 and above which supported the factorability of the correlation matrix. Subsequent principal component analysis revealed the presence of 9 components with eigenvalues exceeding 1 which accounted for 31%, 6.5%, 5.7%, 5.2%, 4.8%, 4.2%, 3.8%, 3.3% and 3.2% of the variance, respectively. Therefore, it is clear that only one major factor exists in relation to this research into the perceptions of school principals about the aspects of their work which referred to in the research questionnaire.
An inspection of the scree plot confirmed the predominance of a single factor above all others and a clear break is clearly evident after the first component.

Figure 7  Factor Analysis (Scree Plot results)

In order to examine the identified principal components in more depth a varimax rotation was performed and 5 of the factors initially identified were extracted. This 5 factor solution explained a total of 58.4% of the variance but, clearly, component 1 is more important than the others and within that factor a number of strong loadings are evident. Furthermore, the coefficients for factor 1 are higher than in all other identified which again confirms the presence of only one main factor.

The variables within factor 1 which have high coefficients are, interpersonal skills (.674), decision making ability (.612), vision (.556), availability (.555), networking (.544), communication ability (.444), stress management (.370), ability to lead (.369), pastoral care (.452) and staff management skills (.479).
All of these factors relate to the ability to engage with staff, school communities and educational partners and stakeholders whereas factor 2 items relate to issues of school ethos and tradition. Factor 3 concentrates on curriculum and pedagogy while factor 4 is concerned with the actual understanding of the role of the school principal. In factor 5 there were no high loadings for any of the variables.

This is an interesting result for a number of reasons.

Firstly, there is a clear consistency in terms of the identified variables and the variables which cause respondents the greatest concern are those which relate to dealing with an enlarged body of partners and educational stakeholders and the implications of these relationships on their professionalism. The current necessity to engage with adults on a range of professional issues clearly demands that a new repertoire of skills is required by the successful principal and these will not happen without training or by chance. This confirms the earlier responses of administrative principals who demonstrated a greater need for training than teaching principals, indicative of the fact that they deal primarily with an adult audience, many of whom are professional and highly educated.

Secondly, the ‘ability to lead’ factor which was identified as a crucial aspect of the work of school principals in the earlier statistical analysis did not appear amongst the higher coefficients selected as important within factor 1. However, it is interesting that the ‘ability to lead’ variable registered as a significant item within four of the five of the factors identified and this suggests that it remains a factor, though not the most significant factor, in terms of the skills/competencies which constituted the main part of the overall questionnaire. Another interpretation is that the data is highly correlated in the first place and that the ‘ability to lead’ is not the only significant item and that other items
such as communication, interpersonal skills, vision, networking ability and decisiveness are, equally if not more, important. Ideally, the factor analysis suggests that ability to lead is more important in terms of teaching/learning because this item scores highest (.408) within factor 3 which focuses on curriculum and pedagogy whereas within the main factor (factor 1) the coefficient for 'ability to lead' was .369.

However when these results are matched with the earlier Spearman Rank Order Correlation which examined levels of skill (part (iv) of each variable) results are very similar and variables identified as significant in terms of their positive correlations were ability to lead, vision, decision making. Around all three of these variables there appeared a cluster of other variables which correlate positively with the results of the factor analysis.

What the factor analysis seems to stress is the need for a response to the new demands being placed on school principals by the increased interaction with external forces is the most important issue and that their repertoire of skills with regard to that aspect of their working lives are most in need of attention.

In overall terms the factor analysis was a worthwhile exercise and was a meaningful one in that it allowed more in-depth statistical interpretation of results and confirmed and refined the possible focus for selective interventions in terms of up-skilling the current cohort of school principals who are clearly threatened by the process of educational change currently underway.

In general, perceived skills levels and training needs may be considered central to this statistical assessment of the role of the principal, and, this adds further support and greater depth to the arguments being generated by this thesis, i.e. that reform and
rationalization are both necessary and essential in order to unleash the latent potential of school principals to lead.

However, it is also true that descriptive statistics remain the central essence of the main arguments put forward in this thesis and that the statistical report is selectively supportive of the main body of evidence.
Chapter 5

Discussion of the Analysis

5.1 Introduction:

Analysis of the data collected which referred to the demographic profile of West Cork Primary schools as profiled in section 4.2 of this research paper has indicated a predominance of small co-educational schools in rural locations with more than half (See fig 3) having a female principal who is generally experienced and predictably a graduate from the teacher training colleges. As the analysis has shown, 76% of the current cohort of principals in West Cork is either N.T trained or B.Ed. graduates from the Irish Training College system. It is significant that there has emerged clear evidence that seniority has a part to play in the appointment of principals and above and beyond the minimum educational requirement (See page11) there is no advantage to having attained additional educational qualifications. The majority of principals are in this case experienced practitioners, male where possible, who have been trained to the minimum level through the traditional entry route to primary teaching, i.e. the Teacher Training College System. Essentially, all principals have been trained to be teachers, and there appears to be little added value for an individual teacher to partake in further academic educations in the context of aspiring to be a school principal.

Therefore, in the educational arena and in relation to the role of the school principal, perceptions and attitudes have clearly developed over time. Traditional ways of thinking are evident in that no real currency is afforded the teacher who develops professionally, or, so it would seem. There is clearly an organisational culture at play in education and
people do things and see things in a particular way. There are, or so it would appear from
the analysis, low levels of difference between the principal's role and the teacher's role
and relatively low levels of importance attached to the position of principal in that no
specific professional, academic or other criteria are identified in terms of attaining the
post, save, having served as a probated teacher for a minimum period of time.
This is, arguably, a weakness and for as long as no clear standards of educational
attainment or practice exist then factors such as position, power, salary enhancement or
deferece to seniority may continue to be important aspects in the motivation of aspiring
principals. It does not follow that the relationship between motivation and performance
in any job are always synonymous and if in becoming a principal individuals have not
considered the challenges and are not competent enough, the inevitability of stress, is all
too probable. That is not to say that any of the principals currently working in schools in
West Cork are inefficient, poorly trained, or stressed. All have clearly reached required
minimum levels of academic achievement and competency with regard to their practice
as the analysis suggests. However, the possibility of success in any job would be
enhanced by a clear list of criteria and a clearer definition of the role than currently exists
vis-à-vis the primary school principal.
It is the opinion of the researcher that the area of school leadership is not yet a
participative learning system within which individuals learn and develop to their full
potential. Training and development in the Irish primary school system with regard to the
role of the principal is, arguably, inadequate and because of the current demands of
accountability and transparency principals may be taking refuge in becoming good
managers, with relevant skills and competencies, to the detriment of leadership which celebrates growth, participation or even mistakes.

In fact this erosion of independence and of authority to effect change, due to the escalating expectations of accountability and lack of system support has undoubtedly caused a lack of interest in the position of school principal. Added to that could be the long hours, the complexity of the job, inadequate financial rewards and the growth expectations of a more complex and less stable society.

From the data analysis on demographic variables in Chapter 4, it is clear that a certain culture exists with regard to the role of the principal, in West Cork schools. This culture follows traditional patterns of valuing all teachers equally, accepts that all teachers are potential principals and values experience over academic qualifications or training.

There is no evidence that the quality of leadership demanded from a principal requires specific training or that the system values the idea that school principal have a specific role in leading a community of learning in a period of sustained change.

In light of the statistics on the future of the role of the principals in Irish schools, (See results of Mercator Research in Chap. 1), which predicts a shortage of applicants for future vacancies, the lack of clarity about the role and functions of the principal in a period of change needs to be addressed. It is not that principals do not have authority, because it is vested in the position according to the Education Act (1998), but there is a danger that as they focus on skill development, driven by accountability, they will be unable or disinclined to lead which may inhibit growth.
5.2 Professional Knowledge:

With regard to the professional knowledge base of the principal, their understanding of the role, their ability to deliver in the job and provide leadership many interesting issues were raised by the analysis.

For example, the vast majority of principals consider they are knowledgeable with regard to broad educational matters, whilst at the same time expressing (See table 9) insecurity on a range of issues.

This is an interesting finding and in marked contrast to responses about pre-service training for the role of principal recorded in table 10.

There, the majority (82%) of principals revealed that they received no specific training for this role. Furthermore, a majority (51%) were either unsure or ambiguous about their own understanding of the parameters of the position that they held (See table 11).

However, despite these recorded reservations the majority (93%) are able to deliver in their role (See table 12) and the issue is further complicated by the high degree of understanding recorded (See table 13) with regard to their leadership abilities.

These are very interesting statistics and hint at a division between the administrator/managerial role of the principal and their leadership role.

It is possible that principals regard leadership, as a secondary aspect of their jobs, inferior to the skills/competencies which they have acquired in the teaching, administrative and/or managerial aspects of their role. It is possible that principals, in adopting an administrative/managerial approach to their jobs, can take refuge in skill/competency development and seek a standard homogeneous response to every issue in their schools.
Uniformity of response is a means of reducing complexity in jobs and in organisations and this is, arguably at least, one of the major dilemmas of education to-day. There is a drive for a one-size-fits-all approach and a perception, perhaps, that a formula exists by which every issue can be addressed. This can create dependence on the bureaucracy of education which can result in a procedural illusion of effectiveness and accountability and schools which exist merely to survive. That is not to say that effectively managed schools cannot be good schools but the concepts of effectiveness and quality in education are not necessarily co-dependant.

However, in the context of the research, the way in which school principals have conceptualised and categorised leadership is interesting, and it would appear that they are increasingly being drawn into an accountability framework. There is also evidence that whatever leadership skills exist were acquired through experience, i.e. 54% of respondent claimed that they were self-taught leaders. (See table 17).

This is again a significant finding in that it points to the necessity of learning on the job which is a clear indication that leadership skills are neither inherent in the individual nor easily acquired using a prescribed skill/competency based formula in a defined training period. This possibility would clearly be enhanced by a mentoring process such as referred to in Section 2.9 of this thesis which looks at training models for school principals in a number of locations. The preferred model in Sweden, as outlined earlier in the data, includes the possibility of learning through experience and in the Irish context, offers the opportunity for policy markers to consider the value of recognising the value of 'formation' in a formalised mentoring process over a designated period of time.
Reality would indicate that policy-makers have not yet realised that leadership may well be the key to resolving any of the educational problems currently being faced by schools.

In general, this section of the data analysis which deals with the knowledge base of the principal is seemingly contradictory.

This is a very important finding in itself.

Why, one is prompted to ask, do principals, who have to a large measure indicated no training, manage to learn sufficiently on the job and why do they consider that despite having little or no training they manage to function efficiently despite having high training needs? (This is clearly evident from tables 22, 23, 24 & 25).

While there are no obvious answers to some of these questions from the presentation of data, implicit in the confusion around the professional competencies of the school principals in the West Cork area, is a clear indication that principals can and do cope. This is a testament to their professionalism, dedication and to the historical reality that informs them, but, it is also an indication that at systems level their difficult lot has not yet been fully addressed. These appear to be little realisation that change is now a constant or that the pace of change is unlikely to decrease as communicated by Fullan and others (See page 17).

The result, without corrective action, will invariably be an accentuation of current trends which already illustrate the unattractiveness of the position of principals to the vast majority of teachers in the Republic of Ireland. Current trends are illustrated on page 16 of this thesis and the position is now becoming untenable. Based on the figures on page 11, and with natural wastage and retirements at 16% annually, a change in perception and practice is necessary, or a crisis of leadership may develop in Irish
primary schools. Essentially, principals need to be empowered to become the leading professional within their schools and in order to achieve this they need support, training and mentoring, not to mention skills and competencies balanced with values and expectations, in order that they may be enabled to realise the potential of their role as a leading professional in a school community.

Leadership in the Irish primary school systems remains a sleeping giant and until there is a recognition at all levels that principals, properly trained, have the ability to exercise dynamic and effective leadership in schools, the situation as it currently exists will remain as the status quo. In the current paradigm, principals’ professionalism and skill levels continue to grow but no new conceptions of school leadership are emerging. Katzenmeyer and Moller have referred to this dilemma in their landmark publication on leadership development in schools in the US when stating:

*Within every school there is a sleeping giant of teacher leadership, which can be a strong catalyst to making change. By using the energy of teacher leaders as agents of school change, the reform of public education will stand a better chance of building momentum.*

Principals need to be able to articulate goals/vision and strategies and understand the uniqueness of their school community and, only through this process achieving balance with externally imposed accountability procedures, will schools be transformed. Professional knowledge in itself is not enough to define the concept of the school principal in this current era of change. The “I’m a good manager/administrator/teacher” syndrome or the tendency to await instructions from on high will need to be broadened to

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include conviction, courage, knowledge, persuasiveness and a range of other skills in order to release the leadership potential within our schools.

As the analysis has shown leadership does exist but it is grounded in a historical framework which, arguably, limits its potential. If the accepted conventional understanding of the role of the principal is based on the historical view that he/she is a teacher with additional responsibilities then, it is possible, that a new concept of leadership is necessary. This can be developed, and, based on the contradictory nature of the analysis on the issue of the professional knowledge base of the principals surveyed, the words of Bolman & Deal who said that, "leadership can be taught but not the way we currently do it," succinctly capture the nature of the leadership paradox within our primary school system in Ireland today.

5.3 Organisational Leadership:

According to Fullam (1991) serious reform involves "changing the culture and structure of an organisation" and culture is universally understood to incorporate the underlying framework of values and beliefs. School leadership therefore requires that the principal reinforces and conveys to others, the central values and beliefs of his/her school both formally and informally. This will involve articulating a vision of the goals and purposes of the school which is grounded in a clear understanding of the past history of the school, its current strengths and potential weaknesses. This vision will also need to be shared, in order to ensure staff ownership of the ideas and actions involved and.

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consequently, the principal will be required to embark on a strategic planning process which will be enable the school community negotiate its relationship with the environment and develop the range of skills necessarily to support institutional objectives. In that context leadership as management skills will be required and the way in which vision is articulated will require the use of managerial processes as a vehicle for the expression of leadership.

In this doctoral thesis the statistical analysis of data has indicated a strong belief amongst respondents that they understand the ethics/values of their school. (See table 26).

In addition, they expressed a low need for training (50%) in comparison to other variables.

Similarly, with regard to the articulation and communication of vision, lower levels of training need (34%) were evident.

However, as may be viewed in table 33 and table 34, there is a greater realisation amongst administrative principal that issues of ethos and the articulation and communication of vision are crucial in school effectiveness. This is not surprising as culture, incorporating as it does values which are not being amenable to rapid change, is clearly an issue for them in their work. As they are afforded more opportunity than their colleagues with full time teaching responsibilities to reflect on matters such as this it is understandably a bigger issue amongst administrative principals. It may be argued that, unless school principals are afforded greater opportunity to develop a culture which embraces change, the status quo will prevail and school cultures that are open, enabling and conducive to change and growth, are unlikely to emerge.
The perception amongst respondents that training is necessary in the area of organisational leadership is a clear indication that time, resources and external support structures are essential factors in the development of school leadership at local and at systemic levels. It may be agreed that the pivotal role of the school principal in creating a favourable culture by having a mission, personifying a set of values and celebrating them could be enhanced by training modules that clarify the role of culture/vision in terms of school effectiveness which springs from the achievement of institutional goals and outcomes.

Currently, statistical analysis would seem to indicate a level of ambiguity between the perception of the role of the principal and the skill of organisational leadership which may be a factor negatively impacting on school growth and change.

5.4 Educational Leadership:

The data relating to the perceptions of principals on a range of issues relating to educational leadership were analysed in section 14.6 of this report.

In the context of the centrality of teaching and learning, the overwhelming majority of respondents accepted personal responsibility (Table 24) but, significantly, (92%) expressed a high training need in terms of that prescribed duty as per the Education Act (1998). Similar results were apparent with regard to the areas of assessment and curriculum development and once more these were understood by the overwhelming majority of respondents as being fundamental areas of importance with which they were conversant but in need of further training.
In addition, the emergence of a greater need for training as evidenced in section 5.3, which examined organisational leadership, was again a feature of the analysis. Thus, the greater need for administrative principals to take responsibility for educational leadership in a whole school context is a feature of the analysis and the underlying implication that the teaching principal does not have the time or perhaps the responsibility given his/her lack of opportunity to develop whole-school approaches to these crucial areas of their work is a worrying feature of the analysis.

In section 2.5 of the review of the literature the distinctions between transactional and transformational leadership are explored and a recurring theme is, the emerging and evolving definition of the school principal in a time of change, which will require the re-evaluation of the historical perception of that role. Historically, the success of the educational process was to a large extent dependant on the individual teacher, a group to which the principal also belonged, but in the future changed educational environment, the role of the principal will become increasingly important as the need to manage change in the interest of teaching and learning becomes more and more essential. The question of how to develop leadership amongst the current cohort of school principals is an obvious one and the areas of educational expertise, mentoring, formal training, hands-on learning, skills development based on a professional formula are all possibilities that require further exploration and discussion. Nor is it clear, that, generic leadership skills and latent leadership potential should only be developed amongst existing, as opposed to potential, leaders.

However, a number of factors can be interpreted from the analysis with regard to educational leadership. Firstly, there is an acceptance that leadership is an integral aspect
of the work of the school principal and the success of many principals in their jobs mirror
that accepted fact.

Secondly, there are barriers to effective leadership not the least of which is ineffective
training and preparation.

Thirdly, leadership is not encouraged and sufficiently rewarded in the current educational
structures and principals are effectively functionaries carrying out tasks prescribed by
external agents such as the Department of Education & Science. In that respect, lobby
groups such as the IPPN have an important role to play in linking leadership with positive
school improvement. In that context, leadership can be viewed as an extension of good
management, and to an extent, leadership and management are, arguably at least,

opposite sides of the same coin. (Read section 2.8 of the literature review for a further
exploration of the interdependency of leadership and management in an educational
setting.)

The key questions that are implicit in this analysis of data relating to educational
leadership are born out of the leadership dilemma that is obvious throughout this doctoral
thesis and the issues involved include the conflict between local effectiveness criteria and
the accountability framework favoured by the DES.

Leadership may sometimes require that criteria for determining school effectiveness
conflict with DES accountability based systems. Alternatively, a lack of educational
leadership may be a crucial factor in not reconciling school effectiveness procedures with
the rights and needs of the individual learner.

In the view of the researcher there is a danger in defining school effectiveness in terms of
accountability and performances outcomes which needs to be checked by leadership in
our schools. This will ensure a balance between the need to improve teaching and learning in the interests of the pupil as well as managerial and administrative efficiency which serve the accountability framework within which schools currently operate. Leadership, unfortunately, has been incorporated into the language of school structures and effectiveness without being properly defined. It therefore needs to be re-defined as a natural process that occurs in schools which might be distributed amongst all members to good effect. However, the distribution of leadership in the school system does not absolve the principal from responsibility and an emotionally mature, self-confident, professional with high levels of integrity is necessary in every school, in the view of the researcher. However, many would argue that, the principal is but a figure head representing the school on occasions and of little influence within the organisation. Proponents of this point of view see the work of the principal being done in every classroom by the individual teacher and believe that the prescribed curriculum and the guidelines of the DES are the cement which builds school communities. This thesis cannot contradict that hypothesis and the overall findings, which record a high degree of inconsistency of response would, to an extent, support that point of view. In that respect, perhaps change is overdue, and maybe the concept of leadership ought to be addressed as an organisational quality and not as the sole domain of the school principal. A more enlightened view of leadership in schools sees principals as anchors and measures of effectiveness that exert influence over others which requires a combination
of awareness, personal attributes and consistencies which may not be found in certain individuals.

Leadership is also a complex process requiring more than simply matching skills and behaviours with specific situations because in essence, it is as much a cultural and symbolic activity, as it is a behavioural one.

However, there will always be a tension in schools between professionalism and the bureaucratic nature if the system and this is one of the major issues in the research. As the role of the principal is changed and new improved professional responses emerge, how will these new principals adhere to rules and regulations and will they subordinate themselves to bureaucracy as a means of coping with uncertainty? This is a significant tension in the life of the school principal and as expertise grows and expectations are raised the professional-bureaucratic dilemma is likely to be a defining feature of the future discussions on the role of the Irish primary school principal.

5.5 Organisational Management:

As outlined in section 4.7, the area of interpersonal skills and the communication abilities of principals followed a familiar pattern. Principals were, in their own view, skilled in these areas yet there remained a substantial demand for further training with regard to these personal characteristics. In addition, administrative principals expressed a higher level of awareness with regard to these competencies. This is an interesting fact, indicative perhaps of a general acceptance that the teaching principal is too busy with the core work of teaching, to be expected to perform in these comparatively less important aspects of their role. This is a mistaken perception because communication, which
incorporates an ability to relate to others (interpersonal intelligence), pervades all aspects of school life. That is not to say that good communication provides all the answers to problems of the primary school principal but, nonetheless, it is difficult to isolate it from the process of leading a school community. At a minimum, good communication should provide accurate information sensitively delivered to all educational partners but it is not or never could be a magic panacea for dealing with complex school issues.

Being an excellent communicator with higher order interpersonal skills does not make a principal more effective and all competencies need to be informed by knowledge. Therefore, in an environment as ambiguous as the school, skills need to be evaluated and reflected upon. In that context, the results of the data ring true, in that whereas there are high levels of confidence with regard to skill levels these are underpinned with an awareness that introspection and reflection are necessary as well as a growing understanding that the skills and competencies of today may not be sufficient into the future. Consequently, the apparent inconsistency between levels of competency and training need may be viewed as a pragmatic response to sustained change by the current cohort of school principals.

Arguably, principals understand the need to change and are learning from current practice whilst of the same time seeking to improve on it.

It many aspects the data on organisational management is interesting because it hints at the commonly accepted dichotomy between theory and practice and it would appear as if the current cohort of principals in the West Cork area are aware that they can be more effective if they deploy a range of experience and understanding in dealing with school
issues. It is not enough to learn by experience only, because while experience is being gained disastrous decisions, with far-reaching consequences, can be made.

Currently, schools are in a situation where ongoing change is the norm for both the institutions and the individuals within these institutions. Creating a culture that is open, enabling and conducive to change and growth is not an easy process and, in achieving that, good interpersonal skills and the ability to articulate clear messages are essential ingredients because the prevailing culture of any school will be an influence upon, and be influenced by, the leadership abilities of the principal in his/her formal and informal activities.

Leaders need to articulate a clear vision and be able to talk about the goals and purposes of their school. They must inspire others to share that vision by giving them the opportunity to discuss or modify goals. Furthermore, they must negotiate the schools' relationship with external forces and have a high tolerance for complexity, ambiguity and risk-taking.

Faced with bureaucratic structures the necessity for the principal to be a good communicator has never been greater. It would appear as if the principals surveyed are aware of these challenges to themselves and to their schools where, arguably, in the future vision will inform goals, judgement will inform rules and the team concept and collective problem solving will challenge the bureaucratic, hierarchical constructs of the past.
5.6 Resource Management

The analysis of the data on respondents' attitudes to resource management provides some interesting results. There is, for example, a degree of uncertainty around personal levels of competence with regard to financial skills despite these being important matters in the view of the majority of respondents. There was also a significant group who expressed a need for further training in financial matters and it was obvious from the data that females were more concerned than males about financial issues. In addition, and consistent with other areas examined, administrative principals had a more acutely formed awareness of the implications of resource management in terms of the perception and effectiveness of their work. This is significant information because with recent educational developments schools have a much greater resource portfolio to manage. In the context of this research school budgetary allocations are seen as crucial in terms of obtaining and utilising resource materials and resource management variables have been framed in the context of the school being a system which links resource to educational possibilities. In that respect schools are seen as input-output systems where resources are acquired and used to deliver the curriculum in the interest of the educational objectives of the school community.

The principal cannot be an observer in this process, and the coping skills and/or the indifference which can be interpreted from the data analysis, suggests that there is a need for principals to be more pro-active in this process in that resources will need, in the future, to be supportive of tangible educational objectives as well as a means of galvanising community support in a particular school catchment area. In that context, leadership becomes a necessity, because within schools the principal will need to align
individuals' goals with organisational goals before deciding on optimal resource acquisition and allocation. In terms of resources, principals need to acquire them in the first instance, allocate them wisely in support of agreed learning objectives, monitor their use and evaluate practice.

Therefore, if budgetary issues are an important aspect of resource management in schools then it is incumbent on all principals to be aware of the functions and benefits of good budgeting. Budgeting is accepted by the majority of respondents as a key part of organisational planning and decisions taken must support organisational goals and be outcome focused. It is patently obvious that if school principals are to manage resources effectively in order to achieve educational aims, they must link financial decision making with the development and delivery of the curriculum, since it is through the curriculum that educational aims are generally achieved.

Linking curriculum and financial planning is but one aspect of the problems faced by principals in integrating the different elements of the schools they lead. In that single aspect of their leadership role, supportive structures need to be in place, assessment procedures need to be devised which evaluate the financial implications of curriculum decisions, and, an annual cycle of review, planning and implementation needs to become integral to this aspect of the work of the school principal. Clearly, organisational issues are the focus of the work of the primary school principal in the area surveyed and these are not necessarily aligned with teaching and learning due to the multiplicity of tasks that are the daily reality of the school principal.

From analysis of the data, which indicated lower training needs amongst experienced principals, there is a clear indication that individuals become more skilled in resource
management with the passage of time (only 10% of principals with 25 or more years
experience requested training in budgetary matters) which is indicator of the reality of a
position where role overload, role ambiguity and restricted investment in training and
professional development are the norm.

5.7 Human Resource Management:

In terms of human resource management areas relating to staff selection, staff
appraisal, management, networking, delegation and conflict management skills were
examined. General responses indicate a positive response with the exception of staff
appraisal which, interestingly, appears not to be recognised as an important aspect of
their work by the majority (65%) of principals.

In general, it is evident from the analysis of respondents' views that principals are
generally aware of the skills required in the area of HRM. They have developed these
skills over time, based on need, but would benefit from additional training opportunities
were they to be made available to them. The anomaly in the area of staff appraisal is
understood in an Irish educational context where the principal is often understood as a
colleague with extra responsibility and where the Inspectorate takes responsibility for
school evaluation on behalf of the DES.

With regard to the data collected on the essential skills of conflict management,
confidence levels and trust in the procedures that pertain were high, as was the awareness
of respondents that conflict can be a negative force unless managed. This is particularly
obvious amongst administrative principals who have higher training needs in terms of
conflict management training than their teaching counterparts. This is indicative of the
fact that they have more time to engage in dialogue and reflection and are generally dealing with adults and larger staff units. For administrative principals the need may be to manage conflict constructively, to use it as a creative force in building understanding and identifying problems.

Selection of staff is also identified as a major concern of principals yet a significant 50% would welcome additional training in the selection/interviewing process. Interviewing is a feature of the work of the school principal and takes place in a wide range of formal and informal situations ranging from brief encounters between two individuals to formal interviews with prospective new staff members. However, to be successful they need to be planned, purposeful, with an emphasis on the quality of the communication as much as on the information obtained.

There are many styles of interview and untrained interviewers such as the average school principal may make mistakes. These may be as simple as poor interview conditions, poor unstructured questions, misinterpretation of answers or attitudinal bias on the part of the interviewer.

Consequently, the skills of establishing a suitable interview climate, building rapport, effective questioning coupled with effective listening, recording and interpretation of information obtained are important aspects of the work of the principal that deserve to be incorporated in their continuing professional development. Arguably, all interactions whether formal or informal are more likely to have positive outcomes when techniques and strategies used by the school principal have been learned, practiced and are fully understood. In addition to finding and selecting staff, the principals surveyed also acknowledged their role in motivating staff in the interest of good teaching and learning.
That is not to say that all principals understood and implement systematic techniques for dealing with problems of poor individual performance and the reluctance of principals to accept that they may have a role in the appraisal of staff. Points to the opposite being the case, in reality.

However, the data suggests that principals consider that they have a (See table 59) responsibility in trying to understand the individual needs and objectives of school staff members and in reconciling their individual needs with organisational goals and objectives. Understanding the motivation of people at work is a complex business, and whereas to some work may be a mere source of livelihood, to others it may their main source of personal, professional, ideological growth and job satisfaction.

Only in understanding what suits and motivates people, including themselves, can principals structure activities in order that all staff members remain involved and on task.

Without an understanding of the implications of de-motivation which can result in individual powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement, principals will find this aspect of their work challenging, and there is a need to incorporate a level of clarity about motivation into the role of the primary school principal.

This need for training is particularly acute in administrative principals (See table 62) who are more frequently engaged with adults at a number of levels that their teaching principal colleagues are. However, for all principals motivation is obviously a driving force that energises directs and sustains them in their work, and in all the schools surveyed, motivated behaviour is seen as positive and desirable. Consequently, (88%) of respondents claimed to encourage staff development in the interest of organisational effectiveness. There is, clearly, an awareness of the need for all staff to attend to their
continued professional development as schools clearly exist to promote effective teaching and learning. This understanding clearly underpins respondents' attitudes to staff development and principals see their schools or places where staff members continually expand their professional capacities. These schools are learning organisations with common purposes which are routinely assessed and re-evaluated and when goals are embraced by individual staff members, organisational success is a more likely result. Similarly, individuals work harder when their efforts are acknowledged and rewarded and will develop professionally in a supportive school environment. Therefore, it is incumbent on the principal to create the conditions that allows self-actualisation of staff members in support of school learning objectives. This is not a simple task.

In that respect, the 57% whole sample response which indicated a high or very high training need in terms of staff development issues is not surprising.

In an effort to empower colleagues in the interest of collegiality. 93% of respondents indicated that they delegated responsibility when appropriate, although 49% still had high or very high training needs with regard to the skills of delegation. The culture in Irish primary schools, where individual autonomy is valued and where seniority is a factor in obtaining promotion, arguably, militates against the use of strategic delegation as an instrument in effective team building. In the context of change there is a need to maximise the value of teams, and delegation can be useful tool in this process, given that the 'leader/dormant follower' model of school leadership may not be effective in the future. Data analysis indicates recognition by principals that they may need to address the issue of delegation in the interest of efficiency and improved performance.
An additional aspect of team interaction is the management of conflict and in that regard 66% of respondents expressed a desire for training. Conflict is a feature of school life and can be caused by structures, performance measures, ambiguity as per understanding of roles, divergent goals, desire for autonomy and/or competition for scarce resources. Conflict may be latent, perceived or real and, though not without value, it can be a destructive force unless dealt with properly.

Principals need to be able to negotiate this potential minefield and be able to separate people from problems, remain detached and calm and be able to apply objective criteria to a variety of situations. This is indeed a mammoth task and hardly possible without training, experience and practice.

In fact training need is the dominant theme of this section of the analysis. The skills analysed are recognised by principals as essential aspects of their work and they have urgent need for training in order to support their own efforts in developing coping skills to add to their array of ‘fire-fighting’ techniques and skills (self-acquired). What is apparent from the data is that principals see themselves as belonging to a profession with authority and control over their schools who have a confidence in their professional judgement. The respect that their position of trust thrusts upon them makes it inevitable that their voice will be heard, if not respected, in their schools. This is both a burden and a privileged responsibility and, in accepting their role, principals accept an inherent but sometimes unstated duty of continued professional development. Theirs is more than a job requiring technical competence. Learning more about their professional identity which impacts positively on their interactions with students, parents, society, other institutions and the education profession generally, is clearly an important issue for
principals with regard to the aspects of human resource management included in this
doctoral thesis.

5.8 Educational Management

In terms of educational management the data analysis resulted in the following points of
view being outlined. For example, the competencies of negotiation, decisiveness
responding to clients needs and networking were perceived by principals to be important
aspects of their work as they strove to build learning communities (See section 4.10).

However, throughout this section a number of implicit truths are evident.

For example, the confidence about their ability to respond quickly and decisively does
not discount the possibility that in being readily available to clients, other aspect of their
work suffer. Nor is it likely that, all decisions made quickly, are necessarily good
decisions. Clearly, there is a recognition that clients deserve and are entitled to a
response when legitimately requested, but all resources within schools, including the
principal, are finite. Consequently, there must be limits to the capabilities of principals to
respond decisively in every situation as the anticipated levels of engagement with schools
by external forces grow over time. The actions of the principal will play a key role in
managing the educational environment going forward and if he/she were provocative,
unhelpful or disingenuous whilst assessing new ideas, or unnecessarily dismissive of
traditional ways of doing things, unfortunate results could possibly be the end result.

Principals need to be able to accommodate points of view, negotiate change without
threatening the status quo unduly, be able to categorise and prioritise issues and empower
others through the purposeful allocation of tasks and roles. These skills are not acquired
easily and though the majority of principals have them to some measure there remains a significant demand for training in all of these issues relating to managing the educational environment.

Significantly, there are no major differences with regard to gender or professional status. There is recognition that their position gives them an edge in terms of managing the educational environment and many may have forceful personalities but none of these are guarantees of success. Schools, like all organisations, have co-operation and competitiveness as opposite sides of the same coin, and, it is incumbent on the principal to manage and reconcile those forces in the interest of educational effectiveness. If this aspect of their work is not done successfully then schools will be vulnerable to outside destructive forces. In schools which are continually, due to weak leadership, being buffeted by the whims of the public there is generally poor morale and the drive for academic excellence is limited with everyone just 'marking time'. That is not to say that schools could or should refuse to engage with external forces and, in reality they remain open systems, dependant on exchanges with the external environment to survive. Furthermore, it is an inevitable fact of life that schools are unable to generate the necessary resources to maintain themselves and are often forced to enter into exchanges with external market forces in order to maintain optimum levels of educational attainment. The reality is that managing the educational environment is a complex issue and no blueprint for success exists. However, where organisational elements are aligned with the school's vision and approaches to pedagogy are supported internally and externally there exists a sound basis for principals to manage the educational environment in support of school objectives.
As we seem to be currently moving towards an acceptance that schools are influenced by external agencies there is a growing realization that the judgement of the principal alone may not be enough to always provide a secure response. In every school effective structures need to be developed to enable a process of mediation between internal and external perspectives on a range of potentially problematic issues. Schools are no longer closed self-sufficient institutions who deliver a diet of facts to passive students and from the data analysis it is obvious that principals accept this and as the centrality of their role as mediators in that process. Training and support to them in this critical aspect of their job is long overdue.

5.9 Public Relations:

Principals also acknowledged the importance of good public relations with some subtle differences emerging in relation to the needs of schools in different geographical locations. (See section 4.11) What is clear is that once again principals are generally aware of the issues, and, that certain issues impact more seriously on certain schools. For example, schools in Irish speaking areas have no perceived need for training in Public Relations issues as they serve a homogenous population with a common objective. Neither do rural schools suffer as greatly as their urban neighbours in relation to the negative impact of social change on student behaviours. Consequently, they are not as acutely aware of the need for effective pastoral care policies. However, there is a strong commitment to pastoral care evident from the recorded responses on and the majority of principals seek to develop clear philosophies and good practices with regard to pupil behaviour. This will require strong management and
exemplary leadership as values will need to be articulated and disseminated throughout their school communities.

There is also awareness from the respondents that school discipline is influenced by a range of factors such as leadership, academic success, values, relationship, expectations and good example. Without these factors featuring, the school promotion may be an exercise in deception and short-lived, as fundamental to valuing school promotion practices must be a belief that deception cannot work and that all aspects of school life are interdependent to some extent. Principals know that they, as significant role models, influence aims, expectations, value systems, organisational objectives, staff and pupil motivation. Consequently, they are the single most critical factor in positive school promotion. However, such is the complexity of the area that training in this aspect of the job has become a necessity in the face of sustained and relentless change in education.

In view of the fact that the principal is the most likely person to influence the success of a school, it is not to our credit that they remain untrained and unsupported in many of the major aspects of their work.

Data analysis indicated a positive reaction from the current cohort of principals with regard to the exceptional challenges of promoting their school but the growing number of competencies necessary to be a successful principal is likely to become a deterrent to aspiring principals. Ownership of a position is a progressive process necessitating skill organisation, commitment, clarity and occurs at the end of a process not at the beginning. In that respect the expectation that a principal as an agent of school promotion should hit the ground running, is clearly an unrealistic one.
5.10 **Administration:**

All of the challenges facing the principal are compounded by general concern that administrative tasks are a major problem. Respondents (See section 4.12) indicated that principals had difficulties with legislation, school planning policy development, record keeping and general administration. Females are particularly concerned by the level of administrative detail expected from them in their role.

One could assume from the data that educational administration is not yet a science in reality and that the new administrative demands for greater accountability and transparency are being resented and possibly resisted to an extent by school principals. Primarily, the issues of time and lack of administrative support underpin this ambivalence towards the administrative aspects of the job of being a school principal.

Implicit in this ambivalence is a view that schools are living institutions and not just organisations with a focus on products. Based on the perception that schools are not industries, principals transmit social and cultural values as they work on a range of issues ranging between, pedagogy, pastoral care, administration and school promotion.

There is of course a legal obligation on principals to maintain school records to an acceptable level but there may be a need to address the issue of support in terms of the growing administrative burden which has become part of the life of the principal of today.

In summary, the analysis clearly indicates that principals of varying gender, experiences, background and educational achievement are experiencing difficulty in managing change. They are in a defensive mode, and, to an extent, are settling for a compromise with regard to the possibilities of their job. They will need intervention and meaningful support.
to free them from this coping response to challenge. Only then will they be in a position
to focus on curriculum and learning. Principals cannot energise school communities and
empower colleagues without the resources to do so and will, arguably, settle for short
term control and stability in the absence of real professional support.
Chapter 6:

Policy Implications and Conclusions:

6.1 It is clearly indicated in the structures and operating guidelines of the primary schools that the principal is intended to be a positive force for school effectiveness. Yet, many barriers exist to this ideal becoming a reality. Principally, the possibility of leadership in our schools is restricted by lack of clarity and the emergent body of knowledge, from this doctoral thesis, is clearly indicating high levels of confusion and dissatisfaction. Though the overwhelming majority of principals are striving for a better understanding of the job and endeavouring to make a constructive difference in their school, there remains a distinct lack of certainty around their roles, as well as their expectations as practitioners of leadership, in educational settings. Much of this confusion is expressed in a need for training in a range of issues. In that respect, this research clearly indicated a need to 'frame' the role of the principal and incorporate into that process, the myriad of contingencies and complexities, which underpin that role. The complexity of the role must be acknowledged and future policy with regard to the role of the principal needs to move away from the narrow simplistic view of the teacher with extra responsibility who is allowed manage the school if he/she does not unduly encroach on the zone of influence of the classroom teacher, i.e. the classroom.

Consequently, it would be appropriate at this stage to re-define the structural process by which principals are selected, framed and evaluated. In addition, the social aspects of the role which incorporates human needs as much as organisational goals must be included in future definitions. School organisations that fail to recognise the interdependence of
administrative/organisational goals and human resources are not usually strong

communities with strong beliefs and/or cultural underpinnings within which political

power is wielded constructively and in which reality is socially constructed and

symbolically represented through rituals, practices, myths and ceremonies.

What is abundantly clear, from the literature and from this research, is that leadership as a

concept and leadership as an aspect of the life of the primary principal is an exceedingly

complex area. Furthermore, it may be argued, based on the results discussed that the

level of confusion in this area is matched by a resolve to learn and grow in the role by

those included in this survey. There is clearly no complacency amongst primary

principals in West Cork about the enormity of the task undertaken by them. Many

serious challenges to their professionalism are identified and it is clear that they, given

the opportunity, will respond both positively and professionally.

It is time, and this is supported by the research, to invest in the office of school principal

and construct a new paradigm of professional operation that will address the

inconsistencies that prevail as to the role, composition and function of the primary school

principal. What is required is a comprehensive review of the role of the principal, which

will address all the imponderables, in order to release the leadership potential of the

current incumbents and create the opportunity for nurturing and developing future school

leaders. Quality must be the key to future policy with regard to the crucial role of

leadership in our primary schools.

Consequently, there are a number of mindsets which need to be challenged.
Firstly, it must become an accepted fact that in its current conceptual framework, school leadership is potentially an impossible task due to its complexity and the current role ambiguity that exists.

Secondly, there is a clear demand for training in the multiplicity of skills/competencies that are required to be a functioning school leader.

Thirdly, it is clear that teaching principals see themselves principally as instructional leaders and ‘cope’ in other aspects of their work. This is a recipe for disaster and within that mindset the ‘lowest common denominator’ factor may become a defining feature of many crucial aspects of the role of the primary school principal in the future.

Fourthly, it must be recognised that the job description of the principal needs to be re-defined and that this will possibly require adjustments in terms of pay, conditions of work and training.

Fifthly, there is a tendency today, to favour structural controls and bureaucratic systems, a fact acknowledged by respondents in their acceptance of the skills/competencies included in the research, but this must be re-evaluated in terms of the individual principal’s role as a catalyst within a school community. There is a need to re-emphasise the role of the principal as an agent in managing complexity, ambiguity, change, incompatibility and conflict.

In order to address these issues the consideration of a number of factors may be helpful. Amongst these, is the issue of the administrative structure of schools and the size of the basic school unit. As already mentioned, almost 75% of schools do not have administrative principals due to their lack of staff/pupil numbers. Some might argue that
to amalgamate smaller schools and allow only units of sufficient enrolment to warrant an administrative principal would be a sensible response to this situation. In that model, all schools would have an administrative principal but many communities would be without a school as a focal point. This may be unacceptable in local rural communities. Others would argue that the notion of community is changed with the advent of global technology and the proliferation of transport possibilities. Communities are, arguably at least, no longer bound by geography and within this research there is evidence to suggest that gaelscoileanna, which draw on diverse communities, are bound by a sense of community based on their ethos and their mission to promote bilingualism in non-Irish speaking areas. However, evidence from the research suggests that this is not the real issue and that administrative principals have equal and sometimes greater need for training in terms of their work as teaching principals do. Therefore, reform at this level is not the easy answer to the issues which have been highlighted in this research. An alternative method is to consider the clustering of smaller units administratively with a number schools having some local autonomy but ultimately answering to one principal with overall administrative responsibility. This is a possibility and would, arguably at least, lead to administrative and managerial efficiency. However, it is also arguable, that leadership would not be enhanced by this model which could potentially create leadership vacuums in schools or lead to professional conflict between individual schools in a ‘one size fits all’ model of accountability.
Nor, is there any suggestion in this research, that the size of school is the issue and even teaching principals exhibited a strong loyalty to their own unique school community and its values, ethos and expectations despite their increased workload.

Others have suggested that principals need not be educators and that suggestion is not unworthy of consideration given the bureaucratic nature of educational management systems, currently in vogue. However the research has, by acknowledging the complexity of the school leadership task, pointed to a future leadership paradigm that requires greater breadth and depth of educational vision than could be offered by an administrator.

In reality the issue of empowering leadership within our school needs to be addressed at a variety of levels.

Firstly, the role of the principal needs to be re-defined in the knowledge that it is not possible to do the job satisfactorily within the confines of the current school day (5hrs 40 mins) and the existing school year (183 days). It has become necessary to change the working day of the school principal and a 9am to 5pm structure would not be inappropriate. Nor, is it inconceivable that the working year of the principal needs to be extended significantly by as much as twenty days. Obviously the above changes need to be reflected in better terms and conditions which would be an added factor in attracting interest in existing applications for vacant school principal positions which are at an all time low level at present.

In addition, prospective principals need to be properly prepared for the role. It is no longer enough to have been an effective teacher in order to gain promotion to the level of
school principal. Preparation could arguably be in the form of a professional programme of activity during which the complexity and the challenge of the role are clearly defined and experienced.

Following certification new principals need to go through a period of formation during which they experience the issues and have resource to expertise and/or a mentor. This period should not be less than 2 years in duration.

A further aspect should involve re-certification of principals at regular 5 year intervals in order that practice might be evaluated in the context of on-going change.

Finally, it would be of added value for all existing certified principals to identify and mentor a prospective leader within their own school or to develop a collegial leadership model which would embrace leadership potential of others within the organisation.

This concept of professional mentoring would, arguably at least, build on the tradition of the principal as a paternal father figure within the Irish primary school system and, in addition, act as a foil to the cellular nature of the typical primary school with its inbuilt limitations on the possibility of learning from colleagues.

The strength of tradition coupled with the existing rules and guidelines, which reflect a different educational era, are no longer, or so it would appear, enough to sustain primary school principals in their work and, in its current phase, the school principal is often too concerned with a multiplicity of tasks to be able to satisfy their personal need for job satisfaction which is crucial to their professional development and personal growth as educationalists. Unless change is considered in terms of the role and function of the school principal this situation will continue and they will continue being the ‘dumping ground’ for all of the maintenance and professional responsibilities within the Irish
primary school system. The role of the principal has shifted dramatically in recent times and they need to be empowered to become leaders as well as managers. It is not enough simply to cope and systems must support the self-actualisation of our school principals in the interest of effective schools in particular communities.

Leadership is summarised succinctly by Sarros\textsuperscript{244} as follows:

\begin{quote}
Leadership is a beguiling, perplexing and challenging phenomenon. Exercised with discretion and consideration, leadership is a powerful tool in building a confident and committed workforce and a strong and resilient organisational culture. Leaders have immense impact on social and cultural systems and therefore they’re morally bound to exercise leadership with discretion and consideration of the general good, not the individual triumph.
\end{quote}

Principals can hardly be expected to reach that level of sophistication in their thinking and in their practice without support, training and constant review.

6.2 Concluding Remarks:

In this thesis evidence has been collected in support of the general view that the role of the primary principal in an Irish educational context is at a crossroads in terms of morale. Analysis of data has pointed to the degree of confusion amongst principals, and, to significantly high levels of dissatisfaction, coupled with low levels of interest, in the actual position of school principal. This evidence is clear from the initial substantive quantitative analysis and is supported by qualitative results and confirmed by statistical reporting procedures.

Much of what inhibits the emergence of leadership in the Irish context is a cultural heritage which presents an understanding of the nature of the work and the function of the school principal that is clearly outdated. A new operational paradigm is required which reflects social and cultural realities as well as the impact of globalisation and change.

In this thesis an attempt has been made to objectify, observe and measure the perceptions of the current cohort of principals, in the area of West Cork under review, with regard to a significant number of the key skills and competencies which underpin their work. A consistent pattern of response emanated and this was confirmed initially by quantitative analysis and supported by triangulation mechanisms which employed qualitative and statistically based additional methodologies.

It is hoped that the central messages of the thesis contribute to the development of a new leadership paradigm for Irish primary school principals that will assist them in their professional self-actualisation and allow them develop further than the current norm which appears to be coping skills. This unease at the expanding boundaries of their role.
and, the lack of definition of it in an era of change, is as clear from the analysis as the acceptance that the range of competencies included in the survey are crucial aspects of the work of a school principal today.

The nature of the educational workplace has changed and emerging trends in society hold implications for our primary schools. A restructured definition of leadership is urgently required in which the leadership role of the principal is central to school performance. This cannot happen without system reform and cultural change.

However, that is not to suggest that complete change is necessary and indeed much of the discussions around new operational models for schools focus on the possibilities and the urgent need to cluster\(^\text{245}\) or the need to organise schools along the lines of the Australian Hub School experiment\(^\text{246}\) which allows smaller schools access specialised educational services at allocated times in larger and better resourced schools in nearby areas of larger population.

In the view of this researcher these are short term solutions to a problem which will not go away. This research has shown that the potential for principals to lead will not necessarily be improved by new school arrangements of larger school units because administrative principals are as stressed as their teaching principal colleagues.

It is the view of this researcher, based on the accumulated evidence, that necessary reforms need to address the area of school leadership above all else. There is, clearly, a


need for a serious debate on school leadership as the catalyst for school effectiveness in an era of change and instability. This may address the issue of school size but only as a consequence of improving the potential of school leaders to be effective and, in the words of Bennett: 247

*In considering what style should predominate at any one time, three issues need to be addressed. The style to be fit for the purpose, fit for the personnel involved and fit for the context.*

The cultural context in which the leadership model, currently in vogue in the Irish primary school system, is, based on the evidence of this thesis, a major stumbling block to the emergence of more effective leadership in our schools. It should not be forgotten that effective leadership makes a crucial difference in whether or not organisations fail. Therefore, we need a vision for the future that can be fused into a coherent theory and a meaningful practice. Otherwise the short term solutions of today will become problems for tomorrow's schools. Effective leadership, exercised by competent professionals, properly trained and with appropriate system supports is the key that will unlock these doors.

We do not need bigger schools, clusters of smaller schools (with their inherent potential for leadership vacuums) or hub schools (which create a need to be forever transporting children from A to B), we need effective schools. Properly trained principals are essential to this process. Currently, our primary principals are clearly overworked and unable to reach their professional potential. This is, based on the research to date, the

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most pressing educational issue pertaining to our primary school system and until and unless it is addressed the latent potential of effective leadership will remain untapped. and schools will remain extrinsically led rather than internally motivated which may, unfortunately, be to their cost.

As Bere, Caldwell and Milikan quoted in Kavanagh\(^{248}\) have said in support of the commonly held belief that effective leadership results in effective school. "...outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as the key characteristic of outstanding schools".

The time for system reform which impacts positively on the role of the primary principal is now and if the reconstruction of leadership in the primary school is completed in an efficient manner, within the current reality of schools, then it may be expected that improvements will be effective in the long term. Otherwise the potential for failure, (especially for children) will remain high or will continue to grow in proportion to the increase in the responsibilities, which they are largely ill-prepared to assume. of school principals.

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The research was conducted in the west Cork area of Region 4 which extends for a radius of 50 miles around the town of Dunmanway (marked in black on the map). All primary schools within that area (123) were surveyed as part of the research and an excellent return (60%) was forthcoming.

All other Education Centre areas (with the exception of Cork, Limerick Galway and a number in the greater Dublin area) are similar to West Cork and would have a high proportion of small schools with teaching principals.
### Appendix II: List of Schools Surveyed in the Quantitative Research

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name of School</th>
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47. Gurrane N.S. 021 7331481
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51. Inchigeela N.S. 026 49197
52. Kealkil N.S. 027 66298
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55. Kilbrittain N.S. 023 49890
56. Kilcoe N.S. 028 38233
57. Kilcolman N.S. 023 39460
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60. Kilmurry N.S. 021 7336324
61. Lárscoil an tEaspaig O’Gealbháin 021 7338158
62. Lisavaird N.S. 023 34987
63. Lisheen N.S. 028 38481
64. Lissagriffin N.S. 028 35311
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66. Our Lady of Mercy 027 50590
67. Presentation Primary School 023 41809
68. Rathbarry N.S. 023 40651
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Appendix III: The Research Questionnaire.

The following questionnaire was issued to all schools in the catchment area of the West Cork Education Centre with a cover letter attached as follows:

Dear Principal,

I would be extremely grateful if you could take the time to fill in the following questionnaire items on the theme of school leadership which I intend to use as the basis for doctoral research on the role of the primary school principal.

As a Principal you are a leader in your school community and playing a vital role in achieving the Department of Education and Science’s aim to provide quality education for our young. However, this task has been made more complex by recent initiatives and, as you know, the increased levels of responsibility and the expanding role of the school principal have resulted in a paradigm shift which has moved the traditional understanding of the role of the principal from one of maintenance and hierarchy to one of change, collegiality, teamwork, improvement and effectiveness.

New challenges have required principals to take on leadership roles and this has resulted in new skills and competencies becoming essential prerequisites for the successful principal. Many of these skills are based on the administrative, managerial and leadership role of the contemporary school principal and thirty four of these core skills have been included in this questionnaire for your consideration. This is not an exhaustive list and other key skills will develop as the principal’s role continues to grow and expand in a period of sustained educational change, but, it will serve to measure the level of difficulty now being faced by principals in their daily lives. These problems have been, arguably, compounded by a lack of structural change, and it is a commonly held belief that without major overhaul of the role and working conditions of the Irish primary school principal, the system as we understand it will struggle to maintain optimum levels of efficiency.

In this doctoral thesis the object is to collect evidence of a quantitative nature in support of the view that the life of a school principal has become a multi-faceted, highly skilled but, inherently unattractive one, as it remains locked into a tradition of the ‘Schoolmaster’ of yesteryear, which, in the opinion of this thesis, is no longer sufficient to sustain the school principal of today who works in a completely different environment.

Therefore, your co-operation is earnestly sought and I look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire before Wednesday 26th May 2004.

All responses will be treated with complete confidentiality and individual cases will not be the focus of the statistical analysis.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Michael Crowley B.A., N.T., M.Ed.
Demographic Profiles:

Please take the time to fill in this questionnaire which will be used as a means by which the statistical data on the included series of questions relating to the role of the primary principal may be analysed and cross-referenced.

Personal Details:
(Please tick the option from each column which most closely reflects your career details)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years as a principal</th>
<th>Position in School</th>
<th>Class(es) Usually Taught</th>
<th>Educational Qualifications</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>Administrative Principal</td>
<td>Infants</td>
<td>B.Ed. Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>Teaching Principal</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>N.T.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-15 years</td>
<td>Acting Principal</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Degree + Postgraduate Diploma</td>
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<tr>
<td>15-20 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>Special needs</td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
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<td>20-25 years</td>
<td></td>
<td>Multi-grade</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25+ years</td>
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<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>Other</td>
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School Details:
(Please tick the option from each column which most closely reflects your school)

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<th>Status</th>
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<td>0-5 Teachers</td>
<td>Single sex Boys</td>
<td>Denominational</td>
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<tr>
<td>Urban school</td>
<td>5-10 Teachers</td>
<td>Single sex Girls</td>
<td>Non-denominational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Disadvantaged</td>
<td>10-20 Teachers</td>
<td>Co-educational</td>
<td>Multi-denominational</td>
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<td>20+ Teachers</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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Please proceed to the next section of the questionnaire which aims to gather specific data on a range of issues related to the expanding role of the primary school principal beginning with the critical area of organisational leadership.
ORGANISATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

VISION FOR THE SCHOOL

(i) Do you have the vision to work co-operatively with colleagues in pursuit of common objectives?
   Yes □ Unsure □ No □

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to communicating this shared vision?
    Constantly □ Often □ Seldom □ Never □

(iii) Where did you develop that skill?
     Self-taught □ Formal study □ Reading □ Peers □ Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
     Very high □ High □ Average □ Low □ Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high □ High □ Not applicable □ Low □ Very Low □

EMPLOYMENT

(i) Do you ensure, where possible and, in the interests of staff morale, that power is shared throughout the school?
    Yes □ Unsure □ No □

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to that task?
     Constantly □ Often □ Seldom □ Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
     Self-taught □ Formal study □ Reading □ Peers □ Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
     Very high □ High □ Average □ Low □ Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high □ High □ Not applicable □ Low □ Very Low □
CULTURAL LEADERSHIP:

ETHOS

(i) Do you have enough knowledge of the local history and traditions to promote the ethos of your school?
Yes □ Unsure □ No □

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to critical reflection on the impact of cultural change on school ethos?
Constantly □ Often □ Seldom □ Never □

(iii) Where did you develop that reflective ability?
Self-taught □ Formal study □ Reading □ Peers □ Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
Very high □ High □ Average □ Low □ Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
Very high □ High □ Not applicable □ Low □ Very Low □

PUBLIC RELATIONS

(i) Do you work to convey positive images of your school to pupils, parents and the wider community in order that they might reflect on school values and beliefs?
Yes □ Unsure □ No □

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to that task?
Constantly □ Often □ Seldom □ Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
Self-taught □ Formal study □ Reading □ Peers □ Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
Very high □ High □ Average □ Low □ Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
Very high □ High □ Not applicable □ Low □ Very Low □
POLITICAL LEADERSHIP:

NEGOTIATION SKILLS

(i) Do you have the skills to engage and mobilise all the educational stakeholders in nurturing a learning community?
   Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to negotiation with educational partners?
   Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop that skill?
   Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
   Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
   Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □

POLICY RECONCILIATION

(i) Do you manage to work within the frameworks set by DES policy and still meet the educational needs of students?
   Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) To what extent do you spend time reconciling policy with student needs?
   Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
   Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
   Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
   Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □
Educational Leadership:

TEACHING/LEARNING

(i) Do you accept responsibility for ensuring that the learning of students in the school is at an optimal level of efficiency?
   Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to that task?
      Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop that skill?
      Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
      Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
     Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Do you encourage staff to engage in professional development in support of optimum school effectiveness?
   Yes □  Unsure □  No □

To what extent do you devote time to that task?
   Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
   Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
   Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
   Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

ASSESSMENT

(i) Do you develop and evaluate assessment policies and practices in your school?
Yes☐ Unsure☐ No☐

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to this aspect of your work?
Constantly☐ Often☐ Seldom☐ Never☐

(iii) Where did you develop that skill?
Self-taught☐ Formal study☐ Reading☐ Peers☐ Not applicable☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
Very high☐ High☐ Average☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
Very high☐ High☐ Not applicable☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

CURRICULUM CHANGE

(i) Do you plan and implement curriculum initiatives in your school?
Yes☐ Unsure☐ No☐

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to that task?
Constantly☐ Often☐ Seldom☐ Never☐

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
Self-taught☐ Formal study☐ Reading☐ Peers☐ Not applicable☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
Very high☐ High☐ Average☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
Very high☐ High☐ Not applicable☐ Low☐ Very Low☐
ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT:

COMMUNICATION

(i) Do you have the skills to communicate effectively with all educational stakeholders and partners in furtherance of educational goals?
   Yes☐ Unsure☐ No☐

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to that aspect of your work?
    Constantly☐ Often☐ Seldom☐ Never☐

(iii) Where did you develop that skill?
     Self-taught☐ Formal study☐ Reading☐ Peers☐ Not applicable☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
     Very high☐ High☐ Average☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high☐ High☐ Not applicable☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

(i) Do you work effectively with staff, pupils, parents and the wider community and remain open to their perceived needs and concerns?
   Yes☐ Unsure☐ No☐

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to that aspect of your work?
    Constantly☐ Often☐ Seldom☐ Never☐

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
     Self-taught☐ Formal study☐ Reading☐ Peers☐ Not applicable☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
     Very high☐ High☐ Average☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high☐ High☐ Not applicable☐ Low☐ Very Low☐
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT:

DECISION MAKING

(i) Do you have the ability to make high quality decisions in consultation with others?
   Yes ☐  Unsure ☐  No ☐

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to participatory decision making?
    Constantly ☐  Often ☐  Seldom ☐  Never ☐

(iii) Where did you develop that skill?
     Self-taught ☐  Formal study ☐  Reading ☐  Peers ☐  Not applicable ☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
     Very high ☐  High ☐  Average ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high ☐  High ☐  Not applicable ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

PASTORAL CARE

(i) Do you develop pastoral policies with a view to managing the behaviour of pupils in a positive way?
    Yes ☐  Unsure ☐  No ☐

(ii) To what extent do you spend time on issues of pastoral care?
     Constantly ☐  Often ☐  Seldom ☐  Never ☐

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
     Self-taught ☐  Formal study ☐  Reading ☐  Peers ☐  Not applicable ☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
     Very high ☐  High ☐  Average ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high ☐  High ☐  Not applicable ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐
PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE:

ABILITY TO LEAD

(i) Are you necessarily better equipped than the average teacher to be a school principal?
Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to achieving a higher professional knowledge base?
Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your professional competencies?
Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competence re. the task of being a school principal?
Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □

ABILITY TO DELIVER

(i) Do you start by trying to do the things that are most important in any given situation?
Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) Do you manage to meet deadlines?
Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □
CLIENT SATISFACTION:

AVAILABILITY

(i) Are you available to people and responsive to client concerns, needs and demands?
   Yes ☐  Unsure ☐  No ☐

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to client related issues?
   Constantly ☐  Often ☐  Seldom ☐  Never ☐

(iii) Where did you develop your competency in dealing with clients?
   Self-taught ☐  Formal study ☐  Reading ☐  Peers ☐  Not applicable ☐

(iv) What is your level of competence with regard to dealing with clients?
   Very high ☐  High ☐  Average ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
   Very high ☐  High ☐  Not applicable ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

NETWORKING

(i) Do you make yourself available and maintain links with all sectors of your school community?
   Yes ☐  Unsure ☐  No ☐

(ii) Do you devote much time to this aspect of your job?
   Constantly ☐  Often ☐  Seldom ☐  Never ☐

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
   Self-taught ☐  Formal study ☐  Reading ☐  Peers ☐  Not applicable ☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
   Very high ☐  High ☐  Average ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
   Very high ☐  High ☐  Not applicable ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐
**PROMOTION SKILLS:**

**SCHOOL PROFILE**

(i) Can you state what your school stands for and what it does?
- Yes ☐  Unsure ☐  No ☐

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to school promotion issues?
- Constantly ☐  Often ☐  Seldom ☐  Never ☐

(iii) Where did you develop your professional competencies re. Public Relations?
- Self-taught ☐  Formal study ☐  Reading ☐  Peers ☐  Not applicable ☐

(iv) What is your level of competence re. the task of school promotion?
- Very high ☐  High ☐  Average ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
- Very high ☐  High ☐  Not applicable ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

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**SCHOOL PRIDE**

(i) Do you show pride in the achievements of your school community?
- Yes ☐  Unsure ☐  No ☐

(ii) How often do you have occasion to do this?
- Constantly ☐  Often ☐  Seldom ☐  Never ☐

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
- Self-taught ☐  Formal study ☐  Reading ☐  Peers ☐  Not applicable ☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
- Very high ☐  High ☐  Average ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
- Very high ☐  High ☐  Not applicable ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐
**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

**FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT**

(i) Do you have the skills to manage school financial matters successfully?
   Yes ☐  Unsure ☐  No ☐

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to financial issues?
   Constantly ☐  Often ☐  Seldom ☐  Never ☐

(iii) Where did you develop your financial skills?
   Self-taught ☐  Formal study ☐  Reading ☐  Peers ☐  Not applicable ☐

(iv) What is your level of competence in financial matters?
   Very high ☐  High ☐  Average ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
   Very high ☐  High ☐  Not applicable ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

**BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS**

(i) Do you have difficulty reconciling teaching/learning objectives with budgetary realities?
   Yes ☐  Unsure ☐  No ☐

(ii) Do you ever resort to fund-raising in order to provide extra resources?
   Constantly ☐  Often ☐  Seldom ☐  Never ☐

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
   Self-taught ☐  Formal study ☐  Reading ☐  Peers ☐  Not applicable ☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
   Very high ☐  High ☐  Average ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
   Very high ☐  High ☐  Not applicable ☐  Low ☐  Very Low ☐
JOB SATISFACTION:

**STRESS MANAGEMENT**

(i) Do you ever experience stress at work?  
Yes☐ Unsure☐ No☐

(ii) To what extent do you experience stress?  
Constantly☐ Often☐ Seldom☐ Never☐

(iii) Where did you learn to identify the signs of stress?  
Self-taught☐ Formal study☐ Reading☐ Peers☐ Not applicable☐

(iv) What is your level of competence with regard to dealing with the symptoms of stress?  
Very high☐ High☐ Average☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?  
Very high☐ High☐ Not applicable☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

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**DELEGATION**

(i) Do you delegate responsibility to colleagues?  
Yes☐ Unsure☐ No☐

(ii) How often do you delegate responsibility?  
Constantly☐ Often☐ Seldom☐ Never☐

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?  
Self-taught☐ Formal study☐ Reading☐ Peers☐ Not applicable☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?  
Very high☐ High☐ Average☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?  
Very high☐ High☐ Not applicable☐ Low☐ Very Low☐
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:

MOTIVATION

(i) Do you motivate people to achieve academically and socially?
   Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to the motivation of others?
    Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your motivational skills?
     Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competence re. the task of school motivator?
     Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

(i) Do you know how to negotiate to achieve consensus?
   Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) Do you always succeed in calming people down?
     Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
     Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
     Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □
HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT:

STAFF MANAGEMENT

(i) Do you encourage and enable professional development of staff?
   Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to this aspect of your work?
    Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your enabling skills?
      Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competence in dealing with staff?
      Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □

STAFF APPRAISAL

(i) Do you engage in formal staff appraisal on a regular basis?
   Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) Are you frequently occupied with this aspect of the job?
     Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
      Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?
      Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □
**POLICY FORMATION:**

*School Planning*

(i) Do you have the skills to keep abreast of all new legal implications for schools?  
Yes☐ Unsure☐ No☐

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to this work?  
Constantly☐ Often☐ Seldom☐ Never☐

(iii) Where did you acquire your legal acumen?  
Self-taught☐ Formal study☐ Reading☐ Peers☐ Not applicable☐

(iv) What is your level of competence with regard to dealing with legal matters?  
Very high☐ High☐ Average☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?  
Very high☐ High☐ Not applicable☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

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**Policy Development**

(i) Do you delegate responsibility to colleagues with regard to policy development?  
Yes☐ Unsure☐ No☐

(ii) How often do you spend time writing and adapting school policies?  
Constantly☐ Often☐ Seldom☐ Never☐

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?  
Self-taught☐ Formal study☐ Reading☐ Peers☐ Not applicable☐

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to that skill?  
Very high☐ High☐ Average☐ Low☐ Very Low☐

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?  
Very high☐ High☐ Not applicable☐ Low☐ Very Low☐
ADMINISTRATION:

RECORD KEEPING

(i) Do you maintain all school records to an acceptable standard of efficiency?
   Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) To what extent do you devote time to that task?
    Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your administrative skills?
     Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competence as an administrator?
     Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □

STAFF SELECTION

(i) Are you involved in the selection of staff in your school?
    Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) Does this occur frequently?
     Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop your skills in this regard?
     Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to staff selection?
    Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to that skill/competency?
    Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □

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INDUCTION:

TRAINING

(i) Did you undergo any specific training in preparation for your role as a principal?  
Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) Do you avail of professional development opportunities re. your role as a principal?  
Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you develop the range of skills you use as a principal?  
Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to all of those skills and competencies?  
Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to those skills/competencies?  
Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □

ROLE CLARITY

(i) Is the current understanding of the principal’s role a guide to you in your work?  
Yes □  Unsure □  No □

(ii) Does that knowledge assist you in your work?  
Constantly □  Often □  Seldom □  Never □

(iii) Where did you learn about the different aspects of the principal’s role?  
Self-taught □  Formal study □  Reading □  Peers □  Not applicable □

(iv) What is your level of competency with regard to all of those skills and competencies?  
Very high □  High □  Average □  Low □  Very Low □

(v) What is the level of your training needs with regard to those skills/competencies?  
Very high □  High □  Not applicable □  Low □  Very Low □
**COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF PRINCIPALS:**

*How would you rate your performance on the following items*

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Appendix IV  Group Interview Transcripts:

The following is a record of the group interview using a semi-structured approach which was held in the West Cork Education Centre at 11.00 a.m. on Friday July 29th, 2005.

In each of the categories an initial question was posed by the interviewer and, subsequently, prompts were used to re-focus the discussion when necessary.

The initial prepared question was framed as follows:  

'To what extent has the position of school principal changed in your working life?'

Respondent A, who had considerable experience as a principal stated:

In my lifetime the position has changed completely. When I was first appointed as a principal all I had to do was open and close the school and keep school records. The Parish Priest dealt with the Department and the curriculum was focused on the three R's (Reading ‘Riting and ‘Rithmetic). Pupils were well behaved and parents were not a visible presence within the confines of the school. All of our pupils were local and the majority followed the work path of their parents. Many remained locally and worked in traditional occupations such as farming and fishing. Nowadays everyone wants to go to University and travel. Rural life has changed out of all recognition...

Respondents B and C commented that life in schools had certainly changed and they were acutely aware that the role of the school principal had advanced in practice as well as in theory. Both were ‘snowed under’ with the multiplicity of tasks and the range of educational stakeholders with which they dealt with on a regular basis.

Both B and C agreed that they had never experienced anything but the current experience of being a principal and according to respondent B, ‘...the role of the school principal is becoming unmanageable. Look at the situation where vacancies occur in small schools. Nobody wants to apply because the job is not worth it’
Respondent C concurred, and listed three West Cork schools currently without principals where, according to rumour no applicants have materialised despite repeated efforts to attract suitably qualified people.

On being prompted by the researcher as to the principal reason for this lack of interest in the position of school principal, all three respondents agreed that the primary reason was lack of financial reward and this point of view was succinctly expressed by respondent B who said; ‘...the meagre allowance paid to principals in smaller schools makes the post very unattractive and the additional stress levels make job satisfaction impossible given the current nature of the work of the principal’

This comment was added to by respondent A, who said that; ‘I no longer feel in charge of my school because there are so many other parts to the equation which did not exist when I began in the job. I would willingly step down if it did not mean a reduction in salary and pension for me’

The second question was expressed as follows:

‘How do school principals find time to be successful in all aspects of their work bearing in mind the increased demands on them?’

All respondents were of the opinion that it was not possible to cope considering they were teaching principals. According to respondent A:

...teaching is what I am paid to do and my first responsibility is to the pupils in my care. Beyond that I try to keep school records up to date and deal with other issues insofar as I can. My biggest concern is the amount of time spent dealing with outside agencies and parents with issues. In my school other staff members get on with their own job. They are all professional, competent people and do not need my advice. I trust them to get on with the job. If I dealt with every issue I would never see my family. It’s fine for the Convent school. They have a full time
principal who has all day and extra money to do what I have to do in my spare time.

Respondent B was of the opinion that, though it was not easy, it was possible to cope with the help of colleagues and by engaging with all partners and stakeholders positively. It was possible to delegate responsibility, and to share the burden that may otherwise fall on the shoulders of the principal. However, he did acknowledge, in line with the opinion of respondent A on principals’ allowance levels, that the responsibility allowance which was paid to principals based on school enrolment was a disincentive and suggested that a similar allowance paid to all principals, regardless of school size, was a possible way of revitalising interest in the post for the future.

Respondent C was of the view that all principals should be administrative and that every school required a full-time administrator. He stated the following:

*We are being conned by the Department who continue to foist on us their performance management accountability systems which do nothing except reinforce the status quo and copperfasten the mindset that systems are more important than people. We should be educational leaders not accountants and psychologists. These services should be available to us. We should be managing them not trying to substitute for them. In my school with three classroom teachers, two resource teachers and three special needs assistants there is enough work for a full-time administrator.*

On being prompted, the respondent agreed that the administrator need not necessarily be a teacher and agreed that an efficient school secretary could function effectively in that role. Respondent B suggested that one principal might effectively manage a number of smaller schools in an administrative role if they were not too remote from a geographical point of view.

This raised the issue of the optimal size at which a school might reasonably expect to have an administrative principal appointed and it was the unanimous view of those
present that the current level of 180 pupils was no longer realistic. Opinions varied between all schools having an administrative principal, to no schools being allowed to have less than four teachers on staff, regardless of enrolment. An ensuing discussion debated the issue of administrative versus teaching principals and though aware of the need for administrative support two out of three respondents preferred to retain their teaching role as they saw it as their area of expertise. One respondent was of the opinion that if he were an administrative principal he could manage all aspects of the work of the school without difficulty. On being informed that the research had shown that there was a greater need for training amongst administrative principals that was the case for teaching principals, the respondent expressed the view that this '... was nonsense as they had nothing to do all day except attend to the issues at hand while he had to do likewise and teach senior classes as well.'

In response to a prompt on the role of post holders in their schools respondents were of the view that these were not as helpful as they could be. According to one respondent, 'the buck still stops with me and even though jobs can be allocated to individuals they still look to the principal as the person with final responsibility.'

On being prompted all respondents accepted that all posts of responsibility in their schools had been allocated based on seniority as the main criteria of selection and they understood the limitations of that model of promotion. On being asked if they were endeavouring to foster leadership skills amongst their colleagues all stated that they did not have the time for such activity but according to respondent A, '...all teachers have the ability to be principals once they get the necessary experience.'
Respondent C disagreed with this point of view, and said, that in his opinion, ‘leaders were born and no amount of training could make a good principal out of certain individuals.’

Notwithstanding the above comments, it was the consensus that the current role of the teaching principal was an unattractive, if not a wholly unmanageable one, and that something needed to be done at Department level or the crisis would worsen and begin to negatively impact on the educational opportunities of school children, particularly in rural areas. The administrative role of the principal was not seen as a magic panacea which would cure all ills and the notion that they were teachers first and foremost was a constant thread throughout these discussions.

Question three was framed as follows:

‘How is it possible in the current climate of change and increased societal expectations to make the position of school principal more attractive?’

Respondents unanimously responded that ‘more money’ was the solution.

In addition they would like meaningful administrative support and more time for administration themselves.

A note of caution was introduced by respondent B when the issue of more principal administrative time was introduced, and, he was of the opinion that:

...the issue of finding a suitable substitute when doing administration is a serious one and it would be far more practical for the Department to allocate an extra staff member for a group of schools. Why could they not allow every five schools ideally, appoint an additional staff member, based in a school of their choice, who would free the principals involved for a day per week to attend to administration and other responsibilities. This would allow some consistency in terms of local arrangements. The current problem of finding a substitute for administrative days.
make the prospect unattractive never mind ineffective if the principal has to spend the day checking up on some inexperienced and possibly untrained substitute.

This point of view was supported by the other respondents and they agreed with the logic involved and saw the possibility of regular administrative support from the same person one day per week as a very attractive proposition. Respondent A. offered the opinion that this person might attend to the administrative responsibilities and allow the principal continue with his teaching duties and stated that in the past she had, ‘...sometimes not bothered taking her administrative days because of the difficulty of finding a substitute teacher and the added problem of picking up the pieces and restoring order after an inexperienced substitute had spent some time in her class’

However the bulk of the discussion related to monetary gain and it was felt that the demands of being principal far outweighed the rewards and that only those who had long service and were considering retirement would apply in the future because of the pension implications of retiring on the highest possible salary level.

The feminisation of primary education was referred to at this point and once again monetary gain was seen as a huge factor in attracting males to other occupations where clear career opportunities existed. All respondents were of the opinion that the reduced number of males in teaching was a trend set to continue unless financial measures were put in place to make the job more attractive.

At this point it was suggested by the researcher that other factors such as the Irish language requirement and the selection criteria of the training colleges, which favoured high academic achievers, not to mention societal factors which steered men in the direction of engineering and related occupations, might be worth considering but these were rejected unanimously as minor details. As respondent C stated, ‘... if you pay
peanuts you get monkeys' and this remained the unanimous verdict of the focus group for the duration of this group interview.

The fourth topic under review which resulted in considerable discussion was introduced in the following manner:

'In what way does the Department of Education & Science need to change in order to facilitate school leadership in the primary school system?'

Again the unanimous initial response of all three respondents was that they should pay principals properly and give schools adequate levels of administrative support. But on further exploration much divergence of opinion was expressed. For example none of the respondents would agree that the role of the principal was clearly defined by the Education Act, which they saw as a vague generalisation and not in the best interest of principals because of its lack of application on the ground.

Respondent C mentioned the section of the Act which gave the principal all the powers that he/she required in furtherance of his/her duty and stated that while it was wonderful in theory it was unlikely to transfer in practice. He quoted the example of an efficient but non-compliant teacher who despite all of his protestations continued '...to administer discipline in an inappropriate manner and cried wolf when challenged on the matter.'

As respondent C said:

 Articles in the Education Act are of little use to me in dealing with non-compliance among colleagues and my status as an authority figure is not reinforced by statute when tradition sees me as the person who is just one of the gang with particular extra duties.

When prompted respondents agreed that it may now be necessary to develop training modules for existing and potential principals. Respondent C said that he needed training
in a whole range of aspects of his work that he was currently coping with, with some difficulty. Both other respondents agreed and would welcome a training programme for principals.

In response to a question as to whether or not all principals should be trained before taking up office a divergence of opinion resulted. One respondent thought that it should be essential and said that, ‘...such is the range of skills required that no single person could be good at all of them without formal training.’

Both remaining respondents thought that if training were to become a feature of being a school principal that a division may arise between teachers and principals in schools which could be detrimental to staff harmony in the long term.

Respondent A said:

‘Groups like the IPPN which seek to drive a wedge between teachers and principals are not going to do any good in the long term. We must all remember that we are in it together and that teachers are the most valuable commodity in education’

At this stage the one of the principal findings of the thesis ‘perceived high levels of skill coupled with high levels of training need’ was mentioned by the researcher and respondents were asked to comment.

Respondent A saw this contradiction as. ‘a symptom of the confusion which currently exists in the minds of most principals with regard to the evolving nature of their work’.

Respondent B offered the opinion that this was very understandable because. ‘increased levels of awareness that have come from top down accountability models were bound to result in increased training needs amongst principals’ and respondent C added to that observation by commenting that training had become a necessity because principals were
now, 'being forced to learn new ways of doing business because of the constant new demands being placed upon them'

When pushed on the issue of how they coped without training, responses could be summarised as, 'with great difficulty', a comment to which all three respondents subscribed.

Respondent A added to the above comment by stating that despite having successfully managed a school for a considerable number of years she still feared the local Inspector's occasional visits because there were so many areas with which she needed to be familiar. She stated the following:

>The plethora of plans and policies which I have to maintain and update constantly are often just window dressing and bear no relation to the actual work of the school. If they were honest many principals would admit that their current obsession with planning and policies is one of the greatest obstacles to getting the real work of teaching done and I believe that standards were much better in the old days in many schools

Not all respondents agreed with this view of school planning and one alternative comment suggested that, such was the multiplicity of tasks now undertaken by the average school principal, good planning had become an essential feature of their work. However this respondent also suggested that planning responsibilities should be delegated if possible but was aware of the mindset of many colleague class teachers who thought that, 'if he was being paid the allowance then he should be doing the work.'

At this point a prompt from the researcher suggested that perhaps it had become necessary to consider the school principal's contract and increase the number of working days to facilitate the additional aspects of their work that had become a feature of their lives. This was greeted with initial negativity and as one respondent replied:
...aren't we already working all the hours God gave us? Do you think that I can forget about school during holiday periods or even at weekends? This week alone I've had meetings with the Chairperson, the supplier of a portable classroom and two parents who didn't bother to attend on the official enrolment evening. If I were paid for all the extra hours I put in I'd be a rich man. All this is expected of me and the Board of Management expect me to be available to represent them on all occasions – you'd think I had a vocation.

However respondent A took a different view and agreed that the way forward would be to rewrite the school principal's contract because the current state of affairs reflected a different era when principals had a lesser role in terms of outside agencies and were free to concentrate on their jobs.

Respondent A stated the following; 'I would be happy to work extra hours if rewarded for them. I'm doing it anyway without thanks never mind financial rewards.' She further stated that it would not necessarily be a bad thing if principals worked longer official hours than colleague teachers as long as, 'my summer holidays are not stolen away from me. I need that break to recharge my batteries'

Respondent C was of the opinion that the burden of responsibility that currently falls on the shoulders of the school principal could and should be shared by members of the Board of Management and colleagues with posts of responsibility within schools. He stated the following:

Currently, the voluntary nature of school management is a farce. No member has any real responsibility and they are of little or no use to the principal in terms of reducing their workload. Neither is the system of promotion within schools going to be of much use in that regard as long as we continue to pay lip service to seniority as the sole criteria for promotion. These people badly need new terms and conditions of employment and their role needs defining if they are to serve schools in a meaningful way for the future.

When pressed on this matter respondent C said that he believed that all members should have prescribed role and responsibilities and that each should be rewarded accordingly in
proportion to their contribution. However this suggestion was not seen as logical by both other respondents and they raised the issue of people with technical skills assuming prominence in schools when educational vision and real leadership were the important matters. Respondent B suggested that in the scenario outlined above it would be possible for, ‘...issues like value for money to become paramount if school treasurers with strong personalities assumed positions of power...’

Respondent A added that:

...it is far better if Boards remain voluntary bodies who will not interfere with the core work of the school and be available to support the principal if needed. We don't want undue interference from Boards. Schools managed very successfully up to the early seventies before the current management structure was even established.

At this stage in an effort to refocus the discussion with regard to how the DES could change structures to allow the principal be better at his/her job the researcher requested that each respondent summarise their points of view and responses were as follows:

Respondent A: ‘Allow teachers get on with their jobs and initiate planning at national level’

Respondent B: ‘Pay principals properly and define their role and functions’

Respondent C: ‘Increase levels of pay in line with responsibility and provide meaningful training and administrative support to all schools’

The final theme was introduced as follows:

‘Can you suggest any new models of school leadership that would be relevant today?’
Initial responses from all respondents suggested unwillingness to change and as respondent A stated, '...schools would be fine if outside bodies stopped interfering with them.'

However in the ensuing discussion on school leadership many interesting points were raised and it was the view of all respondents that unless something was done soon there would be a crisis in rural schools because of the unattractiveness of the job. This was in '...no small way related to the DES policy of assigning teachers to schools only in relation to the number of pupils...' according to respondent C. He offered the view that school numbers should not be the only factor in maintaining schools and referred to a number of small schools that had recently been shut down due to falling enrolments which were in his view possibly temporary and likely to increase in the future as has often happened. In his opinion:

...many rural schools have periods of high enrolment followed by periods of lower numbers due to local demographics. It is high time that the DES recognised that schools do not necessarily have to follow population trends and nowadays transport is not an issue. Why pupils can’t be transported to schools instead of schools growing in urban areas where the majority currently live? This is to the detriment of rural schools which are often viewed as failed educational institutions when they are merely at the mercy of demographic trends and population shifts due to the changed nature of the workplace.

In the opinion of Respondent C it should be possible to maintain schools in areas where they serve communities because demographics change so quickly and he believed that the current policy of choosing schools because they were convenient in terms of the working lives of parents was a disastrous one. How he enquired, '...will schools maintain their traditions and their characteristic spirit if they exist only to serve the workplace?...'
At this point respondent A interjected and enquired if there was a minimum size at which he believed schools were inefficient in terms of overall functioning to which respondent C offered the view that below 4 teachers the work of schools was difficult.

"...with 4 teachers one could have infants, first and second classes, third and fourth classes and seniors and these groupings were very manageable in terms of the curriculum. Schools that size would also be easier to manage that 2 and 3 teacher units which are inefficient in terms of managing the curriculum or so the evidence of those who work in them would tell us..."

Respondent B interjected at this stage and said that he believed that it would not be possible to have agreed school sizes as at any given time schools could be overstaffed and in reality it would be next to impossible to organise class sizes within the agreed maximum guidelines of 29:1 pupil teacher ratio.

Respondent C disagreed and quoted a recent article by John West-Burnham which argued that class sizes were not an issue in delivering good quality education and that it was possible with appropriate planning to manage much bigger class units than we currently believe.

On being prompted by the researcher all respondents addressed the issue of structural change that might facilitate better working conditions for school principals and some of the opinions offered included, inter alia, the following:

- No schools with less than four staff members regardless of pupil numbers.
- A return to the traditional catchment area policy which ensured that the majority of children attended their local schools.
- An end to the policy of approving temporary accommodation to schools because of number surges, as these accentuate the problems of open catchment policies, and, are a blight on the educational landscape not to mention a waste of money.
• More administrative time for teaching principals.

• Proper administrative support in every school.

• Clearer job descriptions for Board of Management members.

• A review of the policy with regard to principals’ administrative days with permanent shared posts replacing the current system of principal having to find a suitable replacement when required.

• One principal with responsibility for a number of small schools in geographically confined areas.

• The idea of parish schools as the basic unit as this would halt the drive towards centralisation and urbanisation.

• Proper training with on-going support as well as realistic rates of pay for all principals.

• An end to interruptions to the school year and a shift towards school based in-service.

• A clearer definition of the role and functions of the principal.