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**‘Being’ an educational leader in Choiseul  
Province in the Solomon Islands:  
A case study of the context of leadership for  
principals and deputy principals.**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Educational Leadership at the  
University of Waikato by

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## **Abstract**

The recent decentralisation of authority to the community high schools highlights the changing nature and role of school leadership in the Solomon Islands. This study explores the context of school leadership for principals and deputy principals in the community high schools from the leader's perspectives. More specifically, what is it like 'being' an educational leader in the community high schools in the Choiseul province. This study attempts to describe the context of leadership using the leader's accounts of being in this role before and during their current school leadership position.

This study was conducted as qualitative research and used a case study research approach. The school leaders of six community high schools of Choiseul province were participants in this study. Eleven school leaders, five principals and six deputy principals, took part in semi-structured interviews about the nature of their leadership context. The research question that acted as a guide to these interviews was:

*What is it like 'being' a school leader in a Community High School in the Choiseul province?*

Through semi-structured interviews with each participant, and the documents that were related to the school leader's position and role, the findings of this research raise a number of issues for those in leadership. This includes the impact of the remoteness and isolation that is seen as a major impediment to leadership preparation and ongoing professional development. The findings also showed that school leaders typically experienced an appointments procedure which was influenced by the local community. Since the community high schools were still being physically developed, the school's physical development was seen as a priority when it comes to the appointment. The research findings provide the basis for establishing policies and practices that might support and enable current and future school leaders in Choiseul in the future.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>A brief background on the Solomon Islands</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The education system in the Solomon Islands</b>	<b>8</b>
Early Childhood Education	8
Primary Education	9
Secondary Education	10
Tertiary Education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)	12
<b>Choiseul Province</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>The context I bring to this study</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Understandings I bring to the study</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Research intentions</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Organization of this thesis</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Review of the Literature</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>The nature of educational leadership</b>	<b>18</b>
The importance of trust in leadership	19
The importance of transparency	20
The importance of social justice	21
The importance of the selection process	23
<b>The development of educational leaders</b>	<b>24</b>
Mentoring	25
Building leadership capacity	26
Emergent school leaders	27
<b>The context of leadership in education</b>	<b>28</b>
Community involvement in education	28
Rural and remote schools	30
The shortage of school leaders	31
The school's infrastructure	33
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Qualitative research</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Case Study Research</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Methods of data collection</b>	<b>37</b>
Semi-structured interviews	37
Documentation	38

Field notes _____	39
<b>Ethical considerations _____</b>	<b>39</b>
Access to institutions and participants _____	40
Informed consent _____	40
Confidentiality _____	40
Potential harm to participants _____	41
Participants' right to decline to participate and right to withdraw _____	41
<b>The research process _____</b>	<b>41</b>
Selection of participants _____	41
Conducting the interview and transcribing _____	41
<b>Analysis of data _____</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Reliability and Validity _____</b>	<b>42</b>
<b><i>Chapter Four: Findings</i> _____</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Introduction _____</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Section A: Cases _____</b>	<b>45</b>
The Community High Schools _____	45
The principals and deputy principals _____	46
<b>Section B: Emergent themes _____</b>	<b>53</b>
Rural, remoteness and isolation _____	53
Shortage of school leadership _____	55
Lack of leadership preparation and ongoing professional development _____	56
Strengths and weaknesses of the appointment procedures _____	58
Community influence and involvement _____	61
Priority of school physical development _____	63
Gender _____	64
The need for transparency _____	67
<b>Summary _____</b>	<b>70</b>
<b><i>Chapter Five: Discussion</i> _____</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Introduction _____</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Rural, remoteness and isolation _____</b>	<b>71</b>
<b>Shortage of school leadership _____</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Lack of leadership preparation and ongoing professional development _____</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Strengths and weaknesses of appointment procedures _____</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Community influence and involvement _____</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Priority of school physical development _____</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Gender _____</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Need of transparency _____</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Conclusion _____</b>	<b>86</b>
<b><i>Chapter Six: Conclusion</i> _____</b>	<b>88</b>

Introduction	88
Implications of the study	88
Limitations of the study	90
Recommendations for further research	90
Concluding comments	91
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>93</b>
Appendix 1: A letter to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development	93
Appendix 2: A Letter to the provincial Education Authority	95
Appendix 3: Letter to the Seventh day Adventist Church Education Authority	97
Appendix 4: Letter of approval from the Choiseul Province	99
Appendix 5: A Letter to the School principals	100
Appendix 6: A Letter to the Deputy School principals	102
Appendix 7: Consent form for Interview	104
Appendix 8: Interview Statement	105
Appendix 9: Interview questions	106
<b>References</b>	<b>107</b>

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter gives a brief background on the education system in the Solomon Islands. This chapter includes the provision of early childhood education, primary education, and secondary education. The three types of secondary schooling are also described, these being, the national secondary schools, the provincial secondary schools and the community high schools. In addition, the tertiary education, technical and vocational education and training is outlined. The latter part of this chapter focuses on Choiseul province, the context and understanding I bring to this study, and the organization of the thesis.

### **A brief background on the Solomon Islands**

The Solomon Islands are located between 8° south latitude and 170.5° east longitude. This area stretches from Papua New Guinea in the north to Vanuatu in the east. The five main islands of the Solomon Islands are Choiseul, Isabel, Guadalcanal, Malaita and Makira. With the inclusion of some of the smaller islands, the Solomon Islands cover a land area of approximately 28,400 square kilometres.

Those who are native to the Solomon Islands are called Melanesians. It is believed that these people inhabited the Solomon Islands thousands of years before it was discovered by Mendana in 1568 (United States Department of State, 2009). This marked the first contact with Europeans, which was then followed by the missionaries, who introduced a formal education system to the Solomons.

In the 1998 national census, there was a population of 496,000 people, 97% of whom describe themselves as Christian (Malasa, 2007). The Christian denominations are further represented as: Anglican 32.8%, Roman Catholic 19%, South Sea Evangelical Church 17%, Seventh Day Adventist Church 11.2%, United Church 10.3%, Christian Fellowship Church 2.4% and other small churches 4.4%. The people of Solomon Islands are ethnically Melanesian 94.5%, Polynesian 3% and Micronesian 1.2 (United State Department of State 2009).

The nine provinces of the Solomon Islands are Choiseul, Western, Isabel, Central, Guadalcanal, Malaita, Makira Ulawa, Rennel Bellona and Temotu. Each province administers and manages their own provincial affairs, such as education and health services, through the provincial government systems. While English is an official language, only 1% to 2% speak English (United States Department of State, 2009). However, the Melanesian lingua franca - Pidgin English and another 120 indigenous languages are commonly used in spoken communications.

The islands' ocean-equatorial climate is extremely humid throughout the year, with a mean temperature of 27 °C and few extremes in temperature or weather. The cool period of the year is from June through to August with an average temperature of 23°C. The annual rainfall is about 3050 mm (Ministry of Provincial Government & Rural Development, 2001). In terms of the economy, 75% of the population are engaged in subsistence farming and fishing for domestic consumption.

### **The education system in the Solomon Islands**

The education system in the Solomon Islands includes Early Childhood Education (ECE), Primary Education, three types of Secondary Education - Community High Schools (CHS), Provincial Secondary Schools (PSS), National Secondary Schools (NSS), as well as Tertiary Education, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

#### ***Early Childhood Education***

Early childhood education was first introduced to the country prior to the 1980s through the initiative of individuals, groups and organisations in the urban centres (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2007b). In the mid 90s, New Zealand provided substantial assistance for ECE. With the growing number of ECE centres, the Solomon Islands government formally recognized ECE in 1998 through teachers training programme at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education and the inclusion of ECE teacher's salary in the National Teachers Payroll (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2007b). In 2005, there were a total of 330 ECE centres with 739 teaching staff in the

Solomon Islands (Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, 2007a).

At present, not all the children aged between 3 and 5 years of age have access to an ECE. This is due to the geographic nature of the islands, the isolation of the rural communities, and the particular locations of the ECE centres. Young children cannot travel the long distances as their parents would not be able to accompany them.

### ***Primary Education***

Primary education begins from the preparatory year prior to year one in the Solomon Islands (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2007b). This means that primary education is seven years in length for children aged between 6 and 12. There are however, variations to this pattern. These variations are due to factors like the late entry to school, and children in ECE being promoted directly to standard one (year one) without attending a preparatory year. In the primary level, children are normally promoted to the next class based on their satisfactory performance in the current class. This had caused some children to stay in a particular year level for more than one year, except in standard six (year six). Standard six is an eliminatory year. This means that children are selected for form one (year seven). Because of the limited number of spaces in form one (year seven), the majority of children are forced out of the formal education system as school dropouts.

According to the education statistics in 2005, the Solomon Islands has a total of 650 primary schools, of which 117 are attached to a CHS (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2007b). The teacher pupil ratio is 1: 25. The major purpose of primary education is to develop the skills that equip children to become an asset in the society (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2007a). These skills include listening, speaking, reading and writing in literacy, basic numeracy skills, and other skills in subjects such as health studies, community studies, science, physical education and agriculture (Solomon Islands, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development 2007b).

As mentioned previously, the geography of the Solomon Islands, and the location of the scattered communities, are a major issue for access to primary education. The recent introduction of free education has increased the primary school enrolments. The remote and isolated nature of many villages with primary schools adds an extra work load to teachers and school leaders who already have substantial roles while often teaching a composite class.

### ***Secondary Education***

There are three categories of secondary schools in Solomon Islands; National Secondary Schools (NSS), Provincial Secondary Schools, and Community High Schools (CHSs). These schools use the same national school curriculum and sit the same national examinations in form three (year nine) and form five (year eleven). School leaders and teachers are on the central government payroll and can transfer across the secondary schools. The provincial and church education authorities are the employers of school staff.

#### ***National Secondary Schools (NSS)***

One group of secondary schools in the Solomon Islands are the NSSs. These elite schools select academically strong students based on the Solomon Islands Secondary School Entrance (SISE) exam at standard six and on the national examinations in form three (year seven). The selection of students is considered nationally. There are nine National Secondary Schools which provide education for students in forms one to seven (Years one to seven).

#### ***Provincial Secondary School (PSS)***

The second group of secondary schools are called the Provincial Secondary Schools. These schools are controlled by the Provincial Education Authorities. These schools have restricted student selection within the provincial boundaries through the SISE exam results in year six. Students that are found to be academically strong in the national examination in form three (year seven) are selected to form four (year eight) in the NSS. All the PSSs are boarding schools except one in

Honiara (Sikua, 2002). Sixteen secondary schools are categorised as PSS. The curriculum for provincial secondary schools has a rural vocational orientation for students who are not able to secure a place in a NSS (Sanga, Pollard & Jenner, 1998).

### ***Community High Schools (CHS)***

The third group of secondary schools are known as the CHSs; the focus of this research inquiry. The name 'community' is to suggest that the schools are controlled by the local community with the support of the Education Authorities and Ministry of Education. Community high schools have grown in number in the Solomon Islands since 1995 (Sikua, 2002). An increasing population, and the need for accessing secondary education in the community, has seen the expansion of existing primary schools to include secondary education. Almost all of the CHSs are non-boarding schools with intakes from form one to three (year seven to nine).

Within the period of three years from 1995 to 1998, the CHSs made up 65% of the total number of secondary schools. One hundred and seventeen CHSs were established in three years. Neither NSSs nor the PSSs have had such rapid growth (Sanga, Pollard & Jenner, 1998). The management and leadership issues that impede quality education are common in the CHSs (Sikua, 2002). The major issue of the fast growth rate is the lack of effective monitoring of the establishment, management and leadership of the schools. Related issues include the scarcity of curriculum materials, textbooks, qualified teachers and educational leaders. The current number of qualified teaching staff and school leaders in the Solomon Islands does not meet the CHS demand.

The majority of these CHSs were built with the support of the local communities in terms of the land, materials, free labour, and the provision of home-stay accommodation for students to live with a family in the community. The community school board governs the school but the principal is responsible for the daily management and operation. Both the principal and the school board are answerable to the community and to the Ministry of Education through the respective educational authorities (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2007a).

Acquiring school leadership positions in the CHSs can occur as a result of the number of years teaching experience, being an indigenous citizen of the community, through political influence, and as a result of the school's remoteness.

Malasa (2007) commented that many educational leaders are not prepared for school leadership. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2007b) has since prioritised leadership preparation in the Solomon Islands national development plan 2007- 2009 saying that "principals (Head teachers) training will be re-introduced and all Principals (Head teachers) will undertake management training (including staff management and resource management" (p. 49).

### ***Tertiary Education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)***

The three well established tertiary institutions in the Solomon Islands are government institutions. These are the University of the South Pacific (USP) in which the Solomon Islands is one of the twelve members; the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) Open Campus of Papua New Guinea; and the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) which is a state institution. The other providers of tertiary education are categorized as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

The University of the South Pacific offers preliminary, foundation and degree courses through distance and flexible modes. Distance and flexible learning approaches have enabled the enrolment of students in remote and isolated provinces. Very few courses are taught in a face to face delivery mode.

The University of Papua New Guinea Open Campus was established in March 2009 after a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the SICHE and UPNG in November, 2008. It offers formal awards such as the Certificate in Community Studies and some diploma courses. Courses are delivered as distance and flexible learning modes as well as through summer schools. The provincial centre for The University of Papua New Guinea is in the Malaita province.

The Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE) offers academic, technical and vocational areas of tertiary education with formal awards from Certificate to Advanced Diploma level. The seven schools that make up the SICHE include the School of Education, the School of Finance and Administration, the School of Industrial development, the School of General Studies, the School of Marine and Fisheries, the School of Natural Resources, the School of Nursing and Health Studies, and the School of Tourism and Hospitality. In 2007, the full-time student enrolments at the SICHE were 1800 (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2007b).

There are several church and privately funded Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions which were formerly known as rural training centres. These training centres offer technical and vocational education for those who have not progressed through senior primary and secondary schools. The basic skills offered at the TVET focus on self-employment and skills that are needed in other employment sectors (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2007b). The central government supports TVETs in the form of grants and salaries for the teaching staff.

### **Choiseul Province**

Choiseul province is the location and context for this research. More specifically, the participants were principals and deputy school principals of the community high schools. The study was conducted in 2009.

Choiseul is a one Island province with a land area of 3,837 square kilometres. Choiseul is located at the northern end of the Solomon Islands at 6.35° south to 156.63° east, and 7.32 ° south to 157.53° to the east.

Choiseul is a multi-cultural society made up of indigenous Melanesians and Micronesian settlers from what is now known as Kiribati. The population of Choiseul is 20,008 according to the census (Ministry of Provincial Government & Rural Development, 2001). In terms of the governance of the province, the Ministry of Provincial Government and Rural Development (2001) stated that Choiseul does not operate under a

chiefly system. This means that traditionally, each tribe had a head who took on leadership roles based on their achievements with regard to their traditional knowledge, skills and bravery in protecting the tribe. The chiefly system that is currently practised in Choiseul now is an adopted system. The Micronesian culture does not have a chiefly system but an elderly system (Ministry of Provincial Government & Rural Development, 2001).

Out of eight native languages and dialects, Babatana language is commonly spoken in Choiseul. English is an official language but lingua franca- Pidgin English and local vernaculars are commonly used to communicate in formal working environment.

Choiseul has twenty-seven Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres, fifty primary schools, and nine Community High Schools (CHS) established by local communities with the assistance of provincial and church educational authorities and the Ministry of Education. The first CHS in Choiseul was built at the Sasammugga Community in 1996.

### **The context I bring to this study**

Being an indigenous citizen of the patriarchal society in Choiseul, I initially believed that leadership was a result of special birth traits inherent in the personality of an individual. While this belief still exists in the context of traditional leadership in some of Melanesian societies, in my leadership experience I have continued to learn about the nature and practice of leadership.

My initial training was in primary education where I graduated in 1993. When I realised the need for effective leadership in schools, I studied educational leadership through distance and flexible learning modes. This has enabled me to be promoted to school leadership positions.

I acquired my first leadership appointment as the deputy head teacher of a boarding primary school in Choiseul which had a critical shortage of school leaders. The education authority selected me without school leadership experience and unqualified for leadership. I asked myself a question; 'is this what it is like to 'be' an educational leader in the Choiseul

province?' I am still answering this question. This question is integral to this research inquiry.

For five years, I served as a deputy head teacher and a head teacher in three primary schools. I learnt by myself on the job. Time and time again, I learnt from my failures while continuing to improve my strengths.

In the early stages of my leadership experience, the local communities were instrumental in my appointment. It was a humbling experience to be recognised by the community in taking on leadership roles. The community leader's words and actions in choosing the school leadership were very powerful. The community support appeared to recognise my positive influence, vision, goal setting and focus on positive change. As a leader, I developed friendships and maintained a team spirit in schools. Although the professional jealousy of others has attempted to obstruct my leadership path, my family, a few close relatives, and some education officers have been sources of personal encouragement.

In 2004, after returning with a higher qualification from the University of the South Pacific, I was asked to be a head of department in a CHS. This came as both a surprise and a stepping stone. My active involvement in the leadership roles in the CHS have been a springboard to being selected as a lecturer at the School of Education in the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education. At the tertiary level, my involvement in the National Teachers Training Programme has informed me of the leadership preparation of school leaders in the Solomon Islands.

My interests in leadership continue to develop and expand as my leadership journey has reached the Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership in a New Zealand university. I am presently submitting my thesis in educational leadership on what it is like 'being' a school leader in the Choiseul Province.

### **Understandings I bring to the study**

Eight years of experience as a school leader in the Choiseul province has given me some knowledge about the context of school leadership in Choiseul. Because of the remoteness and isolation, many educational

leaders and qualified teachers from other provinces consider CHSs in Choiseul as their second or third option. The CHSs in Choiseul are said to be unattractive and not marketable to qualified school leaders. It appears that there is a scarcity of qualified and more experienced secondary school teachers in the province. This has resulted in the promotion of some primary teachers to teach and be appointed to leadership positions at the secondary level. The general feeling of school leaders is that they are not prepared for these new roles and want training to improve their knowledge in leadership, management and administration.

### **Research intentions**

The aim of this study is to explore what it is like 'being' a school leader in Choiseul as a principal or deputy principal. The research considers several school leader's leadership experiences in relation to how they acquired their leadership, as well as the influence, support, and challenges of 'being' a leader in a CHS. The research question for this study was: *What is it like 'being' a school leader in a Community High School in the Choiseul province?*

### **Organization of this thesis**

This thesis has six chapters which systematically explores the context of eleven school leaders in CHSs in the Choiseul province. Chapter one, the introductory chapter, presents a brief background to the study. Within this, an overview of the education system in the Solomon Islands is outlined, background is given on Choiseul province, the context and understandings I bring to this study is described, and the research intentions are stated. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature on the theme of school leadership. Prevalent issues within educational leadership were reviewed for a global perspective and with respect to the Solomon Islands context. Chapter Three describes the methodology. This includes the nature of this qualitative research, the case study research approach, and the methods of data collection. This chapter further outlines the ethical considerations, the research process, as well as the process for data analysis. Chapter Four details the findings. The findings are in two sections; the first section opens each person's stories as a unique case in their own right, while the

second section details emergent themes across the cases. Chapter Five discusses the research findings in relation to the existing literature. For consistency and clarity, the themes in the discussion are those presented in chapter four. Chapter Six concludes the research with the implications of the study, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research.

## **Chapter Two: Review of the Literature**

This chapter reviews literature relating to educational leadership. The first theme relates to the nature of educational leadership. This considers the importance of trust, transparency, and social justice in leadership, as well as the importance of the selection process. Secondly, the process of development for educational leaders is considered. This includes practices of mentoring, building leadership capacity, and the support given to emergent school leaders. The final theme in this chapter relates to the contextual nature of leadership in education. This section addresses the context of leadership in rural and remote schools, the leadership crisis in schools, the challenges of educational leadership, and the priority of a school's physical development within Melanesian schools.

### **The nature of educational leadership**

There are many definitions of leadership and these mean different things to different people (Sharma, 2005). Despite differences, definitions of leadership also share similarities. Munroe (2005) framed leadership around the trust a leader earns from followers, while Kouzes and Posner (1995) focus on "the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for a shared aspiration" (p. 30). Similarly, Newman (1993) described leadership as the "special and unique ability to influence people to move towards goals that are beneficial and meet the groups' best interests" (p.15). Northhouse (2001) too, related leadership to a process of influence whereby "an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p. 3). Within these definitions, the key words relate to 'influence', 'achievement', and 'goals'.

The influence of leadership can be seen as a two way process. A number of scholars (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; McBeth, 2008; Sharma, 2005) suggest that, in the interactive process, leaders influence followers and followers influence leadership. The objective of such influence ought to be collaborative striving for common goals.

Many definitions and understandings of leadership are becoming context-specific. In the school context, educational leadership tends to be oriented towards principals, staff, students, parents and authorities, and how these people influence the particular context. Similarly, Robertson (2005) explains that educational leadership includes the activities and actions that stimulate a continuous improvement process in a particular setting. One of the primary functions of leadership then, is to influence towards the desired change for improvement in a particular context (Northouse, 2001; Sharma; 2005; Wood, 2005). Benneth and Anderson (2003) summarise the concept and context of educational leadership as:

It is a concept [that is] both multidimensional and multifaceted, where the values, goals, beliefs and decision making skills of the principal give purpose and meaning to the policies and procedures which are implemented, are not set by the principal or the school but rather are established and affected by national, provincial, divisional and local pressures groups (p. 13).

In order to achieve desired changes, leaders need to provide clear direction and influence the processes within their contexts (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

### ***The importance of trust in leadership***

Driscoll (1978) noted that trust in a leader's capacity tends to be given in relation to the quality of a leader's decision making. Hoerr (2005) suggests that such trust is based on the interactions and experiences with the leader. He adds that working together with the same focus is not easy if there is no trust.

In educational settings, trust has been identified as a strong factor that contributes enormously to team-work and the collective effort to strive for a team goal (Church, 2005; Daly, 2009; Hoerr, 2005; Pounder, 1998). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) state that the establishment of "trust is pivotal in the effort to improve schools" (p. 50). In the same manner, Gelsthorpe and West-Burnham (2003) found that "schools with high levels of trust have a one in two chance of making significant improvements. Schools with low levels of trust have only a one in seven chance of

improving” (p. 10). The reasons for success are due to the quality of the mutual cooperation and team work between followers and leaders.

According to Pounder (1998), trust guides educational leaders in planning and decision making, and encourages participation and involvement in school activities. School leaders are more willing to offer rewarding tasks to those people who have high levels of trust (English, 2006). As such, choices of who to engage in what activities depend on the degree of trust. Thus, the level of trust between the leaders and the followers is like a measuring device that gauges, filters and influences many leadership decisions.

The trust amongst those involved in a school organisation increases collaboration, productivity, improves academic performance, facilitates effective and quality teaching, boosts participation and attracts involvement in school developments. When trust rules, Daly (2009) suggests it eradicates the burden of transparency and reduces monitoring (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Hoy & Sweetland, 2001; Louis, 2007).

When trust is lost, it is very difficult to regain. Educational leaders would be wise to be cautious on what jeopardises and erodes others’ trust in them. As Daly (2009) stated, the absence of trust is associated with anxiety, isolation and estrangement within an organisation. Communication is critical to any organization as Covey (1991) states “low trust spoils communication” (p. 171).

### ***The importance of transparency***

The need for transparency in leadership practice has been widely discussed in the literature. Until recently, the need to address a leader’s transparency has been a silent and local issue. According to Transparency International (2004), the concept of transparency was established during recent decades as a necessity to fight against organisational and “individual irregularities (corruption, fraud, financial scandals) and in promoting good governance in organisations whether public or private” (Schweigert, 2007, p. 147). In the short period of time since the international initiative has been formed to promote transparency,

many organisations in developing countries have slowly adopted increasingly transparent practices. People are informed of their rights to be informed and organisations are seen to have a role in transparently transmitting information to those concerned.

Neyland (2007) found that when transparency is absent, the people concerned demand organisational leaders “to demonstrate their responsibility regarding how money is spent” (p. 499) and show their openness in the leadership relationships. In such situations, people exercise their rights to openness to access information and demand greater accountability (Florini, 1998; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Lebovic, 2006; Putnam, 1993; Savoie, 2003). McCarthy (2007) goes further to state that “transparency and accountability are replacing secrecy as the only acceptable mode of operations for churches and all organisations” (p.156) whether this be in government organisations or non-government organisations. As citizens, people demand how to access they might access information and in a form that is meaningful to them (Lebovic, 2006). Studies on democracy and transparency point out that some of the reasons for resistance to transparency are anchored in persistent adherence to the culture of secrecy, the bureaucratic culture of organisational political reasons and organisational nature (Florini, 1998, 2003; Pasquier & Villeneuve, 2007; Schweigert, 2007). These three factors often suppress access to information.

To summarise, Juillet and Paquet (as cited in Pasquier & Villeneuve, 2007) explained that transparency is a tool the leaders can use to encourage the involvement and participation of those stakeholders associated with an organisation. A greater transparency enables the distribution of quality information, encourages the growth of shared decision-making, and focuses a group of people.

### ***The importance of social justice***

There is an increasing number of scholars (Court, 2004; Grogan, 2002; Strachan, 1999, 2008; Theoharis, 2008; Thrupp, 2004) interested in social justice within the area of educational leadership. Despite some differing views on the meaning of social justice, there is a consensus over the

presence of injustice and a concern that such practices exist in public schools and often involve those in leadership (Brown, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). Although many leadership models are intended to guide practice, Thrupp (2004) argues that these models are not “oppositional enough to respond to the social justice, ... indeed they can aid the managerialist colonization of education” (p. 23). This position is supported by Grogan (2002) who notes that a status quo of unequal gender relations and injustices in educational practice and policies exists. Men are often given more opportunity and are more seriously mentored in leadership than women. Indeed, men appear to be the gate keepers for the implementation of education policies and practices that advantage them (Blackmore, 2002; Brennan, 2003; Coleman, 2002).

Blackmore (2002) notes that in the global context, leadership has been seen as a masculinist image; someone who is strong in decision making, great influencers and can act independently. Sexism in the selection process is one of the ways that limit and discourage women in leadership (Alston, 2000; Collette, Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Shakeshaft, 1989). Research has shown that there is a perception that women are not as able as men as either principals or deputy principals (Coleman, 2002; Fitzgerald, 2006; Strachan, 1999). Women have to be really outstanding compared with men, or apply when no men with potential to lead are available, before women are selected as educational leaders (Strachan, 1999, 2008). Strachan (1999) found that women were likely to be principals in a school which was underdeveloped, had low socio-economic support, and a reputation of poor academic achievement in a school previously neglected by male principals. Such schools often lack qualified teachers which often force principals to work in both leadership and teaching roles. This type of school is commonly found in rural and remote communities.

Coleman (2002) found that, despite legislation and a changing culture that gives equal freedom and equity to women, the majority of females still experience sexism in selection and appointments. Fenwick (2000) argues that there is a need for change in the recruitment and selection of school leaders because the current policy has not effectively addressed sexism.

### ***The importance of the selection process***

For the democratic and transparent selection of a quality school leader, the selection and appointment process in many countries is guided by internal and external advisors in accordance with legitimate criteria and procedures. The selection procedure is crucial as this is the stage where the definition of a leader is constructed by the selection boards and where candidates present themselves as leaders (Grummell, Devine & Lynch, 2009). This is quite congruent with Britain where local education boards process selection but unlike New Zealand which “has a parent-elected board of trustees ... there is no local education authority (LEA)” (Brooking, 2007, p. 3). Parents’ representatives in the board of trustees can contextualize the recruitments because of their “understandings about the nature and value of the institution and community” (Brooking, 2007, p. 330). Similarly, in South Australia and Victoria, Chapman (1990) noted that selection policies have included the roles of the school council for the local principal selection. Some scholars argue that the formal selection processes of school leaders are too complex and pose negative implications. D’Ardon, Duignan, Duncan and Goodwin (2001) suggest that selection processes can be intrusive and flawed, while Lacey (2002) argued that they can also be time consuming, demanding and traumatic.

In the case where schools are beset by problems related to remoteness and isolation, education officers often manage and process their selection without consulting the schools. In the Solomon Islands, most of the selection processes are determined by a few education officers in the provincial education authorities. A substantial majority of school leadership positions are not advertised. The factors influencing this decision making has yet to be researched. In South Australia for example, Blackmore, Thomson and Barty (2006) found that for some schools due to distance, the district director managed the selection; however, it was argued that in this process “the panels only ever got to hear good news about applicants” (p. 300).

Blackmore et al. (2006) suggest that a good selection is a “subjective process of decision-making strongly bound by the local context” (p. 330).

The idea of contextualizing the selection of school leaders based on the local context appears to be practiced in New Zealand. In New Zealand, Brooking (2007) states that “the 1989 Education Act delegated administrative, governance, and employment responsibilities to boards of trustees of individual schools” (p. 3). The devolution of power to individual schools has provided avenues for parents and the community to be involved through their representatives in the Board of Trustees; they have become part of the selection process (Blackmore et al., 2006). Prior to the selection of principals, Brooking (2007) suggested that preparatory statements for the selection criteria must be focused to the local needs.

### **The development of educational leaders**

According to Silva, Gimbert and Nolan (2000), leadership development in education has evolved over time in three waves. The first wave is where teachers serve in formal roles as a head of department, careers master or school registrar. The main purpose of leadership here is to further the efficiency and effectiveness of the school administration and operation. At the same time the process prepares teachers as it develops their leadership capacity and helps unleash their leadership potential (Wasley, 1991).

The second wave intended to capitalise on the instructional expertise of teachers by appointing teachers as curriculum leaders, instructional leaders and mentors of new teachers (Silva et al., 2000). This arrangement is congruent with the notion of distributive leadership (Copland, 2003; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006).

According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), the third wave of developing school leadership is engaging in the process of ‘reculturing’ schools and educational organisations. Although school “leadership begins from the top - principals and those who run the school” (Benneth & Anderson, 2003, p.13), in a distributed leadership approach, delegate leadership roles to teachers as they seek to reculture their schools (Copland, 2003; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, 2006). This means that teachers are increasingly experiencing leadership roles as a spring board to becoming principals and deputy principals.

## ***Mentoring***

There does not appear to be any universally accepted definition of mentoring (Stott & Walker, 1992). For the purpose of this research, the definition of mentoring is that of a developmental process where an experienced adult guides a less experienced adult with support, advice and opportunity to acquire the desired goals (Fagan & Walter, 1982). Novice school leaders have much to learn about leadership in new leadership appointments. Difficulties they encounter during their transition to take up new leadership responsibilities can be alleviated through mentoring.

Mentoring can be a process where experienced principals mentor newly appointed deputy principals on what is like to 'be' a school leader (Hanuscin & Lee, 2008; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004; Tauer, 1998). Through the developmental process of mentoring, Hanuscin and Lee (2008) reiterate that educational leaders provide opportunities for mentees to assimilate their own experiences and leadership practices with their new knowledge.

Learning interactions can enable newly appointed school leaders to understand their leadership responsibilities in the school. According to Hanuscin and Lee (2008), educational leaders gain the courage to take on leadership roles if mentors "provide information about school procedures, guidelines and emotional support" (p. 56).

There are many ways of effectively mentoring novice school leaders. The success of mentoring depends on the mentors and the mentees-mentors' assumptions and the mentees' assumptions. Hanuscin and Lee (2008) stated that mentoring is likely to be successful when mentors act by "protecting the mentee from serious difficulty but at the same time allowing them to learn from mistakes" (p.56). Stott and Walker (1992) similarly suggest that "mentors therefore have to encourage mentees to expose [their] weaknesses and take risks when learning"... (p.154). To summarise, Tauer (1998) stated that successful mentoring includes the maintenance of long-term interactions in the transition from novice to experienced

leader, honouring their needs and sharing similar goals and big pictures of the purpose of mentoring for mutually beneficial ends.

### ***Building leadership capacity***

The literature on school improvement uses the expression 'building capacity' to describe the development of leadership in schools. To this end, Church (2005) called for school leaders to be responsible for helping teachers by delegating responsibilities to them in order to help them develop the skills and abilities for other leadership roles in schools.

According to Mascall and Rolheiser (2007), three types of capacity can be identified; individual, school and district. Building individual capacity focuses on the knowledge and skills that need to be improved to meet the changes and desired needs of the school organisation (Mascall & Rolheiser, 2007). Through the collaborative capacity of mentors-leaders, the novice and aspiring leaders increasingly become effective leaders (Young, Sheets & Knight, 2005). The influence on a person's knowledge, skills and disposition is a learning process. In this process, Alleman, Barnett, and Phillips-Jones (cited in Stott & Walker, 1992) suggest that successful capacity building depends on the willingness of the mentor to take up the challenge to mentor, and the degree of the mentees' acceptance to be mentored.

In building leader capacity in the Solomon Islands through the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), Hameiri (2009) states that "capacity building is now seen to refer to just about everything – 'the aptitudes, resources, relationships, and facilitating conditions necessary to act effectively' – and at all levels – individual, organisations, institutions and states" (p. 68). When building leadership capacity in the school context, educational leaders have to consider how they can holistically transform others in the school, including students, teachers and the community. In this way, leaders provide a "rich expertise ... among ... those working in the school" (Copland, 2003, p. 379).

### ***Emergent school leaders***

For the purpose of this study, professional development is described as an organised way of accumulating skills, knowledge and dispositions. Commenting on the importance of professional development in the education system, Speck and Lindstrom (2004) state that professional development is a “lifelong, collaborative learning process that nourishes the growth of individuals, teams, and the school through a daily, job-embedded, learner centred, focused approach” (p.10). In addition, Kent (2004) comments that the professional development of school leaders plays a very important role in school initiatives. Ongoing professional development is required due to the expansion of knowledge and the increased demand for new skills to meet the current changes in the workplace (Alvesson, 1993; Gilpin, 2000; Neef, 1998; Sandberg, 2000; Starbuck, 1992). The success of professional development in school organisations lies in the combined effort of those involved.

Laine and Otto (2000) discovered that effective professional development in schools involves all the stakeholders from school staff, school administrators, and parents. Indeed, school leaders are especially responsible for keeping the school body informed of new developments that are required for the ongoing renewal of the educational practices in the school. However, it is more than just informing, as school leaders are responsible for the professional development within the school. Often strategic plans are constructed to support such an endeavour. One such example is Albert School in the USA who state that:

Every teacher and school administrator employed by the school system must develop and implement an annual plan for professional growth that outlines that professional development activities, including reading professional journals, trying out new practices in the classroom and joining professional organizations (ATA News, 2008, p. 5).

In short, the initiative, planning and implementation of professional development activities at the school level should be a team effort of those in the school organisation including parents and, where appropriate, interest groups.

In the dominant model of acquiring professional skills and sets of knowledge, social interactions in practical experiences in the work place is essential (Sternberg & Ben-Zeev, 2001; Sternberg, Forsythe, Hedlund, Horvath, Wagner, Williams et al., 2000). In this way, practical skills are encouraged as equally important as theory in professional development. At its best, professional development can be 'transformational' (ATA News, 2008). This means teachers and school leaders use opportunities for professional learning activities for professional growth. The education system in the Solomon Islands needs a new approach to professional development (Malasa, 2007). School leaders, prior to leadership appointments, need to engage in the professional development activities to prepare and improve their current leadership skills for the new leadership roles.

## **The context of leadership in education**

### ***Community involvement in education***

Community involvement and participation in the educational process contributes to the children's academic performance as well as other school achievements. For instance, community involvement in education can have a positive impact on the psychological well-being of children. Beazley (1994) described the community involvement in education as the process for the community and the school in defining the nature and extent of the community's role. At times, parental involvement can be controlled by school leaders. Pateman (1970) described partial participation as where the community and individuals influence school decisions indirectly in a random, unorganised way or directly with some degree of incompetence. They have very limited power which is often controlled by the school leaders when it comes to decision-making.

In more recent research, parental involvement refers to expectations in academic achievement and efforts to have parents at home join with teachers in the school to improve children's educational performance (Epstein and Sanders, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill and Taylor, 2004). Parental involvement therefore, refers to parents' or community's

participation throughout the educational process (Koutrouba, Antonopoulou, Tsitsas & Zenakou, 2009). The continuity of parental involvement is essential as parents are active partners in their children's education. Through their involvement, parents can contribute to positive decisions that can impact the educational experiences of their children (Crozier & Reay, 2005).

Most often, local communities or parents can be involved in a school through an individual student's education, the parents' committee, the school's daily activities, and the decision making of the school. According to Kouzes and Posner (1995), "people feel strongly and are more committed to their tasks when they take part in setting goals" (p. 258). Such feelings develop an intrinsic desire to be involved and to participate, with the willpower to strive for excellence in the given tasks. In the school context, parents are the citizens of the communities (Sharma, 2005).

In a study of parental participation in the schools in Pacific Island countries (PICs), Sharma (2005) found that "parental participation in school management in most PICs generally lies between consultation and partial participation" (p. 6.14). Community participation was limited to some specific school programmes. In the case of Fiji, Sharma (2005) found that some principals limited community participation to school fundraising and parent-teacher association meetings, excluding them from major decision making. Parents may voluntarily withdraw their involvement because of bureaucratic styles of leadership in schools. The barriers to community participation in schools are still to be researched in Solomon Islands.

In the case of the CHSs in Solomon Islands, where secondary schools have been added on to an existing primary school, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2007) stated that such "community high schools are built and managed by communities, and are assisted by church or provincial authorities" (p. 51). With this sense of ownership, communities expect a high degree of direct involvement and participation in the schools.

### ***Rural and remote schools***

Strokes, Stafford and Holdsworth. (1999) states that “The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines rural as all residences and settlements with less than 1000 people, the Commonwealth Government defines remote as all non-metropolitan places with fewer than 100,000” (p. 12). The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Canberra (2004) reported that “remoteness of a location can thus be measured in terms of how far one has to travel to centres of various sizes” (p. 2). The Solomon Islands had an estimated population of 508,000 in 2007 (Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Meteorology, 2008). Many of the community populations where the CHSs are established have a population of less than 1000. Almost all the CHSs are classified as rural and remote. Stern (1994) describes the rural nature of such schools as a “sparse settlement, isolate[d] from a populated centre” (p.17). For some remote schools there is a day’s travel to the nearest urban centre.

The three major concerns in rural and remote schools tend to be provision, accessibility and quality (Connell, 1993; Stern, 1994; Strokes et al., 1999; Suvorova, 2004; Wallin, 2008). In terms of provision, many rural and remote schools are not equally and timely provided with resources and school grants compared to urban schools. Even in developing countries like Australia, Strokes et al. (1999) found that there is insufficient provision of face to face leadership assistance for the school leaders due to factors like the time consumed for a rural school visit, transport difficulties and bad weather. Regarding accessibility, DeYoung (1991) noted that, due to similar factors as previously mentioned by Strokes, Stafford and Holdsworth, school leaders in rural and remote schools have “little information to assist individuals in rural settings” (1999, p.313). This is because school leaders in the remote schools were normally denied access to information on leadership and professional development. Accessibility is often denied by poor management, expensive communication services and transport difficulties.

Rural schools not only suffer from natural impediments. Kreitlow (1954) pointed out that professional jealousies can become a real stumbling block

for many rural schools and contribute to the “narrow professional outlook of rural and remote leaders” (p.13). This can occur if educational leaders, teachers and communities are biologically related and know each other well. It is often the case in underdeveloped communities that educational issues can be associated with other issues like land disputes and local resources.

In response to rural and isolation issues, marketable leaders tend to look for employment opportunities elsewhere. School leaders on the verge of retirement bravely withstand issues because shortly they will leave the system. Stern (1994) found that in rural and remote schools only young principals and principals who are less educated with lower pay, remain. These leaders are not prepared; less educated with less pay, but they teach multiple classes and are involved in other community activities (Baty, 1989; Galloway & Boswell, 1992; Kreitlow, 1954; Pankhurst, Galloway & Boswell, 1992). Tavola (1992) found that in Fiji rural principals are required to perform many tasks such as repairing generators, water pumps and pipes. This means educational leaders in remote schools must come with many different skills in order to serve a range of functions found in many different situations.

Reliable communications in rural and isolated schools in the Solomon Islands is almost unaffordable except for the use of HF two way radio. In addition to this form of communication, and in the context of the Choiseul Province with close-knit communities and a small population, provincial authorities sometimes opt to communicate with rural and remote school leaders through word of mouth. The reliability and distortion of information through this medium are of great concern. Nevertheless, it is one of the fastest and most available means to communicate with rural and remote schools.

### ***The shortage of school leaders***

In recent times, many schools have experienced a chronic shortage of qualified educational leaders. This leadership crisis has become a global concern. For example, Normore (2006) in the United States found that 40 percent of principals are on the verge of retirement in schools in Canada.

In the study conducted by Ontario College of Teachers (1998), the number of principal and deputy principals nearing retirement is growing faster than teachers without educational leadership qualifications who can replace them. National and international research shows that Australia and other western countries would suffer a great shortage of principals as people are not willing to take up the role of school principal (Collins, 2006; McLeod, 2009). "In the United States and Australia, 40-50 per cent of principals will be due for retirement by 2010" (Collins, 2006, p.17). Preparation in this context needs to address the leadership conditions that attract and retain leaders.

In addition to the shortage in leadership in schools due to retirement, Lauder (2000) and Normore (2002) noted that qualified principals have opted for different jobs in the education system or are looking for lucrative employment outside of the education system (McLeod, 2009). Bowles (1990) has identified that one of the 'push factors' for leaders in schools is principals' salary packages. In the case of school leadership in United Kingdom, Thompson (2000) comments that a rise in the standard of living means the salaries of principals and deputy principals are long overdue for review. School leaders sometimes tend to believe that school leadership is not a well paid job. With a massive exit of school leaders to well paid jobs, Bowles (1990) finds that mostly unqualified educational principals, aged principals at the verge of retirement, and women principals were the ones remaining in schools.

Educational leadership is a major global concern and challenge. Many education systems today are experiencing a shortage in leadership as leaders withdraw from accepting leadership roles (McLeod, 2009). Bottery (2004) found that "across many western countries there has been a renewed emphasis on improving leadership capacity and capability in the drive towards higher educational performance and standards" (p.9). Bottery (2006) suggests that globalisation has affected many educational policies creating friction for those in the role of educational leader.

Changes at the global level have forced changes and reforms within educational leadership to expand and include widening regional issues

(Fullan, 2003). Gilmour (2006) notes that the increasingly political nature of the role of principals and deputy principals has added to the public involvement and “accountability that many educational leaders are not willing to accept” (p. 18). Because of the political influence in schools, educational leaders tend to be focused on school management and are reluctant to participate in their leadership responsibilities.

### ***The school's infrastructure***

Vincent (2006) states that the “school is a public infrastructure - both physically and socially” (p. 433). Thus, collective effort to improve the school infrastructure is a high expectation and priority of local communities, Ministries of Education, and the government authorities. In researching rural schools in Scotland, Forsythe, Carter, Mackkay, Nisbet, Sadler, Sewel et al. (1983) found “a link between the presence of a school in the locality and sense of community” (p. 203). Indeed, often successful school infrastructures can be the result of community efforts. In the Melanesian context, most communities are closely related and have a strong belief in communalism. In the small interwoven community, common values and goals are shared (Vincent, 2006; Forsythe et al., 1983). School buildings are seen as community assets and part of the community identity. Schools also accommodate other community activities and programmes.

In the case of the Solomon Islands CHSs, the recent introduction of foreign assistance in the form of modern and manufactured building materials by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the European Union (EU) and the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) and World Bank (Sikua, 2002) has meant a new opportunity for rural school development. Assistance from these sectors boosts community morale to prioritize the school's physical development. This priority is evident in rural communities who insist on ensuring that the right school leaders are appointed to their CHSs who can plan their school's building projects.

## **Conclusion**

According to the literature, despite many different definitions of leadership, the nature of leadership appears to focus on influencing followers and determining the goals of an organisation. Leaders need to interact with others and establish trust. This is essential to decision making and influences school improvements and productivity. The concept of transparency has gradually influenced the practice of school organisations in developing countries. People have been informed of their rights which increase the demand for transparency in school organisations. A lack of transparency erodes trust in the school leadership. In school organisations where men are gatekeepers in the selection process, women were mostly likely disadvantaged in acquiring leadership positions. A transparent selection of school leaders helps to select competent school leaders. In the case of the selection process for school leaders in the Solomon Islands, I have suggested that the selection of school leaders has not always been transparent. While mentoring can build leadership capacity, emergent leaders are often self-developed, using daily opportunities for their learning.

The community involvement in education contributes enormously to the academic performance of children and the development of schools. The literature shows rural communities to have a small population of less than 1000 people, while remote communities have a distance to travel to commercial centres. The geographical location of the CHSs in Choiseul province are in the rural and remote communities. Rural and remote schools are vulnerable to educational provisions compared to non rural and remote schools. This was why schools in these localities often experience leadership crises. It is not only the rural and remote schools that are experiencing a leadership crisis. The leadership crisis is a global concern and challenge.

The research design underpinning this study is discussed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

Researchers are individuals who view the world differently. As such, the research process from “conceptualizing a problem, to collecting and analysing data, to interpreting the findings” (Merriam, 1988, p. 53) is unique to the researcher and the particular research question. The researcher then influences the decision making within the research design. In this way, I choose to undertake a qualitative research project in the form of a case study to explore the context of leadership for principals and deputy principals in Choiseul in the Solomon Islands. This chapter outlines the research approach, data gathering methods, the reliability and validity of the research, and the process of data analysis.

### **Qualitative research**

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) provide a generic definition of qualitative research as an activity that locates the observer in the world with a view to interpreting particular phenomena. Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities of viewing the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam, 1988). Qualitative research employs a range of interpretative practices in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the context at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Mutch, 2005; Skate, 1995), making meaning from what the participants provide. Mutch (2005) describes the research intention as gathering “descriptive accounts of the unique lived experiences of the participants to enhance understandings of a particular phenomena” (p. 19). In this way, qualitative research enables the researcher to gather some understanding of the meanings, complexities and assumptions which may go undetected in the eyes of the participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004).

Qualitative research is a highly subjective practice. Indeed, Merriam (1988) suggests that qualitative data are mediated through human instruments so qualitative researchers must physically go to the people, setting, and institution to collect data in the natural setting. Accordingly, this study was conducted in Community High Schools with school leaders.

Their leadership stories and leadership related documents are the sources of qualitative data.

### **Case Study Research**

A case study is a research approach commonly used across a range of disciplines including education, psychology, sociology, political science, and social work (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Gilgun, 1994; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994, 2003). Yin (2003) suggests that education has turned to case studies because case study research has “explored the process and dynamic of practice ... and offered useful insights into educational practice and proved helpful in forming policy” (p. 11). The use of qualitative case studies embraces the holistic nature and characteristics of the real life within educational organisations.

Case studies are differentiated by the way they provide a deep description and analysis of a single case or a bound system (Smith, cited in Merriam, 1988). Another distinction is that case study seems to satisfy the three principles of the qualitative method- describing, interpreting, and explaining (Merriam, 1988; Tellis, 1997; Yin, 1994, 2003).

According to George and Benneth (2004), case study research is an examination of the properties of single units. To elaborate on the idea of a single unit, Smith (1978, cited in Merriam, 1988) and Yin (1994) assert that a case study is an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units. These can be summed up by the explanation of Smith (1978, cited in Merriam, 1988) and Cohen et al. (2007) that case study is a bound system in which the boundaries have some kind of common sense. As such, case studies can focus on an individual, a group and / or a unit. Each of these can be studied separately at a particular time, in a particular situation in a particular environment apart from a larger group (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1994). Cohen et al (2007) point out that the purpose is to “probe, observe and analyse intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establishing generalizations about the wider population to which the unit belongs” (p. 258).

This study adopted the case study research approach focusing on principals and deputy principal's stories of their leadership experiences and documents which influence the leadership practice. This study is bounded in the sense that it was conducted in one of the nine provinces in Solomon Islands. It is also bounded by those school leaders who are principals and deputy principals with the participating CHS. In this study, the interviewees preferred the interview to be conducted in Pidgin English (the national language). The researcher is also fluently in Pidgin English.

## **Methods of data collection**

### ***Semi-structured interviews***

The three types of interviews are structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), semi-structured interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1998) and unstructured interviews (Burns, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). For this study, I employed semi-structured interviews to collect in-depth perceptions and experiences of school leadership from principals and deputy principals in the context of Choiseul Province.

Semi-structured interviews have a flexibility that allows the researcher to discard, reframe, retain or alter questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Burns 2000; Merriam, 1998). The pre-prepared questions assist in guiding the interview conversation (Cohen et al., 2007). Likewise, comments and rephrasing allow the researcher to follow up on the participant's comments while taking care not to unnecessarily bias the process. As such, the researcher can narrow and control the differences through guided questions and clarification of meanings.

Heyl (2001) explains that semi-structured "interviews can never be repeated in exactly the same way with each" participant (p. 369). As Borg (1987) notes, differences are caused by how the researcher follows up answers from the participant. Importantly, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging views of the participant, and any new ideas that emerge on the topic during the process of the interview (Merriam, 1998).

During the interview, the researcher can simultaneously prompt and press for clarity by rephrasing questions when necessary. Otherwise, the participants are given a freedom to talk about the topic (Cohen et al, 2007). Being voluntary, semi-structured interviews, participants were encouraged to speak in their own words from a rapport with the researcher. Burns (2000) suggests that the respondent “must use natural language” (p. 425).

In Choiseul, Solomon Islands where English is a third language, respondents were given three choices of language to use in the interview. English was rarely used. In the context of Solomon Islands where less formally educated school leaders are often passive in face to face dialogue with those more formally educated, unspoken responses from the school leaders were noted on the field notes. In this study, the practice of passivity was alleviated by using the respondent’s local vernacular (Babatana) or national language (Pidgin) rather than English in the interview. The open interview questions in this study were purposely designed and framed to maximize the collection of personal accounts of experiences, stories, feelings, practice and testimonies in relation to school leadership. The questions were not asked in a double barrelled questioning style but rather were asked one at a time and worded in simple language. The face to face interviews were recorded and later transcribed word for word.

### ***Documentation***

Documents are written materials that may be “official or unofficial, public or private, published or unpublished, prepared internally to preserve a historical record or prepared to serve an immediate practical purpose” (Keeves, 1997, p. 445). Cohen et al. (2007) further explains that, documentation is non participatory on the part of the participant.

McMillan and Schumacher (1993) explain that documents can describe a wide range of the functions, values and perceptions, showing how they define the organisation. Documents such as a school improvement plan, an achievement test report and staff development plans can be key repositories of information (Stake, 1995). They can give clues about the

styles of leadership, values and views of leadership held by school leaders.

Documents that portrayed the participants' leadership were viewed after the interview. In a situation where English is a third language but most of the written records were in English, participants consented to submit their documents for viewing. However, when the school leaders appeared to express an incompetency, poor management or difficulties in written English, they withheld their documents from viewing.

### ***Field notes***

Field notes are a written account of what the researcher sees, experiences, hears and thinks about with a study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Through the field notes, the researcher keeps records of crucial information in relation to time, place, what is being said, and observations in the field (Creswell, 2002). As added by Keeves (1997) and Mutch (2005), field notes are key information gathered independently of interviews or tape recordings of an interview. Essential information like body language can be noted on the field notes. Field notes help the researcher capture the real live experience in a particular situation (Burns, 2000; Creswell, 2002; Keeves, 1997; Stake, 1995). If field notes are taken at the time of observation, Mertler (2008) noted that "patterns will begin to emerge from the data ... collected" (p. 107).

### **Ethical considerations**

In qualitative research, Stake (1995) described researchers as "quests in the private spaces of the world" (p. 244). Accordingly, the researcher should uphold the code of ethics as guidelines at each stage of the research. Ethical issues can be raised from the nature of the research, the context for the research, methods for collecting data, types of data collected, and what is to be done with the data (Cohen, et al., 2007; Merriam, 1998; Mutch, 2005). With regard to the current study, the issues of ethics were deliberated upon under the following main themes.

### ***Access to institutions and participants***

Under the external research policy of the Solomon Islands government, the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development has to grant research permission for any educational research carried out in the country. Thus, the Ministry was contacted with a letter that sought approval to conduct this research in the Solomon Islands (see Appendix 1). As employers of the potential participants, approval of the Provincial Education Authority of Choiseul Province (see Appendix 2) and the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) Education Authority (see Appendix 3) was granted prior to entering the schools (see appendix 4). At the school level, permission from the school principals was sought (see Appendix 5). Likewise, each participant was contacted by a letter (see Appendix 6) containing the essential details of the research.

### ***Informed consent***

The participants were involved in the research after they understood the nature of their involvement and participation. Before they formally confirmed their participation in the interview and completed the interview consent form (see Appendix 7), participants were given an information sheet, along with the necessary time for discussion about how the interview was going to be conducted, the implications, possible risks, potential benefits, and how their information was going to be used. They were not coerced to participate in this study.

### ***Confidentiality***

The size of the population of the Solomon Islands and the close-knit nature of the communities in Choiseul with a population of 20008, and with only nine CHSs, means that there was a high risk of identifying the participants in this study. However, all measures were taken to conceal the identity of the participants. All the participants' identities were coded. Only identification codes were used to identify the participants in the analysis of data. The codes do not carry any clue that could lead to the easy identification of the participants.

### ***Potential harm to participants***

The safety of participants throughout the study was important. The participants were protected from physical, social and cultural harm. The research involved principals and deputy principals from the selected CHSs. I was aware that my research could cause divisions among the school staff if confidential information was revealed to a third party. To prevent this happening, I ensured that the participants' comments were kept confidential.

### ***Participants' right to decline to participate and right to withdraw***

Participants were fully informed about their choice to participate or not in this study. Their choice was respected. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw if they wished. Although they may have signed the consent form to participate in the interview, they had a right to withdraw at any stage of the study up to the point of confirming the accuracy of their transcript.

## **The research process**

### ***Selection of participants***

Choiseul province is a one island province in the Solomon Islands with only nine CHSs. Three of these CHSs are under the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) Education Authority. The other six schools are registered by Choiseul Province Education Authority.

This study involved the semi-structured interview of eleven principals and deputy principals of the six CHSs who voluntarily agreed to participate. The only selection criterion is that they were principals or deputy principals in a CHS in the Choiseul province. Therefore, factors like gender, qualifications, school size, education authority and religion affiliations were not considered as part of the selection of the participants.

### ***Conducting the interview and transcribing***

The interviews were conducted at a venue determined by the participant. This was typically in the principal's and deputy principal's office in the CHS. Before each interview, the interview statement (see Appendix 8)

was read and explained to the participant. The participant was asked to sign the consent form (see Appendix 7) after he/she understood the nature of the interview.

The interviews were conducted either in Pidgin English (Lingua Franca of Solomon Islands), the participant's mother tongue or both. The duration of the face to face interview with open-ended questions ranged from forty-five minutes to one hour. Since the interview questions were open-ended, the overarching question and sub-questions (see Appendix 9) became a guide to the questions in the interview. Each interview was recorded with a digital recorder and subsequently transcribed. Each participant was asked to confirm the transcribed data, which was in English within a period of five weeks after the interview was transcribed and before the analysis of the data.

### **Analysis of data**

According to Cohen et al. (2007), data analysis "involves organising, accounting for, and explaining the data" (p. 183). Importantly, the form of data analysis ought to be suitable to the data gathered (Cohen, et al., 2007). The data also needs to be able to be compared with themes in the literature (Bell, 1999).

The data from this research was collected from eleven school leaders in the six CHSs, focusing on what is like to 'be' an educational leader in the Choiseul Province. First, the recorded semi structured interviews were transcribed word for word, and document observations and field notes were described in detail. After the information was transcribed, the researcher read through the entire information to note recurring themes (Lind, 2001). Themes appearing often in the scripts formed the basis of the analysis and then became the focus for written narratives (Lind, 2001). In this study, the themes are presented in Chapter Four.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Cohen et al., (2007) stated that in qualitative research, "reliability can be regarded as a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched" (p.149).

This emphasises the degree of accuracy of the data collected and the range of the research coverage in the natural setting. Reliability then, measures consistency over time (Cohen et al., 2007).

Creswell (1994) stated that all participants should verify the data collected before confirming the information. In this study, the school leaders were given an opportunity to re-examine the transcript prior to their confirmation of the data.

The reliability of interviews can be enhanced by the careful piloting of interviews to check the interview approach and the clarity of questions (Silverman, 1993). The piloting of the interview helps to eliminate ambiguous wording, checks the readability level for the interviewees, and gives necessary feedback on the questions (Cohen, et al., 2007). Prior to the actual interviews in the field, the researcher in this study experienced a pilot interview. Ambiguous wordings and interview procedures and protocols were checked and corrected prior to the interview.

Research can also be measured by its validity. In interviews, documentation, and field notes, validity depends on the extent to which these methods capture the leader's experiences of leadership. According to Cohen et al., (2007), "internal validity seeks to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event, issue or set of data which a piece of research provides, can actually be sustained by the data" (p. 135). Merriam (1988) suggested that one way to ensure validity is to give an opportunity for participants to verify the findings; a process which happened in this research.

External validity is concerned with the generalization of the findings; "the extent in which the findings can be applied to other situations" (Merriam, 1988, p.173). For instance, will the study of a school leader be similar to other eleven school leaders in the same province? The issue of generalization of results is problematic and must be considered in relation to the breadth of data.

This chapter has outlined the research design and process. The next chapter will consider the findings from the case studies with the eleven school leaders of the six CHSs in Choiseul province.

## Chapter Four: Findings

### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews with eleven school leaders in six CHSs in Choiseul, Solomon Islands. The data from the interviews are considered in relation to the overarching research question; what is it like 'being' a school leader in a CHS in the Choiseul province? The participant's stories are told and quotes are included from their experiences of being a school leader in the Choiseul province.

In section A, background information is provided on each participant and the CHS where they are currently in a leadership role. For confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for the participants. The names used are not in any way related with the participants' real names.

In section B, eight emergent themes are outlined. These themes were identified through the use of a thematic analysis of the data. The first two themes revolve around the remoteness, isolation, and shortage of school leadership and also focus on Choiseul as a small Island province. The second two themes relate to the lack of preparation for leadership as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the appointment procedures. The third group of themes show the involvement and influence of the community and the priority the community gives to the physical development of the school. The final two themes focus on the gender of leadership and the need for transparency in school spending.

### Section A: Cases

#### *The Community High Schools*

All six CHSs, where the participants for this study are drawn, were built on the same school campus as their contributing primary school. The CHSs are described as the 'top-up of primary schools'. Only one CHS has forms one to five (year 7 to year 11) whilst the other five CHSs have forms one to three (years seven to nine). The Choiseul province education authority has registered five of the CHSs in Choiseul while the Seventh Day Adventist Church Educational Authority has registered the other CHS.

### ***The principals and deputy principals***

Eleven school leaders participated in this study. Five of the principals and two of the deputy principals were men. Four of the six deputy principals were female. All the principals and deputy principals were indigenous Choiseul province citizens except for two female deputy principals who were originally from Temotu province and Western province respectively. For more than a decade, these two females have taught and engaged in a leadership position as deputy principals in the CHSs in Choiseul province.

The leadership of the participants in the community high schools ranged from one year to thirty years experience, while their ages ranged from early 20s to late 50s.

One of the five principals has a certificate in primary teaching while the remaining four principals have a Diploma in Teaching Secondary. Four of the six deputy principals are qualified primary school teachers with two others having graduated with a Diploma in Teaching Secondary. All the participants obtained their teaching qualifications at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education which was formerly named the Solomon Islands Teachers College.

#### ***Principal Jason***

Jason was a qualified secondary school agriculture teacher who had been teaching for more than 30 years. In his career as a secondary school teacher, he has taught in Temotu, Isabel, Guadalcanal and Choiseul provinces. At one stage he was a primary school head teacher, prior to his appointment as Deputy Principal at Pirakamae CHS, and later promoted to principal. He has been a school leader in this present school for nine consecutive years. In all of his appointments to positions of leadership, he did not apply.

The community labelled him as one of the elites with a heart and a willingness to serve his own people by sacrificing and committing to work in the community. He has established a good working relationship and gained community support for the school's physical developments. He is now on the verge of retirement with his leadership goal being to improve

the current state of the school buildings. As years passed, his leadership status has been gradually diminished with the community regarding him as one of their relatives.

### ***Deputy Principal Semola***

Semola is a deputy principal in one of the remote community high schools (CHS) in Choiseul province. She graduated with a Diploma in Teaching Secondary majoring in home economics. The quality of her teaching is reflected in the high pass rate of her students in the national examination. This was a bonus to her current school when she was appointed to a leadership role. Five years before becoming a deputy principal, she worked as a deputy principal in two CHSs with two different school principals who had about 20 and 30 years respectively in school leadership. She is the mother of three children and her husband is unemployed. He is described as a devoted husband and fully supportive of Semola's leadership role.

She acquired her current leadership position as a deputy principal after five years of teaching in two different CHSs, and has now had five uninterrupted years as an educational leader. Although she declined a first leadership appointment, the education authority promised to promote her to a deputy principal position if she accepted the challenge of being posted in a school with a leadership conflict.

Semola's father was a community leader who shaped and paved the way for her leadership. One of her challenges is being a leader in a patrilineal society where some male teachers maintain the traditional belief that men have a legitimate right to be leaders and are superior over women. With her unique feminine approach, she has committed herself to teaching, learning, and school leadership that has a vision to improve educational standards in Choiseul province.

### ***Principal Hadson***

Hadson has a Diploma in Secondary Teaching qualification majoring in English and social science. It took him eight consecutive years to become a deputy principal. His first leadership appointment as deputy principal

was in the provincial secondary school (PSS) which was established just next to his own village. The former principal mentored and shaped his style of leadership. After only a year as a deputy principal, he was directly appointed as a principal in a newly established CHS. To date, he has been a principal in two CHSs over a period of seven years.

His major challenge with the community was the effects of unfulfilled promises and a lack of transparency in the school budget. Beside this, his most effective approach has been to influence his followers with frequent dialogue, consultation and compromise.

Hadson is married with three children. His wife is a qualified secondary school home economics teacher. She has been the deputy principal of two CHSs where her husband was principal.

#### ***Deputy Principal Joy***

Joy is originally from the Temotu province. When she married, Joy came to teach in Choiseul. After thirteen years teaching, she was appointed by the education authority as a deputy principal. Since then, she has been a deputy principal in two CHSs over six years.

She has not been formally prepared for leadership; however, she appears to have a depth of tacit knowledge about school leadership. Ever since her appointment, she has not attended any leadership training workshops beside the leadership support from her husband. Her leadership role model was her former school principal of Choiseul Bay provincial secondary school. Her passions in school leadership are initiating, planning and leading school plans for positive changes.

Remoteness, students' anti-social behaviour and community supports are some of her challenges. Her leadership aspiration is to see the improvement of the physical development of the school, improve the teacher-student relationships, and promote positive changes of attitude towards effective teaching and learning.

Joy is married with three children and her husband is also a school principal in the CHS.

### ***Principal Jepson***

Jepson has thirty years of leadership experience starting as a primary school head teacher in the Western province and becoming a principal in a CHS in Choiseul province. He graduated with a Certificate in Teaching Primary qualification from the Solomon Islands Teachers' College while the Solomon Islands was under the protectorate of the British government.

His promotion from being a primary school head teacher to being appointed as the first secondary school principal of Konamana CHS is due to the recognition of his leadership. While as a head teacher of a primary school, through his influence with the community, he started the secondary school. Since then, he has been a principal for seven years in two different CHSs.

He attracts enormous leadership support through the school team spirit, good public relations, the quality of his leadership, and the great difference he demonstrated in the physical development of the school. He is a renowned leader with a good reputation for transparency and accountability even to the aid donors who fund school projects.

His passions include mentoring novice leaders and designing leadership strategies for schools which have leadership related problems. His aspiration in leadership is to create a leadership environment that stands as a role model to novice educational leaders, and to prepare aspiring leaders in the Choiseul province.

### ***Deputy Principal Arnold***

The youngest of the educational leaders in this research was Arnold. He was only four months into his appointment as a deputy principal. He is a qualified maths and business teacher with three successive years teaching experience in two CHSs prior to his appointment. He acquired his leadership role through the influence and recommendation of the community to the education authority when he acted as an emergent leader over the course of a leadership crisis in a school.

Some of his leadership challenges include his family commitments, parent confrontations in response to school decisions, remoteness, and a lack of

preparation in educational leadership. In his leadership journey, he had preferred to be posted to the present school for six years before intending on becoming a principal. His leadership goal is to maintain the cordial working relationship with the community for school developments and improvements in teaching and learning.

### ***Principal Wilson***

Wilson has a Diploma in Teaching Secondary qualification majoring in Agriculture. Prior to his leadership appointment, he was a teacher and head of subject for fifteen years.

In his leadership journey, Wilson has been a school leader for fourteen years. He first acquired a school leadership role as a deputy principal in a provincial secondary school (PSS) for a year. He was the first principal of a newly established CHS in his own community where he remained a school leader for nine years. In his present school, he had been the principal for four years.

The former expatriate principals in the mission schools mentored him in leadership. In addition, he has had leadership advice from his relatives from the government ministries. He has enormous support from the community due to his involvement in community projects and his personal assistance given to his parents.

Two of his major challenges were the loss of revenue for the school due to the introduction of free education in 2009 and the enforcement of a payment policy of school grants which must be made on cheque. Unfortunately, the only banking service in Choiseul is centralized in the provincial capital. Thus, cheque payments are not normally accepted in business transactions in remote schools and communities in Choiseul. All his direct leadership appointments were acquired through merit. His current vision, at the time of this research, was to strengthen the quality of school leadership through the teachers and to embark on a rehabilitation programme after the tsunami.

Wilson is married. His wife is a school deputy principal.

### ***Deputy Principal Joyce***

Joyce is the wife of a school principal. Originally, she was from Western Province but, after her marriage, she has spent most of her teaching career and school leadership practice in Choiseul province. Joyce was a form three school leaver who furthered her study to obtain a Certificate in Teaching Primary at the Solomon Islands College of High Education.

She was deputy head teacher for ten years in a primary school, and head teacher for four years. Except for the deputy head teacher appointment, she did not apply for any of her leadership positions. Being a deputy principal primary in the current school structure, she was also acting deputy principal of a secondary school. She has gained leadership support and influenced people through her work commitment, faithfulness, and high pass rates in national examinations.

She has not been pre-prepared for school leadership. Persevering with her leadership practice in a patriarchal society where men have the rights to be leaders, and the remoteness, are some of her leadership challenges.

She is married with two children and her husband is the school principal at the same school. Her leadership goal was to continue to improve students' academic performance, to justify the effectiveness of women leadership, and to eradicate the belief that women were incompetent leaders.

### ***Principal Gordon***

The long serving principal, with ten years in the same school, was Gordon. He is indigenous to Choiseul and has a Diploma in Teaching Secondary majoring in Industrial Arts. He has taught in the Provincial Secondary Schools (PSS) for six years prior to his deputy principal appointment. He had been a school leader for almost thirty years. Five years of being a deputy principal qualified him for his principalship. These leadership appointments were awarded on merit.

In leadership, he enjoys managing school discipline and teachers' professional development. He is a good mentor. He had not been pre-prepared and had not been mentored prior to his leadership appointment. Gordon was hard working, receptive to good advice, and has a

determination to persevere with improving students' academic performance.

Some of his leadership challenges relate to land and tribal issues, conservative teachers who resist change, the withdrawal of community contributions in terms of resources, jealousy, and an emerging lack of a sense of ownership of the school.

He obtained and maintained the community trust and respect through his professional approach, quality of performance, strong team work and his caring as a loco-parent of the students. He has a passion for educational development in Choiseul. He is very keen to continue serving in Choiseul province.

### ***Deputy Principal Flora***

Flora was married with four children and her husband was unemployed. She has a Diploma in Teaching Primary qualification and was appointed as a head teacher after five years in teaching. After fifteen years as a primary school head teacher, she gained promotion to deputy principal of a CHS and is now in her seventh successive year.

Her leadership qualities include her positive behaviour towards parents, teachers and students, her patience, and her willingness to be advised. Although she has not been pre-prepared for school leadership, her leadership experiences at primary level were constructive and effective at the secondary level.

Despite challenges, like a defiance to her leadership by some male teachers, she found her role in school discipline and teaching to be exciting. She gets support and encouragement from the community, in-laws, relatives, teachers and the education authority. Thus, she designed and charted her leadership goals towards shaping current teachers to become future school leaders while being effective in teaching and learning.

### ***Deputy Principal Jerry***

Jerry was a qualified primary school teacher with a Certificate in Teaching Primary. He is married with four children. His father and two uncles were also primary school head teachers. Despite a lack of leadership preparation, he accepted a call to be a head teacher after two years of being a class teacher. For nineteen years, he has been a head teacher in primary schools in Choiseul and Western province. With this experience in leadership, he was verbally appointed by the principal as deputy principal in a boarding CHS for about a year. In all his leadership appointments, he has not applied.

In the early stage of his leadership, he lost trust and support from a few teachers and the community due to the contrast of his age and experience in teaching with other senior teachers who had many years of teaching experience but were not appointed. Later, through his sense of humour and hard work, he won the community support and has established a strong team-work in the school. Some of his challenges were problem-solving, planning professional developments, and community opposition to school developments. He is convinced that any deficiency in his leadership was due to the lack of leadership preparation.

### **Section B: Emergent themes**

Whereas the first section of this chapter has considered the uniqueness of each participant's experience and context, the following section describes a range of emergent themes across the participants.

#### ***Rural, remoteness and isolation***

The first emergent theme relates to the remoteness and isolation. In their observations and experiences, most senior principals found that the remoteness and isolation were 'push factors' that forced educational leaders to transfer out from Choiseul. For some principals and deputy principals, the appointment in a remote CHS in the Choiseul province has prevented them from accessing opportunities to formally develop professionally as well as feeling vulnerable when they are involved in community problems and working in isolation. Thus, only the indigenous

school leaders within the school zone appear to have a passion to serve their own people by accepting leadership appointments.

Jason commented:

Community high schools in Choiseul province are situated in the remote communities so they do not attract educational leaders. Thus, only the indigenous educational leaders and teachers of the community within the catchment area of the school are willing to be posted and even committed in the school leadership.

Leadership appointments in the rural CHSs are not attracting school leaders compared with other provinces. Joy noted that there was no incentive for principals and deputy principals who served in the remote CHSs. Many school leaders contended that they were working in isolation with undersupplied leadership assistance from educational authorities. As such, the situation has not encouraged the growth of effective leadership in the province.

Many educational leaders express their concerns over the lack of leadership support from the authorities. Gordon recalled that he had not been visited by the education authority for many years. The impediments to school visits could be due to the financial constraints, shortage of qualified human resources, and the remoteness and isolation. In addition, some principals pointed out that the small population of Choiseul had only one provincial education office with many education officers who had a Certificate in Teaching Primary or a Diploma in Teaching Secondary qualification. It would appear that there are difficulties in addressing many leadership issues in the remote schools. These officers appear to prefer to remain in their administration and management roles.

Rural communities often measure the quality of leadership by the multiple skills and basic knowledge a school leader has. In Arnold's case, he has a Certificate in Teaching Primary qualification but was one of the builders of the longest classroom in Choiseul province. This shows how the remoteness and isolation calls for school leaders to wear many 'hats' in being a leader. With this demand, teachers with practical skills and

community oriented leadership appear to have more of an advantage in acquiring leadership appointments in the remote and isolated schools.

### ***Shortage of school leadership***

All the principals and deputy principals participating in this study suggested that the CHSs in the Choiseul province have a shortage of qualified school leaders. The shortage of leadership was evident in the appointment where Semola described her deputy principal appointment as “a reward and not necessarily attached to a leadership qualification”.

It is stipulated in the Solomon Islands Teaching Service Teaching Handbook (Ministry of Education & Human Resource Development, 2007), that the education authority has to advertise vacant posts for principals and deputy principals. In the case of the appointment of the school leaders participating in this study, not one of them except Joyce, had applied. Hadson elaborated, “I do not know why I was appointed as a school principal. I did not apply and did not expect such an offer”.

The critical shortage of leadership has forced education authorities to insist that Gordon accept a deputy principal appointment even though he declined the offer twice. Moreover, the dearth of school leadership in Choiseul has forced a compromise with the education policy on new leadership appointments, and created unwritten policies in regards to who (educational leaders) and where (CHS) future leaders are to be posted. For this reason, vacant posts were often not advertised.

In this study, the appointment of four women deputy principals in the current context of Choiseul province could mean a critical shortage of school leaders. At the time, compared with other male teachers in the CHSs, these four female deputy principals have an advantage by having a diploma in teaching qualification and having had many years of teaching experience. In addition, two of their husbands are principals.

Although a qualification in educational leadership is one of the key selection criteria in the appointment of educational leadership (Teaching Service Teaching Handbook, 2007), all the participants acknowledged their appointment was not based on their leadership qualifications but on

their years of experience and their high pass rates in the national examinations. These were the major selection criteria.

An education officer of Choiseul province (2009) confirmed that the shortage of qualified human resources and experienced secondary school teachers had resulted in the appointment of some primary school head teachers as school leaders in the secondary schools. In my findings, four educational leaders with primary teaching qualifications, with an average of five years in leadership roles, were appointed as principals and deputy principals in secondary schools.

It is worth noting that acquiring school leadership in Choiseul province was not competitive as Gordon and Jason compared their experience with the Western province and some provincial secondary schools in the Guadalcanal province. To many educational leaders in this study, a shortage of school leadership creates a feeling of complacency with their current qualifications, giving rise to doubts that they will or should pursue leadership professional development opportunities, preferring instead to stay in their present appointments.

### ***Lack of leadership preparation and ongoing professional development***

Most of the educational leaders alluded to the fact that they were not prepared for leadership. They used their tacit knowing and learnt from their on the job experience. Ten of the participants expressed that they did not have a mentor that might have been arranged by the authority for their first appointment. Even after the appointment, there was no ongoing professional development. In his first appointment as principal in a newly established community high school, Gordon recalled:

I only learn on the job through trial and error. One of my secrets is I always ask for leadership advice from the people whom I think they have knowledge, wisdom or skills to help me. I am so excited when someone responded positively to my requests. As much as possible, I grasp every good advice.

With a limited knowledge and experience in leadership, Gordon and Hadson encountered some resistance to their leadership from conservative teachers who contrasted the current leadership style with the

predecessor's style. On one hand, the teachers' reactions could be valid as they were involved in, and disturbed by, numerous trial and error approaches by new principals. These experiences consumed their time and effort compared with their previous leadership experience.

Five primary school head teachers, who were promoted to principal and deputy principals in the secondary schools, accentuated the fact that they had concerns about not being as prepared for leadership as those with secondary teaching qualifications. Flora asserted:

I was afraid and not confident because I was not prepared for leadership in the secondary school. I am only a primary school teacher...even prior to my leadership appointment in primary school I was not prepared. I was only given a copy of teaching service hand book.

Joyce admitted:

On top of not attaining leadership qualification, as an unqualified secondary teacher I often received verbal degradations in my leadership.

With insufficient knowledge of secondary education, many primary school head teachers received negative responses in the initial stage of their leadership. After they gained courage and confidence, their leadership performance was exceptional. The rate and progress of school development, people's response to leadership, the teachers, students, community and leaders' relationships, and the students' attitude towards learning and academic performances in some schools, were closely related to a lack of leadership preparation.

Jerry described his case where a principal removed his deputy roles and Flora stated that "my principal had re-delegated my leadership roles to the community and to other secondary class teachers". The withdrawal of a number of essential leadership responsibilities from the deputy principals with primary teaching qualifications denoted a lack of leadership preparation. The deputy principals concerned commented that such segregation has created leadership conflicts and personal hatred between school leaders.

Leadership preparation was expected to be an ongoing human resource development. The emergence of new and complex changes globally, regionally, nationally and locally required updating of the leadership skills and knowledge. But Gordon claimed:

For almost twenty years in my principalship, authority has not organized workshop for building leadership capacity for the principals; only workshops that focused on curriculum and financial management have been organized by the Ministry of Education.

Hadson also commented:

Since I was appointed seven years ago, only the Ministry of Education has organized workshops on finance and management strategies for the school leaders. Choiseul province hasn't organized in-service training workshop on educational leadership for the principals and the deputy principals including the newly appointees.

In the current context of the Solomon Islands, two senior educational leaders perceived that leadership preparation should be a combined initiative between the Ministry of Education, the provincial education authorities, and the school leaders. At the school level, expert school leaders were expected to mentor novice leaders and prepare the unqualified ones.

In the case of the Choiseul province, flexible learning modes can be purposeful in leadership preparation where remoteness is involved. Educational leaders, who intended to pursue further training, have voiced a need for proper co-ordination of flexible learning modes, and the dissemination of information on training opportunities for teachers in remote locations. Many leaders expressed that they have employed numerous styles of leadership using 'trial and error' approaches. At times, these approaches have encountered reactions and complaints from the community and teachers.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of the appointment procedures***

The teaching service hand book states that all principals and deputy principals vacancies have to be advertised by the education authority and applicants must apply in writing (Ministry of Education and Human

Resources Development, 2007a). However, all eleven participants in the study were surprised at their own appointments as they had not applied. For some participants, remoteness and isolation were like prison-walls preventing them accessing the job vacancies advertised. Others admitted that, as in past, they just allowed the education authority to make direct appointments without any pressure to undertake leadership preparation.

An education officer revealed that:

Because of critical shortage of human resources, we have two principals in the community high schools who were qualified primary school teachers with certificate in teaching primary. Their years of leadership experience and commendable effort in school developments were taken into account in the appointment.

The Choiseul education authority has traditionally opted for direct appointments due to scarcity of potential leaders, experienced teachers, and school leaders. There was a general feeling among the principals and deputy principals of being appointed by the authority but not supported by the authority. It was a concern to many school leaders in the study that no mechanism was in place to prepare newly appointed leaders with a basic knowledge regarding the job.

Jepson was a school leader for thirty consecutive years and claimed he has not been supported by the authority in his leadership development. He commented:

I only have certificate in teaching primary for almost thirty years as school leader and often worked in isolation to develop my leadership capacity.

These educational leaders commented that they have not been supported with leadership workshops and professional development programmes informing them of new concepts and current trends. Many principals voiced that the rapid changes experienced globally, regionally, nationally, and locally, require them to update their current leadership knowledge and practices.

Growing in leadership is essential. It was evident in this study that all the principals and deputy principals had the teaching qualification they first

graduated with. It was also evident that no-one had pursued further leadership studies after gaining their first qualification. As has been discussed, remoteness and isolation were 'push factors' for educational leaders in Choiseul. Thus, Choiseul has experienced an uncontrolled brain drain of school leaders in recent years. That was why Jepson appealed to the researcher:

We are happy that you from Choiseul doing research in educational leadership. And it is our appeal that if you complete your study, you come back to improve the education system of Choiseul province.

In the findings, it was alleged that a few fortunate school leaders used the schools in Choiseul as a springboard to secure other leadership positions and lucrative jobs elsewhere. To them, the Choiseul authority had not been supportive. The result of this uncontrolled exit of leaders has left Choiseul with unqualified leaders. According to Flora:

As a primary school head teacher, I was baffled on where to start as a newly appointed deputy principal secondary.

Gordon explained that his experience was very difficult, searching "all the shelves to find any documents to guide me where to start in my leadership".

All the educational leaders expected there to be a process for mentoring for new appointees and the proper coordination of leadership hand-overs. Flora's and Gordon's experiences signified that the Education Authority might not coordinate the handing-over of leadership roles between the predecessor and the successor.

The small population and tightly knit communities in Choiseul means that sometimes leadership appointments were influenced by individuals in the local communities. Jerry recounted that his current principal was in the school for more than a decade through the influence of the landowners of the school land. The community influence on school appointments can have both a positive and a negative impact on the appointment made by the authority. It is worth noting that communities have a greater influence on the school leadership due to their substantial contribution to the

physical development of the community high schools as almost all the schools in Choiseul were established on customary land.

According to the data, most of the participants expressed their lack of leadership preparation and support from the education authority. It was also revealed that there were some school leaders who have not upgraded or up-skilled their leadership knowledge or practices for more than 20 years. Many of these leaders only have a certificate in teaching primary or a diploma in teaching secondary qualifications. In addition, the respondents emphasised that the community involvement in school leadership can equally impeded their leadership development.

### ***Community influence and involvement***

All the school leaders articulated their views on the community's influence in acquiring principalship and deputy principalship positions in the community high schools. Communities, individual elites (those who the community thinks are most important), and interest groups (like politicians) make recommendations to the education authorities to formalise leadership appointments. Arnold witnessed, in his appointment as deputy principal, that

“ ...because the community has conflicted with the leadership of the outgoing principal and her wife who was a deputy principal, the community recommended me to the education authority to be deputy principal this year. They even earmark me to be the next school principal”.

Failure to comply with community recommendations and suggestions means a school can suffer the withdrawal of community support in the donation of free resources and labour.

It is worth noting that many principals and deputy principals acquired their first appointment as an educational leader in the community high school in their own community before being transferred to other schools. Some educational leaders, who foresaw difficulties in securing leadership appointments in another school, tapped into and encouraged the community influence to retain their leadership title. With the scarcity of school leaders, and the strong community influence, it was problematic to transfer school leaders after they had served three to four years in a

particular school. Jerry mentions that, “this principal is in this school for twelve consecutive years as a way of reclaiming, retaining and recognizing inherited leadership of a particular group of people”.

In his leadership journey, Jason was a primary school head teacher, deputy principal and principal in the same school in his community for almost twenty years for the reason that he was one of the elites of the community. As an industrial art teacher in Gordon’s case, the school’s physical development needs forced him to remain in the same school for more than ten academic years. Less satisfying is how Hadson confessed that his character had been defaced. In Jason’s case, he “lost trust and support even from my closed relatives after five years in the same school”. These leaders perceived they were being branded as stagnant and had lost the community trust and respect. They felt as if they had remained too long in a particular school.

The influence of the community on the posting of educational leaders was unrelated to the achievement of any educational goals. This influences the number of years many school leaders are posted in the community high schools, although the Teaching Service Hand Book stipulated that educational leaders should be posted in a school for a maximum of three to four years.

To acquire leadership support, educational leaders have to respond positively to parents’ applications for assistance even at the expense of the school. This was Jepson’s experience: “I am linking my leadership with the influential elites in of the community. Today, the priest of the ... Church will come to take school rain-gutters for him[self] free”. This was also congruent with Wilson’s experience when he was asked by some parents to write their project proposals.

The community has a major influence on the choice of the school leaders. They can influence the authority through their recommendations which are sometimes not necessarily based on academic reasons. Failure to comply with the recommendations often resulted in the withdrawal of leadership support. Therefore, to avoid the possibility of conflicting with the community, and to rally community support for school leadership,

community involvement in schools was, and still is, an important factor. As a result of such involvement, many of the principals and deputy principals acquired their first leadership appointment in the schools in their own community.

### ***Priority of school physical development***

The first community high schools in Choiseul were established about ten years ago with a form one (year seven) intake. The latest was started in 2009. Compared with other CHSs built less than ten years ago, the school's physical development remains a major priority. According to the Solomon Islands National Action Plan 2007-2009 (2007),

The Community High Schools (CHS) where secondary section added on to an existing primary school. These schools are built and managed by communities, and are assisted by church or provincial authorities.

As major contributors to school developments, communities have a great influence in schools. Moreover, their recommendations, involvement, and participation in school leadership is respected by the education authority.

Many educational leaders commented that school developments have been slowed and impeded by factors such as land disputes, remoteness, resource disputes, lack of funding, community support and the quality of school leadership and supervision. With these common impediments in Choiseul, many communities measure the strength and qualities of leadership through successful school development.

As the elite of the community with ownership rights to resources, Jason has strong community support for school development. This support has awarded him a promotion from head teacher of the primary school to principal of the secondary school. This promotion was also similar to Jepson's case, resulting in:

My good working relationship with the staff and the community to develop, supervise and successful completion of the classrooms in preparation of secondary school, I was recommended to be the principal.

Four principals first received their principalship in a CHS in their own communities after an average of nine years in the same schools. Flora,

because her unemployed husband, has fully supported the school development said:

I was deputy principal in this school for ten consecutive years. Since then, I still receive continuous support of my leadership from the community and in particular from my in-laws.

In Hadson's situation, he was forced into early transfer by the community for not being active and delaying the school's physical development. Arnold, now a deputy principal of Moli CHS, commented that Hadson had, however, been effective in his academic leadership.

The priority of the school's physical development was highlighted by the participants in this study. Many school's physical developments have been delayed for numerous factors. The communities were well aware of their part in building the CHSs. Successful implementation of the school's physical development plan was a high priority and has been used by the community as a measuring device of the school leaders' effectiveness. For the female school leaders, their husbands were instrumental and leading in physical work.

### ***Gender***

Traditionally, men in Choiseul have ownership of the family inheritance and leadership rights over women. As in any patriarch, men exercise autocratic leadership even over their extended families. These rights were said to be some of the cultural identities worth nurturing and retaining in Choiseul. This conservative belief of preserving leadership rights has some influence over school leadership in the CHSs.

As many of the CHSs are still in the process of physical development and situated in village communities, men were believed to be more effective leaders compared with women. This gender discrimination could be rooted in the traditional ways of allocating domestic duties to women while men were assigned more physical work. In this study, all the school principals in the CHSs in Choiseul province were men.

When asked how the four female deputy principal acquired their leadership, they alluded to the fact that their appointments were directly

made by the authority. They did not apply and did not even know whether or not the posts had been advertised. For Semola:

The authority promised to award me deputy principal post if I accept the call to be posted in the school that has leadership conflict.

Newly established CHSs normally face a shortage of staff housing. For Joy:

I think maybe my thirteen years teaching experience in the secondary schools compared with other teachers, my husband is a principal...and another advantage is it would ease accommodation shortage in a newly established secondary school if husband and wife are appointed as principal and deputy principal.

Being a woman from a different province, Joy doubted her potential effectiveness as a leader if she was not the wife of the school principal.

In addition to patrilineal beliefs in leadership, the women's qualification as primary school teachers has made it more difficult for Flora and Joyce to be accepted by some of the conservative community members and a few male teachers. Therefore, the method by which the women acquired their leadership was not seen as a transparent process.

Joyce and Jason, who had leadership experience in other provinces, have contrasted their experience with Choiseul province and perceived some differences on how principals and deputy principals acquire leadership. In his leadership experience in Guadalcanal province and Isabel province, Jason's experience was that the matrilineal system had given leadership power and ownership rights to women. Thus, women were also recognised in their intention to acquire school leadership. This recognition was encouraged and has given women an opportunity to pursue school leadership.

There is a possible unease for men when women are in leadership in this culture. Often women sought to withdraw from the leadership role when confronted by a male's discontent even though they held the position and had leadership potential. In Flora's situation:

Young male teachers many times deliberately snubbed and failed to acknowledge my leadership at the absence of the principal.

As an indigenous, and with many years in school leadership experience in Western province, Joyce contrasted:

One thing I found in Choiseul that eliminated women in school leadership was culture. Choiseul province is different from Western province in some ways when it comes to observance of people's culture. Women were not given equal opportunity as men to undertake leadership role. Periodically, the community deliberately cold-shouldered my leadership. Often, this attitude discouraged me that I wish if I could go back to teach in the Western province.

The four women deputy principals in the study said that they can perform their leadership roles in the CHSs as well as men but they had been constrained by low self-confidence and self esteem. Little has been done to enhance their leadership and enable them to regain and maintain their self-confidence and self esteem.

Women are still considered negatively and as being incapable leaders. However, the barriers are lessening to some extent through the tremendous efforts of some of the women who have made a big difference to school development. Some communities are now gradually accepting women leadership. Semola found that:

Now teachers are cooperative and contributed positively in any school activities under my leadership. They even suggested to me new ways of leading the school. My colleagues also advised me on how to use my power in leadership to make decisions that can improve teaching and learning.

Time and again, community fully supported me to improve the school.

Culturally in Choiseul province, it is strongly believed that leadership is men's role. For this reason, the success of my leadership as a woman had been seen as unique and it drew leadership support and now gained trust in women leadership in the community.

The culture has had a great impact on the choice of principal and deputy principal in the CHSs. Traditional practices continue, in that men still

inherit leadership rights as in the patriarch and patrilineal system, with women being branded as lacking leadership rights.

The appointment of four female educational leaders occurred during a period of critical shortages of school leaders. Where women were school leaders, some male teachers felt that they had been degraded and resorted to maintaining segregation inferring, in the process, that the women were not as effective as leaders compared to men. This suppressive approach has occasionally caused the women to have low self confidence and low self esteem. Although little has been done to support the women's regaining of their self esteem, some of the female deputy principals have proven to the community that women are as effective as men when it comes to leadership.

### ***The need for transparency***

A lot of the participants in the study said that there was a need for transparency in the appointment of leadership positions. Many educational leaders in this study affirmed the loss of support and trust when it was apparent to the community that there was a lack of transparency in the educational processes. Although transparency is a community concern, some principals said that the Melanesian practice of being reserved in open dialogue at school board meetings on the issues of transparency was also an obstacle. Without being able to prioritise and encourage open dialogue with the community, the educational leaders have become aware of complications regarding transparency and gaining leadership trust.

According to the data, communities generally demanded the school leader's transparency on school funded projects. Wilson suggested that the major funding agencies of the school insisted on transparency. Jason experienced:

Community and many of the staff often concern very much on how the school money is spent on the school funded projects when the principal is also school accountant and the school accounts have not been audited. Lack of transparency and accountability in the school budget can easily diminished the good reputation of the school leaders. Therefore, to gain community trust I have to be transparent to the community by presenting financial report termly.

The Ministry of Education, through the public media, has reiterated the rights of parents and guardians to know the income and expenses of the school (Mamu, 2009). According to many school leaders, this announcement has motivated the communities to urgently demand transparency in all of the school accounts. However, Hadson stated:

In many remote schools, we educational leaders did not comply with the call. Thus, we denied parents their rights to know school income and expenses. The reasons being, we were not fully supported and prepared for the accounting job.

It was alleged by some of the deputy principals and the community, that a lack of transparency from the principals was viewed with suspicion as this might suggest a possible misappropriation of school funds. For instance Gordon stated:

Some of the school workshops been organized for educational leaders in the Choiseul province were more focused on curriculum and financial management and not much on building leadership capacity. Hence, educational leaders should have some basic knowledge on book keeping. In spite of the workshops, many principals still not present the financial reports to the community. This raises a lot of questions and suspicious.

A few principals in the study refuted allegations of misappropriation of school funds since they presented financial reports to the funding agencies. In most schools this meant that for transparency, principals were expected to present financial reports to the school staff and the community who were the actual eyewitnesses to the school's physical development. It appears that there has been a lack of a properly coordinated mechanism to disseminate transparent information to parents. It also appears that the principals may have lacked the confidence to present full financial reports to the parents and guidance bodies. This happened in Hadson's experience:

Major challenge in my leadership is financial challenge. Parents alleged that many principals were misusing school funds. Often parents measured and limited their priority of school expense on physical development only. For this reason, they suspicious on how I spent school money on stationeries and school operation and forced in their close involvement in the school financial system.

What must be noted is that stationery expenses and operation expenses are equally important as the school's physical development but could not be easily measured by the community. On the other hand, four deputy principals articulated that, unless parents are informed of other school expenses, they would still depend on the school's physical development as a measuring device of effective leadership.

The findings also revealed that even deputy principals were concerned about transparency of the leadership of the principals. Semola compared the transparency of the leadership in her current school with her previous school. She commented on how transparency in her previous school shaped her leadership:

I really enjoy working at Konamana CHS than Pirakamae CHS. This was due to transparency and fair delegation of responsibility by the principal of Konamana CHS. He shared leadership responsibilities with the staff with open mind. My leadership has improved when I adopted his style of leadership.

The study found that some educational leaders were forced by the communities to transfer to other schools in retaliation for not being transparent over the school finances over a certain period of time. Jepson stated:

I am a principal and school accountant as well. Lack of transparency and accountability in the school budget can cause denunciation of the good reputation of the school leaders.

If you look around the school, my transparency would tell you that people really enjoy working and learning in this school. They accept my leadership. Although my predecessor and the deputy principal have created doubt on the school leadership in this community, my transparency has regained confidence. Delegation of responsibilities encourages us to work in team-spirit. When my teachers claim ownership of the leadership role, they transparently inform the students and the community the required information.

It was disclosed in the study that in the boarding schools, remoteness and isolation are a hindrance to disseminating information to parents. In addition, Jerry expressed that a circulation of newsletters is not practical as schools have limited resources and parents' preference was for word of

mouth. An alternative approach was the use of two way radio through the church leaders.

### **Summary**

A wide range of experiences have been described which give a feel for what it is like being a school leader in Choiseul province. The remoteness and isolation of the CHSs in Choiseul appear to deny access to formal leadership training opportunities and was a cause of the school leadership drain. The shortage of leaders has breed complacency and maintained the status quo of a low profile style of leadership. In addition, a critical shortage of leaders has influenced the manipulation and compromising of the procedure for leadership appointment and selection.

The lack of leadership preparation was seen as a major problem. As a result, all the school leaders worked with their tacit knowledge and a lack of ongoing leadership training. One of the major priorities of the community was prioritizing the school's physical development. Because this priority involves physical work, and the schools operated in a patriarch society, women have experienced being discriminated against in leadership. The participants identified that transparency in school funding by school leadership was demanded. At times, transparency has been used by the community as a measuring device for the effectiveness of leadership.

The next chapter discusses the findings in the light of the literature review with particular reference to the context of school leadership in the Choiseul province, Solomon Islands.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter discusses the common themes in the findings chapter which depict the nature of leadership in the Choiseul province in the Solomon Islands in relation to the literature review presented in chapter two. Some of the key areas for discussion include the issues surrounding the remoteness and isolation of the CHSs as this impedes effective school leadership, and how the shortage of leadership compromises the selection procedures and choice of leadership. Some of the issues relate to the community's influence and involvement in the appointments procedure and the community's sense of ownership of the schools. The community's sense of ownership was also apparent in the priority they give to the school's physical development. In addition, there was lack of leadership preparation and ongoing professional development for the school leaders. The issues of gender in leadership appointments appears to be due to the traditional leadership practices in Choiseul as a province that centres on a patrilineal system where a male has a right to lead. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the need of transparency in school leader's practice.

### **Rural, remoteness and isolation**

The findings of this study reveal that the remoteness and isolation of CHSs in Choiseul influences leaders to transfer out of the province. Similarly, in this remoteness and isolation, school leaders were vulnerable to community problems, denied an opportunity to access professional development, and had to endure their isolated context. School leaders were also vulnerable as they are commonly appointed to other leadership roles in the community. The more they extend their leadership to the community, the more their leadership is felt and recognised by those in the community. The school leaders were also expected to be involved in the activities that were organised in the community. The study found that many of the school leaders were posted in the CHS in their own community. As a consequence, these leaders would be involved in family matters and tribal businesses. Because of the isolation, the leaders'

professional conduct in these matters could create a conflict of interest with the school; something that is not monitored by educational authority.

Mascall and Rolheiser (2007) asserted that leadership capacity can be built at the school level. In remote and isolated schools, building leadership capacity at the school level was the initiative of the leader. With limited resources, this was said to be quite impossible. The majority of the leaders in this study felt that self development in leadership is possible in Choiseul. For example, these school leaders argued that distance and flexible learning modes of study did reach the leaders in the remote and isolated schools but this service was discontinued by the education authority as the personnel changed. There is still the possibility then, of accessing information and improving leadership at the school level. It could be the matter of maximising the utilisation of available and limited resources. The leaders in this study have a range of responses to the issue of remoteness and isolation. Some leaders compared Choiseul with other provinces while some are eager to improve their leadership by trying to utilise the available resources. Still others appear to be complacent within their current situation.

The findings in this study indicated that the age range of the school leaders was from the early 20s to the late 50s with their school leadership experience ranging from one year to thirty years. Like the majority of the school principals in the secondary schools in Honiara (the capital city), school leaders in Choiseul were all qualified and trained teachers with the same salary scales as those in the urban centres except for an inducement allowance for travelling (Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, 2007a; Ruqebatu, 2008). It appears that school leaders with higher teaching qualifications may prefer CHSs in the urban centres.

In America (Stern, 1994), in Zealand (Baty, 1989), and in California (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009), school leaders in the rural schools were rewarded with some form of incentives. This is not the case for rural leaders in the Solomon Islands. The lack of recognition in the form of incentives for the extraordinary leadership pressure rural leaders endure in

the remote schools in Choiseul, does not encourage the leaders. Despite the remoteness and isolation, many of these leaders accepted the challenges and tried to improve the teaching and learning within their schools while engaging in other leadership roles.

The findings of this study also showed that school leaders had challenges from the community's expectations of their leadership role. With the expectation of school leaders needing to have multiple skills, this study's findings are similar to those of Tavola (1992) in relation to leaders in Fiji. Principals in Fiji are seen to be effective leaders if they have many skills and can perform many tasks that may not be necessarily related to the academic improvements. This is prevalent, as many parents in the remote communities in Choiseul are not well-educated, and principals with these special abilities were hailed as effective leaders although academically they may not be achieving good results in the schools.

The New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (2008) found that unfavourable working conditions in rural and remote schools can drain qualified and experienced staff from schools. However, the context in Choiseul has recently changed due to the global financial downturn hitting the Solomon Islands economy hard. For example, after the recession, a fortnightly salary of a probationary teacher is almost equivalent to the price of one twenty kilogram (20kg) bag of rice. This has forced many school leaders to seek leadership employment opportunities in the rural and remote schools; preferably in the schools in their own communities or districts. In the CHSs in their own community, the leaders living needs were supported by relatives as they can have access to local resources for their basic needs for free.

The study concurred with Strokes, Stafford and Holdsworth (1999) that transport is very difficult and very expensive for rural principals. Thus, with very low salaries, high inflation and remoteness, many school leaders waited for their fortnightly salaries even up to four months. An inducement allowance by virtue of remoteness of schools did not make any impact on travelling costs to the nearest and only commercial centre in the province. This appears to have lowered leadership morale.

### **Shortage of school leadership**

The findings indicated evidence of critical shortages of school leadership in the CHSs in Choiseul province. At times, the leadership shortage was like a pendulum that swung according to the unstable situations in the country and includes the effects from the Bougainville crisis in Papua New Guinea which forced leaders to transfer to other provinces. However, the economic crisis and ethnic tensions felt in the capital city has forced leaders to return. Otherwise, the findings agreed with those of Normore (2006), Collins (2006), Lauder (2000), Bowles (1990), Thompson (2000), Malasa (2007) and Baty (1989), that teachers sometimes were reluctant to accept school leadership due to the low salaries, unattractive working conditions and the strenuous workload.

It appears that the government may have failed to consider the human resource developments in parallel with the increase in population and the increase in the number of CHSs. Indeed, there has been a decrease in the number of trainee teachers in the 2006 intake for full time study in the only teacher training institution in the country (S. Maezama, personal communication, October 13, 2008). To ensure a supply of teachers and aspiring school leaders, the number of students in each enrolment period should be maintained, despite the recent introduction of upgrading programmes for untrained secondary school teachers

All the leaders in this study were promoted from being qualified teachers. A shortage of qualified and experienced secondary school teachers had forced the promotion of qualified and experienced primary school teachers to principal and deputy principal positions in secondary schools. The lack of leadership training support after the initial appointments could mean a lack of leadership proficiency in the local education system or perhaps an unwillingness to provide such services given the level of risk involved in this complex context.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2007a) stipulated that all vacant posts for school leadership must be advertised. However, ten of the eleven educational leaders in the study had not applied. Interestingly, only a female teacher was instructed by the

authority to apply for her first leadership appointment but this was in the Western Province. When she was transferred to the Choiseul education authority, she did not apply for head teacher primary school and deputy principal CHS posts. This appointment might show that Choiseul either faced a critical shortage of school leaders or maybe a shift to greater gender equity.

As previously mentioned, in order to select quality leaders, vacant leadership posts had to be advertised as in the selection procedures (Akao, 2008; Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2007a). Sometimes the process of selecting school leaders is different in Choiseul. Formal selection procedures of school leaders were suspended due to a critical shortage of school leaders. Out of necessity, employment policies and selection procedures were breached, allowing communities and principals to influence the recruitment of school leaders and persuade the education authority to formalize and / or legalise appointments. In the event of this critical shortage, participants in the study echoed that the education authority and communities insisted they nominate teachers to accept the call to school leadership. The authority and the community were aware that it was difficult to appoint qualified leaders for remote and isolated CHSs. For that reason, the process of appointing of school leaders was based on who the community knows. And in the case of appointing deputy principals, it depends on who the principal recommends.

Sikua (2002) researched the CHSs in other provinces in the Solomon Islands and found that some politicians were influential in the CHSs. This was not the case in Choiseul province. Politicians played passive roles in this regard unless requested by the communities. However, church leaders in the community were influential in the choice of leadership. The church leaders' words were normally accepted.

An important finding in this study was the appointment of women in leadership roles. Akao (2008) found that in a patriarchal and patrilineal society like Choiseul, where leadership is perceived to be a man's role, women were usually discriminated against in leadership appointments.

Strachan (2008) also had similar findings. In this study, this practice did not appear to occur in Choiseul as the majority of deputy principals participating in the study were female. It is envisaged that these female deputy principals are going to be promoted to principal positions. A possible reason for the increased number of women in leadership could be due to the shortage of school leaders.

Competition for school leadership positions tends to encourage the improvement of skills, the learning of new knowledge, and the initiation of ongoing professional development (Davis, 2007; Hoerr, 2005). This was not the case of the participants in this study. The shortage of leaders has suppressed competition in acquiring leadership appointments.

### **Lack of leadership preparation and ongoing professional development**

The findings of this study showed that some school leaders were not prepared for the school leadership role. The study further disclosed that there was a lack of ongoing professional development for school leaders. Speck and Lindstrom (2004) found that ongoing professional development is essential for individual, team, and school growth in leadership. For similar reasons, it can be important to invite consultants and advisors for leadership workshops that involve parents, teachers and principals (Harpaz, 2003). Similar joint leadership practices for professional development are expected by the school leaders in Choiseul. Again, it would appear that the planning of joint professional development by the school leaders was undermined by a lack of courage as well as a preoccupation with a sense of incompetency. In the context of their leadership, participants admitted that they learnt on the job through trial and error.

The absence of ongoing professional development for the school leaders in Choiseul could mean that the rate of growth in new knowledge and skills of the principals and deputy principals is slow and remains dependent on each person's tacit knowledge. McClelland (2002) found that it was essential that leaders are prepared for leadership roles in order to work smarter and increase their efficiency and productivity of an organisation. In

the Solomon Islands, there are a number of factors that impede effective principalship. These factors relate to the lack of leadership preparation and ongoing professional development. This finding is consistent with the research of Sikua (2002) with selected CHSs in other provinces, Malasa's (2007) research on issues inhibiting the effectiveness of school leadership in Solomon Islands' secondary schools, Ruqebatu's (2008) research on issues that impede the effective practice of some principals in the selection schools in Honiara, Solomon Islands, and Akao's (2008) research in relation to women leaders in secondary schools.

As some school leaders inferred, comparing the remoteness and isolation of CHSs in Choiseul with some provinces that have transport services to the commercial centres, the professional development of school leaders in Choiseul is lagging. This comparison could be based on the number of transport service providers, the frequency of services, and how the leaders utilise the services to build leadership capacity. It had been argued by the many of the leaders that the current transport services in the province are sufficient. What is needed is for leaders to utilise the services.

It was revealed in this study that the school leaders viewed the planning and organisation of professional development as the initiative of the education authority and the ministry of education, and should involve study full time locally or abroad. The staff development of the CHSs could not afford to sponsor schools leader's leadership training. The small income received was sufficient to meet the school operational costs. As a result, no budget, time or effort was set aside for school-based initiatives for leadership advancement. Such leaders' perceptions are not supported by Davies (2007) and Dall'Alba and Sandberg (2000). They state that professional development can also be school based with a leaders' initiatives.

In reference to further training and initiation, the study also found that all the school leaders maintained traditional beliefs that professional development was an external initiative. This perception raises the question of whether or not they understood their leadership roles. Kent (2004) states that effective professional development should be conducted

through step by step activities in the workplace focusing on the context of the organisation. This means ongoing professional development could be organised by the school leaders in the school. Fagan and Walter (1982), Stott and Walker (1992), and Hanuscin and Lee (2008), described such a process as mentoring. Interestingly, this study found that in practice, many school leaders have occasionally practised mentoring in the schools but they did not classify it as professional development. The reason being that, according to their opinion, mentoring was conducted in particular events with someone else and the approach was more informal.

A question that can be asked is; how did the aspirant and novice leaders become acquainted with their leadership roles? School leaders in Choiseul are aware of the basic principles of leadership and some of the leadership roles but they were not prepared and mentored. They learnt through on the job experience.

### **Strengths and weaknesses of appointment procedures**

This study found that there were strengths and weaknesses in the appointments procedures of principals and deputy principals. The process of appointment was questionable as not even one of the leaders has applied for their leadership position. The study found that the principals and the deputy principals were either handpicked by the education authority or recommended the communities. It was a surprise to these school leaders to be approached in this way for these roles.

Similar findings in the rural Western Australia Catholic Schools found that long distances to the schools, remoteness and isolation forced the education authorities to manage the selection without consulting the Ministry of Education, community or the school leaders (Pritchard, 2003). It was expressed in the study that remoteness and isolation would still obstruct leadership advertisements reaching potential candidates in the rural CHSs. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2007a) specified precisely that each education authority must keep the Ministry of Education informed of the all advertisements and have the education authority facilitate interviews with the short listed candidates. This signifies that leadership recruitments made by the

communities and the principals were not procedural until appointments were approved by the authority.

The study also found that there was a general feeling among the school leaders that they were appointed by the education authority but not supported by the education authority. Appointing unqualified school leaders required ongoing leadership support from the authority. This support helps to nurture the new newly appointed and novice leaders in becoming effective leaders. The fact that not even one of the school leaders in this study had been upgraded to another higher qualification beside their first teaching qualifications supported the claim that leaders were working in remote and isolated contexts. The two most senior leaders in the study had a certificate in teaching primary qualification and a diploma in teaching secondary for more than thirty and twenty years respectively. Thus, as has been mentioned, all the school leaders grew into leadership through their tacit knowledge.

Grummell, Devine and Lynch (2009) stated that professional qualifications and management experiences were two major guidelines in the selection of school leaders. In the case of Choiseul, where all the school leaders were unqualified, those who demonstrated management skills but have low teaching qualifications were likely to be appointed to the leadership positions compared with those with teaching secondary qualification. This criterion was considered because of the numerous allegations of misappropriation and poor management of school funds and assets. Such allegations had tarnished many school leader's reputations. The leaders admitted in the study that the schools bank accounts were not usually audited and there was a need to improve the school inventory system.

### **Community influence and involvement**

The findings of the study revealed that community and individual elites have a strong influence on the choice of school leaders for the community high schools. The study also found that some of the underpinning influences ranged from leaders with the potential to support school developments, knowledge and skills, cultural practices and professional jealousy. The community, and / or elites, used their power to rally

community support to bring to the authority their preference of a school leader for formal approval.

The findings in the rural schools in developed countries like New Zealand (Baty, 1989), in Australia (Strokes, Stafford, & Holdsworth, 1999), and in other provinces in the developing country of the Solomon Islands (Sikua, 2002), were supported by the current study in that travel related costs are expensive. Thus, the communities pledged their support, with the sense of ownership, to build CHSs in their own community with free labour and resources. Sikua (2002) found that many communities and politicians did not wait for the government and education authorities to provide logistical support before building schools. Similarly, community supports had moved the communities in Choiseul to build the CHSs on customary lands. They even attracted the teachers and school leaders. In some CHSs in the Solomon Islands, the community support for CHSs is weakening and the parental support is poor. As in these findings, one reason why parents withdrew their support was a lack of transparency by school leadership. This will be discussed in the section on the need for transparency.

Another possible reason for the absence of community influence on the academic development is that most rural parents are not well educated. Because of a limited knowledge on academic issues, they seemed to accept the school leaders' academic decisions. The findings show that in the not well-educated communities, parents were not confident to be involved in academic development but were active in physical developments.

In New Zealand, parents, through their representatives on the Boards of Trustees, were consulted in the appointment of school leaders (Brooking, 2007). The intention of such an organised approach is to take into account the local context (Blackmore et al., 2006). This is different from the case of school leaders in Choiseul. The study found that the current structure and procedure in the appointment of school leaders gave little opportunity for communities to be directly involved in the formal and or procedural appointment of school leaders as there was no parent representative of

each school on the selection panel in the provincial education board. Thus, parents and schools influence the authority by means of building and managing schools with minimal assistance from the authority (Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2007b). According to the participating leaders, they doubted the financial strength of the authority in building the schools if the communities withdrew the support.

It was revealed in the findings that most of the school leaders acquired their first leadership appointments in the CHS in their own communities. Such leadership appointments were likely to be influenced by the community. Sanga, Niroa, Matai and Crowl (2004) found similar patterns to the appointment process in other Pacific island countries. Not all the leaders agreed on such appointments but they had to accept this process in order to be recognised by the people in their community. This way of acquiring leadership is congruent with what Sanga and Walker (2005) described as the 'Wantok System'.

This study is comparable with the findings of Kreitlow (1954) in that there was not much money to improve the school leadership in the rural schools. In addition, the influence of professional jealousy was a barrier to preparing aspiring principals and deputy principals. Professional jealousy was more prevalent in the closely knit communities in rural settings from the close biological relationships between some of the members of the school community and the village community.

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development (2007a), and Sanga et al. (2004), have suggested that teaching posts between schools should be three to four years to give school leaders knowledge about leadership in different school contexts. Another advantage is to avoid leaders overly personalising their school administration and leadership. School leaders can become less productive if they are in the same schools for many years (Sigford, 2006). In the current study, however, the most senior principals were posted at the same schools for the average of eight consecutive years.

### **Priority of school physical development**

The study found that the first community high school in Choiseul was started in 1996. However, the majority of community high schools are still in their initial stage of being physically developed. The pace of physical construction in the rural settings is very slow and difficult. Thus, the leaders mentioned that all the communities expected the school leaders to exercise their leadership know-how to move the school developments forward.

The findings of Shelton (2000), where rural schools are passive in school developments, were quite different to the case of rural schools in the Choiseul province. It was found that donations of local resources, free labour, and major community fundraisings every year, signified an active commitment and prioritising of school's physical developments. As in the rural context of a province in a developing country, the findings are similar to those of Kreitlow (1954) with rural American schools in that revenue collection in the rural schools is a common major impediment that slowed developments.

For good financial planning, Crampton, Thompson and Vesely (2004) have suggested the setting up and improvement of school's budgetary infrastructure. Budgeting within a school's infrastructure seems quite impossible in rural schools. This is due to the weak revenue collections. It appears that the priority of the school budget is often on the school operations alone. With the challenge of the financial constraints, school leaders that enable the school budget to meet the physical developments were hailed by the community and authorities as industrious leaders. Such leaders appear to remain in the same school for more than three years.

The study communicated similar findings to Dewees (1999) and Forsythe et al. (1983) who found that many rural school buildings were not normally inspected for safety. The introduction of manufactured building materials in the rural CHSs was received with great relief after frequently having to replacing flimsy bush materials in school buildings. The sense of relief has motivated and united people regarding school developments. Another explanation was the sense of oneness that was rooted in traditional beliefs

that followers ought to obey the community elders. In Christian beliefs, Sanga and Walker (2005) found that people in the Solomon Islands were afraid they would get cursed if they disobeyed the church leaders' community announcement to work for the schools.

It was revealed in this study that the recent introduction of aid money for school developments has shifted community priority to school's physical development. One explanation for this was that people were intrinsically motivated by the new form of foreign support and assistance that would improve the quality of learning in the rural schools.

It was also made known in the study that the communities used the successful construction of permanent school buildings as a device to measure the effectiveness and honesty of the school leader. One reason is that many school leaders have allegations for misappropriation and embezzlement of school funds and had appeared in the public media, becoming rural community's talking points. In this way, what can be physically seen plays a role in the financial reports to the community.

### **Gender**

Many researchers like Court (2004), Grogan (2002), Strachan (1999, 2008, 2009), Theoharis (2008) and Thrupp (2004), have discussed social justice issues and the discrimination against women in leadership. In the Solomon Islands context, it was found that many women were deprived of their rights in leadership roles (Akao, 2008; Strachan, 2009; Pollard, 2000). However, these studies were not contextualised in the school leadership in Choiseul province as this study is.

This study found that leadership and inheritance rights in Choiseul are similar to the findings of Akao (2008) in Malaita province, in the Solomon Islands, which is based on patrilineal system, a system where a male has rights to lead and rights to inherit family properties. A paternal bond between the father and the sons is culturally recognised in every society in Choiseul. Females have to leave home to be with their husband after marriage. Otherwise, they can remain at home but with very controlled rights and at the mercy of other males (brothers). It was revealed in the

findings that this cultural norm normally disadvantaged women in school leadership role but now it appears to be changing

The study uncovered that in the current deputy principal posts, sixty seven per cent (67%) were female and only thirty three (33%) were male. The first principal of the first community high school in Choiseul was a female. Interestingly, not one of these women was originally from the community where the CHS was located. This does not support the findings of Strachan and Saunders (2007, cited in Strachan, 2009), where Melanesian women usually acquired their leadership position in their own community.

The analysis of the current teaching posts in Choiseul province show that there was a great increase of women in secondary teaching. Another finding is that school leaders were appointed from those with leadership experience either from primary or secondary schools and the majority of the deputy principals with primary qualifications were female.

The study is also similar with Forsythe et al. (1983) and Strachan (2008) in that male leaders were looking for opportunities for lucrative employment positions while female leaders remained. However, this does not mean a decline in male teachers who pursue training for secondary teaching.

The study found that all the female leaders were directly appointed by male education officers even though they did not express interest in leadership positions. Consequently, this does not support the findings of Blackmore (2002), Coleman (2002), and Brennan (2003), claiming that females would most likely be disadvantaged if men were the keepers of the implementation of education policies and selection panels. Nonetheless, the appointment of women in leadership positions was possibly by chance and, as in this study, was not carried out in a transparent manner.

Only one woman in this study had experienced negative responses from males in terms of her leadership. Leadership positions are likely to be associated with risk when women are superior over men (Grogan, 2000; Ryan, 2006, cited in Ryan, Haslam & Postmes, 2007). The majority of

women leaders in this study had great leadership support from their male followers.

Marshall (1994) and Akao (2008) found that women in leadership often had low self esteem. This is quite different in Choiseul; the community, teachers, and education authorities had positive views on women in leadership. Already, such positive recognition had encouraged the self-esteem of women. This was evident in the encouragement for female appointments to leadership roles. Needless to say, the rationale behind some male aspirants, who want to uphold male leadership in schools, was an attempt to maintain a traditional leadership inheritance.

It was found that female school leaders in Choiseul continue to gain leadership recognition from wider communities and authorities. The most obvious reasons were due to the successful leadership stories of the female pioneering principals of the first community high schools, and a few female leaders that followed. The leadership of these women was exceptional compared with the men. Thus, despite their primary teaching qualifications, two of the female deputy principals were appointed among other males with secondary teaching qualifications. In their findings, Blackmore (2002), Courts (2004) and Strachan (2009) found that women were not uncomfortable with a 'masculist style of leadership'. This was only true in the first few weeks of taking up the leadership role. The female leaders appeared to have courage and a high self-esteem after this.

### **Need of transparency**

The findings in the current study show the need for transparency in school leadership, which was similar to the need for transparency in many other organisations as highlighted in the literature (Desta, 2006; Masson, Savastano & Sharma, 2007; McCarthy, 1997; Neyland, 2007; Schweigert, 2007; Transparency International, 2004). In this study, many followers within the school and the community perceived that the absence of transparency in school leadership was a possible indication of corruption and financial scandals. The leaders in this study concurred that there is a need to improve transparency policies in the developing countries to

prevent and control corruption practices (Desta, 2006; Hecht, 1999; Masson, Savastano & Sharma, 1997).

It was found that in the rural and isolated schools, there seems to be no policies for leaders to practically demonstrate to the community how money comes in and how it is spent. It appears that leaders only report to the funding agencies. The reason school leaders reported directly to the foreign aid donor agencies was due to the foreign aid policies. A possible explanation for excluding the communities in financial reports, as in the case of the CHSs in Choiseul, was due to the lack of enforcement of transparency policies in the education system in the Solomon Islands. In addition, although other related policies were breached, parents in the rural and remote schools often lacked legal advice for challenging such actions.

Although transparency is demanded in the community high schools, there are other factors that limit access to information. The findings are in harmony with Florini (2003), Pasquier and Villeneuve (2007), and Schweigert (2007), in that the reasons relate to a culture of secrecy and the bureaucratic culture of the organization. In the rural communities, parents are passive and don't have the courage to openly demand access to information from well-educated leaders in the parents teachers association (PTA) meetings. The study is also paralleled to the study of Lebovic (2006) that, as a gate keeper of information, school leaders determine the content and in what form the information is presented. This practice not only allows the leaders to control transparency but creates allegations and suspicions in leadership.

## **Conclusion**

For the purpose of clarity, this discussion chapter was presented according to the themes. It has identified issues that relate to the remoteness and isolation of schools and that force leaders to transfer out from Choiseul. This had left the CHSs with a shortage of school leaders and with the need for leadership preparation prior to the appointment as well as ongoing professional development.

I found that the school leaders were self-developed in their leadership through learning on the job experiences. The leaders expressed numerous factors that influenced their appointment.

Since CHSs were built in the community village, the findings highlighted how and why the community has an influence and involvement in the CHS leadership and the reasons why they withdraw their support at times. The community support for the CHSs was most noticeable in the way they prioritised the school's physical developments. Interestingly, in the findings, although Choiseul practises a patrilineal system, this did not reflect in the appointment of school leaders. The women leaders in this study were given equal opportunities as men and what was expected for all of the leaders was transparency.

The next chapter concludes this research commenting on the implications of this study and opportunities for further research related to school leadership in the Solomon Islands and beyond.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter concludes my thesis by reviewing the significance of the findings alongside the implications and future possibilities this research enables. I sought to catch a glimpse of what it is like 'being' a leader in a CHS in the Choiseul Province in the Solomon Islands. I had some understanding of the context being indigenous to the province. However, the participant's stories have moved me emotionally, allowing me to catch a glimpse of their personal and professional contexts. In this, there are characteristics unique to each person (case) and emergent themes across the cases. My intention was to tell their stories: I have sought to do this. After describing some implications of this research, this chapter considers the limitations of the study and makes some recommendations for further research.

### **Implications of the study**

This research sought to capture school leader's experience of 'being' in leadership in a one island province in the Solomon Islands. The leader's context and some of their critical experiences have been opened for consideration and reflection. The participants in this research were school leaders in Choiseul, situated in rural and isolated communities, far from the nearest provincial town and essential services. The context appears to limit and impede the growth of these leaders. Indeed, those leaders who were marketable appear to opt for other lucrative jobs in other provinces.

The findings stressed that the critical shortage of school leadership has created a sense of complacency in the school's leadership. Even unqualified staff are beseeched to accept school leadership appointments. Because of the absence of competition in the appointment of leaders, and there being no professional development for school leadership, many long serving leaders become almost stagnant and unproductive in relation to the current needs and global changes in education.

Many school leaders recounted that the lack of leadership preparation and ongoing professional development was a major leadership set back in

Choiseul. Most of the school leaders echoed that the school leadership in this one island province could be improved through effective planning, management, coordination, and team work of the existing educational leaders in the province. With a lack of self-determination and vision for professional development, the majority of the leaders depend on the initiative of the education authority. Their perceptions of professional development were limited to fulltime study in academic institutions.

All the school leaders suggested weaknesses in the appointment procedures. Indeed, often having been appointed by the authority, they were not supported in an ongoing manner. The growth of new knowledge and the demand for new skills requires continuous support on an ongoing basis. Sadly, this was not the case in Choiseul. The findings in the study support Malasa's (2007) position that the lack of ongoing support in professional learning for school leaders is a key leadership issue in the CHSs in the Solomon Islands.

The current study found that there was active community support for school developments; but compared with politicians in other provinces, in the Choiseul province, politicians were quite passive towards school developments. Parents and the wider community have a strong influence in the choice of school leaders as they are the landowners of the school site and said to be owners of the schools, despite the schools being registered by the province and Church. Because of the community influence and involvement, almost all the school leaders have returned to schools within their village community before acquiring their first leadership appointment. In the close knit communities, the choice of school leadership was linked with the community leadership. Teachers who have knowledge, skills and experience to attract community support for building constructions were at an advantage in being appointed as a school leader.

Although Choiseul still exercises a patrilineal system, women were considered for school leadership. This shift in favour of women leadership was due to the successful school leadership showing by several

pioneering women; participants in this study. Thus, gender is not appear to be a major issue in school leadership appointment.

### **Limitations of the study**

This study has several limitations. One such limitation was the sample size with there being a total of six CHSs, and from these, a total of eleven school leaders in the Choiseul province. The study was also limited by the geographical location of the schools and unreliable transport to access the leaders in the northern region. These factors influenced the number and range of participants.

There were school leaders who declined to participate in this study. They tended to be principals with a diploma in teaching secondary qualification where I had taught in the primary schools with a certificate in teaching primary. While I influence this study with my bias, their response demonstrates what is like to be school leader in Choiseul.

### **Recommendations for further research**

The findings from this study open some recommendations for further research. In the first instance, this research can be seen as a pilot study on the experience of leadership in the CHSs in the Choiseul province. The leadership testimonies of the participants portray a uniqueness in their educational leadership as well as some emerging themes about the contextual nature of leadership. Indeed, the stories of the leader's experiences depict the nerve of leadership in Choiseul.

This study found that school leaders were not only not prepared but have not been supported. With a lack of knowledge and scarce resources to enable an improvement in leadership, leaders relied on the authority's initiatives. A more effective strategy might involve the setting up of a provincial school leadership association. Such a development could be initiated as a collaborative action research project amongst the school leaders. In the current milieu, an association seems to be more appropriate than a provincial leadership centre.

Choiseul is a one island province. With the current resources available, linking the school leaders for leadership purposes is possible. What

appears to be lacking in Choiseul is a key leader with a zeal and vision for change, and who is knowledgeable in leadership and innovative in their educational practice. The improvement of school leadership in the Choiseul province requires a leader(s) with such qualities. This recommendation is not advocating for a hero leader but rather a strong group facilitator. The story-forming community of practice could be the subject of individual and collective collegial inquiries.

Since the Solomon Islands has a central education system, similar studies to this one, might be conducted in the other eight provinces in the country. What is the nature of the leadership contexts in these provinces? From this contextual information, national education policies and provincial education acts can be contextualised to meet provincial needs.

The purpose of this case study was to explore what it is like 'being' an educational leader in the Choiseul province in the Solomon Islands. While school leaders are often indigenous to the community, the tie with the community can be constraining at times. The relational 'fit' with the local community is one that needs to be managed and supported, having been initiated with the initial appointment process. Without adequate resources, a leader can be under pressure with the local community.

### **Concluding comments**

This study addresses the question of what it is like to 'be' a school leader in the community high schools in Choiseul province. Undoubtedly, many of the cases might be similar to school leaders in other contexts. In the case of these school leaders, it has been identified that some of the significant leadership needs relates to leadership preparation and ongoing professional development. The study found that if the leaders had been prepared, some of the leadership challenges would have been eased. This raises the question and the need for decentralising the school leadership association or centre to the Choiseul province by empowering and building the leadership capacity of the current educational leaders. The establishment of almost all the CHSs in the close-knit village communities, where most of the people are biological related in many

ways, influences the school leadership. This is paramount when considering school leadership in the CHSs in the Choiseul province.

While the participant's experience of 'being' in leadership are unique, the emergent themes suggest that these leaders experience many similar challenges in their particular contexts. 'Being' in leadership in a CHS draws upon the leader's entire life as they are set within the context of their local community.

My lasting impression of the participants, and their stories, has given me a greater awareness of the need for leadership preparation and ongoing support for leadership in the Choiseul province. My intention is to turn this awareness into courses and programmes to meet this need.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: A letter to the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development

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Hamilton East

3216

Hamilton

New Zealand

Phone: +64211425983

Email: [jls42@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jls42@students.waikato.ac.nz)

Date.....

Permanent Secretary,

Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development,

Honiara,

Dear Sir,

Application for permission to conduct research in the Community High Schools in the Choiseul Province, Solomon Islands.

I am John Lenga Sisiolo, a lecturer at the School of Education in the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education. I am currently on study leave undertaking for further postgraduate studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. As part of my thesis, I am required to complete a research project in educational leadership. I would prefer to do this in the Choiseul province.

My purpose for writing is to seek permission to conduct a research inquiry with some principals and deputy principals in the Solomon Islands, in particular, in the community high schools (CHS) in Choiseul Province.

The research focuses on the educational leaders' experiences of leadership, their leadership journey to date in terms of how they became leader in a school, and the challenges they are presently facing in their leadership role as they look to the future. My intention is to open understandings of what it is like to be an educational leader in this particular province.

The research would be carried with the principals and deputy principals in six community high schools in the last week of April to the first week of June, 2009. The research uses semi-structured interviews, relevant documentation, and personal field notes. The research will not interfere with the school activities and the participants' official duties. It is envisaged that the interview with each participant will take approximately one hour.

The research will have ethical approval from the University of Waikato. The study will not harm the participants, disadvantage schools, nor discredit the Choiseul Province and the Solomon Islands. The research will seek to identify patterns that exist in the experience of those in leadership.

The thesis that reports on the research will not reveal individual identities of the participants or the schools involved. Interviews will be recorded on audiotape with, the participants having the opportunity to confirm the written transcription of the interview. The participants have a right to withdraw from the study if they have a reason to do so. Their rights will be respected.

My supervisor in this study is David Giles, Department of Professional Studies in Education, University of Waikato, New Zealand. He can be contacted on: phone +64 7 838 4831 and email: [dlgiles@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dlgiles@waikato.ac.nz)

Up on receiving the receipt of your approval of this application, I will proceed with contacting and making arrangements with the responsible education authorities and schools.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

John Lenga Sisiolo

## Appendix 2: A Letter to the provincial Education Authority

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Phone: +64211425983

Email: [jls42@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jls42@students.waikato.ac.nz)

Date.....

Chief Education Officer,

Choiseul Province

Taro Post office,

Choiseul Province

Solomon Islands,

Dear Sir,

Application for permission to conduct research in the Community High Schools in the Choiseul Province.

I am John Lenga Sisiolo, a lecturer at the School of Education in the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education. I am currently undertaking study leave for postgraduate studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. As part of my thesis, I am required to complete a research project in educational leadership. I would like to conduct a research inquiry in the Community High Schools in Choiseul province from the last week of April to the first week of June, 2009.

This application seeks permission to conduct research in your Community High Schools. The title of this study is on 'Being an educational leader in Choiseul Province, Solomon Islands: A case study of principals and deputy principals'. It will be focused on the educational leaders' experiences of leadership, their leadership journey, and in particular, how they became leaders, and the challenges they face being a leader. This

information should bring some light on what it is like being an educational leader in this particular province.

Information will be collected through semi-structured interviews, documentation analysis and field notes. The research will not interfere with school activities, conflict with religious belief, and the participants' official duties. Interviews of each principal and deputy principal will take approximately one hour during the participants' free time.

All the procedures for this research have been designed in accordance within the ethical guidelines of the University of Waikato. It is understood that the study will not harm the participants, disadvantage the schools in any manner. The schools and the participants will be coded to conceal their true identity. Since the interview will be recorded, the participants will be given opportunity to confirm the written transcription of the interview. The participants have a right to withdraw from the study but for any withdrawal, they will be asked to inform the researcher or supervisor. Their rights will be fully respected.

My supervisor of this study is David Giles, Department of Professional Studies, University of Waikato, New Zealand. He can be contacted on: Phone +64 7 838 4831 and email: [dlgiles@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dlgiles@waikato.ac.nz)

Up on receiving the receipt of your approval to involve the schools under the SDA education authority in the study, I will proceed with contacting and making arrangements with the participants.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

John Lenga Sisiolo

**Appendix 3: Letter to the Seventh day Adventist Church Education Authority**

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Phone: +64211425983

Email: [jls42@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jls42@students.waikato.ac.nz)

Date.....

Education Director,  
Seventh day Adventist Church Educational Authority  
Solomon Islands Mission  
Solomon Islands,

Dear Sir,

Application for permission to research in the Seventh day Adventist Church Community High Schools in the Choiseul Province.

I am John Lenga Sisiolo, a lecturer at the School of Education in the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education. I am currently on study leave undertaking postgraduate studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. As part of my three paper master thesis, I am required to complete a research project in educational leadership. I would prefer to conduct my research in the Choiseul province from the last week of April to the first week of June, 2009.

This application seeks your permission to undertake research in the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church Community High Schools. The title of this research is on 'Being an educational leader in the Choiseul Province, Solomon Islands: A case study of principals and deputy principals'. It will be focused on the educational leaders' experiences of leadership, their leadership journey, and in particular, how they became

leaders in the schools, and the challenges they face being a leader. This information should bring some light on what it is like to be an educational leader in this particular province.

This research will involve semi-structured interviews, documentation analysis and field notes. The research will not interfere with school activities, conflict with religious belief, and the participants' official duties. Interviews of each principal and deputy principal will take approximately one hour each during the participants' free time.

All the procedures for this research have been designed in accordance within the ethical guidelines of the University of Waikato. The study would not harm the participants, disadvantage the schools, and discredit the Church in any manner. The schools and the participants will be coded to conceal their true identity. Since the interview will be also recorded, the participants will be given opportunity to confirm the written transcription of the interview. The participants have a right to withdraw from the study but for any withdrawal, they will be asked to inform the researcher or supervisor. Their rights will be fully respected.

My supervisor of this study is David Giles, Department of Professional Studies, University of Waikato, New Zealand. He can be contacted on: Phone +64 7 838 4831 and email: [dlgiles@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dlgiles@waikato.ac.nz)

Upon receiving the receipt of your approval to involve the schools under the SDA education authority in the study, I will proceed with contacting the participants.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Yours faithfully,

John Lenga Sisiolo

## Appendix 4: Letter of approval from the Choiseul Province



### CHOISEUL PROVINCE EDUCATION AUTHORITY

EDUCATION OFFICE  
P.O BOX 34, TARO  
CHOISEUL BAY  
CHOISEUL PROVINCE  
SOLOMON ISLANDS

PHONE: 63123/63173 /63174 FAX: 63174/63113

John Lenga Sisiolo  
4/42 York St  
3216  
Hamilton  
New Zealand

You're Ref:

Our Ref: PF/TS/191

Date: 05/05/2009

Dear John,

**Re: APPLICATION FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE  
COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE CHOISEUL PROVINCE.**

I write referring to the above captioned

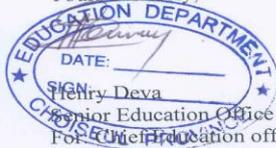
I hereby wish to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> April 2009. Apologies for very belated replied of you letter. You are advice that the application for permission to conduct research in the community high schools in the Choiseul Province is hereby approved.

The Choiseul Provincial Education Authority, wish you all the best and look forward for partnership and continual support in education sector in the province and country at large.

In the mean time, we will assist you proceed with contacting and arranging with the participants.

Thank you

Yours sincerely,



Senior Education Office (admin)  
For: Provincial Secretary  
**Choiseul Province**

*Choiseul Provincial Education Authority, Choiseul Province 2009*

## Appendix 5: A Letter to the School principals

4/42 York St

Hamilton East

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New Zealand

Phone: +64211425983

Email: [jls42@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jls42@students.waikato.ac.nz)

Date .....

..... Community High School

Choiseul Province

Attention: Principal and School Chairperson

Dear Sir,

Participation in a research project

I am John Lenga Sisiolo, a lecturer at the School of Education in the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education. I am currently on study leave undertaking further studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. As part of my Master of Educational Leadership programme, I am required to conduct research in the area that is related to educational leadership. I would prefer to conduct my research in the Choiseul province. It will begin on the last week of April to the first week of June.

In this research project, I want to explore how education leaders acquired their leadership positions, their experiences of leadership, and the challenges they face in being an educational leader in Choiseul province. The research seeks to explore any patterns in the experiences of educational leaders in the Choiseul province.

This letter seeks your permission to involve your Community High School in the study as it is in the prime locality. The study will involve you, the principal, and the deputy principals in a semi-structured interview. Each participant will be interviewed for approximately an hour. The interview will

be recorded and transcribed and you will be given opportunity to confirm the written transcription. Beside the interview, documentations that are related to the context of your leadership can be made available for the research review. The research activities will not conflict with your school programme and your official duties. Interview and viewing of documents that are related to participant's leadership will be done during your free time.

All the procedures for this research have been designed in accordance within the ethical guidelines of the University of Waikato. Care will be taken to ensure that you and the school will not be harmed or disadvantaged. The school and the participants will be coded to conceal their true identity. Your rights are paramount; therefore, you can withdraw from the study up to the stage when I ask for confirmation of data.

It is costly to produce copies of a thesis so copies will be made available at the provincial education office for participants to borrow.

If you wish to conduct my supervisor regarding the research, his contacts are David Giles, Department of Professional Studies, University of Waikato, New Zealand. He can be contacted on: Phone +64 7 838 4831 and email: [dlgiles@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dlgiles@waikato.ac.nz)

I am looking forward to your participation.

Yours faithfully,

John Lenga Sisiolo

**Appendix 6: A Letter to the Deputy School principals**

4/42 York St

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Phone: +64211425983

Email: [jls42@students.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jls42@students.waikato.ac.nz)

Date.....

.....

Deputy Principal

..... Community High School

Choiseul Province

Dear Sir,

I am John Lenga Sisiolo, a lecturer at the School of Education in the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education. I am currently on study leave undertaking further studies at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. As part of my three paper thesis in Master of Educational Leadership, I am required to conduct a research project in the area that is related to educational leadership. I would prefer to conduct this research in the Choiseul province.

In this research project, I want to explore how education leaders acquired their leadership positions, their experiences of leadership, and the challenges they face being an educational leader in the Choiseul province. The research seeks to explore any patterns in the participant's responses.

In this research, you will be interviewed for about an hour. The interview will be recorded and transcribed and you will be given the opportunity to confirm your written transcription. Beside the interview, any documentation that is related to the context of your leadership can be made available for the researcher's review.

All the procedures for this research have been designed in accordance within the ethical guidelines of the University of Waikato. The research study will not harm you nor disadvantage the school. Both you and the school will be coded to conceal your true identity. Your rights are paramount; therefore, you can withdraw from the study up to the stage when I ask for confirmation of data

It is costly to produce copies of a thesis so copies will be made available at the provincial education office for participants to borrow.

If you wish to contact my supervisor regarding the study, his contacts are David Giles, Department of Professional Studies, and University of Waikato, New Zealand. He can be contacted on: Phone +64 7 838 4831 and email: [dlgiles@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dlgiles@waikato.ac.nz)

I am looking forward to your participation.

Yours faithfully,

John Lenga Sisiolo

## Appendix 7: Consent form for Interview

Being an educational leader in Choiseul province: A case study of principals and deputy principals.

I..... **principal / deputy principal** of  
.....Community High School **agree / do not agree** to be  
part of the semi-structured interview on being an educational leader in  
Choiseul province.

I understand that the information collected in the study will be kept confidential at all times. For protection of anonymity, pseudonyms will be used for the participant in the document. Neither the school, nor the participant will be made reference to the document. The information collected in the study will only be used on what has been stipulated on the invitation letter and on this consent form.

Privacy and confidentiality of information on the interview is very important. All the instruments like tape, flash drive and written documents that are used for data collection in the research will be kept secure at all times.

I will be given opportunity to review the copy of the transcript for confirmation of what I have said in the interview. I have a right to make changes on the transcript within the time frame if it is necessary.

I understand that I have ownership of the raw data of the interview which means, I have copy right on the raw data. The raw data is with the care of the researcher who can use it for his personal publications beside his research thesis in the Master of Educational Leadership.

I have a right to withdraw from the research up to confirmation of the transcripts. If I decide to withdraw my participation from the study, I must do so in writing or verbally to the researcher. If the reason(s) for my withdrawal is related to the researcher, then I can submit my letter to either the researcher's supervisor or to the School of Education Research Ethics Committee of the University of Waikato.

Signature.....

Time.....

Venue.....

Date.....

## **Appendix 8: Interview Statement**

### Introduction

I am John Lenga Sisiolo, a student from the University of Waikato, New Zealand. I am from Choiseul province and married with two children. Prior doing further studies at the University of Waikato, I taught in the rural primary schools for eight consecutive years. For five years, I was head teacher and deputy head teacher. One and half years I taught in rural community high school. Before successfully being awarded NZAid scholarship to study in New Zealand, I lectured at School of Education of the Solomon Islands College of High Education from mid year 2005 to 2007.

In this study, I want to explore what it is like 'being an Educational Leader in the Choiseul Province, Solomon Islands'. It is a case study about the context of leadership for principals and deputy principal.

In this interview, I will ask you some questions that are related to your experiences of being a leader. All your responses are your personal views, thus, they will not be graded as explained and discussed on the consent form. You can ask for clarification of questions.

### Interview

### Conclusion

Thank you for your participation in this interview. Your response is essential to my study.

## **Appendix 9: Interview questions**

These are some of the interview questions that are most likely to be asked in the interview. These interview questions will be refined with the guidance of my supervisor, after I organize my literature review and feedback from my pilot interview.

How did you acquire your present leadership position?

How long did it take you to acquire the leadership position?

What encouraged you to decide to become a school leader?

What other leadership positions have you had before this one?

What preparation have you had for your leadership role?

What is it like being an educational leader at present?

How does the current educational context in the province influence your leadership?

In your experience as a school leader, what are the challenges you face as a leader?

How do you intend to address the challenges you face?

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