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**Principal Voice:  
Trials, Triumphs and Training.  
The Experience of Beginning in  
Principalship from the  
Perspectives of Principals in  
Years 3 – 5**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted that the quality of school leadership and school improvement are inextricably linked. Therefore it can be said that, investment in principal development is an investment in quality schools, and therefore an investment in the future.

This report describes a qualitative research project undertaken in 2006, to examine the experience of beginning in principalship in New Zealand, from the perspectives of principals now in their third to fifth year in the role. It attempts to seek answers to questions:

- What training do those entering principalship receive prior to taking up the role?
- How are principals supported as they begin in the role?
- What support is available to them currently - beyond the induction period?
- What training and support is considered to be effective by beginning principals?
- What else could do they believe could be introduced to enhance current support and training?

Twelve principals were interviewed, from a diverse range of school contexts, individually, and then a focus group approach was used to affirm and clarify emergent findings, and to suggest a potential model for improved development.

A review of the literature identified a series of stages that principals move through during their career and the importance of professional learning to support each career stage. It highlighted several strategies deemed to be effective in assisting the development of leadership within the stages identified. The literature concluded, that while there is an awareness of both the stages of leadership, and the importance of targeted development to meet the needs of individuals throughout those stages, most learning remains organisationally rather than individually focussed, and there remains a lack of a planned, structured and synergistic approach to

principal development. The biggest area of concern is suggested as being in the stage where principals are deemed to be effective.

The research findings showed that in the current New Zealand context, there are several effective strategies enhancing principal professional learning. It does, however, conclude with several recommendations for strengthening and enhancing the status quo. Participants in the research suggested that many of the current initiatives offered, remain isolated from each other and now need to be brought into a more robust and aligned framework. There is a perception from those involved in the research, that beyond the induction period, currently eighteen months, there is a void in professional learning opportunities, and that principals struggle to get targeted feedback that allows them to identify their needs. They further suggested that greater preparation for principalship on appointment was required, and believed that a period shadowing an experienced colleague would be invaluable.

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# CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

There is something I don't know that I am supposed to know.  
I don't know what it is I don't know and yet am supposed to know.  
And I feel I look stupid if I seem both not to know it  
And not to know what it is I don't know.  
Therefore I pretend to know it.  
This is nerve-wracking  
Since I don't know what I must pretend to know.  
Therefore I pretend to know everything.  
I feel you know what I am supposed to know but you can't tell me what it is  
because you don't know that I don't know what it is.  
You may know what I don't know, but not that I don't know it.  
And I can't tell you. So you will have to tell me everything.  
*Knots - (R.D.Laing: 1970)*

The above poem resonates with my experience as a beginning principal. I began in principalship in term four 1998. At that time there was no national induction programme for beginning principals and support was limited. I began my principalship in an area that was comparatively isolated and some distance from where I had done most of my teaching and thus also away from the professional networks I had previously built. My only points of contact were the principal who had assisted the Board of Trustees with the appointment, and the principal I had worked with immediately prior to my appointment. We left an extensive network of family and friends and moved to a 'new life' where we knew no one.

Term four is a busy time in any school. Principals scurry to bring one year to an end as well as plan for the following year. As a new principal, who had only ever been a deputy principal, I found the task of setting budgets, drafting annual plans and finalising staffing through management of the direct resourcing of teacher salaries was akin to learning a foreign language. Trying to achieve all of this at the same time as building relationships with staff, students and community was a big ask. I had an inherent fear that asking for help would be seen as incompetence and therefore was reluctant to do so. I struggled on 'alone'.

At the beginning of the following year I joined a series of one day workshops called 'Introduction to Principalship', offered by the local Leadership and Management advisers. Whilst the course content provided

a good overview of the principal's roles and responsibilities, the real benefit was the opportunity to meet and connect with some key people who were consequently influential in supporting me in my development. I remain forever grateful to the advisers, who were prepared to work in a needs-based partnership with me to improve my understanding of principalship, even if that demanded them to "look outside the square". I was also fortunate to have a past colleague move into the area. We were able to establish an effective 'critical friend' / mentoring relationship. This assisted me to remain focussed on my own learning and professional growth. I survived the "sink or swim period" despite having to face some very steep learning curves. I am now moving into my ninth year of principalship and am still passionate about my job and education. I realise that there is still much to learn and that with the constant pace of change, there will always be much to learn. I am not in this job to make a living, but to make a difference.

In 2001 the Right Honourable Trevor Mallard, then Minister of Education announced that he would inject \$27.4 million into the professional development of principals. From the implementation of this initiative and the content of his address, one could conclude that this money was to primarily address two areas of concern, (1) the ineffectiveness of many first time principals and (2) the need to motivate experienced principals to keep on learning (Brooking *et al.*, 2003; Collins, 2002).

In November 2004, I saw an advertisement in the New Zealand Education Gazette, inviting applications from experienced principals who would like to take on a mentoring role in support of beginning principals. At the time I had embarked on postgraduate study through the University of Waikato and I had also been a frequent visitor to the Educational Leadership Centre. Through being involved with these two organisations I had become exposed to the whole notion of building the capability of others. This notion has become an integral part of my personal philosophy. I believe that one of my key tasks is to grow other leaders – not just within my own school, but also in all areas of my potential influence. I reflected

on my experience of beginning in the principalship and was acutely aware how important people had been to my survival and development. I therefore applied and was accepted onto the mentoring programme, (see Appendix 5).

Involvement in this programme opened the doors to other areas of interest. I have since trained as a facilitator at the Principals' Development Planning Centre (PDPC) in Wellington and have joined a Principal Professional Learning Community group (PPLC). These initiatives have a fundamental philosophy of 'principals for principals' as a means of enhancing professional learning and growth. This year, (2006), I was given the opportunity by School Support Services to be a Leadership and Management Adviser for 0.2 of my time. The focus of this role was to work alongside beginning principals, in line with the high priority placed on this task in the output obligations established by the Ministry of Education. These initiatives receive Ministry of Education funding and have been initiated and or prioritised as a direct response to the concerns expressed by the Minister in 2001.

Through exposure to these varied experiences, I have developed an ongoing and deepening interest in the area of professional development for principals. This interest was the motivation for my choice of topic of this thesis.

In this study I am interested in looking at the process of learning the principalship. This will encompass pre principalship through to the years beyond the induction period. I want to study the participants' expectations of principalship and whether this matches their experienced reality. I am interested in what professional learning and or support enabled them to meet the challenges they encountered and what additional support and learning would have been of benefit. I would like to know about the perceived sustainability of learning beyond the "induction" period and how their needs are currently being supported in their ongoing development as effective principals. I need to gain insight into what it is they believe constitutes effective leadership. I am interested in investigating the

continuity of principal development and the cohesion that exists between the various initiatives established to support principal growth. I am particularly interested in the years post the induction period, i.e. years two to five, where there appears to be not only gaps in the research literature, but also from personal experience, the professional development of New Zealand principals. I would like to explore whether our principals, currently in years three to five of their principalship have similar concerns.

The literature has supported my 'wonderings.' Bush & Jackson (2002) contend, "there are many programmes for aspiring, beginning and experienced principals but few of these represent a coherent and integrated programme that covers these three stages of principalship" (p.10).

I believe the following assertion from Bush (1998) aptly sums up the perceived current reality. He states, "there has been a long established awareness that ongoing training is required if school leaders are to operate effectively but this has produced a series of unconnected and modest initiatives" (p. 178).

There are common concerns relating to the professional development of, and support for, school leaders in the literature. Lashway (2003), suggests that induction programmes are too new to have enabled research to evaluate their real impact and effectiveness. Other theorists concur and add, that there has been little systematic or external evaluation for leadership development practices and what is available is generally weak (Daresh, 1995; Daresh & Male, 2000; Hobson *et al.*, 2003; Lashway, 2003; Weindling, 2004; Weindling, 2003; Wong, ND). Bush and Glover (2004) further express concern that much of the literature is normative rather than based on empirical research.

There is a call for research that provides evidence on what support strategies are effective and how leaders acquire the skills and attitudes to become effective in their role. Implicit in this is how differing training, experience and support needs are catered for throughout the learning

process (Bush & Glover, 2004; Hobson et al., 2003). I am hoping that my research will offer further insight into these key questions.

New Zealand is in the midst of a worsening principal recruitment and retention problem (Brooking et al., 2003; Collins, 2002). In 2005, at his address to principals at the New Zealand Principals' Federation Conference in Dunedin the Right Honourable Trevor Mallard, (then Minister of Education), predicted that 40% of current principals would retire in the next 5 years. This information was based on the 2004 Teacher Census information. Pat Newman (2006), in his address to principal representatives at the annual president's moot, expressed grave concern stating, "we seem to have a profession where our experienced teachers do not aspire to be principals".

It seems that now more than ever we need to nurture our beginning principals. The literature strongly asserts that the first years of principal development are critical to success. Effective induction of school leaders should be afforded high priority by all those responsible for principal development. The research indicates that positive induction experiences are critical to the development of attitudes, skills and professional norms that support both current and future growth (Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005; Collins, 2002; Goddard *et al.*, 2004; Lashway, 2003; Martin & Robertson, 2003).

The real importance of this research is encapsulated in the following assertion by the National College for School Leadership's Research and School Improvement Group (2002):

*Commitment to their (new heads) continuing professional development is an investment in quality education for thousands of children. Indeed leadership development in the early years of headship is not something that can be left to chance (p.6).*

It is hoped that information obtained in this research will assist those considering becoming a principal to gain a greater insight into what it is like to begin in principalship. It is my wish that as a consequence of reading the final report candidates for principalship may be able to enter

the profession better prepared and more able to sustain their development. It will be of significant benefit to my growth and development, in my role as a mentor in the First Time Principals' Programme and other work with beginning principals, as it will give me valuable insight into whether or not the service I provide is meeting the needs of the principals I have committed to serving. I also hope that it will create a point of reflection and influence for those responsible for planning and providing professional development to principals in the early stages of their careers.

The thesis is organised in six chapters. Chapter One provides information about me as the researcher, and discusses my interest in, and justification for, this topic. Chapter Two reviews both national and international literature to provide background to and a context for the research. Chapter Three discusses the research design, methodology, methods and data analysis, and how research ethics have been focussed on and achieved. Chapter Four presents the research findings and Chapter Five reviews the main findings against the literature. Chapter Six provides a conclusion and details the recommendations that emerged from the study.



## **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

The focus of this study is to learn how principals in New Zealand perceive they are supported in the first 5 years of their development towards becoming an effective leader. The literature review offers a comprehensive summary of both national and international research into the experiences, professional development and support for those beginning in principalship. It begins with an overview of effective leadership and discusses the leadership characteristics that are deemed to be effective in leading schools in the twenty first century. It then examines what is thought to be effective professional development, and in particular, focuses on effective leadership development. An analysis of the stages of leadership and the positive and challenging experiences within the principal role, establishes the platform for analysing what specific strategies the literature proposes as being effective, in beginning and sustaining professional development for principals. Finally it explores the key development available to principals in the New Zealand context. Within the review the terms principal and headteacher are used interchangeably as is appropriate in different cultural contexts.

### **Effective Leadership**

Effective leadership is extremely difficult to define with theorists contending that evidence based knowledge that leads to a comprehensive definition remains elusive (Bolam, 2003). Riley (cited in Harris, 2003) posits, "there is no one package for school leadership, no one model to be learned and applied regardless of culture or context" (p.10). Fidler (2000) concurs and adds, "no one theory nor any one approach can subsume the complexities of leadership and indeed a search for an all encompassing theory may be illusory" (p.59).

Theorists, although not in definitive agreement, do attempt to convey some of the key characteristics of the current perception of effective leadership. It should be noted that the characteristics highlighted in this

review are not exhaustive of those detailed in the literature. However, the points extracted support recurring themes.

Definitions vary in both complexity and description. Effective leadership is seen as transformational (Day, 2003; Hopkins, 2003; Robertson, 2005). Fidler (2000) suggests that leadership has two key features, “a sense of purpose and confidence is engendered in followers and that followers are influenced towards goal achievement” (p.57). Gunraj and Rutherford (1999) contend, “successful principals have the ability to provide a vision, a sense of direction and clear goals for the school and have the ability to work collaboratively with others to achieve these goals” (p.144). A futures orientation is seen as a vital part of the strategic, visioning process. Leithwood et al. (1999) concur and contend that effective leadership is transformational and encompasses not only those activities listed above but also builds and maintains school culture and effective relationships. Fullan (2005) asserts that the main mark of an effective leader is not just “his / her impact on the bottom line of student achievement but also on how many leaders he / she leaves behind that can go even further. There are too few leaders available who are working on developing good leaders beyond themselves” (p.31).

Another key characteristic, cited in the literature as being synonymous with effective leadership, is learner centred leadership – where learning is the focus for all members of the school community. Inherent in this, is having a deep knowledge of current teaching and learning pedagogy and using data and research as an evidence base (Brooke-Smith, 2003; Day, 2003; Dimmock, 2003; Hopkins, 2001; Leithwood *et al.*, 1999; Robinson *et al.*, 2006; Scott-Nelson & Sassi, 2005). Effective leaders must also be able to recognise and manage the bi modal nature of the job – leadership and management (Bush, 1998; Huber & West, 2002). They need to be able to connect meaningfully with the community (Fullan, 2005; Tomlinson, 2002). Leaders must have a strong moral approach and be values led (Brooke-Smith, 2003; Day, 2003; Dimmock, 2003; Fullan, 2005; Hopkins, 2001; Leithwood et al., 1999; Robinson *et al.*, 2006). Effective leaders are said to possess high levels of emotional intelligence (Bloom *et al.*, 2005; Day,

2003; Strachan *et al.*, 2004) and finally that they engage frequently in reflective practice as a means of making sense of their experiences (Day, 2003; Robertson, 2005; Scott-Nelson & Sassi, 2005). Day (2003 citing day *et al.* 2000) states, “recent research has revealed that successful leadership is connected closely to the commitment and capacity of heads to engage in reflective practice” (p.36). The following statement encapsulates many of the key ideas within the literature about what constitutes an effective leader.

*A leader who can facilitate through action a working climate, who knows the way get things done in a technical sense, who is human in warmth and sensitivity in assisting colleagues to success, who seeks excellence in all aspects of the teaching role, who symbolises leadership through their own example as a learner and a contributor to the learning climate of the school – such a leader will establish a learning community in which there is a strong sense of trust in colleagues, an eagerness to promote interdependence in working out problems, in planning both at a strategic and tactical level. In reflecting purposefully, holistically and critically on the intentions of changes, and where risk and stability are accepted concepts in the pursuit of the growth of the school. Such will be a leader amongst leaders who learns amongst learners (Boyle & Clarke, 1998, p.116).*

### **Links to School Improvement**

Despite the challenge in definition, it is categorically and widely stated in the literature that, effective leadership is at the heart of school effectiveness and improvement (Bush, 1998; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Collins, 2002; Day, 2000; Fidler, 2000; Fullan, 2005; Gunraj & Rutherford, 1999; Harris, 2003; Hopkins, 2001; Leithwood *et al.*, 1999; Martin & Robertson, 2003). Bush (1998) states, “it has become perceived wisdom that the quality of the head is the single most important variable in school effectiveness” (p.323), and Bush and Harris (2000) contend, “whatever else is disputed about this complex area of activity, the centrality of leadership in the achievement of school effectiveness and school improvement remains unequivocal” (p.83). Beere *et al* (cited in Gunraj and Rutherford 1999) concur and add:

*Outstanding leadership has invariably emerged as a key characteristic of outstanding schools. There can no longer be doubt that those seeking quality in education must ensure its presence and that the development of leaders must be given high priority (p.144).*

The literature on the development of leaders for school improvement does however have points of tension. A key point of issue is that while it is evident that effective principalship is linked to school improvement, it is less obvious what activities support the development and maintenance of effective principals (Bush, 1998; Stewart, 2000). Bush and Glover (2004) conclude from an extensive literature review of leadership development, “that not much is known about what forms of leadership development produce enhanced leadership that leads to school improvement” (p.3). Bush (1998) further contends that whilst there may be agreement on the skills of leadership there is no conclusive evidence as to how to best develop those skills. Day (2000) concurs and believes that training programmes are failing to address the identified themes of leadership development in the literature and Martin and Robertson (2003) state “Stronger links need to be established between school improvement and principal development” (page number unavailable).

It is acknowledged, in the literature, that leadership is a learned skill and that professional learning to develop the potential of leaders is vital (Bush & Glover, 2004; Stewart, 2000). Stewart (2000) states, “it is generally acknowledged that ongoing training for principals and aspiring principals is vital for the continued development of quality schools” (p.92). So what is considered effective professional development for school leaders?

### **Effective Professional Development**

As with effective leadership it seems that an all encompassing definition of what constitutes effective professional development is elusive. However, a general consensus is, the core function of professional development is school improvement and ultimately the enhancement of student learning. It is argued that professional development and school improvement are inextricably linked (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Brooke-Smith, 2003; Guskey, 2002; Hill *et al.*, 2002; Martin & Robertson, 2003; Timperly *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, effective principal professional development programmes must facilitate change that is embedded in the cultural norms of the school. In this way professional development must be transformative.

Guskey contends that for professional development to be deemed effective, evaluations should provide evidence of the following:

1. *Positive participant reactions;*
2. *Evidence of participant learning;*
3. *Changes to organisation structures to support the learning;*
4. *Transference and use of the knowledge and skills; and*
5. *Impact on student learning outcomes (Guskey, 2002, p.46-49).*

Stoll et al. (2003) concur but add that linked to organisational support and challenge should be team learning. Hill et al (2002) and Ball and Cohen (1999) reinforce the importance of deep learning, that moves learners away from the replication of facts and requires that actions, as a consequence of engagement in learning become more intuitive. This requires participants to examine values and beliefs that underpin practice and lead to sustainable change. Hill et al (2002) further contend that stakeholders should have ownership of the process.

### **Effective Leadership Development**

Principal development is also recognised in a wide range of literature as having a bimodal nature. There is a responsibility for a principal to develop individually in their leadership role and also to develop the knowledge and skills to improve the learning organisation (Brooke-Smith, 2003; Bush & Glover, 2004; Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005; Dempster, 2001; Stewart, 2000; Strachan et al., 2004). Brooke Smith (2002) and Dempster (2001) both assert that the need to maintain an equal emphasis on both organisational and personal aims. However, they acknowledge that a tension exists and the reality is somewhat different. Dempster (2001) states there is a preoccupation with 'plan-linked' (annual and strategic plans), professional development and as a consequence, an orientation towards "immediate school and system goals at the expense of the type of professional development which responds to the personal needs and socio professional responsibilities of principals" (p.7). Dempster concludes, from his study of the New Zealand context, that organisational learning has a higher priority than personal learning and this is in part due to the way that professional development is funded and resourced. He states that current arrangements in New Zealand "clearly put professional development to

work in the interests of the state and inevitably subjects principals to shift their own learning to serve these powerful interests” (p.15). He suggests that effective professional development for principals has four orientations:

1. *System maintenance – the knowledge and skills of the leadership and management related to carrying out the role of principal.*
2. *System restructuring – the knowledge and understanding of system restructuring initiatives and how to align school policies and programmes with them.*
3. *Professional sustenance – the knowledge and understanding of the values implicated in school leadership and the enduring moral and ethical imperatives in professional life.*
4. *Professional transformation – the knowledge, understanding and ability to carry out productive social and system critiques to develop alternative professional practices (p.20).*

Ribbins (2003) suggests that there are issues with current leadership development programmes. He believes they are largely normative and lacking in a substantial and critical examination of empirical research. He asserts that there is no clear understanding or shared definitions of the key concepts and practices involved and finally, argues that there is little rigorous or independent review, leading potentially to a subjective reality of what they are achieving. Huber and West (2002) further challenge whether or not today’s professional learning has the currency to equip leaders for the future. Fidler (2003) and Dempster (2001) share concerns about the control of professional development and the consequent impact that this has on the total growth of the principal. Fidler states:

*The point at issue is that a number of sectors have vested interests in leadership training – national and state governments, universities and higher education, industry and business – each of which is competing for influence – and this excludes the voice of the profession itself which is often drowned out (p.9-10).*

This fear is further supported by principals in England who express their concern over the National College of School Leadership becoming the sole provider of professional development (Stroud 2005). They suggest that principals be given choice from a diverse range of providers in order to meet their differing needs and contexts. Dempster (2001) and Weindling (2003) also discuss the use of professional standards as currently used in New Zealand to inform principal preparation, performance management

and development programmes. They contend that the limitation of this approach is that it fails to acknowledge the complexity of the role.

Another recurring theme in the literature, is that there should be no 'one size fits all' approach to leadership development and account should be taken of the career stages, prior learning and experience, context and current needs of the participants (Bright & Ware, 2003; Bush & Oduro, 2006; Hopkins, 2001; Southworth, 1995; West-Burnham, 2004). Hopkins et al. (2001) in their report to the governing council state:

*Our challenge is to identify a range of opportunities that will enable school leaders with different life experiences to learn effectively within a context that acknowledges their preferred learning style, their personal characteristics and their different working environments. Further the challenge is to design learning opportunities that promote concurrently the continual development of knowledge, skills and understanding, and social and emotional intelligence (p. 15 – 16).*

Weindling 2003 adds, "the content of leadership development programmes needs to be tailored specifically to the changing needs of the participants and linked to their stages of leadership" (p.4). Weindling (2003) suggests that an identifiable trend in the planning for leadership development is the emergence and use of stage theories and the attempt to link these to a cohesive plan of professional support for transition into and those maturing in, the leadership role. The importance of this trend in supporting leadership development is highlighted in the following:

*Knowledge of the stages or phases, and especially those embracing the beginning phase of headship might well enable those charged with appointing and supporting beginning heads to offer improved training and education, better networks and mentoring based on actual problems that we now know confront most perspective and beginning heads. The utility of stage models is their translation into more relevant and sequenced preparation for the challenges heads will encounter (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006, p 337).*

### **Stages of Leadership**

Theorists have made an attempt to capture the stages that a principal moves through during their career. Although this emerging theory is based on some research with principals (Earley & Weindling, 2004; Ribbins, 2003; Weindling, 2003), it is stated in the literature that there is yet no

“universally agreed, unequivocal consensus on a stage theory of leadership” (Dimmock, 2003, p.8). He further contends that what is being suggested remains conceptual rather than something that is grounded in empirical data.

The stages of leadership, as they relate directly to principals, identified in the literature predominantly cover three very broad phases. They are referred to in various definitions of aspiring, beginning and experienced (Bolam *et al.*, 1995; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Normore, 2004; Stroud, 2005; Wong ND). In a recent publication released by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand principal development is related to four stages – aspiring, first time, established and experienced (Ministry of Education, 2006).

Day and Bakioglu (cited in Stroud, 2005) propose a four stage model commencing with initiation and then moving through development, autonomy and finish with a stage of disenchantment and a consequent decline in levels of performance. They believe that disenchantment is inevitable. Woods (2003), however disputes this contention and argues that professional development can and does lead to the revitalisation of experienced principals.

Three more in-depth models cited are Weindling’s, Ribbin’s and the National College of School Leadership’s 5 Stage Leadership Development Framework.

Weindling’s model suggests principals move through the following seven stages:

- *Stage 0 – Preparation Prior to Headship*
- *Stage 1 – Entry and Encounter (First months in post)*
- *Stage 2 – Taking Hold (3 -12 months)*
- *Stage 3 – Reshaping – Second Year*
- *Stage 4 – Refinement –(Years 3-4)*
- *Stage 5 – Consolidation (Years 5-7)*
- *Stage 6 – Plateau or Regeneration – (Years 8 and onwards)*  
*(cited in Weindling 2003 p.10).*

Ribbins proposes a four-stage model that encompasses Day and Bakioglu’s model. His first stage is formation – the shaping of educational



leaders through their own social and educational history. The second is accession where headship is achieved. The third is incumbency or enacting and at this stage encompasses Day and Bakioglus's 4 stage model with the addition of enchantment. The final stage identified in Ribbin's model is moving on and leaving headship.

The National College for School Leadership's Leadership Development Framework acknowledges the importance of distributed and middle leadership. Its intent is to provide a comprehensive plan to ensure coherent development throughout the career of a school leader (Hopkins, 2001; Newton, 2003). It comprises the following five summarised stages.

<i>Emergent Leadership</i>	<i>When a teacher is beginning to take on management and leadership responsibilities – maybe aspires to headship.</i>
<i>Establishing Leadership</i>	<i>Comprising experienced assistant and deputy heads – no intention to move to headship</i>
<i>Entry to Headship</i>	<i>Preparation and induction</i>
<i>Advanced Leadership</i>	<i>Mature in their role, look to widen their experience, to refresh themselves and to update their skills.</i>
<i>Consultant Leadership</i>	<i>Putting back into the profession by taking on, training, mentoring.</i>

Parkay and Hall (cited in Ribbins, 2003) outline the shared assumptions that underpin stage theory. They are:

- 1. Principals can begin at different stages and not all do so at stage one;*
- 2. Principals will pass through stages at different rates;*
- 3. No single factor determines a principals stage of development; and*
- 4. Principals may operate at more than one stage at the same time (p.63).*

Ribbins (2003) further reminds us that not all principals progress to the final stage.

Day (2003), shares that there are three lessons that can be learnt from the stage development theory. They are

1. *Development is uneven, discontinuous and unpredictable;*
2. *The capacity to engage in critical reflection is vital to growth and;*
3. *Reflection itself as a learning process is subject to 'incremental fluctuation' (p.35).*

A common theme in the literature is that, although these stages are acknowledged, there is a lack of coherence in the development between the stages and, more importantly, an understanding of how principals move through them. Bush and Jackson (2002) contend, "there are many programmes for aspiring, beginning and experienced principals but few of these represent a coherent and integrated programme that covers these three stages of principalship" (p.10). Peterson (cited in Weindling 2003) agrees and suggests, "most programmes remain independent and loosely linked to principals' career stages with little attention to long term planning" (p.15). Day (2003) adds, "interestingly there are still few studies which focus upon the career development and thus the learning or non-learning lives of head teachers" (p.26). The assertion made by Bush (2003) that "there has been a long established awareness that ongoing training is required if school leaders are to operate effectively but this has produced a series of unconnected and modest initiatives" (p. 331), aptly sums up the perceived current reality.

Further to this is the concern that there is no differentiation within the literature between the role of a principal and of an experienced principal, except where experienced principals are used to support those beginning in or aspiring to the role (Hopkins, 2001; Stroud, 2005). The implication from the research is that there is a need for long term planning and a strategic approach to leadership development that pays particular attention to coherence, continuity, sustainability and progression linking every stage of a principal's development (Hopkins, 2001; Weindling, 2003). Stroud (2005) further contends, "there is a need for a differentiated professional development programme to help headteachers continue to be successful in the leadership of their schools" (p89).

The literature suggests that it is useful to gain insight into the experiences of principals, both the positive and the challenging in order to better understand what professional development may be required to meet the varying needs of those being prepared for, beginning and continuing in the role (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). It is this that will now be examined. General issues will be looked at first and then those that are more specific to the stages of development.

### **Positive Experiences in Principalship**

There is a dearth of information regarding what principals really enjoy about the job. The main focus is on the issues. There is evidence that, despite the many challenges, principals remain optimistic about their roles. Earley and Weindling (2004) report that the key aspects of motivation for principals in all of the research studies they had undertaken, were predominantly experiences involving positive interactions with staff, students and the community. Other factors included achieving success and receiving expressions of appreciation.

Ribbins (2003) identified that those who were most successful in the role looked for and enjoyed challenges, remained focused on students, were passionate and remained committed to the principal role.

Another source of motivation was being employed in a consultant role and being able to support the growth and development of others (Earley & Weindling, 2006; Southworth, 1995; Stewart, 2000; Stroud, 2005; Swaffield, 2005; Young *et al.*, 2005).

Huberman (cited in Ribbins 2003) identifies four conditions for sustaining high levels of professional satisfaction. They are:

1. *Enduring commitment;*
2. *Manageable job expectations;*
3. *Good relationships with colleagues; and*
4. *Balanced home / school life (p.67).*

Ribbins concurs, but adds there must be worthwhile opportunities for ongoing learning.

## Issues in Principalship

There is evidence in the literature that the role of the principal has undergone significant change since the late 1980's. Stevenson (2006) suggests there is overwhelming evidence pointing to the fact that the principal's role is increasingly difficult and that the expectations of principals have increased considerably. He contends, "common issues are combining to make the principal's role an increasingly challenging one", and adds, "at the heart of the problem is an expectations deficit that is never likely to disappear. We shall always want schools to deliver more than is realistic for them to do so" (p.409). The literature reveals the following as generic issues that impact on all principals regardless of their experience.

### Generic Issues

The first issue identified in the literature is the uncertainty and complexity of the role created by the rapid rate of change (Bloom et al., 2005; Daresh & Male, 2000; Dimmock, 2003; Stevenson, 2006; West-Burnham, 2000a). Robertson (2005) goes as far as to say, "the only constant in education is change" (p.24). It is the external and imposed change that often creates the biggest challenges (Bush & Glover, 2004). Dimmock (2003) elaborates and contends:

*Current turbulent policy making environments, with changes advocated to most aspects of school and schooling – curriculum, learning, teaching, assessment and accountability place a premium on coherent and synergistic approaches to leadership (p.4.)*

Alvy and Robbins (1998) add "disruptive social dynamics, a decline in financial resources and changes in family structures" (p.1), are all adding to the complexity of the job. Strachan (2004) and West- Burnham (2000a) both discuss the tension leaders face in managing the balance between the vast numbers of management tasks and maintaining a focus on leading the learning. Weindling and Dimmock (2006) add that principals experience ongoing issues with dealing with incompetent or ineffective staff, working effectively with governors and managing time and competing priorities. Robertson (2005) concurs stating:

*Leaders often feel they are in a reactive mode responding within a context of ambiguity, paradox and change and to a plethora of tasks characterised by brevity, complexity and fragmentation (p.44).*

Other recurring themes are budget, resourcing and property management issues (Bloom et al., 2005; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Robertson, 2005; Stevenson, 2006). This has been supported by New Zealand research undertaken by Wylie cited in (Robertson, 2005).

### **Issues Confronting Beginning Principals**

The first issue that a principal faces when beginning in the role is a sense of feeling unprepared (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Bright & Ware, 2003; Crippen, 2004; Draper & McMichael, 1998; Ribbins, 2003). A study of new primary principals in Slovenia revealed that there was a major lack of consistency in what new principals expected to experience and what they actually encountered (Goddard et al., 2004). In New Zealand there is currently no formal qualification for principalship and, congruent with the findings of Bright and Ware (2003), a diverse range of career paths that lead to principalship (Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005; Hansford & Elrich, 2006). Earley and Weindling (2004) state, “we know from research that of those who do become heads there are some who achieve this via a clear and predetermined career plan and others who simply drift into headship” (p.34). From my experience there appears to be two main pathways or career plan options, the first being through a senior leadership position, for example a deputy or assistant principals position, and the second through small school principalship. Brooking et al (2003) posit, “New Zealand has an unusually large number of small schools, with 60% having a roll of less than 200” (p.147), and Strachan (2003), reveals that many principals new to these schools have only been in teaching for between 1 and 5 years. Robinson et al. concur and add, “seven out of ten new principals with school rolls of less than 20 students have come into their first principalship with no prior experience in senior management positions” (p.157). Collins (2002) discussing the consequence of this situation states, “overwhelmingly there is evidence that in many schools, first time principals are being appointed with limited management training or experience” (p.3). Martin and Robertson (2003) add to this mix by suggesting that there are approximately 180 new principal appointments annually across the broad range of school contexts. These factors have

huge implications for the ongoing professional learning and growth of principals. Daresh and Male (2002) state, “providing leadership for schools is a complex activity, regardless of experience levels. But for the novice headteacher or principal, the challenges which now appear can be overwhelming” (p.99). This is explained further by Griffith and Taraban, (2002) in their assertion:

*The preparation of classroom teachers to be principals is, at any time, a complex teaching process to reframe individual horizons of professional interest and knowledge. The immediacy of classroom teaching and learning that forms the lived experiences of teachers must be brought into the context of relationships and responsibilities that extend throughout the school, its communities and the bureaucratic relations linking the school to the education system. The principal must mediate these complex relationships. Indeed complexity is one of the most distinguishing features of the principalship (page number unavailable).*

Whilst New Zealand does have optional programmes for principal development offered through organisations such as the advisory service, the universities and the Educational Leadership Centre based at Waikato University, writers on principalship in New Zealand have often referred to the lack of, and need for, more formal preparation programmes for aspiring principals (Brooking et al., 2003; Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005; Collins, 2001, 2002; Eddy & Bennison, 2004; Ford, 2003; Martin & Robertson, 2003; Robinson et al., 2006; Strachan et al., 2004).

It is contended that leadership development deserves high priority and that waiting until someone enters principalship to begin training is too late (Huber & West, 2002). International research points to many countries taking a more formal approach to the development of principals at the aspiring level. American states have a long history of mandatory formal qualifications for principalship. This constitutes a masters degree (Bolam, 2003; Brundrett, 2001; Bush & Glover, 2004; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Davies & West-Burnham, 2002; Huber & West, 2002; Stevenson, 2006; Tomlinson, 2002; Weindling, 2003). Likewise France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Singapore, Hong Kong and Canada all have mandatory programmes either through formal or experiential modes (Huber & West, 2002). Bush and Jackson 2002 suggest there is the emergence of an

international curriculum for the development of aspiring leaders. They contend that this includes:

*A focus on leadership, including vision, mission and transformational leadership, give prominence to issues of learning and teaching, often described as instructional leadership and incorporate consideration of the main task areas of administration or management, such as human resources and professional development, finance, curriculum and external relations (p.421).*

Despite the best intentions of those responsible for preparing principals for the role prior to appointment it remains unclear how much impact the programmes have (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Bloom et al., 2005; Bright & Ware, 2003; Daresh & Male, 2000; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Bright and Ware (2003) contend that for many principals the impact of any training was negligible, and Daresh and Male (2000) suggest:

*British headteachers do not feel as though they were prepared totally for their posts because they had years of experience in roles similar to but not the same as the headteachers. And American principals report that academic preservice training does not prepare them completely for their jobs. The issue therefore is not one of suggesting that one is prepared either by previous practice or by courses. It is an issue of finding appropriate balance (p.99).*

Further to the feeling of being ill prepared the following key issues have been identified repetitively in the literature as confronting principals in their early years. Bolam (2003) suggests that the issues facing beginning principals fall into three main areas. They are, “the complexity of their roles and tasks, changing external pressures and demands and poor access to professional training before and after appointment” (p.77). Lovely (2004) believes the three key areas of stress are absorbing large amounts of information, working for change despite significant resistance and proving oneself to others. Lashway (2003) adds unrelenting stress, technical skills, relationship management and self-doubt. Most writers on early principalship concur with these broad categories. Over and beyond these broad categories the following more specific items have been identified as key issues:

- Professional isolation and loneliness. Inherent in this is the overwhelming sense of responsibility with the knowledge that ‘the buck now stops with me’ (Bright & Ware, 2003; Dussault & Barnett, 1996; Hobson et al., 2003; Weindling, 2003).
- The legacy practice and style of the previous principal (Earley & Weindling, 2004; Hobson et al., 2003; Weindling, 2003).
- Budgetary issues – financial management (Bloom et al., 2005; Bright & Ware, 2003; Hobson et al., 2003; Weindling, 2003).
- Dealing with incompetent / ineffective staff (Bright & Ware, 2003; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Hobson et al., 2003; Weindling, 2003; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).
- School buildings and site management (Earley & Weindling, 2004; Hobson et al., 2003; Weindling, 2003).
- Applying educational law (Bright & Ware, 2003).
- Time management (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Bloom et al., 2005; Hobson et al., 2003).
- Communication and consultation with staff (Earley & Weindling, 2004; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).
- Creating a better public image of the school (Earley & Weindling, 2004; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).

Quong (2006), reflecting on his own beginnings and through engagement in a small research project with others, identified improving students behaviour, conflict between staff, parent complaints and critical incidents, achieving improved numeracy and literacy results, enrolment and attendance figures and most importantly knowing when to act and when not to act as the most critical issues. He asserts, “achieving the balance between doing too much and too little is the beginning principals most stressful dilemma” (p.383).

There is evidence in the literature that beginning principals find that during their first twelve to eighteen months they have to largely focus on management tasks and issues of organisational socialisation. (Bright & Ware, 2003; Collins, 2002; Ford, 2003; Goddard et al., 2004; Lashway, 2003; Stroud, 2005). Stroud (2005) summarises this stating, “The early



stages are dominated by organisational issues requiring considerable learning as they encounter people and the organisation and attempt to understand the nature of the post” (p.90).

The literature posits that it is not until the second year that beginning principals are ready to take on greater risk, be more creative in their leadership and focus on the core business of learning and teaching (Collins, 2002; Ford, 2003; Luck, 2003; Stroud, 2005; Wong, ND). Luck (2003) found in his study of beginning headteachers:

*In their second year they were beginning to explore in greater detail and take a more strategic overview... More focused support in the form of coaching and mentoring might well be appropriate in the second year when headteachers are often more able to see their development needs clearly (p.3).*

There is no clear agreement on the length of an induction period for a new principal. The literature conveys that it can be anywhere from no induction (the ‘sink or swim’ situation) through to two to three years (Bush & Jackson, 2002; Collarbone, 2001; Lashway, 2003; Stroud, 2005; Weindling, 2003; Wong, ND).

In New Zealand the current induction period has been twelve months but in 2006 has been extended to eighteen months. The aim of induction is:

*To develop the knowledge skills and competencies required by first time principals to be effective in their roles and to provide them with support in their first year of principalship (Eddy & Bennison, 2004, (p.5).*

Given the reported complexity of the role, the diverse range of skills, knowledge and prior experience that principals bring to the role and that management aspects occupy much of the first year there are questions that need to be asked. Is a principal deemed to be experienced after the induction period? How sustainable is the learning? What are the implications for ongoing professional learning and support?

There is clear consensus amongst theorists that “school leaders do not emerge from training programmes fully prepared and completely effective” (Weindling, 2003, p.10), but rather their development needs to be a more planned and incremental process (Bright & Ware, 2003; Cardno &

Fitzgerald, 2005; Collarbone, 2001; Daresh & Male, 2000; Hobson et al., 2003; Su *et al.*, 2003; Weindling, 2004). Research into our national induction programme reveals the following:

*It is important to acknowledge that a one year induction programme consisting of three, four day residential courses and mentoring support cannot, however well designed and delivered, equip participants with sufficient knowledge to be an effective principal, particularly in the area of pedagogical leadership. It can however provide a robust platform for principals to build such knowledge over time (Cameron et al., 2004, p. ix).*

Fullan (2005) asserts that it takes ten years of “cumulative development” to become an effective leader and Ribbins (2003) estimates it takes at least 8 years before one can be regarded as autonomous. Wong (ND) contends it is “important that professional development to support heads at the stage of their headship forms part of a broader continuum of activity intended to support individuals throughout their career” (p.29).

I will now focus on what the literature indicates is available beyond the induction period.

### **Issues Confronting Experienced Principals**

There is paucity in the literature relating to the professional development of principals deemed to be experienced (Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005; Stewart, 2000; Stroud, 2005). Cardno and Fitzgerald (2005) state:

*In the many settings we have examined, preparation and support for first time or newly appointed principals appears to be priority for both policy makers and academics. Catering specifically for development that is appropriate in the later stages of transition is also important but appears to attract less interest (p.318).*

Stroud (2005) concurs and adds there is a gap in professional development strategies for experienced principals.

The biggest issue facing principals, as reported by the literature, appears to be directly related to the stages referred to earlier and, in particular, the ‘disenchantment’ phase – that is sustaining interest and personal growth. Newman (2006) in his president’s address shared some concerns relating to the current state of principalship in New Zealand.

He states that we currently have a profession where:

- *We have a turnover of principals equating to between one quarter and one third of our colleagues leaving each year.*
- *We have an average experience base within principals of about seven years.*
- *The support of and for principals has been dissipated over the last ten years as market philosophies and competition have destroyed commitment to community and collegiality that in the past has always been a strength of our New Zealand education system.*
- *We continue to farewell or bury too many of our colleagues from burnout and exhaustion.*

The literature implies that the major factors contributing to the above are, firstly, the consequences of the issues confronting principals and the changing nature of the job and secondly, as Bloom et al (2005) so aptly state, “experienced principals find themselves in jobs that are very different from the ones they assumed even a few years ago” (p.24). The implication is clearly that if principals do not commit to ongoing learning they are at risk of becoming less effective and becoming disenchanted (Lovely, 2004; Stewart, 2000; Stroud, 2005; Weindling, 2003; West-Burnham, 2000). Stroud (2005) reports on a research study undertaken with a group of headteachers and cites the main challenges as being keeping themselves, and consequently their staff, moving forwards, maintaining and sustaining change, and an acknowledgement that they could not rely on experience alone to remain effective and credible in the profession. All participating principals commented that they felt that the system had neglected them. Stroud (2005) reminds us of the consequences of such negligence. He states, “if experienced headteachers are allowed to degenerate, there is a possibility that the schools, their staff and most importantly their children, will do the same” (p.102).

I will now explore the specific learning strategies that the literature highlights as being effective across the various stages of principalship and that address the key issues that have been identified.

### **Specific Professional Development Strategies**

A scope of the literature consistently reveals that successful strategies for principal development, regardless of career stage, include the opportunity

to reflect on current practice, intense involvement of other colleagues through coaching and mentoring programmes, and learning in context using a range of strategies. These are now described in more depth.

## **Reflection**

Theorists contend that a focus on reflection or critical inquiry must underpin all development strategies (Barnett *et al.*, 2004; Dussault & Barnett, 1996; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Hill *et al.*, 2002; Hobson *et al.*, 2003; Martin & Robertson, 2003; Robinson, 2006; Southworth, 1995; Strachan *et al.*, 2004). Weindling (2003) contends that the role of any leadership development programme needs to concentrate on creating self-reflective practitioners and self directed learners. He further states:

*The most prevalent concept that runs through leadership programmes is the use of reflection in a variety of forms.... It is argued that these form fundamental ways of learning and various opportunities should be provided to allow school leaders to reflect on their experiences both of their training and their work situations (p.18).*

Lambert (2003) believes that reflection is a habit that we should develop as it assists us to consider and reconsider how and why we do things. She contends that the act of reflection will inevitably lead to improved practice and new knowledge. Haigh (2000) asserts:

*“Critical inquiry / reflection is concerned with identifying the way beliefs, goals and practices are shaped by ideology, institutional structure and political constraints. Reflective practice involves teachers in the analysis of contradictions between their personal values and beliefs and the dominant (and possibly repressive) social and institutional norms that influence their practice, consideration of the wider impacts of their current practice and determination of personal and political actions that might effect beneficial change (p.2-3).*

There are numerous perceived benefits of reflective practice cited in the literature, some of them being that it assists in dealing with uncertainty and ensures a more informed approach to decision making, that it allows for a more proactive (rather than reactive), approach to dealing with confronting problems, improves self awareness, and that it matches theory to practice. It is contended that reflection is the skill that both enables learning to be turned into action and increases commitment to action and that without its

presence learning is only likely to occur at a very superficial level. Reflective practice is said to lead to better identification of personal improvement goals and improved practice (Barnett et al., 2004; Lambert, 2003; Robertson, 2005; Stoll *et al.*, 2003; Strachan et al., 2004; West-Burnham, 2004). West-Burnham 2004 states that the “most powerful basis for profound learning is supported reflection – support being provided through coaching and mentoring, the use of a reflective journal, structured reading to inform, review and perhaps most importantly, peer review and feedback on actual practice” (p.5).

The main inhibitors to reflection are cited as being time, knowledge of how to reflect (there is an assumption that effective reflection is a learned skill), physical and emotional stress, isolation from others who can assist in the reflection process and the multi-tasked nature of the principalship (Barnett et al., 2004).

### **Needs Analysis**

An analysis of needs is contended to be a critical aspect of professional learning as it assists to understand the strengths and development needs of the principal. It is a means of assuring that the learning will be appropriate, valid and relevant (Bush & Glover, 2004; Robinson et al., 2006).

In the current New Zealand induction programme the use of SALTAL (Self Assessment of Leadership of Teaching and Learning) serves this purpose. This tool is used to determine both the needs of the individual and the needs of the entire cohort. Beyond that, it's purpose is to provide clear benchmarks for effective practice, encourage self-reflection, to develop learning goals and to provide ongoing feedback to the Ministry of Education as the funding body (Robinson et al., 2006).

There are tensions in the literature regarding the use of a needs analysis. Bush and Glover (2004) suggest while the needs analysis is regarded as being important, there is little evidence of them being used in practice. Hobson et al (2003) concur and add that they have limited value due to

the dynamic and changing nature of the needs of principals. Gunraj and Rutherford (1999) further add that outcomes of a needs analysis should be subject to regular review. Robinson et al (2006) acknowledge the difficulty in asking new principals to self evaluate their development needs when “one could legitimately ask whether new principals know enough to know what they do not know” (p.156).

It is contended that more experienced principals are better at identifying their own professional development needs (Stroud, 2005). However, there is little evidence within the literature to indicate on what empirical evidence this has been based and due to the paucity in the literature on the development needs of more experienced principals could be questioned. Two ways to achieve this, suggested by some theorists, (see for example Bush & Glover, 2004; MacBeath & Myers, 1999) are ‘360-degree feedback’ and the use of a ‘critical friend’.

## **Portfolios**

Many theorists promote the use of portfolios as an effective learning tool (Bush & Glover, 2004; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Lashway, 2003; Martin & Robertson, 2003; Morgan *et al.*, 2002; Stewart, 2000; Weindling, 2003; West-Burnham, 2004). In very simple terms a portfolio is a collection of evidence towards the achievement of specific goals. It may include documents, reflective writing, reports and other appropriate artefacts to show progress. It can be presented in hard copy and digital formats (Stewart, 2000). Bush and Glover (2004) draw on a definition by Wolf et al. that effectively summarises the key points. They suggest, “portfolios are the structured documentary history of a carefully selected set of coached or mentored accomplishments, substantiated by samples of work and realised only through reflective writing, deliberation and serious conversation (p.17). Morgan et al. (2002) see them more as “a personal portrait depicting the strengths and weaknesses of the individual preparing it” (p115). They go on to share some reasons for using portfolios. They contend that they:

- *Are hard evidence of goal completion;*
- *Provide a useful tool for presenting evidence of leadership experience;*

- *Contribute to professional self confidence; and*
- *Are a tool for reflection – reflection on beliefs, convictions, accomplishments for the purposes of self improvement (p.116).*

Martin and Robertson (2003) agree and posit that they are a tool for self-analysis through reflective processes and can lead to improved practice.

Portfolios are an integral part of the requirements of principals currently involved in the First Time Principals Programme in New Zealand. The rationale for their inclusion is well captured in the discussion above.

The perceived benefits of portfolios are that they promote reflection and metacognition, record and provide evidence of development over time and that they contribute to improved self-confidence (Bush & Glover, 2004; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Martin & Robertson, 2003; Morgan et al., 2002; Weindling, 2003).

Issues associated with the use of portfolios are their lack of uniformity, the lack of objectivity on the part of the contributor, the quality of reflection and time constraints (Bush & Glover, 2004).

### **Work Based Learning – Experience**

It is explicitly stated in the literature that the most powerful professional learning for principals happens whilst in the role. Leadership is seen as being both context specific and situational (Bloom et al., 2005; Bush & Glover, 2004; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006; West-Burnham, 2000a; Young et al., 2005), and therefore it is hard to know what will be encountered whilst in the role. West Burnham (2000a) posits, “one of the most powerful determinants of the mindscape or attitude of leadership is experience” (p.69). Bloom et al. (2005) state:

*In our work around the country we have asked hundreds of principals how they acquired the knowledge essential to their jobs: in the teaching role, in preservice and inservice programmes, through life experiences or on the job? They report that their most important learning takes place on the job (p.11).*

The National College for School Leadership in the United Kingdom further stresses the importance of experiential and site based leadership

development (Hopkins, 2001). Pettit (cited in Bush and Glover, 2004) aptly sums this up stating, “no one can simply train for the position of leadership... He / she must do the job to know the job” (p.9).

The perceived benefits of site-based learning through experience are extensive, most importantly the immediate relevance of the learning, the response to a genuine need and the notion of just in time learning (Bloom et al., 2005).

The perceived limitations are that for experiential learning to be of real value it must be supported by others. For example, by a mentor, coach or ‘critical friend’. There can be issues of access to appropriate support and guidance in this way. In addition, there is the inability of principals to reflect appropriately and consequently, it is recommended that this be done with the support of another peer, or peers (Bloom et al., 2005; Bush & Glover, 2004; Griffith & Taraban, 2002; Hansford & Elrich, 2006; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; Quong, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).

### **Mentoring / Coaching**

Mentoring and coaching are unequivocally regarded as a central element in principal development (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Bush & Glover, 2004; Buters, 2000; Crippen, 2004; Daresh, 1995; Lashway, 2003; O'Mahony, 2003; Southworth, 1995; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006; Young et al., 2005). There is no comprehensive definition of either mentoring or coaching in the literature and there is confusion about the differences between the two. There is suggestion that there are overlaps between the two approaches (Ackerman *et al.*, 2002; Sutton, 2005), and that during the process one slips in and out of both roles as different conversations and activities are engaged with (Holmes, 2003).

Mentoring has been defined as the “forming of mutually supportive learning relationships between two individuals working in the same or a similar organisation” (Kirkham, 1995). Southworth (1995) defines it within the educational context as “peer support. It is provided by experienced heads for their less experienced colleagues” (p.18), and Buters (2000)



defines it “a framework for positive support by skilled and experienced practitioners to other practitioners who need to acquire new skills” (p.97). The underlying assumption inherent in mentoring approaches is that a more experienced colleague can assist the development of a less experienced colleague (Bush & Glover, 2004; Buters, 2000; Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Southworth, 1995). It is suggested in the literature that the key points of difference between mentoring and coaching are, that mentoring implies expert on novice, is more general in approach and is of longer duration, whereas coaching is deemed to have a narrower focus on skill development (Bloom et al., 2005; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Hobson & Sharp, 2005). Holmes (2003) states, “coaching has three key identifying characteristics, a focus on learning, results orientation and involves the development of skills competencies and attitudes” (p.3). Bloom et al (2005) define coaching as the “practice of providing deliberate support to another individual to help him / her to clarify and or to achieve goals (p.5). Robertson (2005) concurs and posits, “coaching is a dynamic process that develops uniquely to meet the changing needs of educational leaders (p.38).

There are two approaches to mentoring. The first is formal where the mentoring is arranged through participation in a programme (Bloom et al., 2005; Hobson & Sharp, 2005; O'Mahony, 2003). Such is the case in New Zealand with those beginning principals enrolled in the national induction programme. The other is informal where the mentoring partnership is formed through choice. Likewise coaching can be one on one or occur in groups. It can be more focused on one of the participants or can be based on a peer relationship in which both are active and mutually benefiting (Bloom et al., 2005; Robertson, 2005).

Coaching and mentoring are acknowledged as having both benefits and pitfalls. It is argued that the benefits outweigh the negative aspects. The listed theorists (Ackerman et al., 2002; Bloom et al., 2005; Bolam et al., 1995; Bush & Glover, 2004, 2005; Buters, 2000; Daresh & Male, 2000; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Eddy & Bennison, 2004; Goddard et al., 2004; Kirkham, 1995; O'Mahony, 2003; Robertson, 2005; Southworth, 1995;

Weindling, 2004; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006; Young et al., 2005) suggest the following as the positive and negative aspects of coaching and or mentoring.

The perceived benefits are as follows:

- Professional growth / developing professionalism;
- Increased self confidence;
- Overcomes isolation and offers emotional support;
- Assists in personal and organisational socialisation;
- Benefits all involved;
- Encourages reflective practice;
- Provides a sounding board / confidante and the ability to self disclose / let off steam without fear of judgement;
- Adheres to adult learning theory;
- Supports life long learning, capacity building and focuses participants on continual improvement; and
- Context based and involves experiential learning.

Perceived limitations of mentoring / coaching are

- Mismatch between those involved;
- Insufficient time to carry out the role;
- Dependency creation;
- Reinforcement of the status quo rather than the sponsorship of innovation, due to the conservative nature of mentor/coach practices; and
- Poor balance between support and challenge.

### **‘Critical Friend’**

Whilst mentoring and coaching are seen as non-evaluative approaches, the role of the critical friend is to critique, as the name implies. Costa and Kallick (1993) define a ‘critical friend’ as:

*A trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens and offers critique of person’s work as a friend. A critical friendship takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work (p.49).*

Swaffield (2002, 2005), agrees and extends the definition stating a 'critical friend' is:

*An outsider, who not only has a different perspective on the school from those within it, but also assists them to see the familiar in a new light. The primary aim of a critical friendship is seen as supporting improvement through empowerment, demonstrating a positive regard for people and providing an informed critique of processes and practices (2005, p.45).*

'Critical friends,' as with mentoring, can be allocated or chosen. They emerge from a variety of backgrounds and can include, for example, a member of the governing body, (usually the chairperson), external consultants and other principals or university lecturers. Tools commonly used by 'critical friends' include, open-ended interviewing, observation and self-assessment to initiate dialogue (Costa & Kallick, 1993; MacBeath & Myers, 1999; Swaffield, 2002, 2005).

Perceived benefits of using a 'critical friend' include, support for honest and critical self-reflection and evaluation, affirmation of good practice, and a system for robust formative assessment ultimately leading to improved practice. Use of a critical friend can again, reduce isolation, stress and improve confidence (Costa & Kallick, 1993; MacBeath & Myers, 1999; Swaffield, 2005).

Pitfalls noted are insufficient time and that people have a natural fear of critique and may not fully engage with the process. This is more likely if the 'critical friend' is allocated rather than chosen (Swaffield, 2005).

### **Shadowing**

Shadowing is becoming increasingly common in leadership development programmes and is often linked to mentoring and coaching. It is a "peer related professional development activity" (O'Mahoney & Matthews, 2003, p.2), in which a beginning or aspirant principal can follow an experienced principal for a specified period of time and gain guidance, support and feedback. For shadowing to be effective, ground rules must be established and an opportunity for guided debriefing and reflection must be built in (O'Mahoney & Matthews, 2003).

Strengths of the shadowing experience are that it provides an appropriate role model for beginning or aspirant principals, it provides a basis for learning in context and it provides an “accurate indicator of the role of the principal” (O’Mahoney & Matthews, 2003, p.6).

Pitfalls include that it is dependent on the quality of the relationships formed between the person doing the shadowing and the person being shadowed and the quality and experience of the person being shadowed. It is suggested that tying the experience into specific goals helps to minimise negative impacts (O’Mahoney & Matthews, 2003).

### **Professional Learning Groups / Communities**

Professional learning groups or communities in this context are small groups of principals who come together on a planned and regular basis to deepen their professional knowledge and develop their practice with the ultimate goal of enhancing student achievement (DuFour, 2004). They are structured conversations that focus on active listening, non-judgemental feedback and collaborative action. Action learning and research activities that address problems of practice, grounded in specific contexts, are often a consequence of involvement in professional learning communities. The main benefits of being involved in a professional learning community is that it reduces isolation, supports the social nature of learning, encourages both reflection and action, reduces stress and improves self confidence and efficacy. The barriers are mainly time and access to groups (Boyle & Clarke, 1998; Scott-Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Stewart, 2000; Stoll et al., 2003; Weindling, 2003, 2004; West-Burnham, 2000b; Young et al., 2005).

### **Action Learning / Research**

Action learning and research are terms often used synonymously. In the context of this review the term action research refers to research into one’s practice with the goal to improve it. Action learning is defined by Weindling (2003) as, “a process of learning and reflection that takes place with the support of a group” (p.19). It can however also be looked at more individually and supported by a coach and or / mentor and in this way becomes more of a research activity (Quong, 2006; Robertson, 2005).

Action Research is referred to as a self reflective spiral that moves through the stages of reflection, planning, acting, observing, reflecting again and so on (Bush & Glover, 2004, 2005; Quong, 2006; Robertson, 2005; Weindling, 2003, 2004).

Benefits of action research are that it is experiential and context based. It has a direct and timely focus on one's practice. It requires reflection and action and therefore increases the chance of deeper learning and, understanding of the complexities of the principalship. Barriers referred to when discussing action research are time, and access to appropriate support for the level of reflection required.

### **Problem Based Learning / Case Studies**

The literature suggests that problem based learning (sometimes referred to as a case study approach), is becoming more prevalent in leadership development programmes (Bush & Glover, 2004; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006; Griffith & Taraban, 2002; Huber & West, 2002; Tomlinson, 2002; Weindling, 2003, 2004). Problem based learning is defined as "an instructional approach that uses typical problems of practice as the context for an in-depth investigation of core content" (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006). A key point is that it is an instructional approach and therefore at the point of learning the problem being addressed, is likely to be hypothetical. Problem based learning approaches acknowledge that problems are more often than not the precursor for the need for new learning (Bush & Glover, 2004; Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006; Weindling, 2003). Problem based learning occurs in small groups of people who are encountering, or are likely to face similar problems and draws on the collective experience and knowledge of the group, to progress the problem towards an effective solution (Assor & Oplatka, 2003; Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Griffith & Taraban, 2002).

The perceived benefits of problem-based learning are numerous. Participants are able to learn by doing through interaction with peers and that they receive immediate feedback. It is contended that problem based

learning assists with the development of a more thorough and analytical approach to problem solving and information synthesis, draws on prior knowledge and encourages group and team problem solving in relevant context. Finally it is argued that, engaging in problem based learning encourages both reflection and evaluation of self, and the team (Bush & Glover, 2004; Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2006; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Griffith & Taraban, 2002; Weindling, 2003, 2004).

Perceived pitfalls of this process include the level of knowledge and experience of the group members. An experienced facilitator, who guides the process, is a prerequisite for success. There can be a predisposition towards rushing in and attempting to solve the issue rather than taking the required time to critically define the problem by uncovering all underlying issues. Finally, there is question as to whether or not the problems are aligned to reality with the assertion that they do not include the time constraints and the emotions of others when dealing with issues out of real context (Alvy & Robbins, 1998).

### **Online learning**

The rapid advancement of technology had led to the literature reflecting an increased emphasis on the online environment as an efficient learning space. It is contended that all of the afore mentioned activities can be delivered effectively through the use of technology. It is not suggested the use of technology should replace existing programmes but be used to enhance them. There is acknowledgement that personal contact is still a critical factor in leadership development.

The benefits of E-learning are that isolation can be reduced and there is easy access to increasing knowledge from a global perspective. E-Learning provides economy of time and resources and further, provides ongoing training and skill development in the use of a range of information and communication tools.

The disadvantages of this form of professional development are access to technology, variations in individual proficiency with the technology, the

quality of the portals and the ease of negotiating the sites (Bush & Glover, 2004, 2005; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Griffith & Taraban, 2002; Weindling, 2003, 2004; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).

How are the critical activities of effective professional leadership development reflected in the current initiatives available in New Zealand? This will now be explored.

### **The New Zealand Context**

A recent publication provided by the Ministry of Education entitled “Leading the New Zealand Way – Principal Development” (Ministry of Education 2006), provides an overview of what is currently happening in leadership development in New Zealand.

At this time, there is no formal qualification for principalship. Formal preparation for this stage is accessed either through the universities or Leadership and Management advisers. There is a contractual obligation with the Ministry of Education for advisers in all regions to provide opportunities to aspirant principals. This must be reported on annually. Leadership and Management advisers are further contracted, to provide ongoing support and development to schools.

As previously stated, 2001 saw the inception of a national induction programme in New Zealand. This has been referred to at various points throughout the literature review. Key activities include, mentoring, shadowing, a needs analysis, a reflective portfolio, residential courses that provide networking and problem based learning opportunities, exposure to national and international presenters and online learning.

For more experienced principals there are two initiatives being accessed, the Principal Professional Learning Communities, and the Principal Development Planning Centre.

Principal Professional Learning Communities involve aspects of mentoring and coaching, engagement with professional networks, action learning, problem based learning, shadowing and reflective portfolios.

The Principals' Development Planning Centre targets principals with at least five years experience and involves aspects of mentoring and coaching, encouragement to be involved with professional networks, action learning, problem based learning, reflection, needs analysis and future development planning. The main aim of the centre is to increase principal effectiveness within a supportive and safe environment. Although there is an assessment phase to the centre, its intended focus is to be developmental (Education Gazette, 2006).

The planned initiatives in New Zealand, to support the ongoing development of principals, reflect most of the critical activities suggested in the review of literature accessed.

### **Summary**

This literature review has highlighted national and international perspectives on effective leadership and how it can be developed. There is a suggestion that a national curriculum for leadership development is beginning to emerge. The critical activities, as suggested by the theorists researched, and that form part of this curriculum, have been explored and related back to the stages of a principal's career development and the New Zealand context. Two of the major issues needing to be addressed, as suggested in the review, are the continuity of development between the various stages of leadership identified and how the learning of principals can be sustained beyond the initial stages of their careers.

The next chapter outlines the methodology, data gathering and data analysis processes and ethical considerations of the research.



## CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

The most important consideration facing any researcher, prior to commencing on the research journey, is what methodology should be employed to best achieve the desired results? Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), refer to this as “fitness for purpose”. They state, “the purposes of the research determine the methodology and design of the research” (p.73). Methodology is defined as “a way of thinking about and studying social reality” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.5). This chapter outlines and justifies the researcher’s choice of methodology.

My research question is, “What is the experience of beginning in principalship from the perspective of primary school principals, currently in years three to five of their principalship, and what do these principals believe is important for the support and development of effective principalship in New Zealand”. As this research has as its central focus, the experiences of principals, the methodology will of necessity be qualitative and situated within the interpretive paradigm. Due to the inductive nature of qualitative research, grounded theory will be used to analyse the data and to develop theory. The method of data collection will include individual and focus group interviews. The ethic of research quality including validity, reliability and triangulation of data, and the ethic of respect for the care and the rights of participants will be discussed. I contend that by engaging in reflexive and reflective practices throughout the research process, I can more confidently meet the obligations of ethical practice.

### **Interpretivism**

Characterising a researcher’s preference for working within a paradigm are key underlying assumptions that they have about the nature of social reality (Burns, 2000; Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). These are the researcher’s ontological (our perception of reality and how it can be measured), epistemological (the way that we construct knowledge), and axiological (the role of values), assumptions (Cohen *et al.*, 2000; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2003). Interpretivists believe that the world is socially constructed and that

there are multiple realities. Morrison (2002) states, “for interpretivists, reality is not out there as an amalgam of external phenomena waiting to be uncovered as facts, but a construct in which people understand reality in different ways” (p.18). Scott and Usher (1999) concur and add, “in interpretivism research takes everyday experiences and ordinary life as its subject matter and asks how meaning is constructed and social interaction negotiated in social practices” (p.25). Therefore it is implied that interpretivists further believe that knowledge is constructed through experience and interaction with others. The researcher and participant are interdependent. Interpretivists acknowledge that research is value laden. They recognise that values are an integral part of life and differ in each individual and group (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2003). As the central aim of interpretive research is to understand the subjective world of human experience and this research requires an understanding of the experiences, opinions and lived realities of principals beginning in their careers, the interpretive paradigm best suits the notion of ‘fitness for purpose’. Interpretivist research draws on qualitative approaches.

### **Qualitative Research**

Strauss and Corbin (1998), define qualitative research as, “any type of research that provides findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p10). Dey (1993) explains this further in his assertion that “qualitative data deals with meanings whereas quantitative data deals with numbers” (p.3). The definition that best captures the ideals of qualitative research, in the context of this study, is provided by Watling (2002). He states, “the qualitative researcher is likely to be searching for understanding rather than knowledge, for interpretations rather than measurements, for values rather than facts” (p.267). Qualitative research aims to “paint a picture, potentially facilitating the voice of the research participant to be heard, for others to reflect on” (Bishop1997). Because this research sought to gain an insight into and an understanding of the experience of beginning in the principalship from the perspective of the individual participants, the qualitative method was chosen to enable the principal voice. In qualitative research the participants are seen “not as

subjects but as experts about what the researcher wants to find out” (Burns, 2000, p.393).

There are several limitations identified in qualitative research. First, there are questions about the reliability and validity of the data due to the fact that it is more subjective in nature. Second, is the amount of time required for data collection, analysis and interpretation. Qualitative research generates large quantities of rich data and so analysis is challenging. Third, there are questions as to whether the researcher, by their very presence, may have an impact on the behaviour of the participant and thus skew the data. Finally, because the data is so rich, there are ethical considerations – especially around participant anonymity (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000). These limitations will be explored in more depth in the ethics section.

Qualitative research is based on inductive (from data to theory) reasoning (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). It seeks to understand and reconstruct existing knowledge, through close analysis of patterns emerging from careful consideration of the research information (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). It begins with a strong personal interest and leads to data collection and then the generation of theory (Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Davidson and Tollich, 1999). Cohen et al. (2000) contend that in qualitative approaches the “theory is emergent and must arise from particular situations; it should be ‘grounded’ on data generated by the research act (Glaser and Straus, 1967), theory should not precede research but follow it” (p.23). Therefore grounded theory was used as the most appropriate methodology for this piece of research.

### **Grounded Theory**

Glaser and Strauss (1999), who developed grounded theory methodology, defined it as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained and analysed in social research” (p.1). They add, “its basic position is that generating grounded theory is a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses” (p.3). Grounded theory, as a methodology, has as its central aim, the building of theory rather than, the testing of predetermined

outcomes. Its focus is on allowing the theory to emerge from the experiential accounts of the research participants – in this case the principals beginning in the principalship (Burns, 2000; Goulding, 2002; Scott & Usher, 1999). Strauss and Corbin (1998) state, “although we do not create data we create theory from the data. If we do this correctly, then we are not speaking for our participants but rather enabling them to speak in voices that are easily understood and representative” (p.56). The importance of principal voice to this research has previously been highlighted and therefore justifies the choice of grounded theory as the overarching methodology. Furthermore grounded theory is said to be an interpretivist mode of inquiry, drawing on qualitative methods (Goulding, 2002; Mutch, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The strength of grounded theory lies in its ability to be effectively applied to the study of human endeavour – the central aim of this research. Strauss and Corbin (1998) assert that, “grounded theories because they are drawn from data are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding and provide meaningful guide to action” (p.12). This encapsulates the critical intent of the research. Glaser and Strauss (1999) portray a further strength of grounded theory analysis in the following statement:

*Theory based on data can usually not be completely refuted by more data or replaced by another theory. Since it is too intimately linked to the data it is destined to last despite its inevitable modification and reformulation (p.4).*

Grounded theory is said to make the following possible:

1. *To enable prediction and explanation of behaviour;*
2. *To be useful in theoretical advance;*
3. *To be useable in practical situations;*
4. *To provide a perspective on behaviour; and*
5. *To guide and provide a style for research on particular areas of behaviour (Glaser and Strauss, 1999, p.3).*

A desired consequence of the research project is to offer suggestions as to how the experience of beginning in principalship can be enhanced, and the use of grounded theory as a methodological approach is a means to achieve this.

For the research to adhere to the guidelines of grounded theory it must give attention to three key principles underpinning the methodology. Llewellyn (1998) summarises these as:

1. *The effect of the constant interplay between the various levels of analysis so that each mutually affects and validates the other over time.*
2. *Analysis begins with the raw data and proceeds to increasingly higher levels of abstraction until a theory is generated.*
3. *The developed theory is applicable in practice by being grounded in real life data (Llewellyn, 1998, p 28 – 29).*

As with any methodology grounded theory also has its critics and perceived weaknesses. Cohen et al. (2000), citing Silverman, argue, “it fails to acknowledge the implicit theories which guide research in its early stages and that it may be strong on providing categorisation without necessarily having explanatory potential” (p.152). It is suggested that reflexive practice may eliminate these factors. Reflexive practice will be discussed later.

Grounded theory is also a data analysis method and will be readdressed later in this chapter within that context.

It is stated that, with both qualitative research and grounded theory, one of the more common methods employed is the semi structured individual interview (Cohen et al., 2000; Goulding, 2002). The methods employed in the research will now be discussed.

### **Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

Qualitative research uses methods that generate large amounts of rich and descriptive data and provide insight into the lived realities of the participants in the study (Cohen et al., 2000). Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe methods as “a set of procedures and techniques for gathering and analysing data” (p.5). It is widely acknowledged, in the literature, that interviewing is a preferred method in qualitative research (Bell, 1999; Best & Kahn, 1998; Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000; Dey, 1993; Goulding,

2002; Llewellyn, 1998; Neumann, 1997; Wellington, 2000). Scott and Usher (1999) state:

*Interviewing in an essential tool of the researcher in educational enquiry. This is because the preconceptions, perceptions and beliefs of social actors in educational settings form an inescapably important part of the backdrop of social interaction (p.108).*

Qualitative interviews are “generally semi structured or unstructured, of longer duration and conducted one to one” (Mutch, 2005, p.127). This research drew on two methods of interviewing, i.e. semi structured individual and, focus group approaches.

A further consideration for researchers at the data gathering stage and one that can have a significant impact on the research is the quality of the sample of research participants (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000; Goulding, 2002).

### **Participants**

As the research focus was very specific the sampling procedure used would best be described as “purposive”. Cohen et al. (2000) suggest this is when, “researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality” (p.103). The participants were all principals in their third to fifth year of principalship. They came from a range of primary school contexts in rural and urban settings. A balance between males and females was achieved as was representation from a range of school sizes, from sole charge (U1, 0 - 50 students), to a large (U6 – 500 + students) school. Twelve principals were sought in total from two regions within close proximity to the researcher. Six were from the Waikato region and six from the Bay of Plenty.

The participants were identified with the assistance of personnel from School Support Services. They were able to provide names of principals in the targeted area and their approximate years of experience. An initial list of twelve was identified and a reserve list created. Once consent had been gained, contact was made with each participant to establish an appropriate time and venue for the individual interview. The individual interviews were held over August and September 2006.

## **Semi Structured Interviews**

Mutch (2005), citing Kvale, states “an interview is literally an inter view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (p.127). Cohen et al (2000) concur and add that it is a “gathering of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals” (p.268). In the qualitative approach, interviews are most typically what researchers refer to as semi structured. “A semi structured interview schedule tends to be the one most favoured by educational researchers, as it allows respondents to express themselves at length, but offers enough shape to prevent aimless rambling” (Wragg, 2002, p.149). Semi structured interviews are thought to allow the participant to have greater control over the interview process and are more likely to give the researcher rich data and a clearer understanding of the perspectives and realities of the participant (Cohen et al., 2000; Dey, 1993; Goulding, 2002; Mutch, 2005; Wragg, 2002). Powtney and Watts (1987) state that in the qualitative approach “the interview is a personal record of an event by the individual experiencing it and told from that person’s point of view” (p.23). As the perceived experiences of the participants were the basis of the research intent, it was clear that this approach would allow access to the most relevant information and thus justified the choice of method.

In line with the nature of semi structured interviews open questions were written and provided as a guide. The questions were as follows:

1. Tell me about your school and how long you have been a principal?
2. Describe your journey to becoming a principal?
3. Tell me about the first few months in the job – what were you feeling?
4. What did you think being a principal would involve?
5. Tell me about one of the best times in your principalship
6. Tell me about one of your worst times in principalship?
7. What support did you expect to receive as a beginning principal?
8. Tell me about what has assisted you to grow in your role as a principal?

9. What professional learning have you undertaken?
10. Tell me about when you have found it difficult to get assistance that you have needed
11. Can you give me some examples of support and or professional learning that you have undertaken that you have found particularly valuable?
12. How has your learning to date helped you?
13. How do you keep this learning current and accessible?
14. Tell me about anything that you felt you really needed or would have liked to have access to assist in your development?
15. Give me some examples of when you feel you are being or have been really effective
16. Tell me about your current needs. How do you identify these?
17. How are you getting support for these?
18. What are your feelings about your role as principal?
19. Where do you see yourself in 5 – 10 years time?

These questions were sent out to participants before the interview took place to allow time for reflection. During the interview process flexibility in the structure was allowed as participants addressed questions within questions and offered insights that allowed for some issues to be further explored. Bell (1999) states:

*A major advantage of the interview is its adaptability. A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings. The ways in which a response is made (tone of voice, facial expression, hesitation, etc) can provide information that a written response would conceal (p.135).*

Interviews were recorded on tape allowing me greater opportunity to maintain a focus on the participant and to probe as required. Non-verbal cues and skeleton detail was recorded in field notes (Cohen et al., 2000). This proved to be necessary and useful as in one of the interviews there was an issue with the second side of the tape.

Interviewing is not without issues that need careful consideration. Amongst the more prevalent are the fact that they are time consuming, that there is



a danger of interviewer bias, questions can be leading and written to seek answers that support preconceived ideas, participants may try to please the interviewer rather than be honest in their responses and, analysis can be very difficult due to the large amount of data generated (Bell, 1999; Cohen et al., 2000; Wragg, 2002).

To address some of these issues the questions were piloted with a principal as suggested by Cohen et al. (2000) and necessary amendments made. They were further scrutinised by my supervisor. The tapes were transcribed either by me, or an independent transcriber who had signed a confidentiality agreement. Transcripts were then returned to participants for verification and amendment. It was asked that they add to or delete from the transcript to ensure that their experience had been captured and portrayed in the way intended. Participants were encouraged to remove all reference to names and places that may identify them and to any material that they would not like used in the final report. They were also given the opportunity to withdraw from the research (see Appendix 3a, 3b and 4). The researcher also maintained a reflexive and reflective position throughout the research process as will be discussed further on in this chapter. A final strategy used to address the above, was to follow the individual interviews with focus group interviews.

### **Focus Group Interviews**

Focus groups are defined as “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1997, p.6). Krueger (1994) agrees but adds, “it takes place in a permissive and non threatening environment” (p.6), and Williams and Katz (2001) further add, “participants share a common interest or characteristic”. It is stated that there are six features that typically characterise the focus group process. They are “(1) people (2) assembled in a series of groups (3) possess certain characteristics and (4) provide data (5) of a qualitative nature (6) in a focused discussion” (Krueger, 1994, p.16). Most theorists contend that the ideal number of participants in a focus group ranges between six and ten (Morgan, 1997; Puchta & Potter, 2004; Wooding *et al.*, 2006).

There are two reasons for using focus groups cited in the literature. Firstly they can be used as a method in their own right and thus the principle source of data and secondly as an adjunct to other methods or use in a multi method approaches (Morgan, 1997; Puchta & Potter, 2004; Whitney, 2005). When used alongside other methods Puchta and Potter (2004) contend that focus group research serves two major purposes. The first, “an initial exploratory or hypothesis generating tool” and, the second, “a follow up phase that pursues exploratory aspects of the analysis” (p.7).

The choice of focus groups in this research aligns with the second purpose and was designed to fulfil three key intentions. The first intent was to test my emergent interpretation of the data after the individual interviews. I summarised what I saw as key themes emerging from the data collected across the twelve individual interviews and explained my initial thinking to the group. I then asked them to either confirm or disconfirm the points raised and that what was shared was representative of the group’s thinking. One of the strengths of focus groups is thought to be the capacity to review data both individually and as a group (Goulding, 2002; Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997; Williams & Katz, 2001; Wooding *et al.*, 2006).

The second intent was to explore issues that arose during the interview process and to ask any questions to fill in what I perceived to be gaps in the data collected. It also allowed me to ask the group to design a model of professional development that they believed would meet the needs of principals at the focal point of the research. The focus group guide was again based on a semi structured approach and included the following:

- Review emerging themes and findings for comment and discussion.
- What would you do differently if you were to begin your principalship again?
- What advice do you have for those considering/ beginning in principalship?
- As a group design what you believe would be the ideal professional development model for principals in years 3 – 5 based on your knowledge and experiences.

Consider:

- Resourcing
- Timing
- Curriculum

Data from the focus group was recorded in a book.

The final intent of the focus group method was to reduce the impacts of the weaknesses of the individual interviewing and thus increasing the reliability of the research.

Focus groups have their own set of weaknesses. The main issues are suggested as group dynamics (dominance, conflict etc.). There can be a tendency towards conformity and the interviewer has less control than in an individual approach. The data can be difficult to record and analyse. They are difficult to organise in a manner that ensures full participation (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1997; Puchta & Potter, 2004; Whitney, 2005; Wooding et al., 2006).

The final point proved to be a huge challenge and whilst the intention was to hold two focus groups, the reality was that this had to be reduced to one, and even within that group, the full representation was not achieved. To compensate for this the findings from the research presented to the focus group participants and the discussion notes from the focus group were distributed to all participants via email with an opportunity for response and further input. Nine of the twelve participants responded to the email. The focus group interview was held in October 2006.

Both methods used an inductive process of data analysis and therefore complemented the grounded theory approach. Grounded theory as a data analysis tool will now be discussed.

### **Data Analysis**

The research used 'grounded theory' as its data analysis tool. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define data analysis as "the interplay between researchers and data" (p.13). Blaikie, cited in Scott and Usher (1999), describes a 4-stage data analysis model.

1. *All facts are observed and recorded without selection or guesses as to their relative importance;*
2. *Facts are analysed, compared and clustered without using hypotheses;*
3. *From the analysis generalisations are inductively drawn as to the relationships between them; and*
4. *These generalisations are subject to further testing (p.43).*

This approach is consistent with the 'constant comparison analysis' – the data analysis method that is an integral part of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this method, all raw data is compared and contrasted to illuminate similarities and differences and to look for emerging patterns and themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Goulding, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is worthy of note that data analysis does not occur at the completion of the data gathering phase but is an iterative and integral part of the entire research process (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Mutch, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Watling, 2002). Watling (2002) asserts, "analysis pervades each and every aspect of qualitative inquiry" (p263).

Analysing data took me through a three stage coding process. This is a non linear process especially when working within the open and axial coding phases (Glaser & Strauss, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Burns (2000) defines coding as, "classifying material into themes, issues, topics, concepts and propositions" (p.432). Strauss and Corbin (1998) identify the three coding stages as open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

Open coding or stage 2 of Blaikie's model required the researcher to approach the data with an open mind. Mutch (2005), quoting LeCompte and Preissle notes, at this stage the researcher is making initial perceptions, comparing and contrasting data and, eventually developing subcategories of things that are similar in meaning. The practical application of this involved the researcher initially comparing and contrasting data from each individual question as an iterative process as the interviews progressed. This assisted in the understanding of the information received, and allowed the researcher to probe deeper in interviews as required (Burns, 2000). This was carried out in more depth after the interview process was complete. I carried out initial analysis by

coding using coloured highlighters and annotations in the margins of the amended transcripts.

The next stage is axial coding. This aligns with stage three of Blaikie's model. In this stage the subcategories, identified during open coding, were analysed for links and relationships, and reassembled into more defined categories. The practical application of this stage meant clustering categories where links could be made and evaluating the emerging themes by further comparison and contrast, to look for confirming and disconfirming evidence. Burns (2000) reminds us "an apparent pattern must be challenged. Other plausible explanations always exist" (p.434).

Selective coding is the final stage in the process and is where "a core category is identified and related to all the other subsidiary categories" (Scott & Usher, 1999, p.42). This relates to stage four of Blaikie's model. The practical application of this stage meant that key themes identified were linked back to the data, validating it against the principal voice and then establishing links back to the literature, thus allowing the emergence of 'grounded theory'.

The final consideration in any research is that it adheres to ethical principles and guidelines. This chapter will now address the researcher's role in ensuring that the research meets the ethic of quality and that procedural ethics ensuring the care of participants is afforded full attention. This is underpinned by conscious involvement by the researcher in reflective and reflexive practice.

### **Reflective and Reflexive Practice**

Reflective practice is seen as an important component of educational research. Reflective and reflexive practices are two concepts that are inextricably intertwined but have a fundamental difference. Reflection asks the researcher to think critically about the process of research whereas reflexivity demands that the researcher reflects on "the self, the researcher, the person who did it, the me or the I" (Wellington, 2000). Newby (1997) states, "reflexive awareness implies that the consciousness

of the knower is upon him – or herself as a motivated subscriber to, or constructor of insights” (p.78). He implies that the central concern of reflexivity is that the researcher remains aware of their own biases and assumptions and the potential of these to influence and distort the research process. He further contends that reflexivity requires the researcher to acknowledge that there is no value free knowledge and reflexive practice requires an awareness of the impact of our personal values on the research process and findings. Cohen et al. (2000) concur and state:

*Reflexivity recognises that researchers are inescapably part of the social world that they are researching and indeed that this social world is an already interpreted world by the actors, undermining the notion of objective reality (p.141).*

Guillemin and Gillam contend that reflexivity is “closely connected with ethical practice” (p. 273). Burgess (1989) concurs and adds, “a review of ethical problems and dilemmas should be at the heart of reflexive practice” (p.74). It is suggested in the research literature reviewed that many ethical issues arise through oversight, thoughtlessness or haste (Cohen et al., 2000; de Laine, 2000; Small, 2001). Small (2001) contends, the means for achieving ethical practice is “through learning rather than deterrence” (p.389), and “there is no substitute for the individual’s development to make ethical decisions about the design and conduct of his / her own study” (p405). Reflective and reflexive practices provide an opportunity for the learning and capacity growth to occur. The researcher is assisted to be aware of existing and potential ethical issues through all stages of the research process. Such practice empowers researchers to ask questions of themselves and reflect consciously and critically on their practice, their current and future decisions and the impact of them (Burgess, 1989; Greenbank, 2003; Small, 2001; Smyth & Shacklock 1998; Tolich & Davidson, 1999; Tripp, 1998; Wellington, 2000). This is conveyed by McCormick and James (cited in Cohen at al., 2000). They argue:

*Combating reactivity through reflexivity requires researchers to monitor closely and continually their own interactions with participants, their own reactions, roles, biases and any other matters that may bias the research (p.141).*

Reflective and reflexive practices underpin and inform both the ethics of quality and the procedural ethics adhered to by researchers.

### **The Ethic of Quality**

One of the key responsibilities of a researcher is to ensure quality (Bush, 2002). Gorard and Taylor (2004) state, “the first commitment of the researcher is to the quality and rigour of the research” (p.163).

Researchers must ethically declare their own biases and their potential impact. Gorard (2004) states, “if it is not possible for the research to bring us up against our preconceived ideas then we are not doing research” (p.163). He further contends “findings driven by the researcher however worthy are unethical and constitute poor research” (p.163). As a principal who is currently involved in the programmes that contribute to the development of principals, it was important that I maintained a reflexive awareness throughout the research process. I tried to remain as objective and impartial as possible and critically analysed and challenged myself to be aware of the impact of my personal values, biases and assumptions (Newby, 1997).

A major responsibility of a researcher is to ensure results are reported logically, honestly and made available to public scrutiny. In doing so researchers have an ethical obligation to ensure that their research is both reliable and valid. Falsification of results is clearly unethical behaviour (Burns, 2000). Researchers can employ various means to enhance reliability and validity. Triangulation is one way to achieve this.

### **Reliability**

In qualitative research reliability is about how much the recorded data reflects what actually happened in the research setting (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000). Reliability also carries a notion of replicability. Mutch (2005) simply defines this as “someone else could replicate your study with similar results” (p.114). Reliability was achieved by ensuring the consistency of research procedures, for example using a question guide to deliver the interviews to each of the participants in the project.

## **Validity**

Validity refers to the truthfulness, richness and accuracy of data, approach and analysis. In qualitative research it is further about the extent to which the findings reflect the intent of the research (Burns, 2000; Burton & Bartlett, 2005; Cohen et al., 2000; Tolich & Davidson, 1999). One of the greatest threats to the validity of qualitative research is researcher bias or distortion of fact (Burns, 2000; Bush, 2002; Cohen et al., 2000; Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Reflexive practice has already been discussed and was engaged with throughout the project. Validity is said to be one of the strengths of qualitative research, as researchers in this method commit to representing the voice of their participants in the most accurate way possible (Davidson & Tolich, 1999).

## **Triangulation**

Triangulation was used as a means to enhance both reliability and validity. Triangulation is defined as “using multiple methods, data sources and researchers to enhance the validity of research findings” (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Bush (2002) identifies two types of triangulation. The first is ‘methodological triangulation’, which requires using two or more methods to explore the same issue and the second is respondent ‘triangulation’, which requires the researcher to ask the same question of many participants.

Methodological triangulation was achieved through the employment of two methods - the individual and focus group interview. Respondent triangulation was achieved by interviewing 12 individual participants.

A further means to achieve triangulation is through “member checking” (Mutch, 2005). I achieved this in two ways. The first was to return individual transcripts to allow each research participant the right to review their contributions and to amend them where appropriate, ensuring that they reflected their understanding and intent. (Alderson, 2004; Bassey, 1999; Greenbank, 2003; Radnor, 2001; Wellington, 2000). The second was using the focus group to test my emerging interpretation.



## **Procedural Ethics**

Babbie, cited in Davidson and Tolich (1999), states “just about any research you might conduct runs the risk of injuring other people somehow” (p.71). It is with this in mind that researchers have a responsibility to ensure that their research is carried out in such a manner that potential harm to participants is managed and minimised.

Voluntary participation and Informed consent are two measures designed to protect the rights of participants. Voluntary participation demands that no coercion be applied or inducement made to engage participants. They must participate in all aspects of the research process because they choose to (Tolich & Davidson, 1999; Waikato, 2006). Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the research at any stage and that non-participation would not hurt the research in anyway. Informed consent has an expectation that the participant is fully informed of the nature of the research including any potential benefit or harm that could result (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000; Sammons, 1989; Waikato, 2006; Wilkinson, 2001). Each potential participant was sent a letter outlining the intent of the research, the details and impact of their involvement and included an informed consent form to be signed and returned if they were willing to participate (see Appendix 1 and 2).

Freedom from harm is an important ethical responsibility for researchers. In educational research the most common forms of harm can be summarised as emotional upset and betrayal - where information given in confidence is revealed publicly resulting in embarrassment and anxiety, when one group is advantaged over another, when the researcher fails to accurately reflect the data gathered, when a participant engages in inappropriate behaviour or inappropriate behaviour on the part of the researcher, for example aggressive approaches to interviewing and finally confusion arising from overlapping roles and relationships (Alderson, 2004; Cohen et al., 2000; de Laine, 2000; Gault, 2001; Punch, 1998). It is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to plan to minimise these risks and monitor them throughout the process.

The final point of consideration but one that is of importance is the protection of privacy. Ethical behaviour demands that the researcher ensures that participant privacy be respected and that they maintain the right to control any information about themselves (Cohen et al., 2000; Wilkinson, 2001). Privacy implies that the participant has the right to determine what can be published and what cannot. Participants were sent their transcripts and had the right to amend them, as they required. Further to this questions were sent in advance so reflection and planning time was assured. Confidentiality is another important consideration. It is about non traceability meaning that there is limited possible public connection between the participant and the information supplied (Burns, 2000; Cohen et al., 2000; O'Brien, 2001; Punch, 1998; Sammons, 1989; Wellington, 2000; Wilkinson, 2001). To ensure confidentiality was maintained, as best as possible, research participants are simply referred to as 'principal voice'. People and locations cited directly by the research participants have been given pseudonyms and / or fictitious names. The focus group interview provided a challenge as some participants did come face to face. They were encouraged not to discuss their individual contributions and any analysis shared was presented as a summary of twelve participants thus ensuring the confidentiality of individual contributions.

A prerequisite of all research is to gain approval for it from the ethics committee of the governing body, in this case the University of Waikato. The application detailed how I, as the researcher, would adhere to ethical principals. Approval was gained from the committee in June 2006.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have outlined the methodology and methods used to extract the information required to answer the research question and have demonstrated how these address the issue of fitness for purpose. I have discussed how the roles of reflective and reflexive practices have assisted me to adhere to the ethical principles of research quality and participant care. I have sought to convince the reader that whilst there is no perfect

'truth', a focus on reliability, validity and triangulation enhances the trustworthiness of the research.

The next chapter looks at the findings of the research based on the themes that emerged from the data analysis. It is in a narrative format and contains direct quotations from the 'voices of the principals' interviewed.

## CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

The research question required participants to reflect on their experience of beginning in the principalship from pre-appointment through to their current position. From the grounded theory analysis of the data discussed in the previous chapter, three major categories emerged. They were periods of pre-principalship, induction and post induction. However as this research sought to understand what support and professional learning beginning principals perceived as being necessary to support their development towards effective principalship, it was also necessary to gain insight into what the research participants believed effective principalship was. This provided a fourth category, which will now be discussed prior to exploring the findings in the other emergent categories.

### **Effective Principals**

The principals in the study firstly believed that effective principals have a vision that focuses on student learning and that they are able to ensure 'buy-in' from others. Principals' voices included:

- *Somebody who is able to inspire others to learn.*
- *They have a clear, understood future learning vision for children and the ability to drive the associated development.*
- *To be an effective leader you have to know where you are going. You have to have a vision that everybody buys into. For that to happen you have to really believe it yourself and it has to come from within you. It has to be tied into your values.*

The ability to effectively manage relationships across the whole school community was seen by the participants as a critical attribute of effective principals. Principals' voices included:

- *You need to be able to communicate well with children. You need to be able to recognise all of the different stakeholder groups and work to ensure that their needs are met. For example the Maori community had not been acknowledged for many years when I came here so one of my priorities became to open those doors.*
- *Effective principalship has everybody pulling in the same direction. Students are happy, families are happy, the community is happy and there is pride.*

Principals also included the notion of being a team player and the ability to share leadership with others as a key attribute of effective principals.

Principals' voices included:

- *Working as a team is the most important thing. I mean all decisions are made together. It is always we, never me or I.*
- *Sharing leadership – giving everyone responsibility and having effective public relations to allow effective liaison with the whole school community.*

There was a range of professional skills identified by the research participants. They saw effective principals as having a current and extensive professional knowledge base, as capable managers and drivers of the change process, as reflective practitioners and as being passionate. "I think that passion is important. If you didn't love the job I don't believe you could do it well" (principal voice). This was summed up by one principal as ' "being committed to making a difference". Principals in the study also discussed the importance of having effective management skills. They believed that effective principals had "sound systems and structures in place to support the operation of the school" (principal voice). Aligned to this was the ability to multi task, "to be a good juggler, and keep all of the balls in the air at the same time" (principal voice).

There was also a range of personal skills for effective principalship identified by the participants. These included, effective problem solving and situational assessment skills, effective communication skills, (including the ability to listen actively and openly), the ability to be open-minded, flexible and to maintain a sense of humour. Principals saw the ability to build trust as imperative. "Trust is huge, they know that I trust them and they trust me to support them in every way that I can and to act on my word" (principal voice). Another critical quality was resilience. An effective principal was seen as someone who was able to make the tough decisions, tackle difficult issues and to be able to stand firm against pressure. A final recurrent theme expressed by the research participants was the need to be "real, a role model, and to be able to walk the talk" (principals' voices). One principal stated, "One of the things that I do with my staff is that I don't ever expect them to do anything that I can't or won't do myself", and another stated, "You have to be real – you cannot pretend to be what you are not".

**Key Finding:**

Principals in the study had a common and shared understanding of what they believe constitutes effective principalship.

This chapter will now focus on the findings relating to the support for the development of effective principalship.

**Pre Principalship**

Responses in this area covered the pathways participants had taken to principalship, the specific training accessed, the impact of the training and with the benefit of hindsight what additional training would have assisted them to better prepare for the principal role.

**Pathways to Principalship.**

For some of the participants in the research project principalship was a goal and actively sought as a career path. These principals reported moving into principalship at a younger age and reasonably early in their careers.

*I completed a BMS degree in Human Resource Management / Industrial Relations and then realised that it was not a career path I wanted for myself. It was at a time when they were actively recruiting for teachers and so I did a graduate diploma in teaching with the express idea of going into rural principalship as soon as I could. After four years of teaching in an intermediate school I started applying for jobs and got the first one I applied for (principal voice).*

Participants choosing this pathway generally had between three and eight years teaching experience and shared that they had had limited leadership opportunity. Some had been a curriculum leader or a senior teacher.

Others had not contemplated principalship but had been identified by a person of influence in their career and encouraged to seek it sometimes at the time of a position becoming available. Principals' voices included:

*I never had an intention, never my goal to be a principal. I never thought about myself as a leader. When the principal of my current*

*school left, as DP I ended up acting in the position. When the job was advertised I only applied because a few of my friends said – Why not?*

*An AP's job came up and I was encouraged by the principal to apply for it, won it and really enjoyed it. Then my principal pushed me to apply for a principal's job too. I suppose it was that constant badgering and pushing. I hadn't necessarily thought about it seriously but ended up getting the job so suddenly had to take it seriously from there.*

Still for others it was a natural progression, seen as the next stage in a career pathway after moving up through various middle leadership positions. In this instance it was often not something that people aspired to from the outset but was sought after exposure to leadership positions and to meet the need to keep themselves professionally challenged and motivated. These people had generally been in teaching for a period longer than ten years. Some of the participants who fitted into this description had been recognised by principals that they were working with and encouraged into leadership. Principals' voices included:

*I did not seek principalship earlier on because I wanted to stay in the same area and family came first – before anything else. While I felt I had the skills to do that job I have gone in through a different pathway – that of being AP and DP and so forth.*

*I came back from overseas and the principal I was working with encouraged me to think about principalship as a career. I moved through a senior teachers position to Deputy Principal. During that time I was fortunate enough to have a principal who was like a mentor as well. Over a five year period we designed a systematic pathway to principalship.*

#### **Key Finding:**

There are multiple pathways to principalship in New Zealand.

#### **Preparation for Principalship and its Impact**

Many of the principals in the study shared being unable to identify any formal training they had undertaken to prepare themselves for principalship. One principal stated, "I am pretty unique. I hate to say this but I am probably the most unqualified principal of a large school. I have no degree". Another principal reflected, "I went into my first principalship as a third year teacher and in hindsight I don't think anyone should be

going into principalship in his or her first years of teaching. Learning the craft of teaching is hard enough on its own". Yet another said "I had no training for principalship so I actually found myself being the principal of a school having won the position and I didn't really have a complete idea of what I was in for". A reason offered by principals for not undertaking training was that they had never aspired to principalship. One principal shared, "I never really saw myself as a principal so never followed the leadership or management path as far as my professional development". Others cited the non-availability of leadership programmes.

**Key Finding:**

Many principals are entering principalship without any formal training for the role.

There were exceptions to this. Some of the principals had commenced study towards masters in educational leadership. One principal believed that this had impacted strongly on the ability to manage the principalship.

*It was wonderful preparation because with all of the things you are dealing with in your principalship you have theory to draw on and back you up. For example trying to understand the change process. I don't always get things right but I have got something to reflect back on and to ask myself why I am doing things in a certain way. The other thing about doing study was the networks that you built with other principals and aspiring principals and they are now people I can go to for help. You also get access to key people from the university who can assist in lots of different ways. I would strongly encourage anyone to do study – it really helps you to be critically reflective and it assists you to challenge yourself academically and keep up with change (principal voice).*

Another principal commented, "I think that it is probably useful without you knowing it. When you reflect on an action or decision you can make links back to theory, but I don't know that it directly influences how I manage my school day to day" (principal voice). A principal who had completed a degree in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations found that although this degree was done before deciding on becoming a principal and therefore not done with principalship in mind, that it "had probably more to do with helping me than anything I've done through education or professional development" (principal voice). Another principal



had done a one day leadership course advertised through School Support Services. “I was sent on a leadership programme. We covered mainly styles of leadership and I think we looked at dynamics” (principal’s voice).

**Key Finding:**

Formal programmes undertaken can assist to prepare for principalship.

The most common form of preparation for principalship identified by the research participants was experience gained in various roles held within a school. Principals referred to this as “training on the job” (principal voice). This was summed up in the following statement. “In terms of leadership training very little. It was purely by taking on responsibility through the school system, which was the infusion of leadership. There was no actual course or leadership programme” (principal voice).

On the job preparation in the assistant or deputy principal’s role was reported by some participants as being helpful in terms of its impact on principalship. For this to be considered successful participants suggested that the development had to be initiated and supported by a more experienced colleague, usually the supervising principal. Participants reported moving into the principalship from an existing middle leadership position.

*My principal believed that the most important thing was firstly to establish myself as a good quality classroom teacher – someone who could model good educational practice. He encouraged me to be open-minded and to give things a go. He then expected me to lead a syndicate – a syndicate in a bigger school can be the same as leading a staff of a smaller school. And then he asked me to start projecting, a make and shape type situation where I had to take things to the Board, proposals, budgets, funding applications – doing all the associated paperwork. He then took me to a principal’s conference and began taking me to his professional network meetings. He included me in school planning and organisation in a practical way. One of the biggest things he did for me at the time was give me the freedom to develop my own style. He would question me and create reflection but never determine the direction. There were times when I felt under a lot of pressure as a DP and didn’t like what he was expecting of me. Looking back on it now I can see exactly what he was trying to do. He was helping me to understand that there are times in principalship when you are under considerable pressure (principal voice).*

Being a deputy principal in a small school was also reported as advantageous. “I think in a small school you are given lots of leadership opportunities. There are so few of you that you have to do everything together” (principal voice).

However there were principals who had been in assistant and deputy principal positions and who believed that senior positions of responsibility had not assisted them to prepare for principalship. Although being in positions of responsibility they discussed a lack of opportunity to develop and exercise leadership in a significant way.

*In the DP's role I was mostly given just the same PD as the rest of the staff – nothing really targeting DP's. I was a DP for seven or eight years and I would have to say that in terms of being groomed for a principal's role very little happened. That was because the leader of the school I was in was very capable and everything just ticked along. As a Principal I look back and think how much more I could have done as a DP. I could have been a more supportive and valuable member of the senior management team but how do you know what you don't know (principal voice).*

**Key Finding:**

Middle Leadership positions, e.g. assistant and deputy principal's positions can but do not necessarily provide preparation for principalship.

Another example of preparation through experience for principalship was a period acting in the position. One principal shared:

*I had a year as acting principal then a year back in the DP role and then another two terms acting before being appointed to the position. I think that year acting really prepared me for the permanent position. Another good thing was having the year acting and then coming back and having that year out watching the principal and how he handled things and thinking, I probably wouldn't have done it like that and learning through that way too. He also pulled me into the role much more and we worked together and did a lot together which was awesome training. It was good to sit back and watch and see someone else.*

**Key Finding:**

A period acting in the principal role is valuable preparation for principalship.

The principals in the research were asked to comment on what professional development or support may have assisted them to prepare for principalship. Their responses will now be reported

### **Desired Professional Development and Support**

Principals were asked to discuss what additional professional development would have enabled a better understanding of the principal role. Most responses indicated that they needed a better understanding of management and administrative tasks. One principal summed this up saying, “probably some experience in understanding the systems that we work under – you know MOE guidelines, staffing, property, finance, SUE reports, those sorts of things because they are basically the same or similar in all schools. They are set systems.” There was suggestion that this could have been done formally through courses or through better opportunity in the middle leadership position. One principal commented, “just being given responsibility at the DP level for more than curriculum and discipline would have been useful. Flexible job descriptions that gave exposure to a wide variety of tasks and roles would have been of huge benefit”.

Another common area where participants believed they would have benefited from training was in the people management side of the job. The main point of issue was “skills in dealing with the hard stuff, things that are not up to standard” (principal voice). Other suggestions included generic skills for negotiation, conflict management, facilitation, mediation and how to organise and run effective meetings.

#### **Key Finding:**

Beginning principals believe that training in generic skills in administrative tasks and people management would be beneficial prior to taking up the principal role.

Early identification of people with potential and support and encouragement for people to enter the principalship was another theme in the responses from participants. One principal said “I think we need more

people in the education system encouraging people to go for it – people who support you and motivate you to go on because our schools, especially our small schools are struggling to get principals”. The following quote sums up the general feeling from the research group.

*I think that people who aspire to leadership and show potential should be identified early. They should be given the ability to develop the required skills alongside experienced people. This could be tied into their performance management (principal voice).*

Linked to this development was to have time acting in the position alongside a mentor.

*The experienced people should share their experiences and their journeys in their leadership roles, speaking particularly about challenges that are associated with it. This would create awareness of what to expect because everyone I talk to feels like they have gone in blind and learnt through the hard knocks (principal voice).*

**Key Finding:**

Potential leaders need to be identified and developed early by experienced mentors.

The principals in the study acknowledged the difficulty of planning for pre principalship training programmes. They referenced this back to the multiple pathways to principalship and that each school is context specific and a ‘one-size fits all approach’ to professional learning will not work.

*There are lots of things that you can't prepare for because every school is different and a lot of it you have to figure out for yourself. Going to a course or doing some form of development may give you some ideas but it is actually how you apply them to the setting that makes all of the difference (principal's voice).*

**Key Finding:**

Planning programmes for aspiring principals is difficult as there is no consistent pathway to principalship and each school context is unique.

Finally there was discussion from the participants as to whether or not there should be a prerequisite number of years that a person has taught for before they can enter principalship. The participant group agreed that

prior to applying for principalship candidates should have had at least five years of teaching experience. Principals' voices included:

*Principals who go in after two or three years of teaching and who have no other experience might be able to talk the talk but there is so much they just do not know. Things like how to deal with people, a vulnerable staff member or parent and how can they really know what good teaching practice looks like?*

*I really struggled as a third year teacher going into principalship. People management was a huge issue – I was twenty four and dealing with parents who were a lot older than me. There were issues with people not valuing you as a professional. It was a rewarding but damaging experience and one that nearly drove me out of education.*

**Key Finding:**

Applicants for principals' positions should have taught for at least 5 years.

**Induction**

The second category to emerge from the analysis of data was the period of induction. Responses in this area covered reflections on the experience of beginning in the principalship, professional development and support received and desired professional development and support. These will now be discussed.

**Reflections on the Experiences of Beginning in Principalship**

The participants were asked to reflect on their first three months in the job and how their perception of principalship matched with reality. Those principals who had come through senior leadership positions appeared to feel more confident in the first three months and discussed having a good understanding of what the job involved. "After six years as a DP in a big school, it wasn't like this earth shattering, oh my god kind of experience for me" (principal voice). Participants still acknowledged that "there were things I didn't understand or I wasn't prepared for" (principal voice), and that "I had as clear a picture as I could from the outside but I don't think you really know it until you are in it" (principal voice).

Those principals who entered principalship without extensive teaching backgrounds or senior leadership experience tended to describe the first

three months as exciting but bewildering. The following response summed up the feelings of others.

*What, where, when. There just isn't any support for principals. It was two terms before I could start FTP and during that time unless you have people you can call on yourself you are alone. Nobody gives you a pack and says these are the sorts of things you will be required to do. You step into the job and the next minute you have got someone ringing you asking for something, or telling you something hasn't been done and you think. What is it? Where would I find it? When does it need to be done? That's why I say what, where, when. I think the reality is there isn't really enough information about what the role of principalship is (principal voice).*

**Key Finding:**

Experiences prior to principalship impact on how principals transition into the role.

Common issues emerged for the participant group about their perception of principalship and the reality they experienced. A major discussion point was the fragmented nature of a principal's day and the constant demands on time. Principals' voices included:

- *I think I had a realistic view of what the job was going to entail I just didn't know I was going to have to fight all the fires at once.*
- *You are always trying to keep everyone happy, juggle all the balls in the air and keep them all up. You're probably doing two hundred to three hundred tasks a day, different sorts of things, property, finance or child behaviour and you just go from one thing to another having to switch from task to task.*
- *There can be times when a whole raft of things mount up. There's a difficult conversation you have to have, a parental complaint, the up coming board meeting where you know there is going to be controversy, a whole series of things and sometimes it can feel a little bit too much.*

Another discussion point was the realisation of responsibility - that "the 'buck stops with you' and you can no longer pass it back to the principal" (principal voice), and the consequent sense of loneliness. One principal shared, "you are alone, and you are the person that people come to". Another said, "there is a lot to have on your shoulders. You are responsible for a whole school and it is not just the children, it is the teachers and the safety of everyone."

**Key Finding:**

The complexity and loneliness of the role are common issues facing beginning principals.

**Positive Aspects of Principalship**

Participants were asked to reflect on the highlights of beginning in the principalship. They reported that there had been many highs and these were the things that kept them motivated and grounded. Responses focused firstly on the differences made for children. “I’ve never lost sight of schools being about kids and kids learning. That’s the key and what keeps me in the game. Seeing kids do well and developing as a person is a rewarding experience” (principal voice). Another common theme was a sense of pride in improvement in student achievement data. “I am really excited that our data shows increased engagement with learning and better achievement results’ (principal voice). Many principals spoke of missing teaching and felt some of their best times had been in the classroom. “The best times have been my teaching days. I’ve done some really neat stuff and I have enjoyed the kids. The kids keep you grounded, keep you honest and remind you what you are there for” (principal voice).

Another common highlight for participants was receiving positive feedback from a variety of both internal and external sources. “It’s that moment when you get feedback that says things are going well, whether it is a conversation with a kid, a conversation with a parent or a colleague, or you have seen some sort of high achievement, those are the great things” (principal voice). Another example of welcomed feedback was a positive review by the Education Review Office. “It was great to have our hard work acknowledged and affirmed by ERO” (principal voice).

Implementing successful change was another point of pride and enjoyment for the principals. One principal shared, “the other thing I like about being a principal, particularly of this school, is the warm wairua that we have managed to establish because it didn’t always exist. I guess that is one of the things I have worked hard to achieve” (principal voice). Another spoke about “setting up the school vision and that going

absolutely fantastically and seeing it now fifteen months down the track and everyone having ownership of it. It was a huge success and everyone thinks it is great” (principal voice). For others it was about property enhancements that made the school a better place for kids and raising the public perception of the school.

### **Challenges in Principalship**

The issues discussed by the participant group were overwhelmingly similar. The most common and ongoing issue that principals reported facing was the management of relationships. This encompassed many different aspects of the job. One critical factor was the management of under performing staff. Competency procedures had created high stress points for several of the principals in the sample, as had being held responsible for the mediocre performance of staff members. Principals’ voices included:

- *The worst times have all been around people. They are the things that keep us awake at night. I have found the whole area of dealing with incompetent teachers very, very difficult. I found it difficult to get a straight answer for the clear cut steps one has to go through when a teacher fails their attestation.*
- *Its relationships. It is about how to get all of the people moving in the same direction, not just half or three quarters of them but all of them. Learning how to deal with people without creating more conflict, knowing when and when not to react, and how to react.*
- *Dealing with the gate keepers – especially in rural schools where you can find staff who have been there for a long time and who are unwilling to change. Dealing with passive resistance.*
- *Dealing with surplus staffing. That is just so traumatic.*

Another relationship issue experienced by participants was when being promoted from within the school they were currently working in. One principal shared, “A difficulty in moving from DP to principal is that people frequently blur the lines between how they came to you as a DP and how they now come to you as a principal” (principal voice). Another principal stated:

*On Friday I was the DP (acting principal) and on Monday I was the Principal. There was no right of passage you would say, no welcoming in, no celebration, nothing. I went from informally doing the role to formally doing it. I am an extremely different person to the former principal and I operated very differently. There were a few parents who thought that I was just a DP and shouldn't have got the job. I have a thing on my wall that says once you become a*



*principal all relationships will inevitably change – even those who are appointed within their own schools will notice a change in relationships with former colleagues. I didn't expect it to be like that. I think the surprise for me was the nastiness of people. I had a couple of families and staff members leave and whilst that was probably better in the longer term it really hurt at the time.*

A final issue discussed in the area of relationships was dealing with difficult parents and communities. There were discussions of “bullying tactics’ (principal voice), being used by parents and the frustration of having to deal with unrealistic expectations of parents. Principals’ voices included:

- *I was nearly driven out of education totally by a parent. They believed that the needs of their special needs child were not being met. I had full support of the board and had the assistance of outside agencies but they were dissatisfied and the relationship deteriorated.*
- *I have some parents here who are unstable and known drug users. They threaten and can place you in a position of danger.*
- *I frequently have parents come through who have an unrealistic viewpoint of what they want and start demanding things. This can create a whole range of pressure.*

Having to quickly learn aspects of the job that there had been no specific training for or experience in was another challenge discussed by the participant group. Most common issues in this area were dealing with the Board of Trustees, property, finance, including reading and interpreting SUE reports, preparing for an ERO visit, learning the systems, understanding legal aspects of the job and dealing with the media.

Dealing with inherited agendas or legacies from the previous principal were also identified as issues. One principal shared that “the board were keen for me to get rid of a teacher and that created a lot of initial pressure”. Another walked into a criminal investigation of a staff member that was both highly publicised and extremely stressful. Yet another grappled with following a much loved principal that the community were still grieving for. “The school I went into was perceived as having a great principal. The school had won the Goodman Fielder award and so they thought this person was god, it was difficult to compare” (principal voice). Finally, there were examples of basic documentation not being in place. “I despaired when I arrived, the filing cabinets had been cleaned out, there

was no strategic plan and there were none of the systems or procedures in place that I was used to (principal voice).

Managing the workload and the impact of the job on family life was a major discussion point for many of the participants. The workload was seen as demanding. This seemed particularly true for principals with young families. One principal stated:

*The most challenging thing would be a balance between work and family. When I say that I believe it is because I had a lack of fundamental leadership grounding. Because of that you end up spending a lot of time doing things that you shouldn't. You should be doing other things but you don't have that wisdom to know what is important.*

The other group who identified themselves was teaching principals.

*Being a teaching principal adds to the challenges in your day. You are trying to juggle effective classroom delivery and the principalship. The reality is what are you doing? Are you a teacher or are you a principal? If you try to do them both well you are kidding yourself. You just can't. It's like serving two masters, one when you're in the office you are worried about not giving the kids a fair go and when you are with the kids you are worried about the paperwork piling up (principal voice).*

A final issue was dealing with the unexpected. One principal described this as, "the situations that come at you, you don't see them coming and you get hit from behind, like a piece of four by two and you wonder where did that come from?" An example of this was the floods of 2005.

*I had a real fear at half past one that afternoon when the skies were pouring down and our car park was flooded and we had to bring all the cars up to the quadrangle that I might have to stay the night here with 500 odd children (principal voice).*

There was also an incident involving the kidnapping of a child on the way to school, a case of a spouse suffering severe post natal depression at the time of an ERO visit and there were various other traumatic incidents described by the group.

There was a perception from the participants that induction programmes needed to place a higher priority on assisting principals to understand and increase personal competency in these areas.

**Key Finding:**

There are common joys and issues experienced by beginning principals that need to be considered when planning induction programmes.

The next part of this report will focus on what support beginning principals received during the induction phase. The research participants were asked what support they expected to receive. The majority of the principals stated they had not expected any support beyond their boards, their staff, the local ministry and their families. Some participants commented that they were hopeful of support from other local principals. Some of the participants were aware that there was a national induction programme and others were not. The following summarises the support most valued by the principals.

**Support for Beginning Principals**

Professional development that had direct transference to practice and was context and needs specific was reported as being most useful to the research participants. They believed that it further needed to be readily accessed as much of the learning was seen as 'just in time' learning. Collegial support for learning was also seen as critical with participants stating the need to have someone they could talk with.

**Experience**

The research participants believed that they learnt firstly through experience. They believed that this was the "most powerful form of learning" (principal voice). This reflected both experiences that they brought to the position from previous roles, and more importantly 'just in time learning' from simply doing the job. "The biggest thing is experience, there is no doubt about that and the longer you stay in the job the more you learn" (principal voice). Another stated "I think it is probably the hard stuff that makes you grow. It is the self belief, the willingness to give things a go, and to learn from your experiences" (principal voice). Still another participant agreed but added:

*Through the hard knocks, I've learned a whole lot of things about my job and my role. It's not a wrong way of doing things, but there*

*could be more effective ways of becoming a principal than through making mistakes. But through mistakes you definitely learn because unless you are stupid you're not going to be doing it again.*

Inherent in experience was the need to reflect. "It's time in the job and it's being self critical and self-reflective" (principal voice). While most shared that they did this informally there were principals in the group that kept reflective journals. One principal shared:

*The journal has been a really useful document. I found it really useful when things were tough. I had this heading "I am in the mire and then you flick through it and the heading is "I am out of the mire". I just love reading it now and I go back and I think gee was it that bad, was I feeling that down? I flipped through it in the weekend. Doing some reflective thinking around the questions that you had given me and I thought gosh, we have, I have come a long way but I think more importantly it is helping me to see where I am going and where to next.*

#### **Key Finding:**

Experience or 'just in time learning' is the most powerful form of learning.

#### **First Time Principals**

Most principals cited the First Time Principals programme as contributing significantly to their professional growth. They described it as "hard work but good grounding for the job" (principal voice). The principals believed that the content of the residential courses could be applied back to the school setting and many referred to still using resource material supplied. One principal shared, "FTP assisted me to focus myself on what is important. It has helped me deal with staff and to develop better strategies for teaching and learning. It has helped me streamline systems" (principal voice). Participants appreciated the exposure to high quality national and international speakers. The other perceived benefit of the First Time Principals programme was the networks that it provided.

*I met a whole bunch of girls and guys and from that I've got a network of people I still keep in touch with. We try and meet at a conference or something as often as possible. But the real value is in sharing our stories, fun stories, serious stories, not so good stories, unbelievable stories... That is really valuable and it revitalises you (principal voice).*

The mentoring component of the programme was also seen by many of the principals as an influential and beneficial part of their growth. This will be discussed further below.

**Key Finding:**

The New Zealand induction programme is having a positive impact on the growth of beginning principals.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring was seen by those participants who had access to it as a critical part of their development. For many it was deemed to be the most valuable assistance beyond experience. “The most valuable support I received was that of a principal colleague. Someone who had worked through the teaching profession at a variety of levels, someone who had had leadership experience and had worked in a variety of schools in different areas, someone who was prepared to be there for me when I needed advice” (principal voice). Further to this, mentoring was seen as necessary support during challenging times. One principal shared, “I had a personal mentor and I do not think I could have got through without him, particularly with the surplus staffing thing. It was such a hard time but having someone I could pick up the phone and talk to when I was having a panic was really important.”

Mentors were either self selected or appointed as a part of the First Time Principals Programme. Self-selected mentors came through as being more effective in the eyes of the principal’s interviewed although some participants did share positive outcomes with appointed mentors.

*I think the mentoring programme in the FTP was a really strong system. I know that not all mentoring relationships were successful but my experience was positive. The needs analysis, formal and informal meetings, visiting other schools and sharing ideas were good at exposing different ways of doing things and creating reflection space (principal voice).*

Reasons for mentoring not being effective will be explored in the next section.

## **Principal Networks**

Some of the principals had been invited to join a PPLC (Principal Professional Learning Communities) group by a more experienced colleague. Those that had been extended this opportunity saw it as particularly valuable professional learning. They discussed relishing the opportunity to be able to share issues that they were immediately facing in a structured and supportive environment. They also enjoyed the collaborative approach to ongoing professional reading that occurs within the groups.

Another way that principals reported forming networks was through involvement in Ministry contracts with other schools. An example of this was, an Information and Communication Technology, (ICT), cluster. One principal shared, “the collegial support we had there, that group of six of us has been really powerful. I don’t honestly think it would have been as easy if I didn’t have that group. Through the contract I was able to visit other schools and see good practice. The collegial dialogue we shared went beyond ICT” (principal voice).

A final example of successful principal networks experienced was the local principals’ association. This was not always the case as for some of the research participants, competition and isolation did impact. For some help was a mere phone call away and experienced and established principals readily made themselves available for advice and guidance. An interesting point however, is that with the current high turn over of principals the experience base of these networks is being eroded in some areas. One principal shared “I am now the acting chairperson of the local principals’ association. The problem is that because all of the experienced people have gone we need to look at restructuring to ensure that we provide the necessary support for all”.

Participants cited contacts with governing bodies such as the Ministry of Education, School Trustees Association, New Zealand Principals’ Federation and the New Zealand Educational Institute as being valuable. These tended to be accessed for specific reasons such as planning and

reporting advice and assistance with competency and surplus staffing Participants drew on these organisations to build personal knowledge and better understand process. Participants reported using these most commonly in support of meeting compliance requirements.

### **Internal networks**

Other valuable support mechanisms, for beginning principals, reportedly came from within the school. Participants cited their assistant and deputy principals as being valuable support, both professionally and personally. A principal shared, “I share a lot with my DP. I trust her totally and there would be very little that I don’t actually share with her and other members of the leadership team”

Other people cited as being invaluable support were ancillary staff or administrative officers. In larger schools they were responsible for many of the administrative tasks that dominated the time of principals in smaller schools. One principal stated, “I have an administrative officer who will surf the net for any information I might require. She is experienced in many areas and has the knowledge needed to ensure we meet all compliance issues”.

The final source of internal school support identified was boards of trustees and, in particular, chairpersons. One principal shared, “My board are fantastic. I can’t speak highly enough of them. We have established a team who work towards improving outcomes for the pupils in our school”. Another cited the most valuable support received as having “a competent chairperson, one who knows what they are doing and can facilitate meetings well”.

### **School Support Services**

Some principals discussed engaging the services of Leadership and Management and Curriculum Advisers to assist them with specific areas of focus in their schools. This was seen by participants as valuable, as it was context based and met an identified need. Leadership and Management advisers were often cited as assuming the role of a ‘critical friend’ or

mentor. One principal shared that she had rung for assistance to meet the recommendations of the ERO report and she had been given invaluable support. Another had been given specific support with the analysis and use of data through an action learning process and that had been influential across the school. Another used the adviser as a sounding board. It was reported that the adviser, “gave structure to my thinking and provided me with material and readings that would open up new ways of doing” (principal voice). Those who had engaged the services of advisers saw them as instrumental in their growth and development. This comment was offered by a principal and sums up the relationships experienced and discussed by the participants:

*Having access to someone to have an honest professional conversation with. A listening ear, but she didn't leave you feeling like you'd just been listened to; she went away leaving you feeling that there was hope. She was clever. She would leave you with an idea, a reading, something to think about or something to try. She was someone I respected, she was professional, she knew the area, knew the school, she knew the community at large. She was someone I could trust.*

Principal Updates, run by School Support Services were perceived by many of the research participants as invaluable opportunities to be kept up to date with current issues and initiatives and, to network with other principals around points of interest or concern.

**Key Finding:**

Access to mentoring and involvement in a variety of professional networks is seen as valuable support by beginning principals.

**Post Graduate Study**

Some of the participants discussed being actively involved in post graduate study and some were considering it at the time of the interviews as a potential next learning step. Those that had done study reported finding it beneficial and were able to relate the papers to specific needs within their own school context. Reasons for studying were shared as the need to maintain currency and to build professional knowledge.



## **Curriculum Based Learning**

As well as learning in leadership principals in the study discussed the need to be committed to learning alongside their staff. They were involved in a lot of school based curriculum development. Literacy, numeracy, assessment and ICT were frequently mentioned and most of these Ministry funded contracts. One principal shared, “I think my staff are important. I have an obligation to be able to step into their classrooms and be just as good and just as knowledgeable as they are. If I am going to be knowledgeable about what is going on in my school, I have to learn with them” (principal voice).

### **Key Finding:**

Principals believed that it was important to continue to build their knowledge base.

The next part of this report looks at what professional development principals in the study would have liked.

## **Desired Professional Development and Support**

The principals in the study believed that they had access to a range of support. They believed that support required was out there and it was their responsibility to seek it. They did however have several suggestions for ways that existing support structures could be modified or enhanced to better meet their needs. Two main areas were discussed. They were changes to the First Time Principals Programme and additional assistance from the Ministry of Education

## **First Time Principals' Programme**

There was a perception from the participant group that the residential courses became too high powered and theoretical too quickly.

*At the first residential course I wasn't quite ready for the level of development that we got. I often get my notes and readings out now and they mean so much more to me now than they did at the time. I wasn't ready for that high level of thinking. All I wanted to know was the nuts and bolts of the job. I had only been in principalship for a few months before the first residential and I sat there thinking, I don't know what I don't know. I honestly didn't know*

*what I didn't know and I sat there through this high level stuff worrying about a plumbing job being done at school and thinking, wow I am not ready for this. Looking back, it is not until you have been in the job for twelve months that you know what you need to know. I think if I could have gone back a year later I could have participated with understanding (principal voice).*

Many participants felt that one residential in year one focused on administration, the challenges that principals face and that was practical in nature would be better. There was a concern expressed that some beginning principals were attending residential courses prior to taking up the role and that this was creating anxiety and stress. The principals in the study believed that sometime in the role prior to commencing in the induction programme assures participants get the best from it.

*I believe I was at an advantage doing FTP after acting in the role for a year. I saw a lot of stunned mullets at the first residential but I definitely knew what they were talking about. I think it was better to do it that way (principal voice).*

Participants suggested that residential courses two and three could happen in year two. Some thought that the opportunity to come back together after year two for some in-depth professional development and further networking would be great and suggested that residential three could be held in year three.

Holiday timing of the residential courses was shared as a point of frustration. Workload and time away from family meant that there was some resentment about having to give up much needed holiday time. As discussed before this seemed of greater concern to parents of young families and teaching principals. Principals in the research stated that they understood the reasons behind it but felt there needed to be a compromise. Principals' voices included:

*I don't agree with idea of giving up your holidays because as a first time principal you work flat tuck during the holidays anyway to get yourself up to speed. I was really crook after the last one I went to, it was just too much, because you had to work at school and then you went to the course and there was no time for a break. I can understand why they have it then but for me it is a nightmare.*

*I am pretty dedicated to my job and work long hours so being involved in PD and away from your family during holiday times has been a challenge. I know the holidays are bonuses but without*

*them you go mad. You really need them to achieve some sort of balance or you start to lose sense of reality.*

Some of the participants felt that it would be good to link involvement in the programme to some accreditation towards a qualification. There was suggestion that this would provide greater encouragement to complete all aspects of the programme.

Some participants believed that there needed to be more differentiation in approach to the residential courses. There was a perception that the needs of small school principals, particularly U1 and U2 schools and principals with limited leadership and teaching experience were not being addressed. The teaching side of the principalship was seen as being entirely overlooked.

*Much of FTP is philosophical and while the philosophy is great it is not what a lot of the participants need. There are schools in crisis being led by principals with limited experience that need a much more practical approach (principal voice).*

A final point was that the experience of mentoring within the programme was very inconsistent. Several people were dissatisfied and one principal stated that he was overlooked by his allocated mentor after a later start to the programme. There was agreement that principals should be allocated a mentor on appointment. "I think as soon as somebody becomes a principal, is appointed as a principal, the mentoring process should be established and begin immediately" (principal voice).

Issues with mentoring, identified by the participants, were predominantly related to distance between the mentor and the mentee, a perception that the mentor did not have the time to give and in some cases mismatches in personalities. Principals' voices included:

*I had a mentor with FTP but it wasn't a good experience. The person was in Auckland and I just didn't get anything from them. Whether or not it was because I didn't know what I needed. I don't know it just didn't seem to work.*

*Our mentor came in and did the obligatory stuff and then just disappeared. She didn't attend the residential she was supposed to. I didn't have a wonderful experience with my mentor but the value out of the programme overall was exceptional – you just couldn't fault it.*

Participants felt they would have liked more input into the selection of their mentor. They believed that mentors needed to work within the same general region and be sensitive to the context of the principalship. The practicalities of a U6 mentor working alongside a teaching principal were questioned by the participants. There was a further suggestion from the group that the frequency of the mentoring contact needed to be increased.

#### **Key Findings:**

Principals need a greater focus on organisational issues in their first year.

There needs to be some further consideration for principals of small schools in the First Time Principals Programme.

Mentoring is a critical relationship and expectations need to be defined.

#### **Ministry of Education**

There was a suggestion, from the research participants, that the Ministry of Education needed to provide better initial support to First Time Principals. Suggestions mainly referred to the ministry providing more detail to help them understand and meet the many requirements of the role. “The Ministry should provide a clear structure as to what the expectations are throughout the year, especially in regards to compliance areas” (principal’s voice). Suggestions included that a handbook be available to all principals that had a:

- *Perpetual calendar with all key dates and deadlines;*
- *List of all compliance issues with references to appropriate legislation;*
- *Key contacts and their role descriptions;*
- *Links to other support services; and*
- *Information on the FTP programme (principals’ voices).*

The principals acknowledged that there was information on many of the official websites but they found the navigation of the sites frustrating and the numerous passwords required off putting. Many principals are still

learning how to use technology effectively. Adequate time to access information was also a huge factor.

There was a suggestion from the participants that the Ministry fund the release of full time positions for experienced principals (maybe a recently retired principal) to work alongside beginning principals and their boards.

*If the Ministry is committed to the idea that boards should be doing governance, then they need to be providing greater support and guidance to both board members and principals. The problem we have got at the moment is that we have a three year cycle and the consistency is not there. We have people just coming to grips with the role and then they are gone. A visiting principal would be a great help. They could provide support and guidance at the principal level as well as assist the board in their role. Things like principal appointment and appraisal are crucial and yet not well done. This would be a proactive way to ensure that schools don't fall over. They would provide us with someone we can trust. It's all very well saying you can contact such and such but if you have no idea who that person is you don't know whether or not you can trust them (principal voice).*

**Key Finding:**

Principals required additional help from the Ministry of Education to assist them to better understand the compliance aspects of the role and to assist the board in its work.

The final category focused on the period post induction, and specifically, years three to five of principalship, that being the current phase of the participants' careers. The findings in this area will now be discussed.

**Post Induction**

Principals were asked to reflect on how their growth was being supported beyond the induction period. Questions asked them to reflect on what they believed their current needs to be, who assisted them to identify these needs, how they were identified and what support they were receiving to meet those needs. They were further encouraged to make suggestions as to what additional support would be useful at this stage of their careers. The principals were finally asked to comment on how they were feeling about principalship.

## **Current Needs**

The research participants were asked to identify their current needs. The most common responses often made as though in jest were more time, a good holiday and a new job. Those aside, the other issues raised were staff management and in particular dealing with competency, time management, change management and support and guidance with career pathways. Principal voices included:

*I think my need is support to manage change. There are times when I have moved too quickly or tried to do too much at once.*

*More time. I think that as a principal there is always a reactive element because you just have to deal with whatever happens at any given time and you cannot predict what is going to happen. I still haven't learnt to manage my time. I have tried lots of different ways. I've tried timetabling things. I have tried blocking myself out. I don't know whether it is me, or the nature of the job.*

*I need a new job. I need a bigger school. I think this job would kill me if I stayed here too much longer. Being a principal of a small school is hard work. You have to do the lot. We don't have a caretaker so I have to organise the mowing of the lawns and the working bees. If the toilet floods I am the first person they call. It all stops at the principal's desk.*

One principal shared, "The more I know the less I understand, my current need is to find someone who can help me identify what my needs are. I don't know if you can actually do that yourself because your own point of view can be twisted by your perception of who you are".

## **Needs Analysis**

Principals in the study were asked who helped them identify their needs. Most principals stated that they didn't have anyone who assisted them to identify their needs. Principals' voices included:

*Me and my gut feeling about what is happening in the community, what my staff are saying and what is happening in the big wide world.*

*As something arises or I see a skill that I am lacking in or something that I need to improve in. It's a needs basis really.*

*My goals come from what I want to develop in the school.*

Other principals were using members of their board to assist them to identify their needs.

*I have a positive relationship with my board chair. She comes from a corporate background and is well educated. We also have another highly educated board member. They tend to bring perspectives from the business world, but actually they are in alignment with education so they bring viewpoints and suggestions of not only developing the school but also take into consideration my own development which is appreciated (principal voice).*

Lastly others were having their needs and goals identified through the appraisal system. Appraisal was however reported in most cases as having limited impact and being more compliance based. One principal confessed to only having had one appraisal in four years. "There was no impact in it because I think looking back on it that it was just fulfilling the obligation to have it done. There was no real engagement from either the appraiser or myself" (principal voice). Another principal shared

*I guess I haven't really had any good appraisals. In some regards it can be put down to a new board who haven't fronted up with what they want in terms of a good appraisal and I have backed off because quite honestly it was one less thing to have to deal with. You are going flat tack and if you don't have to have an appraisal then you don't have to prove things to an outside person. My appraisal has been self review with the Board chair. I have had the job sheet and I tell him what I have done about them.*

Goals set as a consequence of appraisal tended to reflect organisational rather than personal goals and there was little evidence to suggest that any analysis of the leadership skills required to achieve them had been carried out. "My goals are all linked to where we are going as a school. They are not particularly personal and they are not about leadership" (principal voice). Another principal shared "my goals are targets aren't they? They are not about me". It was particularly interesting to note that the goals shared by participants rarely matched their perceived needs. Research participants discussed that they had found it difficult to access people who could carry out quality appraisal and would like to see Boards of Trustees given more assistance in implementing quality performance management.

There were two exceptions to this. One principal who had experience in Human Resource Management was proactive in ensuring that his appraisal was forward focused and another was working with a Leadership and Management Adviser and had tied the appraisal focus into a leadership initiative being developed in the school.

**Key Finding:**

Principals need better support to assist them to identify their needs beyond the induction period.

**Support Beyond Induction**

The research principals were then asked whether or not they had been able to access support for achieving their goals. They commonly shared that once the goals had been established they were left to achieve them themselves. They discussed a huge void in professional development opportunities for this particular stage of principalship beyond curriculum contracts. One principal questioned, “why give people a taste of something like FTP and then leave them in the wilderness and then introduce PDPC. That’s just leaving people in limbo”. Another shared, “I believe that’s a hole in the system because once you have been through FTP people just stand off”. The only concrete forms of support that were discussed were a limited number of principals had managed to get into professional learning networks and others had proactively sought and were getting assistance from a Leadership and Management Adviser. Many principals expressed the need for a longer period of mentor support and planned access to professional learning groups. Principals’ voices included:

*I think the mentoring programme should continue for at least three years. It may not be as intensive but it would provide continuity. And then as a part of that process we could be assisted to develop a professional learning group of some sort. It might not necessarily be the people within your mentoring group but a group who could provide you with ongoing support.*

Another suggestion was that principals should be able to access the Principal Professional Development Centre after three years rather than



waiting for five. This could ensure more continuous access to quality support.

**Key Finding:**

There needs to be better continuity of support offered to beginning principals.

**A Potential Model**

The focus group was asked to put together some final thoughts about beginning in the principalship. They were asked firstly what advice they would give to new appointees. They shared:

1. *Lead by example – walk the talk.*
2. *Don't try to change too much too quickly.*
3. *Spend time building relationships.*
4. *Seek help – don't be afraid to ask questions.*

Finally the focus group participants were asked to develop what they considered to be a good model of professional development for beginning principals. This was constructed and subsequently sent to all participants for input and amendment. The following model was put forward by the group as a starting point for a potential professional development framework for principal development in New Zealand.

Pre principalship	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Post induction – Years 4-5
Early identification of potential leaders with appropriate mentoring support after 5 years of teaching	Enrolment in FTP. FTP involvement to gain accreditation towards a qualification. 6 months release for teaching principals		Assistance to set up sustainable professional networks	
Aspiring programmes organised that address identified issues for FTP's	Mentor allocated immediately on appointment if not already in place. Greater frequency of support		Mentors final task is to establish a learning plan for years four and five.	Mentoring continues if required. Greater assistance with needs analysis and goal setting so a balance between organisational and personal learning is achieved.
Support to gain information about the school prior to accepting the position	Residential one Focus = organisational issues and relationship management	Residential two and possibly three	Residential three?	Possibility of an additional opportunity to meet as an FTP cohort group.
Opportunities to shadow an experienced principal on appointment. This person would ideally be your allocated mentor. Internship should cover administrative issues, relationship management and broader leadership perspectives. Tie into FTP	Greater assistance from MOE. Handbook available Assistance for principals and Boards by visiting principals			
	Support for first ERO visit as a principal			
	More opportunity to visit other schools			
				Access TO PDPC after 3 years of principalship
				Leadership and Management Advisers to provide ongoing support

Table – Potential Model for Beginning Principal Development

Despite the many challenges principals had faced they remained optimistic about principalship. They spoke passionately about enjoying their jobs and, with the exception of those approaching retirement, saw themselves in the role in the future. There was a feeling of optimism about the things they still wanted to achieve and a clear focus on making a difference for children.

### **Summary**

The data was organised under four broad categories – effective principalship, and the periods of pre-principalship, induction and post induction. The findings provided insight into the experiences of those beginning in the principalship including the common challenges and joys faced in the role. Principals found that there was both valuable support available and additional support that could enhance and strengthen their preparation for and performance in the role. Participants believed that there needed to be greater continuity in the support offered, and better links between the various Ministry of Education initiatives, in order to maximise the benefits of existing training and resources. They further believed that the Ministry of Education could do more to demystify the principal's role.

I will now discuss the key findings in the light of the research literature presented in Chapter Two.

## CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION

This study set out to explore the experiences of beginning principals in their third to fifth year of principalship from pre appointment through to their current position. Its key focus was on the professional development opportunities received and the participants' perceptions of what would add to the current provision for training for new principals and help them to be effective leaders of our schools.

In this chapter, firstly I explore the participant's definition of effective principalship and secondly, I discuss the findings within the three broad categories that emerged, i.e. the periods of pre-principalship, induction and post induction.

### Effective Principalship

#### **Key Finding:**

Principals in the study had a common and shared understanding of what they believe constitutes effective principalship.

Understanding the research participants' concepts of effective principalship was important to this study as I was interested in their development towards this. It was considered important as the funding released to develop the initiatives to support principals in 2001, and in particular the national induction programme, was as a direct consequence of the concern expressed by the Education Review Office over the ineffectiveness of many beginning principals in New Zealand (Brooking *et al.*, 2003; Collins, 2002).

The principals in the study highlighted vision that had student learning at the centre, the effective management of relationships across the whole school community and the ability to share leadership and adopt a team approach as being critical aspects of an effective principal. They believed that their main priority was to make a difference for their students. The literature studied also highlighted these as being key aspects of effective leadership (Boyle & Clarke, 1998; Brooke-Smith, 2003; Day, 2003; Fullan,

2005; Gunraj & Rutherford, 1999). Participants identified professional qualities such as having an extensive professional knowledge base, being an effective manager of change, being reflective and having a sound approach to the management aspect of the role as contributors to effective principalship. These attributes were identified in the literature researched (Boyle & Clarke, 1998; Brooke-Smith, 2003; Day, 2000; Leithwood et al., 1999; Robertson, 2005; Scott-Nelson & Sassi, 2005). Finally, the participants believed that effective principals have a range of personal qualities that are highly desirable. These included effective problem solving, situational assessment and communication skills. They thought effective principals had a sense of humour, were open minded, flexible and able to build trust. Other critical qualities were resilience and integrity – the ability to ‘walk the talk.’ It was interesting to note that the literature researched did not dwell as much on the personal qualities of an effective leader as it did on the task orientations. The exception to this was the discussion around possessing high levels of emotional intelligence and coming from a strong values base (Bloom et al., 2005; Brooke-Smith, 2003; Day, 2003; Fullan, 2005; Strachan et al., 2004). These two overarching leadership characteristics are reflected in many of the personal qualities identified by the research participants.

One aspect of effective principalship emphasised in the literature, not drawn out by the participants was evidenced based, data driven practice (Boyle & Clarke, 1998; Hopkins, 2003; Leithwood et al., 1999; Robinson et al., 2006; Scott-Nelson & Sassi, 2005). Whilst this was not stated it came through as a clear priority reflected in the improvement of achievement data being expressed as one of the highs of their principalship.

This discussion now turns to the findings in the three broad categories that emerged. It is interesting to note that the emergent categories paralleled the stages of development identified by theorists in the review of national and international literature (Earley & Weindling, 2004; Education, 2006; Hopkins, 2001; Newton, 2003; Ribbins, 2003; Weindling, 2003).

## **Pre-principalship**

In the literature this stage is most commonly referred to as “aspiring” (Earley & Weindling, 2004; Education, 2006; Hopkins, 2001; Newton, 2003; Ribbins, 2003; Weindling, 2003). I found this term difficult to use and misleading as many people do not aspire to be principals as the discussion around my first set of findings shows. Within this category there were three emergent themes. They were early experiences, valued professional development and professional development and support that would assist transition into the principal role.

## **Early Experiences**

### **Key Findings:**

There are multiple pathways to principalship in New Zealand.

Many principals are entering principalship without any formal training for the role.

In New Zealand the only qualification required for principalship is teacher registration. Therefore there is no consistent career path towards principalship (Bright & Ware, 2003; Earley & Weindling, 2004). Three main pathways to principalship were described in the research. The first was through a deliberate and focused decision from an early stage in the participant’s career. The second was a natural progression through various school based leadership positions including assistant and deputy principals’ positions. The third was that other influential people had coerced participants into the role. Participants in the third group had generally been in positions of leadership at the time of being coerced. This was consistent with the national research (Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005). However, the international research shows that many countries have had or are now developing a mandatory qualification for principalship in which the career path is more formal and structured (Bolam, 2003; Brundrett, 2001; Bush & Glover, 2004; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Davies & West-Burnham, 2002; Huber & West, 2002; Stevenson, 2006; Tomlinson, 2002; Weindling, 2003).

A consequence of not having a consistent career structure or pathway to principalship is that many of our principals are beginning in the role with limited preparation and in some cases limited experience. This was certainly the case in the research with the majority of participants claiming that they had no formal training beyond experience in schools to prepare them for the role. It was further supported by Collins (2002). He states, “overwhelmingly there is evidence that in many schools, first time principals are being appointed with limited management training or experience” (p.3).

The next set of findings relate to what principals in the research believed had assisted them to prepare for the principal’s role.

### **Valued Professional Development and Support**

#### **Key Findings:**

Formal programmes undertaken can assist to prepare for principalship.

Middle Leadership positions, e.g. Assistant and Deputy Principals positions can, but do not necessarily, provide preparation for principalship.

A period acting in the principal role is valuable preparation for principalship.

There were two principals in the study who had commenced post-graduate study towards a master in educational leadership as part of their preparation for principalship and another who had completed their degree. They reported that it had positive influence on their preparation for principalship. They cited increased self confidence, a stronger knowledge base and an evidence base to reflect on and draw from when decision making in the principal role. This is a point of tension in the literature. In countries where master’s level study is mandatory, such as the United States of America, there is mixed feeling as to how much impact these programmes have (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Bloom et al., 2005; Bright & Ware, 2003). Likewise, in other countries where there are no formal qualifications, principals report feeling unprepared for the role. Daresh and Male (2000) suggest from their research that there are issues regardless of the preparation undertaken. Wiendling and Dimmock (2006) believe:

*Formal training programmes available both prior to appointment and within the first few years of headship enable a better technical knowledge and awareness of the challenges, expectations and priorities to be gained. However it is equally the case that no amount of experience or preparation whether through formal training or through experience as a deputy can provide a sufficient induction to what is a complex and demanding job (p. 337/338).*

The majority of the principals in the study had only their experience to draw from as preparation for principalship. The participants had a range of teaching experience when entering the role. The least was three years and the most in excess of twenty. There were mixed feelings as to whether or not being an assistant or deputy principal was adequate training for the role. In the final analysis it would appear that it was dependent on the ability of the supervising principal and the leadership opportunities that were provided by them. Some found that there had been restrictive job descriptions with no focused leadership training whilst others had carefully planned and structured approaches provided for them. Those that had had the opportunity to act in the role for a period of time found this to be the most beneficial form of preparation that they had undertaken and that the learning during that time was invaluable. Research in this area supports these findings. Wiendling and Dimmock (2006) concluded from their research that headteachers found the following experiences as valuable prior to their first appointment.

- a. The need for a wide range of experience especially as a deputy head;*
- b. The value of a period acting as a head;*
- c. The importance of delegation by the head;*
- d. The rotation of deputy responsibilities; and*
- e. The need to work with heads who saw deputy headship as preparation for headship (p.335).*

The next set of key findings discusses what principals in the study believed could strengthen pre-principalship preparation.



## **Professional Development and Support that could Assist Transition into the Principal Role.**

### **Key Findings:**

Potential leaders need to be identified and developed early by experienced mentors.

Beginning principals believe that training in generic skills in administrative tasks and people management would be beneficial prior to taking up the principal role.

Applicants for principals' positions should have taught for at least five years.

Some research principals were grateful to those people who had been instrumental in encouraging them to seek principalship as a career option and for preparing them for the role as best they could. Others who had aspired to principalship, but had lacked opportunity to practice and develop leadership, believed that principals needed to be more proactive in developing others and succession planning. The worldwide leadership crisis has increased the interest in leadership succession and sustainability (Collins, 2001; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) suggest, "leadership succession and sustainability will occupy the centre of educational reform for the first two decades of the twenty first century" (p.59).

Graham Collins (2001) expressed, "interest in the possibility of creating a version of NPQH for New Zealand deputy principal's aspiring to non teaching principalship" (p. 12). There was clear interest from participants in the study to have leadership recognised and developed early. My fear with this proposal is the further erosion of career pathways for those principals who begin in smaller schools and the impact on these schools for gaining quality applicants. There is already frustration being expressed about the inability of principals of smaller schools to be recognised by boards as capable of taking the next step. Perhaps the idea needs exploration in terms of principalship rather than focusing on non-teaching principalship.

There was a clear expression of interest from principals to have access to some form of training prior to beginning in the role. National research undertaken (see for example Brooking et.al, 2003; Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005; Collins, 2001,2002; Ford, 2003; Strachan et al. 2004), has referred to this need and supports the interest expressed by the participant group. Research participants believed that being provided with an understanding of the generic administrative skills required to do the job as well as some basic training in relationship management would have assisted them greatly. Both of these concerns feature significantly in the research regarding issues confronting not only beginning principals but principals in general (Bloom et al., 2005; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Robertson, 2005; Stevenson, 2006; D. Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).

Principals in the study further believed that there needed to be a minimum of five years of teaching prior to being able to apply for principalship. One principal in the study shared:

*I went into my first principalship as a third year teacher and in hindsight I don't think anyone in their first years of teaching should be going into their first principalship that early in their career. Teaching is a hard enough game to get your head around. There were problems, particularly with relationships and while it was rewarding it was more damaging and nearly drove me out of education (principal voice).*

Research participants believed that fundamental grounding in teaching should be a prerequisite for principalship. There was little evidence in the literature as to whether or not there was support for this claim by the research participants. I wonder if that is because New Zealand is reasonably unique with its high percentage of small rural schools. Strachan (2003) and Robinson et al. (2006) certainly agree that there are many people with limited teaching experience being appointed to smaller rural schools. Strachan further alerts us to the fact that these are often isolated, hard to staff schools with high principal turnover, which make the challenges even more difficult. Further research into this area and its associated impacts would be worthwhile.

Finally in this section the principals stated that they believed planning for pre principalship training would be exceedingly difficult.

**Key Finding:**

Planning programmes for the pre-principalship stage is difficult as there is no consistent pathway to principalship and each school context is unique.

Due to the fact that there is no consistent pathway to principalship and that every school is a unique organisation, participants believed that it would be difficult to plan effective programmes. One principal believed that it was not the training that was important, but the ability to apply the training to a real situation in an authentic context. They discussed that to do this you had to be in the role. The early identification of aspiring principals would go some way to achieving this but there will always be those who “drift into principalship” (Bright and Ware, 2003, p.8).

During the focus group interview participants created a possible model for principal development. They suggested that there should be intensive training provided on appointment, before taking up the post, with the possibility of being released to shadow an experienced principal being desirable. If at all possible this principal would become the mentor. This would need to be brought under the umbrella of the First Time Principals Programme if it were to be successful. In some way this mirrors, albeit less formally, the situation in England with the now mandatory qualification for headship and the subsequent induction programme (Newton 2003). It certainly has components of what the research suggests is quality support for beginning principals with the inclusion of mentoring and shadowing to support and develop the required skills (Bloom et al., 2005; Bolam et al., 1995; Bush & Coleman, 1995; Bush & Glover, 2005; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Hobson et al., 2003; Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Lashway, 2003; Robertson, 2005; Robinson et al., 2006). Huber and West (2002) concur. They state:

*Most effective are models that are centered on experiential methods – that have adapted development programmes that feature some form of internship – That is the placing of programme members in schools under the supervision and guidance of an*

*experienced school leader who is able to offer support and guidance. Clearly this is the most powerful learning context, grounded in the realities and complexities of actual school leadership, yet offering a safety net as judgements and analyses can be developed within the constraints of individual accountability. Such an approach allows programme members to explore alternatives and encourages them to both discuss and reflect on their judgements (p.1093).*

In sum it is the feeling of both the research participants and theorists cited that more be done in the period pre-principalship to prepare candidates for the task ahead. Preparation needs to include more than experience as a teacher if it is to assist in preparing candidates for the complexity of the role of the principal. There is a call for a planned and structured approach that bridges the worlds of experiential learning and theory. Huber and West (2002) suggest that the most important reason for this is that waiting until someone is in the position to begin their development is too late and only puts students and teachers at risk.

### **Induction**

The next broad category to emerge was the period of induction or the point at which the principal takes up their first appointment. Three themes that emerged in this category were first, impacts, second, valued professional development and support and finally, professional development and support that would strengthen this stage of their development.

### **Impacts on Principalship**

This first set of findings discusses the impacts on the principal as they transition into the position.

#### **Key Findings:**

Experiences prior to principalship impact on how principals transition into the role.

The complexity and loneliness of the role are common issues facing beginning principals.

There are common joys and issues experienced by beginning principals that need to be considered when planning induction programmes.

There was evidence from the research participants that the quality of the professional socialisation opportunities accessed had direct bearing on how accurately they perceived the role and their ability to transition successfully into it. Professional socialisation is defined as the stage pre appointment and “relates to the initial preparation to take on an occupational role such as school principal and includes the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to conduct the role regardless of the setting” (Crow, 2006, p.11). When reflecting on their first three months in the job, responses from participants showed that time in a senior leadership position, with targeted and deliberate support, enabled them to move into the role with a realistic understanding of what to expect. This was further strengthened, if an opportunity had presented, by having some time acting in the principal role. These principals acknowledged that there was still a lot that they didn’t know and that the leap from their previous position to principal was huge but they were prepared for this. They tended to approach the role with greater confidence and self-belief. Those with limited teaching and leadership experience grappled with the complexity of the role they now faced and felt that they “had lots of questions and not many answers” (principal’s voice). Participants believed that they did not have a good understanding of the requirements of the job and found that the job was different from what they had anticipated. This is supported in the literature. Dimmock (2003) believes that the following factors influence initial success:

*Self-belief;*  
*Depth and breadth of previous experience;*  
*Relevance of previous experience;*  
*The ability to transfer previous experience;*  
*Breadth and relevance of prior training;*  
*The ability to transfer prior training;*  
*Learning and working with appropriate role models;*  
*Ability to learn on the job; and*  
*The quality of the institution and local support structures in place*  
(p.65).

Dimmock’s belief, is however, questioned by others. While theorists believe that professional socialisation is important in preparing future and transitioning leaders for their roles, what they are less certain of is the current impact of what is available (Crow, 2006; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Crow (2006) states, “considerable opinion exists that this stage of

principal preparation needs to improve and rigorous empirical evaluations of leadership preparation need to be conducted” (p.312).

It is further stated in the literature that the first concern a beginning principal faces is a sense of feeling unprepared and a realisation that what they expected to experience and what they actually encountered were two different things (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Bright & Ware, 2003; Crippen, 2004; Draper & McMichael, 1998; Goddard et al., 2004; Ribbins, 2003).

It is suggested in the literature that programmes to assist principals both prior to taking up an appointment and during the induction stage need to give credence to some of the issues that are commonly experienced (Hobson et al., 2003; Saunders & Stockton, 2005; Walker & Dimmock, 2006; Weindling, 2004; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). The concerns identified in the literature closely paralleled the issues experienced by the research principals. They found the loneliness of the job a surprise. This was closely linked to increased accountability and responsibility. It was not always that they were alone but that they were suddenly in a position where they could not share information with others as readily as before and that they had to be prepared to accept ultimate responsibility for decisions. They spoke of the need to have someone outside of their immediate context to talk to whom they could trust and would understand. They also found the increased workload and the complexity, number and brevity of tasks a problem. This often increased their sense of loneliness as in many cases it meant working long hours to stay ‘on top of things’, which consequently took time away from their families. This was certainly reinforced by the research literature (Bright & Ware, 2003; Dussault & Barnett, 1996; Hobson et al., 2003; Weindling, 2003). Alvy and Robbins (1998) support this by saying, “a new comer on the job has just as much official power, responsibility as does the ten year veteran (p.16), and further that “although the principal interacts with hundreds of individuals on a weekly basis, the principal usually feels isolated and lonely because no one else has the responsibility of the school on his or her shoulders (p.18).

Other problems experienced included firstly, the management of relationships, in particular difficult parents and staff, including dealing with the sudden change in relationships when being promoted from within the school they were currently working in. Secondly, learning administrative tasks for which there had been little or no prior training and experience, such as working with the Board of Trustees, property, finance, including reading and interpreting Staff Usage and Expenditure, (SUE), reports, preparing for an Education Review Office visit, learning the systems, understanding legal aspects of the job and dealing with the media. Thirdly there were issues dealing with other's imposed agendas or legacies of the previous principal. Finally, there was dealing with the 'unexpected', and the stress that creates. In the focus group interview participants also referred to managing change and ensuring that they did not take on too much. Again these were all identified in the literature with the exception of dealing with emergencies. This was a new concept (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Hobson et al., 2003; Weindling, 2003).

It is asserted in the literature that the initial period frequently determines the success or otherwise of a new principal (Ackerman et al., 2002; Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Lashway, 2003; Lovely, 2004; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). The impact of the afore mentioned concerns is, they invariably lead to a decline in confidence and agency. They may also cause others to question the capability and credibility of the new principals. It is therefore imperative that these issues are addressed in preparatory and induction programmes. Weindling and Dimmock (2006) contend, "more attention to the induction, taking charge stage is needed because it is invariably problematic and requires careful analysis and action in situ" (p.335). Hobson et al. (2005) concur but add

*If first time headteachers experience problems and do not receive effective support which will enable them to deal with, minimise and overcome those problems, then the ability to facilitate school improvement and to contribute to raising standards will be impaired" (p.1).*

There are also common experiences that create an increased sense of agency and confidence in new principals. The research principals took great pleasure from, and pride in, the differences they had made for

children and their contact with them. One of the principals shared, “I think the highs for me are the little things that happen and particularly those that come from the hearts and voices of children” (principal voice). Things such as improvement in student achievement data, receiving positive feedback from a variety of both internal and external sources, and implementing successful change were sources of motivation for the research principals. Despite the dearth of information in the research literature relating to the positive aspects of principalship, there was evidence that elements identified by the participants were consistent with those of other principals. What is clear is that these positive experiences, contribute significantly to ongoing commitment to, and success in, the role (Ribbins, 2003).

This report will now discuss the professional development and support received that assisted principals to grow in the role.

### **Valued Professional Development and Support**

#### **Key Findings:**

Experience or ‘just in time learning’ is the most powerful form of learning.

The New Zealand induction programme is having a positive impact on the growth of beginning principals.

Access to mentoring and involvement in a variety of professional networks is seen as valuable support by beginning principals.

Principals believed that it was important to continue to build their knowledge base.

The research participants believed that the most valuable learning occurred in the role. Linked closely to this was the necessity to engage in reflective practice. They showed a clear preference for professional development that was context based, focused on their current and immediate needs and provided learning that could be directly transferred to practice.

This is backed up by the literature with a contention by theorists that both experiential based learning and reflective practice must underpin all



professional development for the various stages of principalship (Barnett et al., 2004; Bloom et al., 2005; Bush & Glover, 2004; Dussault & Barnett, 1996; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006; West-Burnham, 2000; Young et al., 2005).

Strachan et al (2004) identified the following has being elements of effective professional development for leadership:

- *Involve double loop (deep) learning;*
- *Include the identified needs of the participants;*
- *Have contextual relevance;*
- *Create ownership of learning;*
- *Be both challenging and transformative;*
- *Include critical reflection;*
- *Be grounded in current research;*
- *Provide ongoing support;*
- *Be focused on both leadership for learning and administration and management; and*
- *Be run by knowledgeable, credible facilitators with high quality presentation skills. (p. 46/47)*

When learning through experience and reflective practice are related to the criteria above it becomes apparent they are closely matched. The possible exception is that credible providers run professional development, although this in itself raises an interesting point. One of the fears expressed by the participant group was that learning through experience often meant that you were learning from your mistakes. While they believed that learning through mistakes is not a wrong way to learn, there was a perception that there are better ways to become skilled at the role. Their solution to the problem was that experiential learning should be supported by a credible mentor. This was seen as providing the opportunity to reflect or problem-solve along side others. Covey (1989) agreed on the importance of engaging others rather than relying only on our experiences. He states:

*The person who is truly effective has the humility and reverence to recognise his own perceptual limitations and to appreciate the rich resources available through the interactions with the hearts and minds of other human beings. That person values the differences because those differences add to his understanding of reality. When we're left to our own experiences we constantly suffer from a shortage of data (Covey, 1989, p.277).*

Another learning opportunity deemed to be invaluable by the participants was the First Time Principals' Programme, (FTP). Although there were some issues that participants felt needed to be resolved, (these will be discussed later in this chapter), the overall perception was that the programme provided powerful form of learning. Principals noted the strengths of the programme as its immediate transference to practice and its needs and context based focus of this approach. Furthermore was the exposure to national and international speakers enabling a broader view of leadership and thus encouraging participants to "focus on what was important" (principal's voice). Finally, FTP provided the opportunity for principals to network and share common experiences with others who understood and empathised with each other. Induction programmes are highlighted in the literature as being of critical importance (Alvy & Robbins, 1998; Bush & Glover, 2004, 2005; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Eddy & Bennison, 2004; Lashway, 2003; Lovely, 2004; Weindling, 2003, 2004). Weindling (2003) asserts, "the induction of school leaders should be high on any agenda for reform as research indicates that positive induction experiences are critical to the development of attitudes, skills and professional norms that support both current and future growth (p. 8/9). In New Zealand, it is the point where formalised training begins for those who opt into it (Eddy & Bennison, 2004; Hansford & Elrich, 2006; Robinson et al., 2006). Effective induction is also thought to improve retention rates (Lashway, 2003).

Access to credible mentors was seen as one of the most valuable supports available to beginning principals. The literature certainly supports this and asserts that mentoring has become synonymous with the development of principals (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Bush & Glover, 2004; Buters, 2000; Crippen, 2004; Daresh, 1995; Lashway, 2003; O'Mahony, 2003; Southworth, 1995; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006; Young et al., 2005). The benefits research participants gained from mentoring were reflected in the review of the literature provided in Chapter Two. However, mentoring was not without problems. These will be discussed in the next part of this section.

Internal and external networks were perceived as extremely valuable support and development mechanisms for the research participants. These provided professional growth to the participants as well as timely support on both a professional and personal basis. They were instrumental in reducing isolation and stress. In the case of internal networks, they were seen as reducing workload. Internal networks included boards of trustees, senior leadership teams, and administrative staff as well as other staff members. External networks included advisers, fellow principals and identified cluster groups who had come together for a specific purpose. These groups were very focused on ongoing learning and frequently began with a “what’s on top?” (principal voice), where there was opportunity to share current concerns. This notion is again well supported in the literature (Boyle & Clarke, 1998; Scott-Nelson & Sassi, 2005; Stewart, 2000; Stoll et al., 2003; Weindling, 2003, 2004; West-Burnham, 2000; Young et al., 2005). External networks tended to dominate the literature with internal networks only getting mention by some.

Ongoing learning in curriculum, alongside staff, was also seen by the participants as valuable support and development. They discussed the need to remain current and credible with their staff. This was not generally reflected in the literature as the key focus remained on the development of the broader role of the principal. One note of caution did come from Dempster (2001). He contends that the New Zealand Ministry of Education maintains a hold over professional development and organises this to meet its own agenda. Whilst this was not reflected in the discussion with the principals it may be an area worthy of further exploration as much of the professional development accessed by beginning principals was curriculum focused and government funded. There was little doubt that Dumpster’s further assertion, that organisational learning had a higher priority for principals, than did personal learning, was true of the sample group of principals. This will be referred to later in this chapter.

Two principals had engaged in post-graduate study. They had chosen to do this as they saw it as important to remain credible with staff and to

ensure that they had the currency to lead their schools. Other principals cited a desire to begin but felt that the workload of a beginning principal and participation in the First Time Principal's Programme made this impractical. Again this did not have high priority in the literature scoped. When discussed it is usually linked to pre-principalship and mandatory qualifications in overseas countries which often require study at the masters level (Bolam, 2003; Brundrett, 2001; Bush & Glover, 2004; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Davies & West-Burnham, 2002; Huber & West, 2002; Stevenson, 2006; Tomlinson, 2002; Weindling, 2003). Having said that there is no doubt that in the literature on effective leadership, being committed to ongoing learning and remaining the lead learner are given clear focus (Brooke-Smith, 2003; Day, 2003; Dimmock, 2003; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Hopkins, 2001; Leithwood et al., 1999; Robinson et al., 2006; Scott-Nelson & Sassi, 2005).

Professional development and support that could strengthen practice will now be discussed

### **Professional Development and Support that could Strengthen Practice**

The principals identified two areas, in the period of induction, that they believed could have been enhanced to better meet their needs.

#### **Key Findings:**

Principals need a greater focus on organisational issues in their first year.

There needs to be some further consideration for principals of small schools in the First Time Principals' programme.

Mentoring is a critical relationship and expectations need to be defined.

Principals required additional help from the Ministry of Education to assist them to better understand the compliance aspects of the role and to assist the board in its work.

There was an indication from the research participants that their first year in the job needed to be focused on learning the administrative side of the role and in building or in some cases re-establishing relationships. They believed that the First Time Principals' Programme needed to reflect this

priority. They worried most about the ‘nuts and bolts of the job’ and were not prepared or ready for the more “philosophical and highly pitched” (principal’s voices), approach they received. It was clear that they could see the benefit of the offered curriculum but felt that they would have got more from it had it been offered once they had been in the position for at least 12 months. This is supported in the literature (Ford, 2003; Lashway, 2003; Normore, 2004; Saunders & Stockton, 2005; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Theorists refer to this time as organisational socialisation. It is defined as being context specific and requires that new leaders learn the “knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to conduct the role in a particular setting” (Crow, 2006, p.311). Normore (2004) highlights the complexity of this. He states:

*Each school is comprised of a complex array of people, policies, processes, and priorities to which school administrators must adjust. As teachers make the transition to school administrator so does the emergence of new socialization experiences (page number not available).*

Bright and Ware (2003) concur and add that the new principals having only ever been trained as a classroom teachers, suddenly find themselves challenged with learning a completely different role that requires a new skill set. They contend that it leaves new principals “caught in the dichotomy of needing to understand curriculum matters while feeling inadequately prepared to handle complex personnel issues and organisational difficulties” (p.15).

Weindling and Dimmock (2006) sum up the importance of success in this phase. They state:

*We contend that post appointment processes, dominated by organisational socialisation, create the interactions that legitimate and validate a new school leader within a school, preparing the way for him or her to exert influence (p. 334).*

Some participants also believed that there needed to be more differentiation in approach to residential courses. There was a perception that the needs of small school principals – particularly U1 (0 – 50 students), and U2 (50 – 100 students), schools and principals with limited leadership and teaching experience were not being addressed. The teaching side of the principalship was seen as being entirely overlooked. This is supported

in the literature and those responsible for organising the programme are well aware of the diverse needs of the group that they are charged with planning for and are committed to ensuring that they achieve the best programme possible for all participants (Robinson et al., 2006). Collins (2001) in his presentation to NZARE stated, "he was interested in the extent to which the needs of first time 'teaching principals' might differ from the needs of first time 'non teaching principals'. If this difference is as great as I suspect there might be a case for a separate training provision for each sub-group" (p.12). There seems to be a call from the participants of smaller schools to take this a step further. The main issues appear to lie within the residential courses.

Mentoring was highly desired by the research participants but not always successful and or accessible. The main issues identified with mentoring were with mentors allocated through the First Time Principals Programme. When the participants established informal mentoring there were no perceived problems. However not all participants had established contacts that provided a pool of suitable mentors. Reasons for a break down in mentor / mentee relationships were described as physical distance between the mentor and mentee, mismatches in personalities, and school sizes and types, time available for both mentor and mentee and an insufficient number of contacts. As previously stated mentoring and coaching have become synonymous with induction and leadership development programmes worldwide. Southworth (1995) expresses some concerns about the mentoring relationship and would reinforce the above points as negative impacts on the experience. Some theorists contend that research indicates that there should be a minimum of six face to face contacts over a year (Bolam, 2003; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Hobson et al., 2003; Weindling, 2003). The research participants indicated that this was significantly more than they were offered during their time on the programme.

Principals all considered that access to a mentor was a critical aspect of their growth and felt that it needed to be strengthened.

Principals in the research also believed that they needed greater support from the Ministry of Education during their initial period. They identified two sources of support. The first was the provision of a handbook that detailed key information. Participants in the research felt that this would assist them to demystify the leadership role and attached responsibilities. There was very little evidence in the research to either support or disconfirm this idea. A search of the National College for School Leadership however did provide evidence that a “New Heads Handbook” was provided. Access to this can be gained through [www.ncsl.org.uk/classof2005](http://www.ncsl.org.uk/classof2005).

Second, many participants believed that their Boards of Trustees required additional assistance, in understanding the key requirements of their role, and that, the Ministry of Education should be providing this. Earley and Weindling (2004) identify boards as being a potential source of invaluable support for principals but also a point of added stress, especially when relationships go wrong and lines between governance and management are blurred. They assert, “it can be argued that governing boards have a leadership role and that this is expressed largely in terms of the enactment of strategic direction, critical friend and accountability (p.126). Therefore as leaders in schools they too need development. There is no suggestion in the literature as to who should do this or how it should be done.

The final section of this report deals with the post-induction period and how participants perceived that their needs are currently being met. Only one theme emerged from this section and that was the lack of continuity in structured support available to principals beyond the period of induction.

### **Post Induction**

#### **Key Findings:**

There needs to be better continuity of support offered to beginning principals.

Principals need better support to assist them to identify their needs beyond the induction period.

The principals in the research felt that they fell into a 'black hole' after the period of induction. The exception to this was those principals who had been included in existing network groups during their first years in the post and those who were able to maintain relationships with long-term mentors. This is clearly supported in the research literature. Many theorists discuss the discontinuous nature of leadership development and express their concerns regarding this (Bush, 1998; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Cardno & Fitzgerald, 2005; Collarbone, 2001; Earley & Weindling, 2004; Earley & Weindling, 2006; Robertson, 2005; Weindling, 2003). Further to this concern is that theorists believe the dominant focus for leadership development is on the pre-principalship and induction periods. Cardno and Fitzgerald (2005) for example state, "the rich array of principal preparation and induction programmes does not fully extend to the arena of continuing professional development for experienced school leaders" (p.318). Ribbins (2003) identifies ongoing learning as one of the key contributors to principal motivation and job satisfaction, as a means to avoid the stage of disenchantment. With the acknowledged principal crisis looming it seems imperative that we begin to look closely at professional development that goes beyond the initial focus highlighted by Cardno.

Research participants clearly recognised that they had ongoing development needs. Although they could identify their current needs, these seldom related to established goals. The goals that the participants discussed were largely organisational goals that linked directly to annual plans. There had been no reflection as to whether or not they had the required skills to be able to effectively reach the desired outcomes. There



was little focus on developing leadership. When asked how they thought they measured up against the criteria they had suggested for effective leadership, the common response was, “I have a long way to go” (principal’s voice). Most principals could not identify who was helping them to recognise their needs nor articulate how they were getting assistance to achieve the outcomes they sought. Dempster (2001) discusses that there are several concerns with plan linked professional development. He asserts plan-linked development:

- *Asks principals and teachers to turn their learning towards organisational priorities;*
- *Down plays the centrality that personal professional needs and experiences have in adult learning;*
- *Restricts career learning to the organisational conditions shaping principals and teachers work;*
- *Avoids learning related to social critique beyond the school; and*
- *Fails to recognise the power of communal critical reflection in learning about present and preferred practices (p.7).*

Principals in the study thought that more effective appraisal processes, a longer period of working alongside a mentor / coach who could assist them to identify needs, inclusion in professional principal networks and earlier access to the principal Development Planning Centre would assist them to identify their needs and achieve a more continuous approach to their development. This was reflected in the model created by the group. The literature reinforces the value of all of these activities in relation to effective principal development.

## **Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the key findings against the literature. Many factors that impact both positively and negatively on the confidence and sense of agency of beginning principals as they begin in the role have been highlighted. The chapter has provided insight into what professional development has assisted the research participants to grow into the

principal role effectively, how existing professional development could be enhanced, and has identified additional support that could be offered to further strengthen their growth. The major finding of the research is that there needs to be a more continuous approach to the professional development of leaders encompassing all stages of a principal's career.

Chapter Six offers some concluding comments and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the experience of beginning in principalship from the perspective of primary school principals, in years 3 to 5 of their principalship, and what these principals believe is important for the support, and development of effective principalship in New Zealand. The research principals were grateful for the available support and impressed with the quality of the current programmes. They believed that the support required if they were to be effective in the job was 'out there' and, one just needed to know where to go and, to be proactive in doing so. The study did however highlight some possible recommendations for how preparation for principalship could be further strengthened. Recommendations were for the Ministry of Education, those responsible for the delivery of the First Time Principals Programme, experienced principals and finally for those considering principalship.

### ***Recommendations for the Ministry of Education***

This study has led to the following possible actions:

1. There is the consideration of a leadership professional development framework that achieves a coherent approach and addresses the identified stages of leadership. Such a framework would require a closer look at the current synergy between the various initiatives on offer and how they can be brought into greater alignment. This could include extending the current First Time Principals' Programme to three years, allowing access to the Professional Development Planning Centre from three years rather than the current five and having an expectation that beginning principals be accommodated as soon as possible within existing Principal Professional Learning Communities.
2. Further research is conducted into career pathways and how aspiring principals could be better assisted to plan for and transition into principalship. This could include a minimum time of teaching prior to being able to be considered for principalship.

3. A principals handbook be written and allocated to all first time principals that includes the following:
  - Perpetual calendar with all key dates and deadlines;
  - List of all compliance issues with references to appropriate legislation;
  - Key contacts and their role descriptions;
  - Links to other support service;
  - Information on the FTP programme; and
  - A list of accredited performance management providers.
4. Research is undertaken into the possibility of seconding principals (current or recently retired) into full time positions to support principals and Boards of Trustees to carry out their roles.
5. Further assistance is provided to Boards of Trustees, especially in the area of performance management - principal appointment and appraisal. A list of performance management providers that meet Ministry guidelines and expectations for quality appraisal be available to schools.
6. Those principals outside of the induction period are considered as high priority for ongoing support from Leadership and Management advisers. Their key role would be to co-ordinate and support the development of professional learning networks that involve those emerging from induction working along side more experienced principals.
7. Consultation is undertaken with the providers of the First Time Principals' Programme to consider the recommendations suggested below.

## ***Recommendations for those Responsible for the Delivery of the First Time Principals' Programme.***

This study has led to the following possible actions:

1. A review of the mentoring component is considered to ensure that it is best meeting the needs of beginning principals. The possibility of participant input into mentor selection, the match between mentor and mentee, and the frequency of visits may require further thought.
2. Consultation is carried out with the Ministry of Education to explore the possibility of extending the duration of mentoring to three years.
3. Efforts be made to ensure all participants receive a mentor immediately on notification of appointment regardless of starting date.
4. A review of the timing of residential courses is conducted to determine whether or not there could be some allocation of term time to these.
5. Consideration is given to rearranging the residential courses. The suggestion is that, there is one course in the first year of principalship that focuses largely on effective relationship management, and administrative approaches. This could be followed by two courses distributed over the second and possibly third year that cover a more philosophical approach to leadership.
6. Consideration is given to the needs of teaching principals and those with limited teaching / leadership experience and how these could be better met within the residential programme.
7. Work with the Ministry of Education is considered, to assess the practicality of a period of internship for principal appointees prior to taking up the appointment. If possible, this should be with the person who will be their mentor.

8. Mentors assist principals to formulate an action plan for development as the final mentoring activity.
9. The possibility of some form of accreditation be gained on completion of the First Time Principals' Programme

### ***Recommendations for Experienced Principals***

This study has led to the following possible actions:

1. Experienced principals give further consideration and focus to the early recognition and development of leadership in potential candidates for principalship
2. Senior leadership team members are provided with opportunities to experience all aspects of the principal's role through the development of flexible job descriptions and structured opportunity to assume leadership responsibility.

### ***Recommendations for those Considering Principalship***

This study has led to the possible following actions:

Principals in the study had the following advice for those beginning in the principalship:

1. Find out as much as you can about the school prior to accepting the position.
2. Lead by example – 'walk the talk'.
3. Manage change carefully - don't try to change too much too quickly.
4. Spend time building relationships.
5. Seek help – don't be afraid to ask questions.

## **Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research**

The limitations of this research relate to the size and nature of the sample and the restricted geographical area from which research participants were drawn. A larger number of participants from across New Zealand would enable much broader and more comprehensive findings to be drawn. Kura and secondary school principals' views are not reflected in this study and further research that included the views of these groups would contribute to a more comprehensive picture.

To seek a more balanced view of some of the assertions made by the research participants, it would be worth spending time with representatives from the Ministry of Education, those responsible for the delivery of the First Time Principals Programme, including the mentoring team and other relevant providers to seek their input.

There have been further recommendations made in the body of this report.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the limitations of the research findings it is hoped that this report offers valuable insights into the experience of beginning in the principalship and in particular what is considered effective professional development and support, and how what currently exists could be further enhanced.

I was really pleased to receive a phone call from one of my participants to ask if they could use their transcript as a part of their appraisal documentation this year. Their reason for wanting to do this was that they believed that it had been the best reflection undertaken since beginning in the principalship and had opened some "futures thinking". Another principal commented on this throughout the interview process. These were rewarding moments in the cycle of the research. It is hoped however that this reflection will extend further – to those charged with the responsibility of developing our future educational leaders.

Tony Blair is cited as saying:

*Leadership and vision are crucial to raising standards and aspirations across our nation's schools... We cannot leave leadership training to chance. Our best heads are superb but we need more of them and that means offering them the best available training, the chance to share their experience of what works, the opportunity to learn from the best in leadership whether in the public or private sectors in this country or abroad and time for reflection, refreshment and inspiration (Newton p.92).*

Such a statement encapsulates the importance of a commitment to improving leadership training for all and the essence and intent of this research. In the final analysis it is about our children and ensuring that we are giving them the best possible opportunity to be tomorrow's leaders.



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## Appendix 1 - Individual Letter to Potential Participants

19 St Clair Place  
Beachwater  
Papamoa

Date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (Principal) \_\_\_\_\_

You have been identified as someone who may be able to assist me with a research project that I am proposing to undertake. The research is being undertaken towards completion of a Master's thesis supervised by the University of Waikato.

### **What is the Research Thesis About?**

During the next few months I wish to conduct research into the experiences of principals now in their third – fifth year of principalship.

The aim of the research is to explore how prepared new principals felt for the role, what professional development has been of benefit in facing the many and varied challenges and what may be needed to strengthen and or sustain the development phase.

My research question is specifically **“What is the experience of principalship in years three to five and what do these principals believe is important for the support and development of effective principalship in New Zealand.”**

### **How will it happen?**

I would like you to be involved with one individual interview that would take no longer than 1 hour. I wish to conduct the interview over July and August and would negotiate a suitable time and place with you. At this time I would appreciate being able to sight any current professional learning goals or plans that you may have.

Then I will ask you to join 5 other participants in a focus group interview on a mutually agreed date in September.

There will be 12 individual participants, six from the Bay of Plenty and six from the Waikato. Focus group interviews will be with the other participants in your region.

### **What will I get out of it?**

You hopefully will enjoy the interview process to reflect on your role, and you might enjoy the networking experience with other leaders in the focus group as you discuss emerging findings. Whilst there may be no direct and immediate benefit for you, you will be contributing to research that could have influence over the professional development opportunities for future principals. As my thesis will be available for reading by a wider audience, I hope that the Ministry of Education and others involved in the support and induction of principals in the early stages of their career will be interested in the findings.

### **Will people know who I am?**

As a participant you will be assured that I will do everything in my power to protect your confidentiality. I have attached a letter of consent that outlines specifically your protection as a participant throughout the research process. You will only be referred to as a pseudonym of your choice or a non specific role description (e.g. Principal 1) and there will be pseudonyms negotiated for your school name and other people who may be mentioned in your contributions.

The focus group interview will mean that you will meet some of the other participants. I am minimising the possibility of comments made being traced back to individuals by

1. Presenting data at the focus group interview as a collated response of emerging from all 12 participants across the two regions.
2. Holding two focus groups in separate regions.

I would therefore encourage you to protect your confidentiality not to reveal your own personal contributions.

### **What if I change my mind?**

You may withdraw any time prior to the initial interview taking place.

The individual interview will be audio taped and then transcribed. You will have the chance to review and amend the transcription. You will have the right to withdraw from the research for up to two weeks after receiving the transcript. For example if you received your transcript for review on 10/07/2006 you would have until 24/07/2006 to withdraw. The final date for withdrawal will be specified in the "return of transcript form" sent to you with the transcript of the interview.

There is no obligation for you to take part. If you are interested I would appreciate you filling out and returning the enclosed informed consent form. Please feel free to phone me should there be any questions you would like to ask or anything you would like clarified.

### **Is there anybody else involved?**

I have two supervisors from the University of Waikato who are assisting and supporting me throughout the research process. They are Doctor Jan Robertson and Doctor Jane Strachan. My supervisors will not know the identity of the participants involved.

Should you have any concerns throughout the process you are able to contact them directly. They may be contacted by email using the addresses below.

[jane@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jane@waikato.ac.nz) or [jan@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jan@waikato.ac.nz)

### **What happens now?**

I will contact you in a week to ascertain your willingness to be involved in the research and answer any further questions. Should you agree I will negotiate with you a suitable time for the first interview and for obtaining consent. If you choose not to be in the research this will not harm the research in any way.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely  
J.M.Patuawa

## Appendix 2 - Informed Consent

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to becoming a participant in the Masters research being conducted by Jacqui Patuawa on the experiences of beginning principalship. I have read the information letter and have been given the opportunity to seek further clarification and understanding of the research topic.

I understand that the research undertaken will contribute to a Master's thesis supervised by staff at the University of Waikato and in its final form will be available for reading by a wider audience

I understand that the research will involve one individual interview with me that will be recorded, transcribed, kept securely, and returned to me for comments and amendment. The transcription of the interview will be done by a person who will sign a confidentiality form precluding discussion of the interviews with anyone other than Jacqui Patuawa.

I consent to discussing openly my observations and experiences around my experience as a principal. I understand that all published quotes will avoid disclosing my identity, the name of my current school and the names of others referred to within my interview by using generic terms or pseudonyms. However, I also understand that in small scale research such as this it may be inevitable that quotations and rephrasing might be attributable to me if others learn of my involvement. I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the transcript and make amendments and/or deletions, with this in mind.

I understand that the research will also involve me in a focus group interview with 5 other participants. I understand that any reference made to individual interviews within this forum will consist of common themes from the group of 12 participants and will not identify any individual participant. I understand that the conditions as described for the individual interview will apply to the focus group interviews. The exception to this is that the focus groups will not be transcribed but data will be generated through group discussion and a written response.

I consent to my views or direct quotes being part of a Master's thesis and subsequent conference papers and articles.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from all or part of the research at any time until two weeks after receiving the transcript of the individual interview. Should I have any concerns or complaints, I can contact the research supervisors, Dr. Jan Robertson, ([jan@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jan@waikato.ac.nz)) and Doctor Jane Strachan ([jane@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jane@waikato.ac.nz)) at the University of Waikato.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 3A - Return of Transcripts

19 St Clair Place  
Beachwater  
Papamoa

[patuawafamily@xtra.co.nz](mailto:patuawafamily@xtra.co.nz)

Date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you again for the privilege of interviewing you. Please find enclosed the transcript of the interview conducted on \_\_\_\_\_. The script was transcribed by \_\_\_\_\_ but beyond that is confidential to you and me. The text is saved to a pen drive and is accessible only to me. When it is not in use the pen drive is securely locked away. The information is not permanently stored on any computer.

The transcription is verbatim, except for the removal of fillers (umms, ahhs) and unnecessary repetitions. Because it is raw data it does not have the refinements of written language so may seem disjointed in places. The raw data will be used as short excerpts to highlight key ideas and themes, and it may be rewritten slightly so that it is fluent within an academic text. You will not be identified as the author of the quote.

I would appreciate you reading the transcription and adding, deleting or altering any parts you wish so that it accurately reflects your views. Make comments on the transcript itself and return it by mail with the accompanying form releasing the transcript for use.

If you have named particular people, I would ask you to choose a pseudonym to protect their privacy. You can indicate this on the transcription.

You are free to withdraw from the research for two weeks from the date of this letter. The final date for withdrawal will be \_\_\_\_\_. If you would like to do this please indicate on the release of transcript form.

If you would like to discuss the transcription before returning it, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Jacqui Patuawa

### Appendix 3B - Release of transcript for use

Name of participant \_\_\_\_\_

I have received the transcription of the interview and have read it. The following ticked situation applies:

\_\_\_\_\_ The transcript is acceptable as raw data provided that the conditions agreed to on the original consent form are met. I have made no alterations.

\_\_\_\_\_ I have corrected the text of the transcript. Once these alterations are made the text is acceptable as raw data provided that the conditions agreed to on the original consent form are met.

\_\_\_\_\_ I want to withdraw from the project. Please destroy any data you have collected from me.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Jacqui Patuawa  
19 St Clair Place  
Beachwater  
Papamoa

Email: [patuawafamily@xtra.co.nz](mailto:patuawafamily@xtra.co.nz)



## **Appendix 4 - Transcriber Confidentiality Agreement**

### Transcription Confidentiality Agreement

I agree to transcribe the interviews and discussions for Jacqui Patuawa's research project with the University of Waikato. I understand that all material in the interviews and discussions is confidential and I agree to discuss it with nobody except Jacqui Patuawa. I will save the transcripts to a pen drive which will be available to Jacqui only. I will not save the information to my computer. While the pen drive is in my possession it will be kept secure and will only be accessible by me.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 5 - Notification of Change of Supervisor**

Dear Participant

Due to unforeseen circumstances I have had a change of supervisors. Doctor Jane Strachan is now unavailable to supervise my thesis due to increased work obligations. Russell Yates is now responsible for the co-supervision of my thesis and is currently your first point of contact should you have any concerns. Russell can be contacted using the following email address. [ryates@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:ryates@waikato.ac.nz). Doctor Jan Robertson remains a nominated supervisor and can be contacted via email as previously advised.

## **Appendix 5 - Application Letter to be a mentor in the First Time Principals Programme.**

Jacqui Patuawa  
761 Buckland Road  
Matamata

21 November 2004

David Eddy  
Project Director  
First Time Principals Programme

Dear David

Please find enclosed my application for a mentoring role for the First Time Principals Programme in 2005. I apologise for the brevity and the last minute application but hope that it provides you with sufficient information to offer me the opportunity for an interview and the chance to expand further.

I believe that I have the skills to be an excellent mentor and am passionate about the possibility of working in the area of developing Principals.

The reason I would like to put myself forward for this position is that it is only seven years ago that I began as a first time Principal. At that stage there were limited programmes to help me and so I appreciated greatly the support I received from colleagues – both past and present.

As I have gained experience so I believe I am now ready to offer assistance to others. I also believe that I am acutely aware of the many issues that face beginning Principals and would be sensitive to their needs. As a Principal that still has a teaching component I have been active in the attendance of curriculum related courses and my priority is learner centered leadership.

One important aspect of my educational philosophy is the belief that one of the key roles of a Principal is to build the leadership capacity of others. Fullan reminds us that the true measure of a leader may well be the leaders that he / she leaves behind. To build capacity it is imperative that we not offer quick fix solutions but encourage the development of reflective practice in a supported environment. In this way we empower people to make informed decisions and give them the confidence to generate their own problem solving and way forward.

I have strong interpersonal skills and relish the opportunity to work alongside others. Through the consultancy work I have recently engaged with, I see this as a two way process in which I am both a learner and a mentor / coach. Therefore I see this as a great opportunity to further my own professional development. I believe that through the experience I would learn as much about my own leadership as I would be able to support others in the development of theirs.

Through my recent study at a Masters level I have been engaged in professional reading and dialogue around leadership themes. This has necessitated deep reflection around my current practice. I would enjoy the opportunity to encourage and develop this in others as it has impacted positively on my leadership.

My recent ERO report (November 2003) highlights very definite strengths in the area of professional leadership and mentoring and encouragement of staff.

It outlines a strong and focused approach to strategic planning and community consultation including strategies for working with the Maori Community.

I invite you to read it on line for further information and support for my suitability for this position.

Thank you for considering this application.

Yours sincerely  
Jacqui Patuawa