Journeys into principalship: The experiences of beginning principals of independent schools

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Abstract

Although beginning principals of independent schools enter a role that is widely regarded as increasingly challenging and possibly deleterious to their well being, there has been very little research conducted to examine their transition into this role. This study examined the experiences of beginning principals in Australia to identify the most effective components of their preparation, the factors which helped them to transition into the role, the greatest challenges they faced and the rewarding aspects of the role. Through this understanding, it is hoped that beginning principals can be further assisted in their preparation and transition into the role.

A mixed methods approach was used incorporating an online survey and interviews with beginning principals. The study was conducted in three phases. In the first phase, beginning principals were asked to take part in an online survey. From the survey participants, eight principals who were in their first two years in the role were interviewed as Phase Two of the study. In the third phase, eight beginning principals were interviewed before commencing in the role as well as four times during their first year.

The results showed that, overall, the beginning principals were quite well prepared and felt confident in taking on the role. The most important components of their preparation for principalship included post-graduate degrees which included a strong business and management component, leadership development courses and previous leadership experiences, particularly in deputy positions which had offered them a wide range of responsibilities and experiences in overall school leadership. The results also identified a number of important elements which had helped them to make a strong start in the role, namely pre-commencement experiences in the school, an effective welcome and induction process, a proactive and supportive school board, help from independent school associations and mentoring and support from other principals.

Although the beginning principals in the study were quite well prepared for the role, it was clear from the results that becoming accustomed to the intensity of the role was by far the most challenging aspect of their transition. The key factors contributing to the intensity of the role were the extremely demanding workload, the weight of responsibility and the pressures associated with being a senior public figure and leader.
These results are consistent with the growing body of literature which has highlighted the increasing demands placed on principals worldwide and the possible deleterious effects of this role intensification on their wellbeing. Other areas which they found to be challenging were dealing with staffing issues, building a strong executive leadership team, understanding the culture of the school, dealing with enrolment issues and school finances and responding to critical incidents.

The results also demonstrated that, despite the challenging nature of the role, beginning principals enjoy their work and gain great satisfaction from making an impact in the lives of students, working with their staff and being in a leadership position where they can make significant decisions which shape the vision and development of the school.

The main recommendations coming out of this study were: for future research to identify and find ways to reduce the specific drivers of work intensification for independent school principals; a greater emphasis on the school board’s support for the beginning principal; and, the development of specific training and coaching processes to help beginning principals develop greater resilience.
Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in any University. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the dissertation contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the dissertation itself.

Signed: ..............................................................

Stephen Bagi

Date
Acknowledgements

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# Acronyms

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<tr>
<td>AHISA</td>
<td>Association of Heads of Independent Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIS</td>
<td>Association(s) of Independent Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AISNSW</td>
<td>Association of Independent Schools New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AITSL</td>
<td>Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASC</td>
<td>Anglican Schools Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEECD</td>
<td>Department of Education and Early Childhood Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISCA</td>
<td>Independent Schools Council of Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISPP</td>
<td>International Study of Principal Preparation</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISQ</td>
<td>Independent Schools Queensland</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISV</td>
<td>Independent Schools Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Masters Business Administration</td>
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<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Multiple Sclerosis</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAPLAN</td>
<td>National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCSL</td>
<td>National College for School Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPQH</td>
<td>National Professional Qualification for Headteachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
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<tr>
<td>OHS</td>
<td>Occupational Health &amp; Safety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Qld</td>
<td>Queensland</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBU</td>
<td>Single Bargaining Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<td>Vic</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
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Chapter 1 — The rationale and focus of this research

Ever since my earliest childhood memories of being at school, I have always sensed that a school principal’s role is an important and challenging one. My first encounter with a principal was quite memorable as I had been sent to his office after throwing a rock which had unfortunately hit a small boy called Frank in the head. There I stood, quivering at the knees and crying, scared at the punishment that might soon be meted out to a remorseful grade two student. I remember clearly how my primary school principal seemed to be a stoic figure who communicated the seriousness and gravity of the situation with a sense of compassion and fairness. There was a cane brought out which actually seemed to me to be larger than I was but thankfully, I escaped this punishment. Having learnt my lesson, I never again found myself in other principal’s office for punitive reasons.

During my high school years my appreciation of the enormity of the work of a principal grew. Once again I saw in my principal an elegant balance of seriousness and care. I started to appreciate the size of the task of being responsible for a school of over 1,000 students, mostly teenagers bursting at the seams to learn, grow and savour life. I began to see the school as a complicated but seemingly well organised collection of teachers, students, volunteers and parents. I regret not expressing my appreciation to these two fine gentlemen who helped create and sustain a place where I was safe, received a great education and started to find my feet as an individual. I suppose like many other graduates, I was only too keen to get out of school and explore the world.

Since then, my appreciation for the work of principals has only grown. Through my involvement on the board of an independent school and through my work as a consulting psychologist working with school leaders, I have had the privilege of spending time with many men and women who have taken up this leadership challenge. I have come to appreciate the multifaceted nature of the role and the many pressures and challenges principals face on a day to day basis. I have been happy to hear of their wins and have often been concerned to hear of the struggles they face as they try to fulfil this all-consuming role. So often, behind the outward appearance of confidence and calm I have seen a high level of stress, a heaviness about the issues they face and an emotional
and physical exhaustion that can come from the burden of responsibility they bear and the sheer magnitude of the work.

Having personally experienced burnout in 2006 which resulted from an accumulation of stress and fatigue after 20 years in a leadership role outside the educational sector, I know only too well the emotional and physical costs often faced by senior leaders in various fields. As I had found the whole experience of burnout much worse and costly than I could have imagined, it consequently fuelled in me a desire to help others who were in senior leadership positions to stay well on their leadership journeys. My training as a psychologist, my experiences in a senior leadership role combined with my interest and work with independent schools led to an interest in learning about the experiences of those who were just starting their journeys as a principal. I became interested in understanding what it was like to step into the role of principal for the first time and how this information could help other principals make this transition in a healthy and strong way.

**Why study the experiences of school principals?**

School principals play a vital role in education systems throughout the world. Whether they are the principal of a small rural primary school or large urban multi-campus College, their leadership will have a significant impact on the school’s organisational and instructional health (Ayers & Sommers, 2009; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). In the past three decades, much has been written about how much principals can positively influence the educational outcomes of the school (Garcia-Garduño, Slater, & Lopez-Gorosave, 2011). Although the extent and nature of this influence has been debated, overall the literature clearly demonstrates the vital role and positive impact principals have on their schools (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011). It is because of this influence principals have in schools that continued research is warranted. Through a greater understanding of the nature and influence of the role, principals and schools can be helped to reach greater effectiveness in reaching their personal, educational and organisational goals.

While being a principal can be an extremely rewarding experience, it also comes with great responsibilities and challenges. Being a principal has always been a challenging
role, but particularly over the past two decades it has become increasingly complex and demanding. This trend is likely to continue.

The principal-ship and school leadership will be more challenging; principals will continue to be struggling to manage and lead their schools, to ensure that professional standards are enhanced and to manage their multifaceted jobs with increasing demands dictated by the changes and challenges brought about by the world outside. (Ahmad & Ghavifekr, 2014, p. 50)

Changes in expectations by the education system and the parent community, coupled with rapid changes in technology and society itself, have added to the demands of the role without necessarily taking away any of the pressures which principals face on a day to day basis. As the role of principal has become more challenging and multifaceted, the effects of the role on their wellbeing are becoming the focus of research efforts (Riley, 2013). Considering the mounting evidence that the stresses and challenges of being a principal can have deleterious effects on their wellbeing, more focused research in this field is long overdue (Dewa et al., 2009). It behoves schools, education systems and governments to consider the effects of work related stress on their principals as a matter of duty of care and as a genuine commitment to work towards their wellbeing and career longevity.

In Australia and internationally, possible current and future shortages of principals and a declining interest in the role of principal has caused concern (Barty, Thomson, Blackmore, & Sachs, 2005; Copland, 2001). As a healthy education system requires the development of adequate leaders for the future, research into the experiences of principals can help to understand the factors which may be de-incentivising aspiring leaders to take on the principalship. Research could also highlight areas which need to be addressed regarding the nature of the role of principal to make it more appealing to potential candidates for the role.

One final rationale supporting the study of school principals is to look at the bigger picture benefits to our society. A healthy and fair education system helps prepare well educated and emotionally mature citizens. Cranston, Mulford, Keating, and Reid (2010) suggest a threefold framework for understanding the value to society of the education
system as it provides democratic equality, social efficiency and social mobility. Democratic equality reflects a nation’s commitment to ensuring that all young people have the opportunity to develop into healthy contributing adults. Social efficiency is the benefit to our society of having a healthy workforce, while social mobility reflects the advantage to individuals of a system which provides them with credentials that are useful in gaining employment and seeking advancement. Therefore, improving the education young people receive will ultimately have benefits for our society. Improving educational outcomes can only come from a multi-pronged approach looking at making positive changes in all aspects of the educational process. Research into the roles and experiences of principals is ultimately one small part of the quest for a better educational system.

Why study the experiences of principals of independent schools?

It is important for educational research to consider independent schools as they represent a significant and growing sector in education in Australia. As depicted in Figure 1 below, the education system in Australia is comprised of three main streams. Government schools are the largest sector as they cater for 65.1% of all students. Catholic schools account for 20.6% of students while independent schools have 14.3% (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2014). Catholic schools are regarded as a separate grouping because of the denominational and governance system to which they belong (Dearden, Ryan, & Sibieta, 2010). In 2013 there were 1,015 independent schools in Australia with 68% being in a metropolitan setting, 29% in a provincial setting and 3% in a rural setting (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2014). Australia has enjoyed a rich history of diversity in its education system and the presence of both government and independent schools has existed since 1848 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011).
Australian independent schools are partially funded by the government, with this support contributing to the growth of this sector (Caldwell, 2010). The funding for independent schools in Australia comes from both Federal and State levels with conditions existing for eligibility to this funding requiring both educational and financial accountability (Wilkinson, Caldwell, Selleck, Harris, & Dettman, 2007). Approximately 85% of independent schools in Australia are associated with a religious denomination or a particular church predominantly from the Christian faith (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2014). The government support and freedom given to faith-based schools, although appreciated by many, has also fuelled debate regarding the distribution of government resources to assist faith based organisations (Maddox, 2011). In recent years, the basis and amount of government funding to schools has been highlighted and given considerable media exposure through the research and recommendations of the Gonski Report (Windle, 2014). The remaining independent schools (i.e., those that are not faith-based) are often linked to a particular educational philosophy or system. For example, Steiner schools and Montessori schools (Caldwell, 2010).

In the international context there is a great variety in the definition, prevalence and government funding of independent schools. In the UK there is no direct Government funding to independent schools and this sector only accounts for about seven percent of school students although the government sector does include some schools with a
religious foundation (Caldwell, 2010; Ryan & Sibieta, 2011). The development of independent schools in the US has been helped in recent years through the implementation of a voucher system in many States. Through this voucher system the government can indirectly support independent schools who now account for about 12% of student enrolments (Cooper & Baxter, 2008). Although initially independent schools with a religious affiliation were not able to utilise the voucher system, this limitation has changed allowing these schools to accept this funding (Figlio & Stone, 2012). A voucher system is also used in other countries such as Chile (Hsieh & Urquiola, 2006) and is being considered in countries like India which has a growing Independent sector (Gouda, Das, Goli, Maikho, & Pou, 2013). The Netherlands stands out for its high prevalence of independent schools which has come from a long commitment to offering school choice. Currently 70% of Dutch schools receive funding from the government but are privately run (Patrinos, 2013).

The vast majority (80%) of independent schools in Australia are “not for profit” companies governed through a board of directors while others are linked to a larger, possibly denominational, system of governance (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations & Gonski, 2011). These boards or councils are legally responsible and accountable for the governance of the school and work with the school principal to create and implement goals and to facilitate the development of the school (McCormick, Barnett, Alavi, & Newcombe, 2006). A number of associations have been created to link independent schools together. These associations offer support and advice, training and representation at a government level (Australia. Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations & Gonski, 2011).

The independent school sector in Australia is growing. This growth is reflected in both student numbers and staffing and exceeds growth in government schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). If current growth rates continue, it is possible that the majority of schools in Australia will be non-government by the middle of this century (Caldwell, 2010). Independent schools have in recent years, had an increasing profile in the community as they have been required to be more financially and educationally accountable (Gurd, 2013). It is hoped that independent schools provide an increasing quality of education as they need to respond to market pressures and competition for students (Daniels, 2011).
Most of the research into schools and principals in Australia has examined government or Catholic schools. In recent years more research attention has focused on independent schools. However, there is a great need for more research into these schools, particularly looking at the roles and experiences of principals. Given the growth of this sector, coupled with it being a comparatively under-researched area, the study of independent school principals warrants more research attention.

**Why study the experiences of beginning principals?**

Usually our first days in a new job are quite memorable. They contain a mixture of excitement and some trepidation, particularly, if we have not been in the role before. The first phase of a school leader’s life as a principal is the culmination of many years of experience and study. Beginning principals immediately face the challenge of coping with the magnitude of work, building solid relationships and managing a multi-million dollar facility (Daresh & Male, 2000; Lashway, 2003). This experience can be very demanding and stressful with some beginning principals struggling, especially if they aren’t receiving adequate personal support (Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011; Sackney & Walker, 2006). It is in the principal’s and the school’s best interest for this journey into the principalship to be as smooth and productive as possible.

Understanding the experiences of beginning principals can help both principals who are already in their early years in the role and those who are preparing to become a principal in the future. This understanding can help aspiring and beginning principals to prepare for, identify and respond effectively to the greatest challenges they are likely to face in the role as well as be inspired by the great rewards of being in a position that can have a significant impact in the lives of students, families and teachers.

Research into the experiences of beginning principals also has possible applications for training and support programs. Although the past decade has seen an increase in the provision of preparation and ongoing development programs for beginning principals, there has been comparatively little research into the efficacy of these initiatives (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, & Orr, 2010). By studying the experiences of beginning principals a clearer picture of their preparation and ongoing support needs can be identified and incorporated into training if they are underrepresented.
Although this research will seek to develop an understanding of the experience of being a beginning principal from the beginning principal’s lived experiences, there is a limitation with this approach that needs to be mentioned. The literature in the area of leadership development reflects that as a leader moves through a novice stage, through intermediate, to finally one of expert, their perception of the role, skills, and sense of self identity change (Gronn, 1999; Lord & Hall, 2005). Therefore, although research based on the reports of the experiences of beginning principals reflects their experience and interpretations, the full picture may not be seen as they are not in a developmental stage to fully respond to and describe various aspects of their experiences. A longitudinal study with the same participants or the utilisation of the reflective comments of experienced principals may add another dimension to research in this area.

**Thesis outline**

This thesis will investigate the experiences of beginning principals in Australian independent schools. To place this research into the context of what is already known about this area, the following two chapters will examine key themes in the literature. Chapter 2 will look at the broader themes of the roles of school principals, the increasing demands made on them, the consequences of the demanding nature of the role, attempts to redefine the role in the face of “super principal” expectations and the rewarding aspects of the role. Chapter 3 will look more specifically at themes in the literature relating to the general experiences and challenges faced by principals of independent schools, the challenges faced by beginning principals and the training and support programs that are currently available for beginning principals.

Chapter 4 will outline the specific research question and four sub questions that have formed the basis of this thesis. This will be followed by an examination of the theoretical underpinnings of this research project and the methodology by which the research was conducted and assessed. The following four chapters will combine a presentation and discussion of the findings. Each chapter will include the data related to one of the sub questions of the study, a discussion of the results and some general suggestions for future thought and research. Chapter 5 will report and discuss the results concerning the preparation and sense of preparedness of the beginning principals in the study. Chapter 6 will report and discuss the key components the participants regarded as helpful in their commencement as a principal. Chapter 7 will report and discuss the
main challenges faced by the beginning principals in the study and Chapter 8 will highlight the rewarding aspects of these principal’s early experiences. Finally, in Chapter 9 the thesis will conclude with an overview of the results, discussion of issues raised by the results and the presentation of recommendations based on the results of this study which will be designed to aid beginning principals to commence their principalship in a healthy and productive way.
Chapter 2 — Themes in the literature relating to school principals

School principals have been the focus of considerable international research attention over the past four decades (Hallinger, 2011). The insights gained from this research have shed light on various aspects of the role of principals, the challenges they face and the vital part they play in the education system. As there is no shortage of research material relating to principals in general, the challenge will be to present this material in a succinct way that will encapsulate the key themes that appear. This chapter will look at five key themes in the literature regarding the role of principal. These themes are:

- The role of principal is multifaceted, demanding and vital to school effectiveness
- The role of principal has become increasingly complex and demanding
- The challenging nature of the role can adversely affect the principal’s wellbeing
- The call to change “Super principal” expectations to more realistic models of principalship
- The rewarding aspects to being a principal

This overall understanding will then serve as a foundation to the following chapter which will focus more closely on research relating to principals of independent schools and those who are embarking on their journey into principalship. This area of leadership is not as well researched and documented, particularly in relation to the wellbeing of beginning principals as their transition into position.

This literature review will present themes in a generic de-contextualised fashion looking at the commonalities experienced in the roles and experiences of principals in general, both here in Australia and in the international arena. Acknowledging that some have questioned the use of de-contextualised material which does not fully take into consideration the individual contexts of schools and school leaders (Dimmock & Tan, 2013; Tan, 2012), for the purposes of creating a general overview this approach is warranted. These themes will then be discussed in relation to literature that centres on the theoretical concepts of work intensification and emotional labour.
The role of principal is multifaceted, demanding and vital to school effectiveness

Principals are expected to perform a plethora of functions and activities. Essentially, the overarching purpose of the school principal is to provide leadership and management of the school (Department for Education and Skills, 2004). The following comment provides a helpful overview of these two overarching responsibilities.

Principals are required both to lead and to manage. Leadership develops shared vision, inspires and creates commitment and embraces risk and innovation. Management develops systems, which limit uncertainty, even out differences and improve consistency and predictability in delivering educational services. (Education Services Australia, 2014, p. 6)

Principals are leaders of learning communities and play a crucial role in the education system as they; “…inspire students, staff and members of the community to continuously enhance the learning of all” (Education Services Australia, 2014, p. 2). Over the past few decades, much of the research attention regarding school leadership has focused on the role of principal. This focus may have overemphasised the role of the principal in relation to the whole picture of leadership within the school, leading to school leadership being viewed synonymously with principalship (Ehrensal, 2015; Gunter, 2001; Gurr & Drysdale, 2013). This emphasis has also reinforced expectations that the role requires the presence of a super-principal (Ehrensal, 2015). This super-principal expectation will be discussed in later sections.

Various frameworks have been developed which seek to summarise the key functions which principals are required to provide, and the skills and attributes they need to fulfil these functions. As the role is so multifaceted, so too are the attributes required to fulfil these roles. Although there are over 50 models of school leadership in use in Australia alone (Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, 2011) there are many similarities in the role definitions for school principals here in Australia and throughout the world.

In the United Kingdom, the principal is referred to as a head teacher. The National Standards for Headteachers report outlined a helpful framework for understanding the role of principal / headteacher (Department for Education and Skills, 2004). Set out in
six interdependent areas, the standards identify the knowledge requirements and professional qualities headteachers need to bring to the role and thus provide a snapshot of what the role entails. These six areas are:

- shaping the future;
- leading learning and teaching;
- developing self and working with others;
- managing the organisation;
- securing accountability; and,
- strengthening community.

In a comprehensive synthesis of previous research into the practices of school leaders, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008) reported on four practices which reflect the main requirements of school leadership and, as such, are reflective of the role of the principal. These are:

- building vision and setting directions;
- understanding and developing people;
- redesigning the organisation; and,
- managing the teaching and learning program.

Similarly, in the Australian context, various descriptions of leadership expectations and expected abilities or competencies have been formulated by various State and National authorities. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership was formed by the Australian government to promote the development of teaching and leadership within schools. The Institute’s paper on *National Professional Standard for Principals* (2011) outlined a framework that encapsulates not only what a principal is expected to do, but also the capabilities they should possess to enable them to be effective (Education Services Australia, 2011). There are three leadership requirements or capabilities:

- vision and values;
- knowledge and understanding; and,
- personal qualities and social and interpersonal skills.
These leadership requirements are applied in the school setting through the following five key professional practices:

- leading teaching and learning;
- developing self and others;
- leading improvement, innovation and change;
- leading the management of the school; and,
- engaging and working with the community.

In another Australian example of a role and capabilities definition, Cranston and Ehrich (2006) and Cranston (2008) report on a five inter-related leadership capabilities model relevant to school leadership and, in particular, the role of school principal in the Queensland Education system. They are listed below and will be commented on in the following section.

- personal;
- relational;
- educational;
- intellectual; and,
- organisational.

Principals need to have a wide range of personal abilities which will help them to be able to do the job effectively over a long period of time. Personal qualities such as self-confidence or efficacy (Tschannen-Morgan & Gareis, 2004), a sense of responsibility and personal perseverance (Cotton, 2003), the ability to stay motivated and engaged over a long period of time (Furnet, 2011) and personal integrity (Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011) are all important to success and longevity in the role.

Relational abilities are vital for principals as so much of the role revolves around interactions and relationship-building with other school leaders, teachers, students, parents and the wider community. There are a wide variety of components to relationship building. It is important for the principal to exhibit an ability and willingness to communicate effectively, resolve conflict (Ayers & Sommers, 2009), encourage others (Kellough, 2008) and be able to relate effectively with a diverse group of people (Lumby & Coleman, 2010).
The over-arching goal of educational leadership is to facilitate greater teaching and learning outcomes. Consequently, many formulations of the role of principal highlight those elements which positively influence the overall instructional quality and outcomes of the school (Lovely, 2004; Stronge et al., 2008). There is also a large body of literature which strongly connects the effectiveness of the principal to the overall educational outcomes of the school (May & Supovitz, 2011).

Intellectual abilities, such as decision making and problem solving, form an essential part of the principal’s role and daily experience. The principal is bombarded daily with a plethora of issues requiring decisions concerning all aspects of school life and often are required to make these decisions “on the spot”. Although there is a time pressure to make these decisions, the principal needs to exercise great care as the results of these decisions will possibly impact students, teachers and the educational programs of the school (Calabrese & Zepeda, 1999).

As the most prominent leader of the school, the principal is required to show organisational abilities in order to lead the school in its ongoing development. Organisational leadership encompasses a number of facets, including the ability to formulate and implement vision for the future (Robinson, 2007) and make the necessary strategic changes that will be enable the school to sustain its development (Davies & Davies, 2006). The development of a healthy school culture (Ayers & Sommers, 2009) and a safe and positive school environment are also important (Stronge et al., 2008). The role of the principal in organisational leadership and development has been shown to contribute significantly to overall staff morale (Hart, Wearing, Conn, Carter, & Dingle, 2000). Not only does the principal need to manage the existing organisational structure, but also look at projected future staffing needs, oversee leadership development and possible succession planning (Fink, 2010).

The role of the school principal is multifaceted and requires capabilities in many areas. An exhaustive list of the minutia of the principal’s responsibilities covered under the umbrella of these general areas would be quite substantial. The following quote gives a helpful overview of its multifaceted nature.

More than ever, in today’s climate of heightened expectations, principals are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. They need to be
educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. They are expected to broker the often-conflicting interests of parents, teachers, students, district office officials, unions, state and federal agencies, and they need to be sensitive to the widening range of student needs. (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005, p. 1)

From this review of the relevant literature it is possible to see that attempts have been made to encapsulate the wide and varied nature of the work principals do into ‘frameworks’, ‘practices’, ‘skill sets’ and so on. In the next section I will look at the literature which demonstrates that the role is multifaceted and demanding.

The role of school principal is multifaceted and extremely demanding

The role of school principal is generally regarded as being extremely challenging. The previous section highlighted the major areas of the role of school principal and the areas of capabilities needed to fulfil this role. Unlike other leaders in the school, principals are in a position of responsibility over the functioning of the whole school (Ayers & Sommers, 2009). In addition to the huge responsibilities a principal is expected to fulfil, research has also shed light on some of the work-life aspects of principals which make the work even more demanding.

The demanding nature of the principalship is reflected in the huge workload principals experience. Workloads can be evaluated in the amount of specific responsibilities a principal has or in terms of the actual hours worked to fulfil these responsibilities (MacBeath, O’Brian, & Gronn, 2012). The literature in this area clearly shows that principals are working long hours (Cameron, Lovett, Baker, & Waiti, 2004; Pierce, 2000). Research in New Zealand showed that 29% of principals were working between 61-70 hours each week and 5% were working more than 71 hours a week (Wylie, 2008). It is not unusual to see 60-80 hours a week being reported by principals, both here in Australia and internationally (MacBeath, 2011; Walker, 2009).
In Australia, considerable data have been generated by *The Principal Health and Wellbeing* longitudinal research project which has been examining the wellbeing of principals and deputy principals (Riley, 2014a). The study which has involved over three and a half thousand principals and deputy principals from throughout Australia has found that during school terms “Approximately 50% work upwards of 56 hours per week during term with ~13% working upwards of 66 hours per week” (Riley, 2014a, p. 13). Research carried out in South Australia showed that the work load for principals had increased over time. One principal expressed real concern over how they would be able to keep doing the 80-hour-week they had worked for the past decade (Sahid, 2004). It is clear from the research that principals generally work long hours. However, it is not just the number of hours worked that can be challenging as the nature of the work and how it transpires each day can be taxing as well.

The challenging nature of the work of principals is exacerbated by the disjointed way the principal is required to work and respond to school needs. Peterson (2001) highlighted three key descriptors of the principals workday in terms of brevity, variety and fragmentation. The principal’s day may involve hundreds of brief tasks and interactions (Peterson, 2001). These brief interactions usually contain an expectation of decision making (Calabrese & Zepeda, 1999). The number of such interactions and tasks each day and the constant nature of their appearance requires the principal to have acute problem solving skills and work comfortably in a world of brief exchanges. There can also be a sense of frustration with these short encounters as they may not lead to positive changes in the instructional effectiveness of the school (Samuels, 2008).

The second characteristic of the principal’s typical work pattern is the great variety in the tasks and interactions they need to respond to (Peterson, 2001). The principal may go from a very complex strategic planning issue to responding to a teacher, parent or student with concerns and then on to a seemingly unimportant administrative matter. This variety requires the principal to demonstrate great flexibility and the ability to deal with a huge diversity of issues and people with these interactions, consuming a great deal of time and emotional energy (Lovely, 2004).

Added to these challenges is the effect of fragmentation (Peterson, 2001). The work of the principal is characterised by a constant breaking of the flow of work by interruptions, problems and crises (Samuels, 2008). Although these quick, varied and
often unplanned interruptions may be rewarding, as they may give a sense of quick positive outcomes, the nature of these short interactions can also be quite draining as many of them involve a human / emotional component. This fragmentation of work also makes it more difficult for principals to apply generally accepted principles of time management and work efficiency (Parkes & Thomas, 2007). To fulfil a senior leadership role in any organisation requires certain attributes and skills. From research into the work expectations and the type of work day most principals experience, it is clear that their roles are complex and demanding. This complexity is often difficult to capture and quantify as much of it occurs behind the scenes in the emotionally demanding interactions the principal is required to engage in each day. The emotional nature of the role and the concept of emotional labour will be reported on later in this chapter.

The role of school principal is vital to the quality of education that a school provides

There is universal acceptance of the important role that school principals play in the quality of education provided by schools. The links between the leadership effectiveness of the school principal and other key school leaders have been explored extensively in research, particularly as there has been a heightened community awareness of student educational outcomes in many countries (Towns, 2013). Leithwood et al. (2008) made seven key observations about the role and importance of school leadership. Two observations that are relevant to the discussion here are that “[S]chool leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” and that “[S]chool leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions” (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 27). Both of these statements highlight the impact of school leaders on the educational outcomes of the school. More specifically, research has highlighted the influence of the principal’s leadership style and effectiveness on educational outcomes (Al-Safran, Brown, & Wiseman, 2013).

Principals influence the functioning of the school and educational outcomes in a number of ways. The principal’s influence has often been looked at in terms of instructional and transformational leadership. Instructional aspects of the role involve those things that influence and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Transformational aspects of
the role involve those things that influence and improve the organisational structure and function of the school. Although these two categories divide the work neatly on paper, in reality they are often intertwined (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010) and have perhaps created a false dichotomy (Towns, 2013). Overall principals can have a great impact on the functioning in all areas of the school through their ability to influence key decision making (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Studies carried out in Australia as a part of the larger *International Successful School Principalship* project have also echoed the importance of the principal’s values, leadership style and personal attributes in improving educational outcomes (Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2006).

Principals can have a positive influence on the teaching staff of the school which then impacts on student experiences (Slater, 2011). Their contribution in terms of developing a staff milieu which supports healthy relationships, engagement and ongoing professional development also contributes to better student outcomes (Angelle & Bilton, 2009). Although the general influence of principals is clear, Branch et al. (2013) and Nir and Hameiri (2014) argue that more research is needed to examine the specific ways in which their influence leads to better educational outcomes.

**The role of principal has become increasingly complex and demanding**

In the past three decades the role of principal has become significantly more complex and demanding (Eckman, 2006). With new tasks and accountabilities being added to their role and seemingly nothing taken away, the weight of the responsibility of principalship has only grown (Fink, 2010). This change has been “unrelenting” (Mulford, 2003) and has led to an intensification of the role (MacBeath, 2006). It is not within the thin scope of this section to outline all of the changes that have occurred in education systems and the role of the principal, but to highlight some salient and global aspects of these changes. In the following section I will outline four of these changes that have contributed to the growing demands made on principals.

**Increasing accountability for educational outcomes and use of market terminology in educational settings**

Principals and school leaders are increasingly being held accountable for educational outcomes. In the US this trend has increased since the passing of the *No Child Left
Behind Act 2001 legislation (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002) with principals becoming increasingly accountable for improved student outcomes (Angelle & Bilton, 2009; Catano & Stronge, 2006). This follows on from the prevalent theme in the literature which links principals to school educational outcomes. Not surprisingly, this change has led to increased pressures, scrutiny and expectations on principals to produce desirable outcomes (Copland, 2001; Davis et al., 2005; Styron & Styron, 2011; Tucker & Codding, 2002). This increased accountability can give an unrealistic weighting of the extent to which a principal influences educational outcomes in their school (Catano & Stronge, 2006).

The literature reveals an increased focus on the collection, reporting and analysis of student outcomes with the purposes of evaluation and planning for improvement in the school’s performance in the future (Townsend, 2011). White (2010) suggests this increased focus on looking at creating, assessing and sustaining positive learning outcomes has dominated educational attention in Australia over the past decade. An aspect of this increasing accountability is found in the prevalence of high stakes testing which is based on the idea that accountability will result in students and school staff working harder to achieve better results (Lobascher, 2011).

Although high stakes testing has been a part of many education systems around the world, in the Australian context it is a fairly recent arrival (Minarechova, 2012). The combination of the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) which was introduced to Australia in 2008 and the subsequent development of the My Schools website which contains information on the NAPLAN results and other school results, has increased the public’s access to the results of such standardised testing (Caldwell, 2011). As well as some educational concerns regarding the use of high stakes testing, it has served to add pressure on principals to improve educational outcomes (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Smeed, 2010). This push for increased accountability has also interplayed with another change in the educational landscape with the increasing use of market terminology and competition between schools.

Globally, with the use of high stakes testing there has been an increasing shift to market competition amongst schools (Butland, 2008). The underlying assumption is that, as schools compete for students, the quality of education they provide will improve (Lubienski, 2007). Implicitly, the presence of a competitive school environment will
increase the competitive pressures faced by school leaders (Kasman & Loeb, 2013). This pressure is exacerbated by the publication of educational achievements of schools as this information is considered necessary for the “consumer’ to make choices (Stevenson & Wood, 2013).

Schools have also needed to place an increasing emphasis on marketing strategies and promoting a positive image of the school (Townsend, 2011). This commodification of education has created new challenges for educators. Some of these challenges have been to reconcile market competition with collaboration between schools (Connolly & James, 2006), to not compromise on issues of equality (Alam & Khalifa, 2009), to not reduce education to a consumer product and to maintain an academic accuracy in marketing promotions which are designed to influence parental decisions (Lubienski, 2007). In the context of this research the net effect of this move is relevant as it has increased pressure on schools to perform well in these publically scrutinised test measures (Stevenson & Wood, 2013). Principals are increasingly required to communicate a school vision that caters for current and future “consumers” (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2007).

**Increasing legal compliance and risk management**

The increased amount of accountability and responsibility extends much further than student performances on key tests. In Australia there is an increasing amount and complexity of regulatory accountability / compliance schools need to adhere to at both State and Federal levels in a variety of areas such as education, employment conditions, financial accountability, child safety, teacher accreditation, the handling of information and the use of facilities (Lock, Pilkington, Newton, & Robson, 2010). In a study with principals in Western Australia, Lock and Lummis (2014) reported that principals found fulfilling compliance requirements required considerable time and resources, with re-registration of the school as being the most time consuming and stressful. Not only does this required time on compliance take away time principals could spend on instructional leadership, but it is also another source of stress (Lock & Lummis, 2014; Smeed, 2010).

Principals also have a responsibility for ensuring compliance to risk management policies. These risk management policies have become increasingly complex, requiring more time from principals (Starr, 2012). Although the origins of these regulations and policies are grounded in a sincere desire to create and maintain safe school
environments, they have added another level of paperwork, accountability and responsibility to principals and other school leaders. There has been an increase over time in the amount of legal responsibilities the principal must be aware of to ensure school safety and minimise possible litigation resulting from issues like bullying, sexual misconduct, injuries and negligence (Teh, 2009).

One of the main responsibilities of school leaders has always been to do everything in their power to create a safe environment for children. However, over time, principals have had to become more attuned to both internal and external threats to the safety and wellbeing of their students and staff. Since the Columbine massacre in the United States in 1999, school security has received considerably more attention (Green, 2009) and the threat of the activity of sex offenders on the school campus is a constant concern requiring precautionary and responsive measures (Maxwell, 2006). Over the past decade, there has also been an increasing public awareness and concern over bullying in all its forms and the short term and long term negative effects on students (Jacobson, Riesch, Temkin, Kedrowski, & Kluba, 2011; Rigby, 2007). As bullying is sadly also a problem impacting on staff members this, too, needs to receive the attention of school leaders (Riley, Duncan, & Edwards, 2011). The combined effect of the growing plethora of compliance issues is a greater workload on school principals.

**The challenges of technology leadership and usage**

Another part of the mantle of leadership principals have had to accept is technology leadership. Since the introduction of computers to schools over thirty years ago, there have been huge developments in the use of new technologies, with school principals having to take on an active role in the leadership of the introduction and utilisation of these technologies (Davies, 2010; Lecklider, Britten, & Clausen, 2009). Technological leadership has become a vital component of overall school leadership (Sincar, 2013). The exponential explosion of access to knowledge which has come through technological advances has created its own set of challenges for principals to ensure their school is providing the latest in technology and helping students to learn how to utilise the new, rapidly expanding pool of available knowledge (Crow, 2006).

While new technologies have brought great personal and educational benefits, they have also brought new sets of challenges for leaders in both their implementation and usage. Sometimes the challenge of adopting new technologies comes from the opposition of
school staff. Teachers can be resistant to implementing new technologies and innovations as they may be reluctant to change their practices and anxious about their abilities to learn new skills (Dawson & Rakes, 2003; Sincar, 2013). The management of usage of mobile phones and the internet have also created new challenges for principals. Research in cyberbullying amongst students in Brisbane and Sydney for example, found that 11.5% of students are experiencing at least one case of cyberbullying in the course of a school year (Sakellariou, Carroll, & Houghton, 2012). This whole new modality for bullying has been made possible through the rise of internet usage and mobile phones.

While adding much to the effectiveness of school leadership, the proliferation of the use of emails has also created some new challenges for principals. One challenge is the amount of time which is required on a daily basis to process and respond to emails. Glendinning (2006) reported that he had received or sent approximately 12,500-17,500 emails in the course of his first year as a high school principal. This volume of emails required about 2.5 hours of his attention each day. Although being a quick, cost effective tool for leaders in organisational communication, there are some downsides associated with this tool (Sumecki, Chipulu, & Ojiako, 2011). Email can have a negative effect through the interruptions it causes in work flow (Jackson, Dawson, & Wilson, 2003) and can create unnecessary tensions when they are sent to the wrong people or are used as a non-personal way of complaining or expressing negativity (Glendinning, 2006). The sheer volume of information reaching leaders through emails, mobile phones, and the internet can leave them burdened by information overload. Information overload occurs when there is too much information being presented to an individual, leading them to not be able to adequately process or utilise this information which then can result in stress, reduced work satisfaction and ineffective decision making (Misra & Stokols, 2012).

The effects of globalisation and an altered relationship with the community

Globalisation has had a large impact on schools through the way they approach education and respond to the world (Lingard & McGregor, 2014). Some of these impacts are outlined in the Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008) which highlights a commitment to provide an education which will enable
Australian students to compete strongly in a developing global setting. The declaration argues;

Globalisation and technological change are placing greater demands on education and skill development in Australia and the nature of jobs available to young Australians is changing faster than ever. (p.4)

The global movement of people has also created new challenges for schools to be inclusive of immigrants and refugees (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). There is also a growing expectation that principals be leaders of social justice and encourage their schools to embrace local and wider issues such as environmental issues (Mulford, 2008; Theoharis, 2007).

There have been many changes that have impacted on the demands placed on principals in the past two decades. Difficulties in accurately researching the effects of these changes have been exacerbated by the sheer pace at which they have occurred (Chapman et al., 2009). While many changes in the education system and in the community have been extremely helpful for schools in their ability to deliver quality education, some have come at the cost of dramatically increasing the workload and stress of those who are charged with leading in a time of change (Brown, 2006). The chapter will now focus on a discussion of how these work pressures influence wellbeing.

**The challenging nature of the role can adversely affect the principal’s wellbeing**

As the challenges of the role of principal increase so, too, does the emotional and physical burden they bear. The combination of a stressful job with long work hours can create some significant challenges to physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing (Bagi, 2009). In the following section I will outline some of the mental health, physical health and relationship consequences that have been reported in the literature.

**Mental health consequences**

The emotional strain of the work and fatigue over a sustained period of time can impact greatly on the principal’s wellbeing and possibly lead to burnout (Whitaker, 1996). Phillips, Sen and McNamee (2007) found that the self-reported stress experienced by
principals had increased significantly over time. Studies looking at the reported stress levels of principal in New Zealand have found that 38% of the principals surveyed reported experiencing a high level of stress in their work (Wylie, 2008). Research in the UK and the US has also identified high levels of stress in principals as they try to fulfil their role and juggle the expectations placed on them by students, families, staff and the broader community and education system (Langlan-Fox & Cooper, 2011; Phillips et al., 2007; Phillips et al., 2008; Tucker, 2010; Van der Merwe & Parsotam, 2012). Research carried out with principals in Victoria also reported that stress was one of the main factors affecting their wellbeing and principals were experiencing higher levels of stress than other professionals in comparable work roles (Department of Education and Training Victoria, 2004). Stress and long work hours over a prolonged period of time can produce deleterious health and mental health consequences.

In terms of mental health wellbeing, principals can feel overwhelmed by their roles and possibly become burnt out. Studies with Scottish principals showed they had a significant concern about just coping with their roles (MacBeath et al., 2012). These long work hours make burnout a real possibility for school principals (Green, 2009). Burnout is a severe, debilitating condition which is characterised by exhaustion, depersonalisation and cynicism and perceptions of inefficacy (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Some major contributing factors leading to burnout are identity issues, emotionally demanding work, continued stresses in the work place and excessive work hours (Bagi, 2013). Identity issues can be problematic when an individual has a blurred demarcation between their sense of personal identity and their work identity which in turn can lead to an over commitment to and identification with their jobs (Casserley & Megginson, 2009). In research with US principals, Combs, Edmonson, and Jackson (2009) found that 8.8% of the principals in the project reported experiencing high levels of burnout.

It is clear from the research that the challenging nature of the role of principal is having negative effects on their mental wellbeing. Recent findings from research carried out with Australian principals indicated that;

...collectively principals and deputy / assistant principals score less than the general population on all positive measures (self-rated health; happiness; mental health; coping; relationships; self-worth; personal wellbeing index)
and higher on all negative measures (burnout; stress; sleeping troubles; depressive symptoms; somatic stress symptoms; cognitive stress symptoms). (Riley, 2014a, p. 14)

Other aspects of the role of principal can also lead to mental health issues. One of the challenges principals often face is loneliness. As the old saying goes ‘it’s lonely at the top’, and many principals experience this sense of loneliness because of their senior leadership role in the school (Skelly, 1996). This sense of loneliness can lead to a sense of depression (Izgar, 2009), as well as possible mental health consequences resulting from the demanding nature of the role, a principal’s physical health may also suffer.

**Physical health consequences**

The demanding nature of the role of principal can have adverse effects on their physical wellbeing (Green, Malcolm, Greenwood, Small, & Murphy, 2001). Being in a role with high stress and long work hours can lead to physical problems like headaches, changes in sleep patterns, gastro-intestinal complaints and, more seriously can be linked to the development of high blood pressure and cardio-vascular disease (Vladut & Kallay, 2010). A study of primary school principals in Victoria found that:

> Principals reported higher stress levels and worse physical health than a group of white-collar employees of similar socioeconomic status. (Green et al., 2001)

With some research indicating that younger professionals may be more prone to the development of coronary illness (Kuper & Marmot, 2003), Riley (2013) raised concerns over the well-being of principals in Australia in the coming years considering that a large proportion will be retiring in the next five years and will be replaced by younger ones. These health consequences are potentially quite serious and can lead to principals having to go into early retirement (Weber, Weltle, & Lederer, 2005).

**Relationship consequences**

Long work hours can place considerable strain on principals in all areas of their lives. The obvious impact is on their ability to spend quality time with their families and time to just rest and recharge (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005). Struggles with work life balance mean that family life is impacted negatively (D’Arbon, Duignan, & Duncan, 2005).
2002; MacBeath, 2006; Phillips et al., 2007). This lack of quality time can lead to disappointment, frustration and possibly relationship issues and marriage breakdown (Evetts, 1994; Flintham, 2003).

The demanding nature of the role of principal can negatively impact on their mental wellbeing, physical health and personal relationships. In the following section I will comment on the effect of the expectations made on principals and how attempts have been made to redefine or restructure the role.

The call to change “super principal” expectations to more realistic models of principalship

It is clear from the literature that the role of school principal has become increasingly demanding over time, more of a “super” principal role than heretofore. A question that has been asked by researchers, and I am sure many principals is, “[I]s the role too big for one person to adequately fulfil?” Can someone fulfil all the expectations of the role or do schools need “super principals” who have more energy and wisdom than mere mortals? If the role is unrealistic, then this will create an unrelenting burden in the lives of school principals, discourage other potential aspirants from pursuing this role in their educational careers and mean that the role of principal and the structure of school leadership would need to be reformulated.

Is it a job for “super principal”?

Is there simply too much on the job description of a school principal for one person to be able to fulfil? In the previous sections of this literature review I have touched on various aspects of the role. Although the list of responsibilities taken from the literature review has not been exhaustive in its coverage, certainly it has painted a picture of a gargantuan role. The image of a “super principal”, has come partly from the hierarchical leadership structures in schools in which the principal is seen as the focal leader charged with leading the school bravely into the future (Eckman & Kelber, 2010; Pierce, 2000). As the demands and challenges of school leadership have grown, so has the superhero persona of the principal. Despite changes in leadership structures over time, there is still a prevailing perception and expectation of the single, strong and heroic figure leading the way (Mulford, 2008).
The “super principal” expectation has also been partly fuelled by educational reforms which have placed more emphasis on the role of the principal in shaping school outcomes (Copland, 2001; Garrick, 2010). With the increased demands made on principals, the role may be too challenging for one person to fulfil adequately (DiPaola & Tschannen-Morgan, 2003; Usdan, McCloud, & Podmostko, 2000). If the role is seen in this “super principal” manner then the negative consequences for those who are already principals will not be surprising. The stereotype may prevent principals from asking for help and also possibly discourage future potential principals from seeking this role.

**Negative perceptions of the role are discouraging potential aspirants**

A negative perception of the role of principal seems to be de-motivating prospective applicants (Thomson & Blackmore, 2006). The stresses, workload and other expectations made of principals and the effects of this on their family and personal lives are often cited in research as being deterrents for people pursuing a role as principal (Bass, 2006; D’Arbon et al., 2002; Thomson & Blackmore, 2006; Usdan et al., 2000). Howley et al. (2005) summarised this reluctance to pursue principalship in the title of their article *The pain outweighs the gain*. As potential principals are usually people who are in some type of school leadership role, they are very aware of the joys and stresses of the job as they observe the daily work life of their principal. Many teachers see greater disincentives in the role of principal rather than the rewards, resulting in the role of principal not being perceived as an attractive professional goal (Howley et al., 2005). Research examining the perceptions and attitudes of deputy female principals in Israel showed:

> The head’s role is characterized, in their view, as total, overwhelming, highly energy consuming, remote, and politically embedded, all of which are elements perceived to be incompatible with the deputy’s personality, lifestyle and preferences (Oplatka & Tamir, 2009, p. 228).

Some researchers have suggested these negative perceptions are also fuelled by public and media perceptions of the role of principal (Thomson, Blackmore, Sachs, & Tregenza, 2003) and that most of the research in this area is tipped in favour of exploring disincentives leading to a biased view of the role (Bass, 2006). Principals, themselves, may also be inadvertently passing on negative perceptions of the role. A
study of Scottish principals found that despite 88% of the principals commenting on the privilege of being in the role, only 46% would recommend the role to a colleague (MacBeath et al., 2012). The consequences of these perceptions may be contributing to some shortages of applicants.

For any organisational system to be healthy it needs to have a pipeline of quality aspirants who are prepared and eager to take on the senior roles of the organisation. If certain roles are perceived in a negative way, with the costs outweighing the benefits, then potential job candidates will be unwilling to apply, eventually leading to a shortage in that particular area. There is research to indicate that both problems are appearing when it comes to filling the role of principals. Whether these negative perceptions of the role have contributed to a world-wide shortage of applicants or not is unclear. There are definitely some signs of shortages and difficulties experienced by schools in recruiting quality applicants, both here in Australia and internationally (Gronn & Lacey, 2004).

There is differing opinion about whether these shortages represent a universal trend or reflect specific locations and types of schools (Mitgand, 2003). In the Australian scene, research has indicated at that time there were no immediate shortages, but there were a number of situational factors possibly dissuading potential candidates such as location and size of the school (Barty et al., 2005). Although the research is not definitive, many researchers agree there has been a decline in the numbers of people seeking to apply for principal positions which is a cause for concern if there is to be a continued adequate supply of quality applicants in the future (Watson, 2007).

**Redefining the role of principal**

Running parallel with the research into the challenges and expectations made of school principals have been concerted efforts to re-define the role of school principal and the development of healthier models of school leadership. What is clear is that the “super principal” model is not healthy or sustainable. This theme is not confined to educational leadership as there is a growing sense in many sectors that senior leadership roles are becoming unachievable for one person to adequately fulfil.

The demands on those who occupy the top roles of contemporary organizations are rapidly outdistancing the capabilities of any single person,
Various conceptualisations of the role of principal and the sharing of leadership have gained increasing acceptance. One of these models that has gained considerable attention and application in the past decade is the “distributed leadership” model (Bolden, 2011; Louis, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Smylie, 2013; Youngs, 2009). Although the term “distributed leadership” is understood and applied in different ways, at its core is the sense that it is more than sharing leadership. It suggests school leadership should be spread out over the school through multiple leaders in both formal and informal contexts (Glen, 2009; Larsen & Rieckhoff, 2013). In this model, the principal moves from the apex of leadership and invests considerable time and effort developing leadership skills and opportunities for leadership for others (Harris, 2012). Sharing the responsibility of school leadership can take on various formulations besides distributed leadership models.

Leadership responsibilities can also be shared with a leadership team or a co-leader. The development of a strong school executive leadership team is a way the burden of responsibility can be shared (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Thomas, 2009; Usdan et al., 2000). The leadership responsibility can also be shared with a deputy or assistant principal who is given increased responsibilities (Kwan, 2009; Wexler Eckman, 2006). Some trials are also occurring which are exploring ways of job-sharing the principalship in both Catholic and government schools in Australia (Starr, 2010). The common theme is that the job is too big for one person and that the principal needs a team of leaders with complementary abilities and experience working alongside him/her to fulfil all the facets of the responsibilities of school leadership (Thomas, 2009).

In summary, over the past three decades there has been an increasing awareness of the need for school principals to develop shared models of leadership (Townsend, 2011). While the development of different leadership models has some potential advantages to the principal, the burden of responsibility is still often perceived to be with the principal, as the “buck stops here” feeling is still very much a part of the role (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Furthermore, the move to distributed leadership does not necessarily reduce the workload and leadership demand on the principal, as with it comes the need
to identify other leaders, supervise their development and give feedback about their work (Leithwood et al., 2007). Some principals also do not necessarily want to share their role with others hierarchically below them and would prefer to share the load only with others of equal status (Garrick, 2010). Hallinger (2011) suggests more research is needed to adequately assess the efficacy of these various models of school leadership as applied in various contexts. Regardless of the adopted model, Dunaway (2009) argues that principals should be encouraged to develop their own leadership style without having to feel they need to personally fulfil all the expectations of the “super principal” which have been placed on them or which have maybe been self-imposed.

The rewarding aspects to being a principal

There are many rewarding aspects to being a school principal. The literature about school principals abounds in material examining the challenges of the role. As has been seen in this chapter, the role has become increasingly difficult and demanding over time and has created a huge burden for principals. As a balance to this image of the stressed and burdened principal, it is crucial to understand the rewarding aspects of the role. Although the rewarding nature of the principalship is relatively under-researched, it is a theme that is present in much of the literature. Despite it being a difficult role, many principals consider their jobs to be very rewarding, as they are making a significant impact into the lives of students and their families (Bass, 2006; Brown, 2006). It is important to understand what factors motivate school leaders to apply for principalship and the rewards they experience while in the role.

Motivating factors for becoming a principal

To understand the rewards of principalship it is relevant to examine the perceptions of these rewards by those aspiring to be principals. It is these perceptions and motivations that influence their decision to journey towards principalship. A study of almost 1,000 individuals enrolled in principal preparation courses in a variety of US educational institutions looked at these motivators for wanting to be a principal. The research found that:

The student group clearly perceived the intrinsic service-oriented reasons of desiring to make a difference, having a positive impact on people and students, and having the opportunity to initiate change as three of the top
motives for seeking a principal position. The students perceived that by entering the principalship they would be able to have more of a positive impact on teachers, students, and the entire school organization than they would as a teacher. (Bass, 2006, p. 25)

The personally and professionally demanding nature of the role also served as a motivator for pursuing principalship (Bass, 2006; Thomson et al., 2003).

**The rewarding nature of the role of principal**

Research internationally and here in Australia, has shown principals report a high degree of job satisfaction (Saulwick & Muller, 2004; West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010; Worthing & Paterson, 2013; Wylie, 2008). Research conducted with 502 principals in the US found that 68% of principals surveyed rated themselves as very satisfied in their role and 78% shared they loved being a principal (Metlife, 2008). Research conducted with Irish principals found that 93% were happy in their role (Darmody & Smyth, 2011). Research carried out with 689 principals in Victoria also showed that 90% of the principals agreed that their job brought them a great sense of personal satisfaction and that 97% reported the impact on the lives of young people as the best aspect of their work (Saulwick & Muller, 2004).

They see young people, individually and collectively, as the wealth of the future: to educate and nourish them gives their life meaning and brings them great satisfaction. (Saulwick & Muller, 2004, p. 21)

Although principals are concerned about the magnitude of the job, it is the challenges and the variety within the role that is a great motivator and gives a sense of reward and accomplishment (West et al., 2010). In the light of the negative perceptions of principalship, it is these rewards that would be useful to explore further and highlight to potential aspirants (Johnson & Holdway, 1994; Sodoma & Else, 2009).

**Conceptualisations of work intensification and emotional labour**

From this review it is clear that the role of principal is changing and becoming more challenging to fulfil. Two concepts are useful for understanding these changes and their effects on the wellbeing of principals. The first is the concept of work intensification.
Work intensification described as “working harder for longer” (McLennan, 2009, p. 56), represents increasing expectations from a role, increasing difficulty in the tasks and longer hours required to fulfil the role (Burchielli, Pearson, & Thanacoody, 2006). It is widely acknowledged that work intensification is a widespread phenomenon affecting workers in various sectors around the world and it is often accompanied by negative consequences to wellbeing such as fatigue and stress (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Wajcman, 2008).

Research has shown that work intensification is prevalent in the education sector and is experienced by teachers, school leaders and university lecturers (Burchielli et al., 2006; Easthope & Easthope, 2000; Gronn, 2003a; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004; Youngs, 2007), leading to a significantly higher incidence of stress related issues (McLennan, 2009). Gronn (2003a) described this work intensification as a crisis in the domain of school leadership.

Work intensification has affected principals as their workload and responsibilities have increased significantly in recent years (Fullan, 2014). Although the literature is replete with examples of work and responsibilities being added to the role of principals, it is very silent when it comes to commenting on whether anything has been taken out of the role to alleviate the growing pressures faced by principals. More research is needed to understand both the nature of this intensification and how principals seek to cope with it (Gronn, 2003a). It is important to note that work intensification doesn’t just involve more work, but it also reflects the nature of the work which can be emotional challenging and draining.

The second concept which is helpful to understanding the demanding nature of the role of principals is that of emotional labour. In seminal work, over 30 years ago, emotional labour was defined by Hochschild (2012, p. 7) as labour that:

..requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others.

Emotional labour has also been described as “the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions” (Morris & Feldman, 1996, p. 987).
Not only are the issues principals deal with throughout each day potentially emotionally challenging and draining, this concept of emotional labour also highlights the pressure on principals to maintain an appropriate emotional response to students, teachers and parents. Morris and Feldman (1996) argued that the effort required to display these organisationally appropriate responses can be quite emotionally draining, especially when the person is monitored in some way. It can be argued that the “public face” (Hochschild, 2012) of the principal requires them to subjugate the expression of their feelings for a more organisationally accepted response. These additional emotional challenges add to the intensity of the work role and should raise concerns about their impact on the emotional wellbeing of school leaders (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004). In recent years more attention has been given to the concept of emotional labour and how it affects school leaders and principals (Gallant & Riley, 2013; Riley, 2014a). These two concepts of work intensity and emotional labour underpin the discussion of the results in Chapter 7.

**Concluding comments**

In this chapter I have examined some of the broad themes in the literature regarding the nature and changes in the role of school principal. It is clear from the research that the role of principal is crucial, challenging and changing. The challenges of the role and the magnitude of the work can often burden schools principals and lead to stress and other negative effects on their wellbeing. The intensification and emotional nature of the role were also discussed as issues of concern and research investigation. While the bulk of the research has focused on the nature and challenges of the role, it is clear that principals do find their roles appealing and rewarding.

This broad look at the nature and challenges of the role of principal will provide a foundation for the following chapter. In Chapter 3 I will examine the themes from the literature which pertain more specifically to the focus of this research namely the preparation and experiences of beginning principals and the narrower field of research relating to principals of independent schools in Australia.
Chapter 3 — Themes in the literature relating to principals of independent schools and beginning principals

Having laid a foundation regarding themes related to principalship in general, I will now examine the literature that is germane to the focus of this research project. In this chapter I will examine literature relating to leadership in an independent school, the challenges faced by beginning principals and the development of preparation and support systems for beginning principals in general and specifically for beginning principals of independent schools in Australia.

Additional challenges for principals leading independent schools.

Independent schools form a significant part of the education landscape in Australia. They account for 14.3% of Australian school students and, when combined with Catholic schools that cater to 20.6% of students, reflect a significant private school presence covering 34.9% of students (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2014). It is not surprising therefore to find the vast majority of the research that has been carried out in general, both here in Australia and internationally, has involved government schools. There is also a considerable body of literature and research that has focused on Catholic schools with the least amount of focused research being done with independent schools. While there are many similarities to school leadership in the government and private sectors (Jorgenson, 2006), there are also a number of differences (Earley & Evans, 2003). Despite the relatively small amount of literature in this area, particularly related to independent schools in Australia, three themes do appear in the literature which highlight some of the additional challenges faced by principals in the Independent sector. These themes are consumerist expectations and market pressures, faith leadership and governance issues. The next section will outline these themes in detail.

Consumerist expectations and market pressures

Independent schools are susceptible to the pressures caused by consumer expectations and market pressures as they operate with a fee system and need to compete with other schools in the education marketplace. Independent schools in Australia are financed
through a combination of government funding and the charging of school fees. Having a fee assisted financial basis does provide benefits to independent schools as well as posing some challenges such as increased parental expectations. Roberts (2007) reports that there is often a public perception that independent schools will provide a higher level of academic and behavioural standards for their students, with parents becoming increasingly demanding of the services provided by the school (Dempster, 2000).

Although all schools experience pressure to be perceived by the public as being high performing, there is considerable pressure on independent schools to demonstrate high performance in the increasingly competitive environment of schooling. Thus, independent schools need to produce healthy student performance and consumer satisfaction (Miron & Nelson as cited in Lubienski, 2007). As parents are paying fees, it is quite reasonable they would expect “value for money”. While not the subject of this research, an untapped area of research would be to explore the ways in which “value for money” in education is understood by parents and how parental expectations are influenced by the level of fees that are paid.

A possible issue arising from a fee paying environment is the amount and type of input parents feel they can have with the school’s teachers and leaders. Although research has been carried out examining patterns of parental involvement in schools it has not generally focused on independent schools. In general, while parental interest and interaction can be helpful, some research indicates this is an area where school staff can feel pressured and even bullied (Riley et al., 2011). Baek (2010) found that while teachers appreciated appropriate involvement and feedback from parents, those parents who showed more of a propensity to comment on pedagogical aspects of the teachers work were unhelpful. In particular, parents who were more highly educated and were from a higher socio-economic background were more likely to intervene in school matters, monitor the teacher’s performance and raise questions on teaching methods. Based on these results, it would be an interesting field for future research to look particularly at this type of parental involvement in independent schools, particularly those with a higher fee base.

In the context of the consumerism of education, independent schools also need to compete with other schools for enrolments and market themselves effectively. Competition with other schools can mean continual improvements are made and the
services offered are in line with family expectations and are marketed effectively (Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2007). In their promotion, private schools often capitalise on their superior facilities and, through their logos and promotional language, make emotional and symbolic appeals (Lubienski, 2007). With this competition is also a pressure placed on the principals of these schools to keep any negative incidents or performance reports out of the public view as they may adversely affect the image of these schools (Dempster, 2000).

Competition between schools may impede cooperation. Although independent schools are bound to fulfil the educational requirements as prescribed and directed by the government, they also enjoy a great deal of autonomy and flexibility. Most schools are linked together through associations or church denominational entities, however, their effective collaboration may be impeded by the combination of independence and competition in the market place (Connolly & James, 2006). It would be understandable that a particular independent school might be reluctant to expend a great amount of time and resources into helping a senior staff member prepare for the role of principal where, in fact, they might take on this role in another, perhaps geographically, competing school. Considering the scarcity of research into the culture of independent schools and their co-operation, this would be a valuable field for future research (Klindworth, 2008).

The added dimension of faith leadership

In addition to the areas of leadership already outlined, principals of independent schools are often also expected to provide faith leadership. As 84% of independent schools in Australia are associated with a religious denomination or a particular church predominantly from the Christian faith (Caldwell, 2010), there is an expectation made that the principal will play an active role in faith modelling and spiritual development within the school community (Gannell, 2004; Hurley, 2005; Revell, 2008; Sayce & Lavery, 2010). Principals of faith based schools are often expected to promote the doctrine and values of the particular supporting religious denomination and create a community which encourages and nurtures these beliefs (D'Arbon, Cunliffe, Canavan, & Jericho, 2009). Often, it is the inclusion of a particular spiritual world-view and framework that has motivated the parents to enrol their children in a particular school.

In a Queensland Catholic Schools leadership framework, faith leadership was included as an important component of the leader’s work in addition to the usual overall
leadership categories required from school leaders (Spry, 2004). In the US, the Catholic Conference includes spiritual leadership as one of the three aspects of the leadership given by school principals.

The spiritual leader role focuses on faith development and building the Christian community as well as facilitating the moral and ethical development of those in the school community. (Rieckhoff, 2013, p. 28)

The faith leadership aspect of the role can be a great incentive to applicants, as they can freely live out and share their faith experience with others in the school in a supportive environment (Gannell, 2004). Previous research has shown various areas in which spiritual belief structures can help principals in their roles such as building resilience in stressful circumstances (Gibson, 2011) and helping to guide the school communities through tragic events (Tarrant, 2014).

Faith leadership can also create extra responsibilities and challenges for the principal. One of these challenges is to help foster a balance between the pursuit of academic excellence and spiritual development within the school community (Banke, Maldonado, & Lacey, 2011). Another area of extra responsibility is that often independent school principals are expected to be involved in active service in their particular church community and encourage school families to become a part of these communities. This often involves cultivating a positive relationship with the leader of the local church with which the school is affiliated (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Fulton, 2003). These added expectations contribute to their already full workload (Hurley, 2005). The principal’s responsibility, therefore, extends beyond pedagogical and organisational tasks to the development of faith and values through their pastoral leadership and the development of a more faith-centred school culture (Neidhart & Carlin, 2011). The principal of an independent school with a religious affiliation is often seen as a role model for faith and life (Klindworth, 2008) and is expected to exercise ‘servant leadership’ by incorporating their spirituality into their leadership as well as interactions with staff, students, parents and members of the wider community (Banke et al., 2011; Gibson, 2011).

Leading a faith-based school can also create some dilemmas for the principal. Whereas the core faith principles of these schools often reflect an avoidance of exclusivity, they can become exclusive and even promote this whether advertently or inadvertently.
(Maddox, 2011). It is a challenge for spiritually minded schools to fulfil one of the core
tenets of their beliefs and values by reaching out to marginalised students (Scanlan,
2011) and to reconcile faith teachings with business pressures and marketing without
fostering elitism. In adhering to and promoting the teachings of the church system to
which the school is linked, principals may also experience dilemmas in balancing equity
while maintaining certain moral standpoints on issues such as homosexuality
(McNamara & Norman, 2010).

The particular challenges and opportunities presented by faith leadership in independent
schools in Australia is an undeveloped area of research which warrants more attention.
Most of the research carried out with private schools in Australia has focused on
Catholic schools. One Catholic school principal summarised the importance of faith
leadership well by saying;

The role of the school principal in faith development has grown in
significance as the community becomes increasingly disengaged from
Church. Many opportunities for principals to be supported in their role will
be needed in the future. (Neidhart & Lamb, 2013, p. 73)

While some commonalities exist between the Catholic school system and independent
schools, research is scarce regarding how the role of independent school principal
diffs from those in the Catholic education system. In addition to the expectations of
faith leadership, principals of independent schools also operate in a governance
structure which is different to their government school counterparts.

**Governance and issues with the school board**

Independent schools operate within a different governance system to that of most of
their government counterparts. They are generally legal “not for profit” companies
which are governed by a school board (McCormick et al., 2006). The school board is
legally responsible for the running of the school and the school principal is accountable
to the board (Hurley, 2005). This governance system allows for a greater degree of
autonomy for the school and decision making latitude for the principal (Association of
Heads of Independent Schools of Australia, 2011). The freedom to make decisions that
are relatively free from external controls can add an attractive feature to the role of an
independent school principal (Jorgenson, 2006).
School boards have a crucial role in the healthy governance of independent schools. Usually board members are subject to the same faith requirements as the principal and may be confined to representatives of a particular church (Austen, Swepson, & Marchant, 2012). The dynamics and health of the board will have an influence on the principal. The board chair has an important role in fostering a positive relationship with the principal. Problems can arise when the board chair and the board itself extend their role into the operational management of the school, contest power in the decision making or develop unhealthy relationships with the school principal (Gannell, 2004; McCormick et al., 2006). Sadly, boards can often be a source of discouragement and conflict for the principal (Gannell, 2004).

Unhealthy relationships between a board and a principal can cause considerable angst for the principal in their attempt to fulfill their role. If the board is unsympathetic to the challenges and problems faced by the principal, this can lead to a diminished care of the principal by the group who are in a position to address such concerns (Dewa et al., 2009). In the corporate sector, the nature of the board chair and CEO relationship has received considerable scholarly attention. It is not an easy balance for the chair and the board who have overall responsibility and authority over the appointed CEO (who, in independent schools is the principal), to exercise this governance responsibility while respecting the leadership of the school principal (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). Optimally the relationship between the board chair and the principal will be healthy and productive. A mutually respectful and productive relationship between the board chair and the principal will also serve to strengthen the overall work and healthy dynamics of the board (Guerrero, Lapalme, & Seguin, 2014).

Since the effectiveness of the principal may be either helped or hindered by the board, attention to building and maintaining the health and expertise of the board is a salient aspect to consider (Costello, 2010). In recent years there has been a growing emphasis placed on building healthy boards that are composed of individuals who are independent, competent and committed (Monks & Minow, 2011). Costello (2010) argues that members of independent school boards are often under-skilled and lacking in some areas of expertise. As board membership criteria may have certain requirements under a school’s constitution, it may at times be difficult to recruit board members with certain desirable expertise. Also, if board members are somehow associated with the
school, for example, by being a parent of a currently enrolled student, extra care needs to be taken to ensure their independence in decision making as this is crucial to effective governance (Costello, 2010; Monks & Minow, 2011). Although the importance of the relationship between Australian independent school principals and their boards is clear very little research has been carried out to explore the dynamics of this relationship.

It is clear in this section the principal of an independent school has to do a great deal of emotional labour in the promotion of the school, the outward expression of faith leadership and in their work the school board. This public figure leadership requires the principal to present themselves and act in a certain way which may mean repressing their real emotions (Hochschild, 2012).

In the next section I will review the literature relating to the experiences of beginning principals. Once again, the literature specifically relating to beginning independent school principals is scarce, so the focus will be on the findings related to experiences of beginning principals in general and conceptualisations of their socialisation process.

**Common experiences and challenges shared by beginning principals in their socialisation into the role**

Becoming a beginning principal may be exciting and rewarding, but for many it is also quite stressful and possibly traumatic (Garcia-Garduno, Slater, & Lopez-Gorosave, 2011; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). The beginning principal is fully responsible for their multifaceted role straight away and has to do the job while still trying to adjust to the role and assimilate into the new community (Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012; Crow, 2006). In this section, I will examine some useful theoretical frameworks which describe the process of socialisation and overview the literature regarding the challenges faced by beginning principals.

**Theoretical frameworks for understanding the socialisation of beginning principals**

Beginning principals share a common journey of socialisation as they prepare for and commence their roles. Even if they have previously been at the school, they are now entering a new role with new dynamics and challenges. For most, they are entering into a completely new school environment and must navigate successfully as they enter into this new community. Socialisation here refers to the process of learning and acquiring
skills that are required for a beginning principal to successfully function in a new community of the school incorporating the new role identity (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Crow, 2007; Sayce & Lavery, 2010; Watkins, 2003). A number of models of socialisation have been used to describe this process in the lives of beginning principals and I will outline some of these in the following section.

The socialisation of new principals is often understood in terms of professional socialisation and organisational socialisation (Crow, 2006). Professional socialisation involves the preparation, both formal and informal, and the experiences of the professional that have equipped them with the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to take on their new role (Cowie & Crawford, 2008; Miller, 2013). Although, traditionally, this has represented the professional preparation before entering the new organisation as the principal, Crow (2006), and Weindling and Dimmock (2006), suggest this professional socialisation continues into the role as the beginning principal needs to continue to learn leadership skills in a number of areas. For the purposes of this research, professional socialisation will be regarded as continuing into the role of principal. The learning that occurs pre-commencement will be called preparation and the learning that occurs post-commencement will be referred to as ongoing professional development.

Organisational socialisation is generally regarded as the post-commencement contextual application of values, skills and knowledge to the specific school community with the development of an appropriate perception of role identity (Cowie & Crawford, 2008). For beginning principals this socialisation means defining their identity as a principal for the first time in the specific school context. Crow (2006) argues for an extension of this context to include broader community and educational institutions with which the principal is required to interact. Although organisational socialisation is generally regarded as starting at the commencement of the role, some beginning principals have the opportunity to begin this acclimatisation to the new organisation before their official commencement. It may be argued that organisational socialisation begins in some form once the job has been accepted and continues to develop in the period preceding the official commencement. Possibly due to the way organisational socialisation has been generally regarded as starting at commencement, there is very little research available
which examines how the principal-elect begins this process as they prepare to take on the role.

A more detailed and comprehensive model of socialisation was suggested by Weindling (2000) who outlined six phases beginning principals are likely to experience. The timings of these stages are approximations. Stages 0-3 are of particular interest in the context of this research. These six phases are:

Stage 0—Preparation prior to headship;
Stage 1—Entry and encounter (first months);
Stage 2—Taking hold (3 to 12 months);
Stage 3—Reshaping (second year);
Stage 4—Refinement (years 3 to 4);
Stage 5—Consolidation (years 5 to 7); and
Stage 6—Plateau (years 8 and onwards)

As Stages 0–3 are the focus of this research in the following section I will discuss these four stages of the socialisation process.

**Stage 0—Preparation prior to headship**
Preparation for principalship occurs over many years in both formal and informal contexts. The experiences gained in leadership positions coupled with information and training gained from principal preparation courses and university qualifications help to prepare the individual to take on the role of principal (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006).

Although the term is used in different ways by researchers there is an anticipatory stage that begins when an individual has accepted the job offer to become a principal. Alvy and Robbins (1998) suggest this anticipatory period involves a process of the individual moving out of their current role and mentally preparing to start in the new role as principal. Once the individual has accepted the position of principal they begin to interact with the new school in a variety of ways and in different contexts which culminates in their official commencement in the role.
Stage 1—Entry and encounter (first months)
This is a critical period as the beginning principal experiences the reality and complexities of the role (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Although authors use various models of socialisation, the importance of this entry and encounter stage is universally highlighted. This stage begins at the commencement of the role as they “hit the ground running” with all of the expectations of the role working upon them immediately. This encounter stage helps the principal to start in the role and begin to establish important relationships with the board, staff and school community. In this period, the beginning principal begins to understand and work within the culture of the school.

Just as a person entering a new country must learn a new language and a different set of ways of doing things, beginning principals must also learn how to behave and how to get things done in a new organization. (Sackney & Walker, 2006, p. 344)

This entry and encounter stage can include any induction and orientation to the role that the beginning principal is given. Induction to the role can be done effectively, in an ad-hoc fashion or not at all. This stage can be made considerably easier on the principal if there is a mediated entry into the position through an effective induction system (Crow, 2006). In essence, induction can be regarded as any process which helps new members of an organisation to gain the knowledge and skills they need to fulfil their role (Daresh & Playko, 1992). Unfortunately, research shows that such focused and well thought through induction / orientation programs for principals are quite rare (Wright, Siegrist, Pate, Monetti, & Raiford, 2009). Some principals are thrown into the deep end and given very little orientation and practical guidance as they start in their role (Yeatts, 2005). During the entry and encounter stage, principals need to feel welcomed, gain understanding of the culture of the school and work out how their leadership style will function in the context of the school (Shields, 1997).

Stage 2—Taking hold (3 to 12 months)
In this phase, the new principal develops a greater understanding of the key issues facing them and begins to make changes in the school. This period is sometimes called the ‘honeymoon period’ in which the principal is often given more latitude to manoeuvre (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Robbins and Alvy (2004) describe this period as the beginning principal moving into an “insider” stage which involves a clear
acceptance of the new principal by the school staff and community, the principal being able to build strong relationships and having confidence in their leadership position. Although the progression to the insider phase can happen quite early, it would be hoped that the principal will be in this phase by the end of the first year (Lovely, 2004).

**Stage 3—reshaping (second year)**

After the first year, Weindling and Dimmock (2006) suggest that the second year is generally one of reshaping in which the principal is beginning to feel more confident in his/her leadership and there is generally a greater understanding between principal and staff. It is also a period in which the beginning principals can initiate larger changes.

Figure 2. below is a visual representation of this socialisation process including key events into the time frame. This conceptualisation of the early socialisation of beginning principals will provide a helpful framework for understanding the experiences and challenges which principals will face.

![Figure 2: The socialisation of beginning principals](image)

In the following section I will examine research which identifies the common challenges faced by beginning principals in these early stages of their socialisation into the role.
Understanding the common challenges faced by beginning principals

In the past decade there has been an increasing research focus which has attempted to identify and understand the experiences of beginning principals. This research has largely focused on looking at the common challenges faced by beginning principals in the early stages of their role. The research shows beginning principals worldwide face many of the same challenges and that it can be a stressful and traumatic time as the beginning principal navigates his / her way into the role (Earley et al., 2013; Garcia-Garduño et al., 2011a). In the following section I will present the key findings from research which has studied the challenges faced by beginning principals. Initially, I will report on three comprehensive reviews of the international research in this area which have synthesised the main challenges faced by beginning principals. I will then focus on five specific studies which can add to our understanding of this area.

In a significant systematic review and analysis of 20 years of research in the UK and other English speaking countries regarding the experience of beginning principals, Hobson et al. (2003) found beginning principals in different countries and regions tended to face a number of common challenges. These findings have been cited extensively in the subsequent literature in this field as a basis for ongoing investigations in this area. Apart from a plethora of various smaller challenges found in the research projects that were reviewed, it was found beginning principals were most challenged by:

- feelings of professional isolation and loneliness;
- dealing with the legacy, practice and style of the previous headteacher;
- dealing with multiple tasks, managing time and priorities;
- dealing with the school budget;
- dealing with (e.g. supporting, warning, dismissing) ineffective staff;
- implementing new government initiatives, notably new curricula or school improvement projects; and,
- problems with school buildings and site management.

In a similar review of research, Weindling and Dimmock (2006) found beginning principals were also challenged by responding to the culture of the school, the
development of their own leadership style, staff motivation and the public image of the school.

In a more recent comprehensive review of the literature, Earley et al. (2013) found beginning principals experienced similar challenges regardless of which country they were in and the particular context of their school. The main challenges for beginning principals were:

- feelings of professional isolation and loneliness;
- managing staff who thought the school was better than it actually was;
- inaccurate inspection judgements;
- improving teaching and learning;
- improving pupil progress and raising standards at a rapid pace;
- effecting improvements rapidly;
- developing staff, especially in preparation for change;
- developing resilience in coping with emotional and traumatic situations;
- dealing with multiple tasks, and managing time and priorities;
- managing the school budget, especially those in deficit;
- dealing with ineffective staff;
- implementing initiatives;
- restructuring staffing, especially of the leadership team;
- dealing with the legacy of the previous head;
- developing a culture of accountability;
- engaging governors and parents for greater impact; and,
- problems with school buildings and site management.

I will now report on a sample of five research studies related to the challenges faced by beginning principals. Although there are many commonalities in the results, each study highlights certain facets of the challenges which can deepen our understanding of this area.

The first project was conducted in the US by Shoho and Barnett (2010). The research examined the experiences of 62 beginning principals in Texas over their first few years.
in the role. The sample consisted of principals from mostly elementary schools (58%), middle school principals (24%) and senior school principals (18%). Qualitative analysis of the information gathered indicated that the challenges beginning principals were faced with fell into three themes.

First, beginning principals expressed the challenging nature of being an effective instructional leader. Beginning principals can feel the pressure of heightened expectations made on them to lead academic standards. One principal commented “[The] biggest challenge is now that as principal I am responsible for the success of the kids, all of them now” (Shoho & Barnett, 2010, p. 575). Second, beginning principals also struggled with administration issues. These involved a range of challenges from financial budgeting, dealing with difficult staff members and balancing the huge workload. Third, beginning principals found school community issues were challenging and took up a considerable part of their time. These community issues included the challenge of leading the school community into changes and dealing with the expectations of the school principal by the school.

The second project to be considered was conducted by Gentilucci, Denti, and Guaglianon (2013) who studied 11 beginning principals in the US using a “respondent driven” approach to interviewing. This approach allowed a greater freedom from the participants to drive and guide the conversations. The research found the most challenging aspects of the beginning principal’s experience were:

- coping with stress;
- managing time;
- creating positive working relationships; and,
- desiring additional mentorship and support.

These issues are now examined in more detail.

*Coping with stress and managing time.*

The beginning principals found that, although they had expected the role to be difficult, they were surprised at how much work was in the role. The intense and demanding nature of the role was also a main challenge as it seemed to consume their time and made it difficult to balance work priorities. These two concerns are reflected
consistently in research with beginning principals. Many beginning principals are overwhelmed with the volume, pace of work and high expectations placed on them by others right from their first day (Sackney & Walker, 2006; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Time management issues extend beyond the allocation of time and prioritising of work as the long work hours also impact on the beginning principal’s overall lifestyle and ability to have quality time with his / her family (Walker, Anderson, Sackney, & Woolf, 2003). The research suggests that many are not prepared for the magnitude of the role and beginning principals are;

…initially shocked both by the intensity of the job and the relentless demands on them to address challenging and seemingly intractable problems. (Male, 2006, p. 19)

Creating positive working relationships

This interpersonal challenge of creating and sustaining positive relationships with staff, students and families also features in other research pertaining to beginning principals. Beginning principals are required to navigate through an intricate maze of relationships and a large part of their work involves the dealing with a range of relational issues and problems (Clarke, Wildy, & Pepper, 2007).

Desiring additional mentorship and support

The desire for mentorship stemmed from a sense of loneliness and a seeking of support and guidance. The issue of loneliness is one that is found consistently in research with beginning principals and reflects the way in which their relationships with others change when they take on the role and the subsequent feelings of isolation and loneliness (Kellough, 2008; Rooney, 2000). Once they take on the principal role, their relationships with others automatically change as people relate to them in a different way. They also sense that no-one else around them carries the same responsibilities as they do and therefore are not able to understand the pressures and responsibilities of the position. Although they are surrounded by people and engage in numerous interactions during the course of each day, the old saying is true: “It’s lonely at the top”. Often, beginning principals are surprised by, and not prepared for, the feeling of emotional distance from others (Skelly, 1996).
I used to be part of the conversations in the lunchroom and everything and now I’m not. And that part of its lonely. (Gentilucci et al., 2013, p. 82)

The third project to be considered is a case study of one beginning principal in Canada which shed some light on the challenges of principals in establishing their leadership (Northfield, 2013), and highlighted three particular challenges that emerged. These challenges are also related to the challenges of socialisation and establishing leadership credibility. Northfield (2013) found the challenges concerned:

- leadership / management tensions;
- leadership trust; and,
- socialisation.

This study is very important to consider as it looks at the challenges in a broader way and focuses more on process rather than specific items. A great challenge to beginning principals is simply to adjust to being in the role and to develop their leadership style so they can make positive changes in the organisation. The second challenge is that, in order to effectively lead, the principal needs to establish trusting relationships.

From an organisational standpoint, trust between individuals and groups of individuals is known as “relational trust” and is deemed necessary for the attainment of institutional objectives, as people and groups rely on each other to perform and carry out expected tasks (Northfield, 2013, p. 172). Northfield (2013) suggests that leadership trust is understood in two areas of task ability and interpersonal ability. This means that developing trust is a process of demonstrating that the beginning principals can both do the tasks required and they are a person of integrity. The building of trust takes time and effort to establish and maintain and is a crucial and yet, at times, can be a fragile aspect of effective school leadership (Kutsyuruba, Walker, & Noonan, 2010; K. Walker, Kutsyuruba, & Noonan, 2011). The third of the challenges reflects the journey of learning that beginning principals face in which they exercise leadership while also learning how to lead (Alvy & Robbins, 2005). As the beginning principal learns and utilises the help of other professionals, they gain the self-confidence in their ability to lead in all situations (Northfield, 2013).

The fourth study to be highlighted focused on beginning elementary school principals in Chicago conducted by Spillane and Lee (2014). They found, overall, the greatest
challenge was the “reality shock” of the great sense of responsibility that came with the role. One of the participants shared:

One thing that really was smacking me in the gut Sunday night was the responsibility part. It’s like the ultimate responsibility . . . all the people who work in this building—their employment and welfare or their well-being as far as financially and in other ways is dependent upon my successful leadership of this organization . . . there’s a lot of responsibility there. (Spillane & Lee, 2014, p. 442)

The research also found this burden of responsibility led to increased stress. Beginning principals also experienced loneliness and 7 out of 8 of the principals reported the workload had become overwhelming.

The final study to be highlighted was carried out in Australia. In contrast to research throughout the world, there is comparatively little research available in the Australian context. Quong (2006) undertook a project which chronicled his experiences as a beginning principal. In comparing his experiences, and the experiences of six other beginning principals, Quong found that, although a specific list of common problems could not be generated from the data, there were similarities in the experiences of beginning principals as they faced challenges in five broad areas:

- improving student behaviour;
- conflicts between staff;
- parent complaints and critical incidents;
- achieving improved literacy and numeracy results; and,
- enrolment and attendance figures.

Quong’s conclusion regarding the biggest challenge faced by beginning principals revolved around the question of “when to act and when not to act?” (Quong, 2006, p. 379).

Before moving on to consider a framework for understanding the challenges faced by beginning principals it is important to comment further on one of the challenges that often features in studies of beginning principals. Beginning principals often find dealing with the legacy of the previous principal challenging (Earley et al., 2013; Hobson et al.,
2003; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). When any senior leader begins their work in a new place, they are essentially picking up from where someone else has left off. If the previous principal was held in high regard, then their legacy may pose a challenge for the new principal to live up to and this may shake their sense of self-confidence (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Also, in losing a revered leader, the staff may still be in a process of grief. It is also difficult for the new principal to follow a predecessor who may have left under less than optimal circumstances and may have left a track record of conflict and inefficiency (Sieber, 2002). In any case the beginning principal needs to take into account the leader who they have followed as reflected in this comment;

The ghosts of the past still rule the school. Although invisible, the image of the last principal haunts the current leader. Even though school faculty and staff noted the principal's frailties while she ran the school, they endow her with saintly virtues once she leaves. The new leader must acknowledge and respect the ghosts of his or her predecessors (Rooney, 2000, p. 77).

Developing a framework for categorising the challenges faced by beginning principals

As there are many challenges faced by beginning principals it will be useful at this stage of the literature review to develop a framework for categorising these challenges. In their review research carried out over a decade in both Western Australia and Queensland, Wildy and Clarke (2008) suggested a framework of four inter-related categories for understanding the challenges faced by beginning principals;

- dealing with place;
- dealing with people;
- dealing with system; and,
- dealing with self.

Beginning principals need to understand and respond to the particular context (place) in which the school operates. This is particularly relevant when considering the variety of school contexts in Australia which range from small isolated rural contexts to large urban schools. The interpersonal (people) aspect of the work of beginning principals is crucial as they are constantly interacting with staff, students and parents. Dealing with the system involves the beginning principal’s ability to understand and respond to the
demands and operation of the education system to which they are accountable. Finally, Wildy and Clarke (2008) suggest an important category is dealing with self which involves the building of personal resilience which the beginning principal will need to be able to cope with the huge demands placed on them in the role. Resilience is needed when considering the drain of emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012).

An example of the incorporation of this framework into research design can be found in research prepared in Western Australia associated with the International Study of Principal Preparation (ISPP) by Clarke, Wildy, and Styles (2011). The research project involved 45 beginning principals situated in Western Australia. The data showed no significant differences in terms of gender, qualification or age while demonstrating the most difficult aspects for beginning principals were:

- managing paper work (system);
- dealing with poorly performing staff (people);
- achieving a work / life balance (self); and,
- and balancing system imperatives with local needs (system).

To help with the construction of a helpful framework for categorising the challenges faced by beginning principals, this current research project will utilise the four categories as suggested by Wildy and Clarke (2008) of place, people, system and self. In considering comments made by Earley et al. (2013) regarding the commonalities of the challenges faced by beginning principals regardless of school context, the framework for this research will absorb the context of the school (place) into the system category which would now reflect both the organisational aspects of the school, the wider educational context and the school’s location and size.

The resulting three aspect framework will view the main characteristics of the challenges faced by principals into that of people, system and self. To rename and reorder these categories this research project used a framework which looked at:

- personal challenges;
- interpersonal challenges; and
- organisational challenges.
In Table 1, I have collated the challenges identified in the literature review regarding the challenges faced by beginning principals and included possible areas of challenge for independent school principals. As with most categorisations some items could validly be placed in more than one category however, this framework seeks to place them where they seem to fit best.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal challenges</th>
<th>Interpersonal challenges</th>
<th>Organisational challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workload and responsibilities</td>
<td>Dealing with ineffective staff</td>
<td>Dealing with curriculum reform and government initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with Stress</td>
<td>Building staff motivation and preparation for change</td>
<td>Managing school administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with the legacy of the previous principal</td>
<td>Dealing with staff conflicts</td>
<td>Problems with buildings and site management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing leadership style</td>
<td>Building an effective executive leadership team</td>
<td>Dealing with the school budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness and professional isolation</td>
<td>Working with the board</td>
<td>Improvement projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith leadership</td>
<td>Dealing with parental complaints</td>
<td>Ensuring academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improving student behaviour</td>
<td>Maintaining the public image of the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Balancing diverse Stakeholder needs</td>
<td>Contextual influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working with the school culture</td>
<td>Working in a competitive school environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dealing with critical incidents</td>
<td>Enrolment figures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the list above that the journey of beginning principals can be filled with many demands and challenges. With the rising awareness of these challenges has also come a concerted push for the development of better preparation and support systems for beginning principals.

**The growing international interest in developing more effective preparation and support systems for beginning principals**

The past two decades has seen a significant increase in the amount of principal preparation courses and programs on offer (Hallinger & Lu, 2013). This has led to many beginning principals being more formally prepared to take on the role (Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). It is hoped, that through adequate preparation, beginning principals will be able to cope more effectively with the shock of the challenges of the role as well
as the challenges of socialisation process (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2011). It is important to overview the preparation options that have become available to many of those becoming principals and to examine their effectiveness in preparing and supporting new principals in the major challenges they face. For the purposes of this research project, only a general overview of these programs will be reported.

The preparation of beginning principals

Although each person’s experience is unique, there are commonalities that are present in the pathway to principalship. Considerable scholarly attention has been paid to the question of how school leaders are prepared to take on the role of principal. To some extent, all beginning principals have been prepared advertently or inadvertently by the learning and experiences they have acquired on their leadership journey. In addition to their leadership experiences there has been a growing opportunity for aspiring principals to engage in specific programs and education which is designed to help them be adequately prepared to take on the role (Hallinger & Lu, 2013).

Preparation through previous leadership positions and internships

The previous leadership experiences of beginning principals can play a large role in helping them to prepare for the role. As many beginning principals have come from a senior leadership position such as deputy principal, previous leadership roles can serve as effective preparation for principalship (Bloom & Krovetz, 2001). Although experiences in the assistant or deputy principal role may give first-hand exposure to roles and challenges faced by principals, they may not adequately give exposure in all areas. Areas like discipline and management may be present in the assistant role, but often there is little exposure to the overall instructional leadership of the school unless the principal sees their role in helping the assistant to gain a broad range of experiences (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007). Deputy principals can gain valuable learning from their roles, especially if the existing principal delegates significant responsibilities to them and works in a collaborative fashion (Sieber, 2002).

In some countries, those preparing to become principals may also undertake a focused internship to get the “hands on” experiences and learning that bring to life the lessons learnt in more formal education. Internships can last up to one year and can be very effective if the interns are integrated into the school and given a broad range of adequate responsibilities with opportunities for supervision, mentoring and feedback (Gray, 2001;
R. T. Taylor, Pelletier, Trimble, & Ruiz, 2014). This focused exposure to the culture and practices of a particular school, along with a guided transition process, can give the aspiring principal real school experiences in which they can apply and learn the skills and knowledge they will need in the role (Davis et al., 2005).

**Preparation through formal tertiary learning**

Although there are no formal educational requirements specifically for principals in Australia (Cranston & Ehrich, 2006), the role of graduate studies is important to consider. Throughout the world, those preparing for principalship can access postgraduate masters degrees which are specifically related to educational leadership or may be more general in their organisational leadership focus such as MBAs. These degrees can provide the individual with a great deal of theoretical and practical knowledge coupled with on-the-job experiences that can help prepare them for the role (Hallinger & Lu, 2013). Brundrett, Fitzgerald, and Sommefeldt (2007) argue that a masters degree is appropriate for someone leading a school in which, in most countries of the world, the teaching staff are required to have a graduate level qualification. Doctoral studies are also an option for school leaders wanting to engage in higher level study involving theory and practice that is related to their field (Brundrett et al., 2007).

**Principal preparation courses**

Over the past two decades there has been an increasing focus placed on principal preparation courses. Globally, there is a growing interest in leadership training, and specifically, principal preparation courses which are trying to address issues such as the balance between academic and practical training, the models of leadership that are relevant to education and the mode in which these programs are delivered as options or integral parts of higher degree programs (Brundrett & Dering, 2006). Oplatka (2009) summarised the goals of one principal preparation program as providing the candidates with exposure and training in a wide variety of skills and understanding that reflects accurately the diverse nature of the role of principal.

The UK has had a professional qualification for principals for some time. *The National Professional Qualification for Headteachers* (NPQH) became mandatory in England and Wales in 2004 and has had a similar qualification in Scotland (Cranston & Ehrich, 2006). The NPQH programs have been run by the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) which since 2013 has been called the National College for Teaching
and Learning (NCTL) (National College for Teaching & Leadership, 2014). Although the NPQH was legislated as being non-mandatory in 2012, it continues to be provided through the NCSL and other organisations (Bush, 2013). The program which takes 6 to 18 months to complete, includes a placement at a school, modules of study, and a final assessment. It can also be used towards gaining a Masters level qualification (http://www.ncsl.org.uk).

In the US a major project was commissioned by the Wallace Foundation which was designed to examine the components of effective pre and post commencement programs for beginning principals (Davis et al., 2005). In comparing effective programs it was found for both pre and post commencement programs, the key elements of effective programs were ones which;

…are research-based, have curricular coherence, provide experience in authentic contexts, use cohort groupings and mentors, and are structured to enable collaborative activity between the program and area schools. (Davis et al., 2005, p. 3)

In the context of criticisms regarding the effectiveness of principal preparation courses in the US in past years, considerable efforts have been made to improve these programs and bring about a greater alignment with national standards (Orr, 2011).

In order to identify some commonalities between various principal preparation programs, Darling-Hammond et al. (2010) examined a number of highly regarded pre-service programs and found they all contained the following components:

- a comprehensive and coherent curriculum aligned to state and professional standards;
- a program philosophy and curriculum that emphasize leadership of instruction and school improvement;
- active, student centered instruction;
- faculty that are knowledgeable in their subject areas;
- social and professional support in the form of a cohort structure as well as formalized mentoring and advisement from expert principals;
vigorous, carefully designed targeted recruitment and selection processes; and,

- well-designed and supervised administrative internships (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010, pp. 181-182).

In Australia, individual States have been involved with the creation of principal preparation resources and courses. An example of this can be found in the Victorian context where leadership development has been a focus of attention in the government school sector (Elmore, 2007). To facilitate the development of quality leadership training, the Bastow Institute for Educational Leadership was created in Victoria by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The Bastow Institute also offers a range of leadership development courses and, in particular, a principal preparation course which features teaching, personal assessment and coaching and a two week placement with an experienced principal. The Institute, in conjunction with Monash University, also offers a Master of School Leadership (Walker, Bryant, & Lee, 2013). An initiative of Education Queensland to help aspiring and currently serving principals created a number of workshops in which case study methods were incorporated as a part of the teaching focus (Cranston, 2008). Similarly, each state has developed their own programs and professional standards.

There has also been a process taking place which has been focused on bringing together some nationally accepted standards for leadership. In 2010 the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was formed by the federal government to foster the understanding and application of excellence in school leadership (Dinham, Collarbone, Evans, & Mackay, 2013). Through a process of research and consultation, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals has been developed and accepted nationally, providing a unified framework for understanding the role of principals with implications for principal preparation (AITSL, 2011).

Assessing the efficacy of preparation programs

In the context of the development of principal preparation courses throughout the world, there has also been a call to assess the efficacy of these programs. If these programs are designed to help prepare beginning principals, research should be conducted that will demonstrate their effect. In some ways;
It is not clear whether those who undergo formal prescribed standards-based preparation programmes make more effective, successful, resilient or enduring school leaders than their peers in Western Australia or Mexico who enjoy none of the privileges of such preparation. Nor indeed is it clear whether they are more or less likely to exhibit any one of the features of effectiveness, success, resilience, or endurance than their antipodean counterparts. (Wildy et al., 2007, p. 11)

Although there is evidence from the UK showing an increasing number of beginning principals are feeling appropriately prepared to take on the role, a direct link to the role of the principal preparation courses has not been clearly established (Brundrett & Dering, 2006). Despite the number of principal preparation programs available throughout the world, Darling-Hammond et al (2010) argued that there has been little research carried out to assess the effectiveness of these programs. There has been some criticism of many programs available in the United States in that they seem to provide a piece-meal approach to the topics that are considered in the preparation process (Cowie & Crawford, 2007).

It is also uncertain whether these programs adequately cover the challenges the new principal will be facing from day one, like conflict management (Anderson, 2007) and decision making skills (Calabrese & Zepeda, 1999). Schmidt (2010) also raises some important questions of whether these programs cater adequately for the individual needs of the participants and whether there is enough emphasis placed on the emotional preparation for principalship.

These comments are quite important when considering the vast array of research which highlights the emotional toll on principals in their challenging role. The goal of providing emotional preparation is not simply one to provide survival tools, but to help school leaders sustain a healthy emotional identity in their roles (Wallace, 2010).

To provide more empirical insights into the effectiveness of principal preparation programs, the International Study of the Preparation of Principals (ISPP) was commenced involving research conducted in 12 countries (Mentz, Webber, & van der Walt, 2010). Some of the results of this research project have already been cited in this review and the research work is continuing to produce helpful insights into the
effectiveness of preparation programs (Scott & Webber, 2013). Clearly, this is an important area for future research to determine how these programs can better take into consideration the complexity of the challenges a beginning principal will face and deliver a program which adequately addresses those issues (Clarke & Wildy, 2013). Webber, Mentz, Scott, Okoko, and Scott (2014) suggest that preparation programs should be in a process of continuing review and development to ensure their efficacy. As more research is being conducted there are some encouraging signs of the effectiveness of principal preparation programs as they help principals prepare for their roles (Cunningham, 2013; Orr, 2011).

Post-commencement professional development

Beginning principals require support and ongoing professional development (Zepeda, Parylo, & Bengston, 2014). In a similar vein to the rise in principal preparation courses there has also been a growth in the development of ongoing support for beginning principals and the development of programs which cater for the differing needs of principals as they move through different stages of their careers (Webber, Mentz, et al., 2014). Even if the beginning principal has been involved in a preparation course, they will still need this training to be supplemented to help them navigate through the challenges of actually being in the role (Searby, 2010). As particularly in Australia there are no mandated preparation courses, the role of ongoing training and support of beginning principals is even more important (Bush, 2013b).

Programs to support and help beginning principals to develop

In a similar fashion to preparation courses throughout the world, there are a considerable number of training and support programs available which are designed to assist principals in their early stages and throughout their careers. An example of such a program is the First-Time Principal Induction Program, which was established in New Zealand in 2002. This program combines residential modules throughout the principal’s first year with mentoring and online help and has helped many principals in their assimilation into the role (Cameron et al., 2004). By 2014 the program had been delivered to over 2000 beginning principals (Centre for Educational Leadership, 2014). The challenge of a program such as this one is to provide leadership development that is related to the real needs of principals in their overall role as leaders of positive change.
(Martin & Robertson, 2003) and to respond to the diverse needs of those taking part (Robinson, Eddy, & Irving, 2006).

In Australia there are many programs available for beginning principals. An example of such a program currently available is the *Evolve: New Principals Program* run through the State Education System through the Bastow Institute. The program which was formerly known as “Professional Support for New Principals” was strengthened in 2013 as reflected in these promotional comments:

- Matching new principals with experienced principals as their coaches (either accredited or working towards their accreditation).
- Extending the program from twelve months to eighteen to ensure support is sustained over time.
- Introducing a three-day residential that will allow new principals to form strong and enduring support networks.

The program includes opportunities for new principals to visit high performing schools to observe and discuss best practice with their peers, and support for online professional learning groups to leverage the potential of peer-to-peer professional development. These measures will assist new principals in meeting the challenges and demands of the role. (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014, pp. 18-19).

One important facet of many of these programs is the establishment of mentoring relationships which will encourage and guide the beginning principal in their transition into the role.

**The role of mentoring and support from other principals**

Mentoring can be an effective part of the process of preparing and supporting beginning principals (Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengston, 2012). Although well established in other professions, the concept of a guiding and supportive role model is relatively new to the field of educational leadership (Schechter, 2014). Daresh (2004) argues the importance of mentoring in the development of professional identity and function formation. Through mentoring, an experienced principal can guide the beginning principal through the particular challenges they are facing with real benefits for their overall psychological wellbeing (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). Similarly, more focused goal
oriented professional coaching can be a great help and support to beginning principals (James-Ward, 2013).

Much attention has been given to the design and implementation of effective induction programs which include mentoring. In the Australian context, there are a number of mentoring initiatives in place like the *Mentoring for First Time Principals Program in Victoria* (Victorian Department of Education, 2009). In some programs, principals can choose who their mentor will be while in others they are assigned a mentor (Searby, 2010). This personal contact with an experienced principal is regarded by many as being just as important as much of the formal training which beginning principals receive (Mentz et al., 2010). In addition to mentoring, beginning principals can learn about their role and form relationships with other principals through training courses and conferences.

Ongoing professional development plays an important role in the life of any teacher or school leader. Throughout the course of each year there are many conferences and educational electives beginning principals may attend to fine-tune their learning and development in specific areas. Participation in association run events and developing informal friendships with other principals can also be of great support and encouragement throughout the principal’s career. In the light of the challenges of loneliness and professional isolation, the role of mentoring and establishing social support from other leaders is a salient component for the wellbeing and professional development of beginning principals (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010).

**Principal preparation and development in independent schools in Australia**

Beginning principals of independent schools in Australia are able to access a growing number of preparation and ongoing professional development programs. These programs and courses are made available through Government initiatives, through the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA), state branches of Associations of Independent Schools (AIS), and other associations. Although independent schools can choose to become a member of associations, these associations do not function as regulatory bodies and serve more in a support and resource function. Principals can choose to take part in training programs as;
AISs provide a range of services to member schools. In addition to representing the views of the independent school sector at state and territory level, they administer funding provided by the Australian Government on a range of targeted programs, as well as providing professional learning opportunities, advice and information. Many AISs also offer industrial relations services. (ISCA, 2011, p. 3)

Preparation courses and beginning principals courses are offered at a state level through the branches of some of these organisations. Some states have dedicated leadership development centres which facilitate training and support to beginning principals. As an example of the types of programs on offer, the AISNSW offers a range of courses through its leadership centre. There is a course for those seeking to develop in their leadership capacities. This course is called the flagship program and consists of:

- ten face to face course days + three days of focused school visits;
- online meetings;
- ongoing journaling;
- pre-reading tasks;
- ten hours of professional companioning;
- regular feedback on the progress of the Professional Project;
- a summative presentation of the outcomes of the Professional Project; and
- a final reflective paper (AISNSW, 2014a, p. 4)

The AISNSW leadership centre also offers a beginning principals course which;

…has been designed to meet the most pressing challenges encountered by newly appointed school Principals in their first three years in the role. …This is a ten day program spaced across a school year. The program’s focus will be on increasing the understanding of governance, financial, legal and other leadership issues which participants bring to their principalship…A special feature of this program will be the individualised professional support that each participant will receive from an assigned leadership coach. Leadership coaches will be matched to participants from a
pool of trained and experienced independent school principals. (AISNSW, 2014b, p. 22)

Independent schools that are linked to particular denominational bodies can also benefit from programs run through their associations. For example, Lutheran schools in Australia (Lutheran Education Australia) have developed a number of leadership development programs to help beginning principals to be better prepared to take on this role. Some poignant driving principles for the development of these programs have been the acknowledgement that leadership development is a responsibility of the individuals, their schools and the larger Lutheran system and that programs need to be built on sound theoretical foundations and that current principals are suited best to help and mentor aspiring principals (D'Arbon et al., 2009).

As previously mentioned, many independent school principals lead schools which are based in a religious context and therefore are expected to demonstrate faith leadership as a part of their leadership mantle. How independent school principals are prepared in their spiritual formation and journey is a largely unexplored area of research. In research within the Catholic school system in Australia, Belmonte and Cranston (2009) found that, for the participating principals, their religious formation had been a neglected aspect of their preparation. If faith leadership is expected of the principal then it follows that it should be a component of their preparation and ongoing development (Rieckhoff, 2013).

**Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have outlined the research themes which reflect the challenges faced by independent school principals and beginning principals in general. I have also highlighted the development of programs that are geared to help prepare and support beginning school principals. Considering the experiences of beginning principals of Australian independent schools are largely un-researched this current project is well placed to contribute to our understanding of this field of study. In the following chapter I will focus on the specific research questions of this study, the theoretical underpinnings of the research methodology and describe the research process.
Chapter 4 — Methodology for the research

From the review of the literature outlined in the previous chapter, it is clear that the study of the experiences of beginning principals in independent schools, specifically in Australia has received little research attention. Although there is a wealth of research pertaining to principals in general, and some research examining the challenges of beginning principals, there is a gap in the knowledge base looking at the specific context of independent schools. The current study was undertaken for these reasons. This chapter will outline the research questions that guided this research project, the theoretical foundations for the research, and the data collection methods employed. Also, the chapter will provide a rationale and outline of the three phases of data collection that were undertaken.

Research questions

In this study I examined the experiences of beginning principals of Independent Schools in Australia as they journeyed into the role of principalship. The main research questions were:

What are the experiences of beginning principals of independent schools in Australia?

Although the research question is specific in terms of who is being studied and what context they are in, some more refined sub-questions were developed to highlight the salient facets of these experiences. Specifically, the overarching research question was examined in four areas. The four associated sub-questions were:

1. Preparation for principalship

How are individuals prepared to take on the role of principal and what is their self-perception of preparedness?

2. Keys to starting well

What are the main factors which help beginning principals to start well?

3. The challenges of principalship

What are the main challenges that beginning principals face?
4. The rewards of principalship

What are the most rewarding aspects of being a beginning principal?

Each of these sub-questions focused on the main components which characterise the journey of individuals as they take on the role of principal for the first time. The aim of this study was to investigate and describe this journey which has been largely unresearched and to provide insights which can have applications for beginning principals, school boards and independent schools associations.

Theoretical underpinnings of the research design

This research project was based on a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is useful in the study of the meaning of everyday experiences (Saldana, 2009), as it seeks to describe:

…the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomena. Phenomenologists focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. (Creswell, 2012, p. 76)

The philosophical foundations of phenomenology can be found in the writings of Husserl (Mapp, 2008). According to Husserl, experiences of “things” form the basis of knowledge.

One of the important premises of Husserl’s arguments is that we exist in a day-to-day world filled with meanings of our everyday actions and the world appears to us through lived experience. The world is pre-reflective, thus we don’t reflect over the world as we live in it. Our everyday living takes place without us having to think about it or translate it into disciplinary discourses. (Oberg & Bell, 2012, p. 204)

Although the term phenomenology is used in various ways, there are two major branches of phenomenology, hermeneutical and, empirical or transcendental (Creswell, 2012). Hermeneutical phenomenological enquiries are interested in making interpretations of meaning from the descriptions of the lived experience (Flood, 2010). Empirical or transcendental enquiries are more interested in the description of the
experiences of the participants rather than making interpretations or creating theoretical constructs about those experiences (Flood, 2010; Lopez & Willis, 2004). In this research project, an empirical phenomenological approach was used which focused on data collection of the actual experiences of the phenomenon, the analysis of the descriptions of those experiences by the participants and the identification of commonalities in those experiences.

To aid the formulation of the description of the experience in question, empirical phenomenological researchers are encouraged to “bracket” themselves by taking a conscious decision to not bring their own preconceptions, ideas or theories into the research process (Oberg & Bell, 2012). This bracketing is also referred to as *epoche* and is important as the researcher sets aside their own attitudes and beliefs so they can concentrate more clearly on the experiences of the participants (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). Bracketing is not a feature of the other form of phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, as it regards the preconceptions and attitudes of the researcher as too difficult to negate (Oberg & Bell, 2012) and a necessary part of the interpretative process (Laverty, 2003). The hermeneutical approach requires the researcher to have a detailed knowledge of the subject in question in order for an interpretation to be made (Mapp, 2008). With this in mind, it is clear that complete bracketing as a feature of empirical phenomenology is an ideal and cannot be completely achieved, however, the validity of the research quest was enhanced by my awareness and application of its importance.

To gain this understanding of lived experience, phenomenological methodologies include the use of interviewing in which the participants are asked to share their experiences of the topic being investigated (Laverty, 2003). In order to create a fresh understanding of the phenomenon, the researcher examines the participant’s statements which highlight key aspects of the experience and use these to identify the main underlying themes which reflect and describe the experience (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). This process allows for the development of “an objective ‘essence’ through aggregating subjective experiences of a number of individuals” (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004, p. 32).

In this research project, the phenomenon being studied was the experience of becoming a principal of an independent school in Australia. The experience of becoming a
beginning principal represents a period of time which leads up to commencement in the role and continues into the early socialisation process. Although empirical phenomenology focuses on the use of qualitative methods, I will also expand this to include quantitative methods. This mixed methods design will add another dimension to the qualitative enquiry.

**Mixed methods design**

To address the aim of the research a mixed methods approach was employed. *Mixed methods* has emerged as a third paradigm of research methodology and seeks to synthesise both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). In general it is defined as:

…research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings, and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or a program of inquiry. (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007, p. 4)

In general, the quantitative approach is concerned with aspects of research such as hypothesis testing, standardised data collection and statistical analysis while qualitative approaches utilise the researcher as the collector of data and seek understanding by induction and hypothesis creation. Each approach has its own set of strengths and shortcomings which can make mixed methods an appealing methodology as it hopefully capitalises on the strengths of each while minimising the shortcomings (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Although mixed methods designs can yield a richer amount of data there are some dilemmas and questions that need to be addressed as mixed methods integrates two different research paradigms - quantitative and qualitative, in the one study. Bryman (2006) discussed some of the questions relating to the integration of the two approaches in asking whether the two types of data would be collected at the same time or in a sequence, which data type would have priority in the research, and what would be the aim of any triangulation that is carried out. Mixed methods research also raises the ontological and epistemological dilemma of combining objectivist with constructivist foundations (Bryman, 2007). While some theorists would argue that the two cannot be combined, others see that mixed methods can actually bridge the gap between the
purported dichotomy of these traditions as it promotes a pragmatic philosophy of the researcher using what they believe will work best to answer the research enquiry (Doyle, Brady, & Byrne, 2009). Utilising two paradigms in research, although possibly creating some tension, can also provide an opportunity to showcase the benefits of both. As a researcher I found that when considering more than one type of data, the best of the empirical phenomenological approach can be combined with an approach that centres on pragmatism (Onwuegbuzie & Combs, 2011).

In this study I used a quantitative approach in the first phase through the development and application of an online survey. In the second and third phases of the research, a qualitative approach was used through the interviewing process and analysis of the data. Although triangulation is often used within one paradigm, it is also possible to compare results from various methods to gain a more complete understanding and validation of the data (Ostlund, Kidd, Wengstrom, & Rowa-Dewar, 2011). There are many benefits to using a mixed methods approach in terms of maximising the participant sample, the test instrument and interpretations of data (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Sutton, 2006). I will now examine some of the basic processes by which mixed methods design gathers and analyses data.

**The design and use of surveys in quantitative research**

Quantitative studies often utilise surveys as a method of data collection (Hoe & Hoare, 2012). Although in the past, surveys have been administered in a paper-based format, with the growth of internet usage, online surveys are increasingly being utilised to gather quantitative data (Teo, 2013). As an alternative to paper-based surveys, online surveys offer a cost effective and efficient way of gathering data from a broad range of participants providing a format which makes storage and data analysis more efficient (Biro, Botzenhardt, & Ferdinand, 2014). To assist researchers in survey design and application, a number of survey platforms are available and are relatively easy to use (Lauer, McLeod, & Blythe, 2013). Although these platforms have prepared formats for surveys, the researcher is still required to think through the type of data they want to collect and what type of questions will work best to generate this data as the research questions are explored (Lauer et al., 2013).

In addition to demographical information, online surveys often utilise questions based on a Likert scale and open ended questions which allow for the participant to give more
information about their answers or topics of interest (Mitchell & Jolley, 2010). Likert scales usually contain 5-7 rating points with the inclusion of a middle option, purportedly increasing the reliability and validity (Lietz, 2010). Online surveys need to be easy to access, understand and complete while being able to maintain anonymity (Lefever, Dal, & Matthiasdottir, 2007). With the administration of online surveys there is a risk that requests for participation may slip past the attention of individuals because of the multiple invitations for survey participation they may receive, or the invitation may be classed as junk mail by the person’s email program (Lefever et al., 2007). In all survey research, the goal is to produce a high quality of data which can then be analysed statistically to test hypotheses and reflect any generalisations that can be made (Sarantakos, 2005).

**Interviewing and the analysis of data in qualitative research**

Interviewing is the major mode of data collection in qualitative research. Through the interview process, the researcher aims to “capture information from and about the informant’s reality” (Brenner, 2006, p. 360). As the data collected lies in the realm of human experience, it cannot necessarily be reduced to numbers (Anderson, 2010). In an inductive approach, the researcher seeks to describe the themes which emerge from the interview data as representing the experiences of the participants (Brenner, 2006; Creswell, 1998). Interviews are usually conducted with a small sample of participants either individually or in focus groups. For interviewing to be effective, thought needs to be given to sampling, ethical issues, the interview process, the structure of the interview and how the transcripts are created and analysed. The following sections will highlight some of the key aspects of the interviewing process.

**Sampling and ethical issues**

Qualitative interviewing involves a sample of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. Through examining the range of experiences of a number of participants a more comprehensive understanding of that phenomenon will be developed. The sample can be selected by the researcher or come through individuals being made aware of the study and volunteering to be a participant (Kemparaj & Chavan, 2013). It is important for the participants to give an informed consent which confirms their acceptance to be in the interview process, shows their understanding of the privacy commitments made to the participants in terms of the storage and reporting
of the information gathered and demonstrates that the participant understands the mode, duration and recording of the interviews (Boyce & Neale, 2006). In the consent process, it is also important that the participants understand their participation is voluntary and they have the right to withdraw from the research at any time (Seidman, 2006). The anonymity of the participants is also an important ethical consideration (Schostak, 2006). These issues were addressed in the study and are outlined in the section below entitled, Phase One: The online survey.

The interview process
The purpose of an interview in qualitative research is to understand the lived experience of the participants and the meaning they place on these experiences (Seidman, 2006). Interviewers need to understand the dynamics of the interview process, such as the importance of establishing and maintaining rapport to aid the flow of information through the trusting positive relationship that is developed between the interviewer and the interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Southall, 2009). The interview process is also facilitated when the interviewer is proficient in questioning which opens up sharing by the participant, active listening, suspending their own judgements and being aware of their own biases. As this study was primarily phenomenological in its approach interviews formed an essential aspect of the research process.

Interviews conducted in person provide the opportunity to capture more of the verbal, non-verbal and contextual information that can be garnered through observation during the interview process (Opdenakker, 2006). However, because of time, distance and availability constraints, interviewing may also be conducted in a synchronous time but not a synchronous place format through Skype or by phone. Interviewing by Skype enables the interviewer to still be cognisant of the participants non-verbal cues (Hanna, 2012). Interviewing by phone is effective but can lose some of the nonverbal and contextual cues which add meaning to human interactions (Opdenakker, 2006). Although losing some of this information through interviewing by phone or Skype, there may be advantages to these modalities as they allow the participant to be in a natural context while being interviewed. This context adds to their level of comfort and to them feeling free to be themselves (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). Novick (2008) argued that even though phone or Skype interviewing may be regarded by some as “second best”, there is a lack of evidence which confirms that these modes of interviewing produce a
lower quality of data. The manner in which the interviews were conducted is discussed below in the sections outlining Phase Two and Three of the research.

**The structure of the interview**

The researcher can choose to structure and ask questions in the interview in various ways. Interviews can be structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The semi-structured method is the most widely utilised in qualitative research and provides opportunities to create data from pre-formulated open-ended questions as well as the pursuit of other questions which arise from the interview process (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured approach also provides a sense of commonalities between the participants as they are all asked the same core questions (Brenner, 2006). The interview questions and sub-questions, should be phrased in a way that is easily understood by the participants (Creswell, 2012). The researcher may conduct one or multiple interviews. Although one-off interviews are used widely in research, multiple interviews do allow for the development of a stronger relationship between the participant and the interviewer and can foster a greater degree of sharing as well as the opportunity to gather more information (Knox & Burkard, 2009).

**The creation and analysis of interview transcripts**

Transcription forms a vital role in qualitative research as through the transcribing process, the verbal and some of the non-verbal content of the interviews is transferred into written form so that it may be studied in detail (Bailey, 2008). Transcriptions may range from attempting to record every utterance including pauses and non-verbal communication to transcripts which simply reflect the main aspects of the verbal communication (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005). Although the aim of transcription is to produce an accurate representation of the conversation, it is not free from the transcriber’s interpretations and subjective evaluations and so can never be a perfect replication of the event (Halcomb, 2006; Lucas, 2010). This is another reason why the empirical form of phenomenology was used in this research. Although transcriptions can be regarded as “partial and essentialized renditions of the phenomena themselves” (Duranti, 2006, p. 309), they still provide a valid and essential basis for qualitative research.

Transcripts of interviews provide a written data base from which the researcher begins their analysis by coding the text. Although there are various approaches to coding, it is
generally referred to as the process by which tags or labels are attached to the data from which themes can be identified (Gough & Scott, 2000; Sarantakos, 2005). Utilising software programs can help the researcher to more effectively manage, code and process data (McLellan, Macqueen, & Neidig, 2003). In particular, software platforms such as NVivo can greatly assist the researcher in their coding and organising the data into themes (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). Consistent with an empirical phenomenological approach Osborne (1994, p. 9) describes this process of analysis:

The researcher identifies all the themes in the protocol for each participant then sorts them into thematic clusters which are then sorted into higher order clusters in much the same way as in a rational factor analysis. This stage of data analysis constitutes a within persons analysis. When such analyses has been conducted for all participants, an across persons analysis abstracts the shared themes to form a pattern or structure of the phenomenon.

For comprehensive analysis and reporting back of results, the researcher is encouraged to practise both closeness and distance from the data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The analysis should be presented through the key themes with supporting quotes, a comparison of the any differences in the themes across the participants and finally a link to any existing literature (Bazeley, 2009). In reporting the themes and analysis, it is important to semi-quantify the comments by the participants to paint a picture of how characteristic the theme is of the overall sample (Anderson, 2010). Thus, through the interviewing, transcribing and analysis process, a rich and detailed amount of qualitative data can be produced which will give an account of the “bigger picture” and subtleties of the experience which is the focus of the research.

Having highlighted some basic foundation for mixed methods research I will now outline the development and implementation of the research design of this project. For this research, a three-phased approach was created. Phase One of the research involved the development and administration of an online survey. Phase Two involved one-off interviews with some of the principals who had taken part in the survey. Phase Three involved a series of interviews with beginning principals during their first year in the role.
An overview of the research design and implementation

Phase One: The online survey

An online survey was developed and administered as Phase One of this research project. There were two aims in utilising the online survey. One aim was to gather quantitative data concerning the experiences of beginning principals of independent schools. This data provided useful insights into the experiences of these principals and also guided the development of the questions and focus for the following phases of the project which were interview based. The other aim of the survey was to create a connection to beginning principals who could possibly take part in the second phase of the project. In this section I will outline the method of selection for participants, the consent process, an overview of the participants, design process for the survey and a description of the data collecting and analysis.

Contacting the participants

In terms of sampling, I decided to take a broader approach to the first phase which would then narrow down in the subsequent phases. The eligibility criterion for the participants of the online survey was that of beginning principals of independent schools who were in their first four years in the role. The rationale behind this sampling definition was to increase the possible pool of respondents to ensure the results would be able to be statistically analysed, as the numbers of beginning principals in Australia in their first year would be too small to ensure an adequate number of returned responses and analysis.

To access potential participants, a number of independent school associations throughout Australia were approached to elicit their co-operation with the research project. The national associations that were approached included the state branches of the Association of Independent Schools and the state branches of the Christian Schools of Australia. The following Queensland associations were also contacted, Lutheran Education Queensland, Anglican Schools Commission Queensland, Uniting Church of Australia Schools Commission Queensland and Associated Christian Schools. Most of the state and national bodies contacted were interested in being a part of the project. Some of the organisations agreed to make available the contact details of the beginning principals who were members of their association and who were in the first four years of their first role as a principal. This enabled invitations to take part in the survey to be
sent directly to these principals. Most of the independent school organisations agreed to forward on an invitation to participate email written by me to the beginning principals that they were aware of in their systems. Appendix A contains the email used in this process. This enabled me to make contact with potential participants through these associations, but not personally.

The invitation to participate email explained the aims of the research, contact details of the researcher and the two academic supervisors and clearly set out the criteria for participant eligibility. The invitation also indicated the estimated time for the survey completion was about 15 minutes and a link to the survey website was included. A reminder email was sent out approximately three weeks after the invitation. The survey was open for participation from August to November 2012. The aim of the study was stated as examining the challenges faced by beginning principals of independent schools who were in their first four years in the role and also to assess their perceived level of preparedness when they took on the role. Although the survey would be designed to look at the overall experiences of beginning principals, the original focus and hence description of this research project leaned more to the study of the challenges faced by beginning principals.

The design and administration of the survey

A copy of the online survey is provided in Appendix B. The survey was created using the LimeSurvey platform and was created in a way that the respondent’s personal information and contact email would not be accessible to me. The only exceptions to this were the respondents who would be invited to take part in a follow-up interview. Completion of the survey signalled consent to participate in the study and details of ethics approval and relevant contacts were also included. The survey consisted of 20 main questions with some of these questions having sub questions. The questions were structured as follows.

- Questions 1-5: Demographic information
- Questions 6-13: The challenges and overall experiences of being a beginning principal
- Questions 14-20: Preparation and transition into the role
In the following section I will comment on the survey questions and include some examples of the questions used.

**Questions 1-5. Demographic information.**

The first section of five questions was designed to gather demographic information such as gender, year of principalship, the type of school, size of school and geographical location of the school.

**Questions 6-13. The challenges and overall experiences of being a beginning principal.**

In question 6 the participants were asked to rate how challenging they had found 51 items which represented various aspects of being a beginning principal. To ensure the main areas of challenge identified in previous research were represented in the survey, the list of items was based on Table 1 from the previous chapter which represented a collation of previous findings. Table 2 below, contains these items with some additional categorisations to expand on the areas where further probing was deemed to be relevant. As some items could validly by categorised differently or represented in more than one category the “best fit” was chosen for each item. The specific question of specific work hours is not represented in these items as a separate question was included to gain this information. This table contains the 51 topics covered in the question. These were worded into statements which the participants were asked to rate in terms of how challenging they had found these facets of being a principal. The ratings ranged from “not challenging” through to “very challenging” on a 5 point Likert scale. The items were ordered to mix the themes from the various sections.
### Table 2

The 51 items included for rating in the survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal challenges</th>
<th>Interpersonal challenges</th>
<th>Organisational challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Demands of the role</strong></td>
<td>Board, executive and other leaders</td>
<td>Administration &amp; compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>Working with the board</td>
<td>Dealing with compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multifaceted nature of the role</td>
<td>Building the leadership team</td>
<td>Curriculum reform and initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of responsibilities</td>
<td>Working with other school leaders</td>
<td>Managing school administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing time</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dealing with the school budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for administration</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Problems with buildings / site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with interruptions</td>
<td>Dealing with ineffective staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>Personal conflict with staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People requesting time</td>
<td>Conflict between staff</td>
<td>Staff recruitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>Dealing with staff negativity</td>
<td>Staff development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for strategic planning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Building staff motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developing leadership style</strong></td>
<td>Students and parents</td>
<td>Legal actions by staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacy of the previous principal</td>
<td>Parental complaints</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing expectations</td>
<td>Conflict with parents</td>
<td>School performance and vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing leadership style</td>
<td>Critical incidents</td>
<td>Ensuring academic performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a faith leader</td>
<td>Improving student behaviour</td>
<td>Student safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects on well-being</td>
<td>Balancing stake-holder needs</td>
<td>Educational improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying healthy</td>
<td>Consumer expectations</td>
<td>Competitive school environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with stress</td>
<td></td>
<td>Enrolment figures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping with fatigue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Initiating strategic vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality time with family</td>
<td></td>
<td>The public image of the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loneliness &amp; professional isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dealing with media &amp; community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from another principal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Building a healthy school culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An example representing the overall question and one out of the 51 items follows.

Please rate how challenging you have found the following aspects in your role as principal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 40. Coping with fatigue</th>
<th>not challenging</th>
<th>slightly challenging</th>
<th>moderately challenging</th>
<th>challenging</th>
<th>very challenging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following two survey questions (questions 7-8), were open ended questions included to allow the respondents to make any additional comments regarding the challenges in the previous question and add any other aspects of the role they found very challenging that weren’t included in the items. I considered it to be important to not restrict the data gathering to these pre-defined items considering the limited research looking specifically at beginning independent school principals in Australia.
In the open ended questions (9-11), respondents were asked to comment on the highlights of the experience of becoming a principal, what they enjoyed most about being a principal and what they enjoyed the least about being a principal. As work hours were featured in the literature a question was included asking for an approximation of their weekly work hours. As an example, the following open question is included. What do you enjoy most about being a principal?

The final question (12) relating to their challenges and experiences asked for a rating on how they had found the experience of being a principal. The 5-point Likert scale ranged from “much easier than you expected” through the mid-range of “about what you expected” through to the high range response of “much more challenging than you had expected”. This question was designed to put the overall experience into the perspective of their expectations of the role.

**Questions 14-20 Preparation and transition into the role**

The remaining seven questions looked at aspects of their preparation and how they were welcomed and inducted into the role. Two questions (14-15) asked for a rating on a 5-point scale of how effectively they felt they were prepared to take on the role of principal and the amount of training they had received regarding how to establish their leadership style and priorities in the first six months of the role. The question relating to rating their preparation was as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slightly effectively</th>
<th>Moderately effectively</th>
<th>Quite effectively</th>
<th>Very effectively</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Q</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 16 asked for a rating of the effectiveness of their welcome and induction and this was followed by an open ended question (17) asking for suggestions of things that could have been done to make their welcome and induction more meaningful.

The following question (18) was designed to gauge the contribution of various aspects of the training and preparation they had received. The questions asked for a rating on how helpful for their preparation they had found their previous leadership experiences, experiences as a deputy principal, advice and support from other principals, completing
a principal preparation course, undertaking post-graduate studies, their own reading and research and mentoring. There was also an option in the rating scale to indicate if any item was not applicable in their experience. The question and an example of one of the sub questions and rating are included.

In your preparation to become a principal, how helpful did you find the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous experiences in a school leadership position</th>
<th>unhelpful</th>
<th>minimally helpful</th>
<th>helpful</th>
<th>reasonably helpful</th>
<th>very helpful</th>
<th>not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The final two open-ended questions (19-20) asked about what the respondents felt could have been done to help them to be better prepared for the role and specific areas in which they would have benefitted from additional training.

The final section of the survey contained an invitation for those who were in their first two years of being a principal of an independent school and had not previously been a principal before to take part in a follow-up interview. It was also communicated that although I would receive notification of their name and email contact, no association could be made to link them to their survey responses.

**The administration and limitations of the survey**

Once the survey was activated, the potential participants were contacted either directly or through the relevant participating association (as outlined previously). A reminder email was also sent out three weeks later. The survey was completed by 36 beginning principals and their demographic details are outlined in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of being a principal</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>School location</th>
<th>Size of school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>First</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Second</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Third</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unfortunately the smaller than expected response rate meant that the statistical analysis of the data was limited. The response rate may have been influenced by the factors of...
‘survey fatigue’ and a lack of time. In my discussions with the Chief Executive of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools at that time, it was flagged to me that principals had recently been asked to be a part of a number of online surveys and they may not want to do any more at that time. The second issue was one of making contact with people in busy leadership positions. As already outlined in the literature review, beginning principals are extremely busy and are bombarded by many emails each day. Although the survey would take less than 15 minutes to complete, this may have still seemed like too much time to commit to such an exercise. The invitation emails may also have been lost in the sea of email correspondence principals receive or may have been regarded as spam by the principal’s email program.

Although the statistical power of the findings were limited, the results were still useful in the overall mixed methods analysis and provided a way of triangulating the issues that emerged from the interviewing phases of the project. The other positive result from the administration of the survey was that eight principals who were in their first two years in the role indicated they would be available for the follow-up interview which formed the basis of Phase Two of the research project.

**Phase Two: Interviews with beginning principals in their first two years**

In Phase Two of the study, the sample selection criterion was narrowed to more accurately represent beginning principals. The term “beginning principal” more accurately defines those who are in their first one or two years as this includes the first four phases of socialisation as outlined in Chapter 3. Eight principals who were in their first two years in the role were then contacted with the view of explaining the procedure of the interviewing process, privacy issues and gaining their consent to be involved. Details of this information can be found in Appendix C.

These eight principals were then interviewed in November and December of 2012 to gain a deeper insight into the challenges and general experiences of their first two years in the role. Five interviews were conducted in person at the principal’s school, two were conducted by phone and one by Skype. The interviews were semi-structured, with core common questions being asked of each participant and other questions emerging from the interview process. The combination of set questions and more open discussion were utilised to add more personal richness and to gain a more holistic understanding of the
lived experiences of the interviewed principals (Frosh, 2007; Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011; Roberts, 2007).

To ensure confidentiality their names have been changed while maintaining their gender. Table 4 contains the pseudonym first names, demographic details and the mode of interview for the 8 participants. The six female and two male participants were located in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Although the proportion of females was much higher than males in Phase Two, this was reversed in Phase Three which brought an overall balance to the study. Four participants were in their first year of the principalship and four were in their second year. Where possible the interview was conducted at the school and all took less than 60 minutes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>School size</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>Qld Regional</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>200-500</td>
<td>by phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Qld Urban</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>500-1,000</td>
<td>in person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>NSW Urban</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>500-1,000</td>
<td>in person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>NSW Regional</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>&lt; 200</td>
<td>through skype</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>NSW Urban</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>&lt; 200</td>
<td>in person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terri</td>
<td>NSW Regional</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>200-500</td>
<td>by phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronwyn</td>
<td>Vic Urban</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>&lt; 200</td>
<td>in person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Vic Urban</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>200-500</td>
<td>in person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the interviewer, I endeavoured to create a warm rapport between myself and the participants. Creating a natural and comfortable interviewing rapport was aided by my experience in counselling, coaching and interviewing which has spanned nearly 30 years through my work as a pastor and psychologist. The core questions used in the interviews are presented below.

1. As you look back over your time as principal, what has the experience been like?

2. What have you found to be the most challenging aspects of the role?

3. In what ways were you prepared and trained to take on the role of principal and how prepared did you feel when you started in the role?
4. What could be done to help principals in their first year? For example by school boards or associations.

5. What was your welcome and induction into the school like?

6. Are there any other things that could have helped you in your first year?

7. What are the aspects of being a principal that you enjoy the most or find the most rewarding?

With the use of open-ended questioning, the participants were also asked to elaborate on issues and key experiences in order to give more texture to the content of the interview. The interviews contained an appropriate amount of my personal self-disclosure and comments regarding the issues that were mentioned and contained both light-hearted and very serious phases which reflected the mood of the participant and the content. All participants were very co-operative and open in talking about their joys and difficulties.

Each participant’s interview was recorded on a digital recording device and then transcribed and coded into a number of themes which encompassed the content. Each interview was transcribed and checked for accuracy as soon as possible after the event as I listened through the interviews, checking and correcting any transcription errors that had been made. I then worked through each manuscript coding the material into various nodes as they called in the NVivo program. Once a node had been defined all subsequent transcript material from the other participants was coded into this node or new nodes created to describe the experience. Some nodes were eventually combined as they represented similar content. Ultimately a larger grouping of these nodes into themes was produced. The reporting on the themes without interpretation and theorising is an important aspect of empirical phenomenological study as it seeks to capture the essence of the phenomenon (Osborne, 1994).

The next section will outline the procedure and execution of Phase Three of this study in which eight beginning principals were interviewed before commencing and throughout their first year in the role.
Phase Three: Interviews with beginning principals in their first year

Phase Three constituted the main part of this research project as eight beginning principals were interviewed a number of times during their first year in the role of principal. Through this process their journey and experiences throughout their first year were studied and the insights gained gave a greater depth to the results and a more accurate overview of their experiences as compared to a one-off interview. Multiple interviews also allowed for some issues to be re-visited for comment regarding developments. A total of five interviews were planned with one during each school term of 2013 and one before they had commenced in the role.

The greatest challenge in the recruitment of participants was in the timing of the invitation for participation. It had to be at a time (the last term of the year) when appointments for the following year are generally finalised and communicated to the school community. It was crucial to make contact with potential participants who were about to commence in the role of independent school principal and had not been in the role of principal before. The data gathered would provide an ongoing report on their experiences in the crucial first year as a principal.

Through the invaluable assistance of the independent school associations, eight participants were identified and were willing to take part in the research. It is quite difficult to assess how many beginning principals start each year as this information is held by various organisations. I contacted the Association of Heads of Independent Schools (AHISA) who shared that 27 beginning principals had joined their association in 2013. This figure is not definitive of the number of beginning principals that commenced in the role for the first time in 2013 as some of these beginning principals may have been in their second year and not all beginning principals join AHISA. However, this estimate does demonstrate that the eight participants was a valid sample size of the subject pool.

To ensure the confidentiality their names were changed while maintaining their gender. Table 5 contains the list of pseudonym first names and other demographical information. All represented combined primary and secondary schools. The six male and two female participants were located in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. All of the participants, except for Andrew were embarking on their first year in the role of principal. Andrew had spent a short period as a principal in
another school but was included in the sample as he was considered to still be in the early formative stages of his development and was the only participant from NSW.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>School size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brendon</td>
<td>Regional Qld</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>200-400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Regional Qld</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>500-1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Regional NSW</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>500-1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grahame</td>
<td>Regional Vic</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>500-1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Urban Vic</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>500-1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Urban Vic</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>500-1,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Regional Vic</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>200-500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Urban WA</td>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>&gt;1,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For all the interviews, all participants were given the option of either phone or Skype. Most of the interviews were conducted by phone. In the consent process, the participants were made aware of the proposed five interviews. The interview plan included one interview before commencement and one interview towards the end of each of the four school terms. This would give a comprehensive coverage of their first year in the role. All interviews were under 60 minutes in duration. The creation and coding of the transcriptions was carried out in a similar fashion to those of Phase Two. In the following section I will outline the core questions for each of the interviews.

**The pre-commencement interview**

A pre-commencement interview was conducted with six of principals in the cohort. This interview occurred a few months before their commencement and provided an opportunity for me to begin to build rapport and a trusting relationship with the participants. The pre-commencement interview was conducted in person with one participant and by phone for the others. The interviews were digitally recorded while the participants were in their offices during the course of the school workday.

The questions were designed to examine how they were feeling about becoming a principal, some of the challenges they were expecting to face, the aspects they were looking forward to and some discussion about the preparation and training they had received. The questions for the pre-commencement interview were;

1. What are you looking forward to the most in taking on the role of principal?
2. What do you anticipate the most challenging and difficult aspects will be in the role in the first 2 years?

3. How prepared do you feel to meet these challenges?

4. What experiences and studies have helped to prepare you for the role?

5. Are you doing anything specific to prepare for the role?

6. What plans are in place for your induction welcome and in helping you to settle in to your new role?

7. What do you think will be the main factors that will help you to start well?

8. What do you think could be done to help new principals to cope with the demands of the role?

The participants were very co-operative and some mentioned they were expecting to find the research process helpful to themselves as a way of reviewing and debriefing their experiences.

**Term one interview**

The following interview occurred towards the end of their first term in the role. The questions were designed to facilitate reflection on their experiences in the first term and also to compare some of their expected challenges and joys they noted in their pre-commencement interview with their actual experience. In questions 3 and 11, after their initial response, I made reference to the challenges and joys they had stated in the pre-commencement interview to see whether these were reflected in their actual experiences. There was also scope for them to comment on any anticipated challenges for the following term. The questions for the term one interview are outlined below.

1. What has your first term been like?

2. What have been the most challenging aspects of term one?

3. How does this compare with the challenges that you expected?

4. Were there any big surprises for you in term one?
5. What was your welcome and induction like? (Details of their commissioning service were also probed at this point if they were not mentioned)

6. What things have made starting well easier for you?

7. What things have made starting well more difficult you?

8. What are the things from you background, experience and training that have helped you the most?

9. What will be the most helpful to you in your ongoing development as principal?

10. How are you feeling about term two?

11. What have you enjoyed the most in your experiences so far?

**Term two interview**

The questions for term two’s interview followed a similar pattern to the previous ones covering issues related to the research questions. The interview also sought to gain some additional data on how they had found the experience of being a principal in comparison to what they had envisaged the role to be like. I asked them to rate themselves on a scale of 1-5 so that an overall comparison could be made rather than reporting their individual comments. To gain a deeper perspective on their experiences, some new questions were introduced. By asking questions from a different angle, other facets of their experience were also highlighted. For this interview, they were also asked about the lessons they had learnt about being a principal and whether there were things coming up in the rest of the school year that they were not looking forward to. The questions for the term two interview were as follows:

1. Overall how did the term go?

2. What were the greatest challenges that you faced?

3. What could have or could now be done to help you with those challenges?

4. How has the role compared to what you expected? On a scale of 1 through to 5 with 1 representing “much easier”, 3 representing “about what I expected” through to 5 representing “much harder”.

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5. What major lessons about being a principal have you learnt so far?

6. Are there any things that you are not looking forward to in the rest of the year?

7. What have been the greatest joys?

For both the term three and term four interviews, the questions were sent out before the interview to allow the participants some time for pre-reflection. As some of the questions were tackling specific issues regarding aspects of the role and asking for suggestions for improvement, this extra time to think through the responses was considered to be important in gaining more comprehensive answers. The questions regarding challenges and rewarding experiences were contained in all of the interviews.

**Term three interview**

The third term interview also contained two questions which looked specifically at issues that were of interest, namely the effectiveness of distributed leadership and the way that the beginning principals had perceived the expectations made of them. The final question probed to reveal any underlying aspects of the role that could be improved to help the beginning principals. The term three interview questions were as follows:

1. What have been the main challenges that you have faced in this term?

2. What have been the rewards and wins that you have experienced?

3. Do you believe that the expectations that others have of you in the role of principal are realistic?

4. Does distributed leadership significantly ease the pressures that you face?

5. What three things would you like to change about your role?

**Term four interview**

The term four interview was the final interview in the study. It was a valuable opportunity to review their experiences of the first year in the role of principal. Similar to the term three interviews, the questions were sent out to the participants before the interviews took place. Instead of asking about the challenges they had faced that term, the question was broader in its context and asked them to identify and reflect on the
three greatest challenges they had faced throughout their first year. Similarly, they were asked to comment on the three aspects of their role they had enjoyed the most. One question asked them to reflect on how they were feeling in terms of physical and psychological health. It was also relevant to ask about whether they had been through some form of performance review and, if so, what had this experience been like for them. The final question gave the participants to share their message to future potential principals. This final question allowed them to pass on any words of advice or lessons learnt that they felt would benefit aspirants. The term four interview questions were as follows:

1. What three things have you found to be the most challenging in your first year as a principal?

2. How are you feeling at the moment? (wellbeing, health, fitness, emotional psychological)

3. Have you had some type of a first year performance review? How did it go?

4. What can boards, school leadership teams and associations do to help new principals to start well?

5. What are the three things that you have enjoyed the most about your role?

6. If you had an opportunity to speak to possible future principals what would you say to them?

Concluding remarks
As a researcher I found the research experience very rewarding and insightful. All of the participants in the Phase Two and Three interviews were extremely co-operative and happy to talk about their experiences. I did not sense they were avoiding any issues as they covered a range of both positive and negative experiences in some depth of disclosure. No participant withdrew from the project or expressed any concerns with the research process. It was an enriching experience for me to have journeyed with the Phase Three beginning principals through their first year in the role. The process was mutually beneficial as I gained invaluable insights into the experiences of beginning
principals while they had an opportunity to reflect on and share their journey with an independent person.

In the following four chapters I will outline and discuss the findings from all three phases of the research project. Instead of looking at the results from each phase of the project, the results will be discussed in separate chapters each corresponding to one of the sub-questions of the thesis. The results from all three phases will be combined and compared as these chapters will address the key research questions. At the beginning of each major theme I will include an image\(^1\) with the section heading. These images are included to provide a symbolic overview of the content of each major section and it is hoped they will add a further dimension to the presentation of the results. Chapter 5 will look at the findings regarding the preparation they had received and their sense of preparedness for the role. Chapter 6 will look at the themes that emerged regarding the factors which contributed to a strong start for them in the role. Chapter 7 will examine the specific and overall aspects of being a beginning principal they found to be the most challenging. Chapter 8 will look at the rewarding aspects of the role and also include their words to future aspirants. Finally, in Chapter 9 the overall findings of this project will be summarised and specific recommendations pertaining to the preparation and support of beginning principals will be discussed.

\(^1\) The photographic images included in this thesis were used in accordance with the license terms of CanStock Photo Inc and iStock
Chapter 5 — Preparation and preparedness

The preparation for principalship is a multifaceted journey. It involves formal and informal training courses, the lessons learnt from previous roles, opportunities to gain specific skills and the help and guidance of others (Webber & Scott, 2013). Some of this preparation is planned while some occurs serendipitously through the experiences and the lessons that can be learnt from either successfully or unsuccessfully navigating through the challenges of life and school leadership.

The first sub question of this research study examined what preparation the beginning principals had received and what was their self-perception of preparedness as they anticipated beginning in the role of principal. The study revealed a number of important components of preparation which the beginning principals had benefitted from. The findings highlighted the importance of formal avenues of preparation and previous school leadership roles in helping individuals to prepare for principalship. In this chapter I will report on the various components of preparation the participants had received and their sense of preparedness as they entered the role.

Preparation for principalship through tertiary studies and training courses

Each of the beginning principals had completed various tertiary degrees and leadership courses. Although the specific value of these degrees and courses was not assessed in the interviews, there were some findings which highlight salient aspects of their preparation and can provide some guidance for aspirants.
Preparation through tertiary studies

Although tertiary qualifications are necessary for someone to become a registered teacher, in Australia there are no mandatory post-graduate requirements for those taking on the position of principal (Cranston & Ehrich, 2006). Teachers and school leaders can choose to undertake post-graduate studies in a specific area of education or in more general leadership areas. The Phase Three group of principals reported on a variety of tertiary studies they had undertaken.

Seven out of the eight Phase Three group of beginning principals had completed Masters degrees. Six has completed a Master of Education and one has completed a Master of Educational Management. One had completed a second Masters degree and one was in the process of completing their second Masters degree which was an MBA. Two of the Phase Three principals also had doctoral degrees.

An observation of the benefits of a post-graduate degree which contains a strong focus on business and management was made by one of the Phase Three principals and two of the Phase Two principals. Mark, a Phase Three beginning principal, had completed a Masters of Education and was working on his MBA at the time of the study. In referring to the value of the MBA’s contribution to his preparation he commented, “I have to say that the big thing that has really helped me is my MBA studies. It just gave me such a strong theoretical and practical understanding of running an organisation”. This comment was further reinforced as Mark reflected on the reported lack of business preparation beginning principals had expressed at a recent event:

Where I was on the weekend, there were about eighteen other first year principals from Independent Schools. The biggest thing that they all said that they struggled with was the business side of things and the management side of an Independent School. All of them said – they had done Masters degrees in education and none of that really prepared them for that aspect whereas because of my business studies, I felt that was probably a real strength as a result.

Similarly, two of the Phase Two principals group also highlighted the importance of undertaking a Masters program which contains a strong management and business component. Susan, a principal of a large urban school commented:
I did finish my Masters in Leadership and Management. I just don’t think anyone should become a principal that hasn’t got their Masters degree; just some theoretical underpinnings and something on leadership and management. No matter how good you are in people management, organisational management, project management, you need your theoretical underpinnings before you get into principalship”.

Bronwyn also echoed these sentiments and reinforced the assertion that principals should have a Masters degree. She shared these comments reflecting on the two Masters degrees that she had previously undertaken with one being in management. “I think those really made a difference to where I am as well, so if I’d come in with just a Bachelor of Education I think, I would have left. [laughs].

The previous comments regarding the value of more business focused study in the preparation process were also evident in the survey responses as 61% of the respondents made comments which indicated they would have liked to have received more specific training in the business and management areas of principalship. This theme will be further studied in Chapter 7 when the results regarding the challenges of being a beginning principal are overviewed.

Postgraduate studies can provide valuable training and education which can help beginning principals to be better equipped in both pedagogical and organisational aspects of school leadership (Hallinger & Lu, 2013). The value of obtaining a Masters degree as an important part of the preparation for principalship was highlighted in research carried out with beginning principals in the UK (Sieber, 2002). Although no evaluative comments were made by the participants of this study regarding the value and benefits of post-graduate degrees per se, seven out the eight Phase Three principals had completed masters level education. As argued by Brundrett, Fitzgerald, and Sommefeldt (2007), it is quite appropriate for principals to have a Masters degree considering they are leading a teaching staff who are required to have a graduate level education. Although some research has been carried out establishing the benefit of post-graduate level preparation (Orr & Orphanos, 2011), more research is needed, particularly in the Australian context, to study the efficacy of post-graduate studies.
Preparation through training courses

As well as formal tertiary studies, school leaders can undertake leadership development and principal preparation courses. Although all of the beginning principals had participated in and greatly appreciated a variety of leadership courses throughout their careers only two out of the Phase Two and Three principals had been specifically involved in a principal preparation course pre-commencement.

Brendon, a beginning principal in a regional school with 300 students, was appreciative of the “aspiring principals” course he had undertaken through ISQ (Independent Schools Queensland). Similarly, only one out of the eight Phase Two principals had undertaken a specific principal preparation course pre-commencement. As John, a Phase Two beginning principal of an urban school of nearly 1,000 students commented; “I also got to do the AISNSW’s preparation for principalship course and that was just invaluable. Absolutely invaluable.”

Possible reasons for the low participation rate in principals preparation courses could be that “aspiring principals” may be reticent to identify themselves in this way or they have not yet made a decision that they will move towards a principal position. For two of the Phase Two principals, Terri and Margaret, their promotion to principal was totally unexpected which would have left them very little or no opportunities to be involved in such training.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, the uptake for principal preparation courses post-commencement is much higher and is a significant component in helping beginning principals to start well. In the following section I will discuss the findings regarding the contribution that previous leadership experiences had in the preparation of the participants to take on the role of principal.
Preparation for the principalship through previous leadership roles and experiences

This study highlighted the important role that previous leadership roles and experiences played in preparing the participants for principalship. Taking on a senior leadership role such as principal can be the culmination of many years of experience in various leadership roles. A person’s leadership journey can start at a young age. For example, Brendon traced his leadership journey back to an early age when he commented; “[I]n terms of sports teams’ leadership I have been involved since I was eight years of age”. Similarly, Phase Two principal, Ruth, shared; “I started being a leader in Scouts very early on; when I was 15 I started being a group leader.” Valuable previous leadership experiences can also be gained from working in other occupations before entering teaching.

I think having been in industry for thirteen years was very useful for me, so I was in the business world and I think that a school is a business. It’s not just a business, but part of the running of the school is a business. (Elizabeth)

Although there are no set career pathway for becoming a principal, most beginning principals have previously fulfilled senior leadership positions in schools (Bloom & Krovetz, 2001). The following Table 6 indicates the leadership positions the eight Phase Three beginning principals fulfilled prior to becoming a principal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership position</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deputy or assistant principal</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of middle or senior school</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dean of studies</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>
It is important to note that seven out of the eight Phase Three principals had occupied these leadership positions in schools which covered all grades. One principal had come from a school which catered for middle and senior school students. This is a relevant observation as Cray and Weiler (2011) commented on concerns in the US concerning the unpreparedness of beginning principals in leading K-12 schools as they had come out of leadership of either a primary or secondary school.

The data clearly highlighted the important role previous school leadership experiences can play in preparation for principalship. All of the Phase Three principals shared that their previous school leadership positions had significantly helped to equip them for the role of principal. In the next section I will outline the reported benefits of these experiences. These benefits will be presented under the three main categories introduced in Chapter 3, i.e. personal, interpersonal and organisational.

**Personal preparation**

Through previous school leadership experiences, beginning principals can be assisted in their personal preparation to take on the principalship and cope with its demands. Paul, a Phase Three principal who had moved from a Head of middle school position in a large urban school to become principal at a smaller regional school, shared how being in this role had helped to familiarise him with the role of principal. He commented:

\[
\text{The majority of it was familiar. The core business is still the same, with the exception of building programs and financials; they’re the two new bits.}
\]

In Chapter 7 I will return to the comments made regarding the areas of building programs and finances as these represented a common challenge for many beginning principals.

As well as general familiarisation with the role of principal, previous leadership roles had helped the beginning principals to become used to the work load and challenges of principalship, develop greater resilience, learn how to make difficult decisions, and develop greater personal confidence. These benefits of previous leadership experiences will now be detailed.
The data showed that previous experiences in senior leadership roles helped to prepare the beginning principals for the workload and the challenges of responsibility. Five out of the six Phase Three principals who had participated in a pre-commencement interview, made specific references to the way their previous school leadership role had prepared them for the workload they were expecting in the role of principal. Michael, a Phase Three principal, shared how his involvement in a boarding school had helped prepare him for long work hours:

I have been mainly been in schools that are full-on 24/7. If you’re in boarding, which I have been a lot of the time, where I’m still working after 12 o’clock at night checking that there aren’t boys escaping and stuff, so, from that point of view, I’m used to it.

Similarly, Grahame a Phase Three principal shared “I work very closely with my current principal and we’re pretty similar now in our workload. We both put in a lot of hours every week. So, there is nothing new for me in that respect”. Brendon and Helen, both Phase Three principals also commented that they had been in large and very busy schools and had already experienced a high workload. Brendon shared; “This place is unbelievably busy here. I doubt that there is a school as busy that offers as much as we do”. Helen recounted her previous workload at a large urban school; “I certainly don’t forget that I was doing 18 hour days, seven days a week. It was relentless”. This exposure to the time demands of school leadership helped these principals to feel prepared for this demanding aspect of the role.

An invaluable part of the personal preparation in becoming a principal is to build personal resilience and the ability to deal effectively with difficult situations (Wildy & Clarke, 2008). Previous leadership positions can help prepare the beginning principal for the tough decisions that will inevitably have to be made as illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

I have been involved in some very sensitive conversations with staff, students, with families about a whole range of things. If I think back in the five years about the number of conversations we’ve had about students we’ve had to expel, staff that have had to move on, all those sorts of things. You draw on those experiences and I guess it toughens you for those tough
decisions that you have to make down the track. Because I know within myself I have done this before and if I need to act that way with a staff member issue I know that I can draw on the fact that I’ve done it before and I know what has to happen. And I know how to do it correctly. (Grahame)

Grahame’s comments reflect the ongoing nature of preparation. It is a process that occurs over some time. Particularly in the difficult decisions, the leader can begin to develop the resilience and abilities to make difficult decisions that will prove invaluable once in the role of principal. Overall, his experiences as a deputy principal helped Grahame become more confident in moving into the role of principal. In his pre-commencement interview, as he contemplated starting in the new year as a principal he commented:

I feel pretty confident at the moment. And as I said, for the last five years I have been working closely with our current principal. So, I have governance experience. I’ve been involved in just about every aspect of running a school with him.

The data indicated that previous senior leadership positions had contributed positively to the preparation of the beginning principals and their transition into the role. The experiences they gained were also important in preparing them in the area of interpersonal leadership. In the following section I will examine the data relating to this topic.

**Interpersonal preparation**

A large part of the daily activities of a principal involves interpersonal interactions with other leaders, staff, students and parents of the school. All of the six Phase Three principals who had participated in a pre-commencement interview shared how their previous leadership experiences had helped them to develop interpersonal leadership skills. These leadership experiences had provided them with exposure to the dynamics of the school board, dealing with difficult people and the nature of various roles within the school, giving them a greater ability to connect with other leaders. The following section will examine these benefits.
The data showed the benefits of previous experiences in working with school boards and their various committees. Michael commented:

My previous Heads have been really good to me in that they have put me on school board committees, so committees like finance, capital planning, governance committees. So, I have had a taste of working with a board.

Similarly, Brendon commented on the value of having been involved with the school board for a long period of time which helped prepare him for the interpersonal side of being a principal. He commented that he “had very good grounding”, felt “very prepared” to take on the role and had benefitted greatly from having had the opportunity to be at “all the board meetings” over the past eight years.

Navigating successfully through the interpersonal challenges a school leader faces with other school leaders, staff, students and parents is a crucial aspect of the role of principal (Lovely, 2004; Robbins & Alvy, 2004). One unavoidable aspect of being a principal is dealing with individuals who are being “difficult”. Mark, a Phase Three principal who was remaining at the same school, but moving into the role of principal commented:

Dealing with difficult parents and difficult staff over the years is really good preparation for headship. There is a lot of similarity, even with difficult kids. It is good that, if you’re dealing with difficult people and learning to do it well, then that’s great training.

As Mark was staying at the same school, it would have also been an additional benefit to have already had challenging interactions with many of the same people who would be present in his role as principal.

Another benefit from having been in a number of previous school leadership positions is that it gives the beginning principal insight into the roles of those who are now reporting to him / her and the ability to connect more effectively with them. Grahame, a Phase Three principal of a regional school with nearly 1,000 students, had also been in three head of school positions before becoming a deputy principal in his last role prior to taking on the principalship. He reflected from the benefits of being in these significant leadership roles:
I have had experience in a lot of roles within a school. So, when I talk to the people who are in these positions, I can draw on that experience. I know the mistakes I’ve made; I know the things that work. I can give them a fairly clear vision of where I want them to take their role. But at the same time, it will be a realistic vision because I understand what the challenges were when I held those positions at other schools. So, I think that has prepared me enormously.

Clearly Grahame’s experiences and lessons learnt from actually having been in those roles gave him an understanding of the role and insight into how to help his current school leaders to be more effective in those roles. Elizabeth, a Phase Two principal of an urban school with 350 students, shared how her specific experience in the area of curriculum was helpful to her:

I do think it’s relevant; I used to run the curriculum in my previous school and so having a very, very solid understanding of the curriculum and the expected levels for the different children at different ages meant that I can have very genuine in-depth conversations with the main people that actually run the school; like, the curriculum coordinator and teachers and you can actually answer them genuinely with real knowledge. I think that would be very hard if you didn’t know the curriculum.

The data clearly revealed the importance of previous school leadership experiences as an invaluable part of the preparation and learning needed for the interpersonal aspects of the role. These previous experiences can equip the beginning principal to respond to interpersonal challenges and to identify, connect with and lead people who are in school leadership. The benefits of these experiences also extended into the organisational aspects of leadership.

**Organisational preparation**

School leaders gain invaluable experience in the organisational aspect of school leadership which can help them to be prepared for the organisational challenges they will face as principals. The benefits of these experiences were typified in the comments made by Phase Three principals, Helen and Grahame. Helen shared about the broad range of experiences she gained from her previous deputy principal role of a very large
urban school. Helen had benefitted greatly from being “part of several change management processes”. These included “everything from the structure of the school day, from going from single sex to co-ed, selling an initiative which meant basically selling to the school community a program in China”.

Grahame also shared in his pre-commencement interview how his time as deputy principal had exposed him to a wide range of experiences in organisational leadership that had helped to prepare him to eventually take on the role of principal.

> When I came into this role I wouldn’t have been ready to be a principal because I think that this role that I’m currently in has given me that broad overview of the whole school. It has also given me that insight into a lot of things that a principal does that no one sees. So, the governance side of things, the financial side of things, and the business side of things. … For example, OHS; there is a huge responsibility with that and industrial issues, human resources, and these are things that teachers don’t learn. I’ve been lucky that I’ve learnt from just experience from being involved.

In particular, working closely with a principal for a number of years gave Grahame a first-hand glimpse into the life of a principal and the breadth of organisational issues they need to deal with. Principals are expected to provide leadership in many aspects of the school. It follows that their preparation will be aided by a broader exposure to school leadership. Those who had received experience in areas like governance, buildings, finances and high-level decision making felt that this was a significant advantage. In the next section I will look at the role how being in a deputy principal’s position can help in the preparation for principalship.

**The effectiveness of the role of deputy principal as preparation for principalship**

Although there is no set pathway to follow which leads to the role of principal, many beginning principals take this step after being in a deputy or assistant principal role (Bloom & Krovetz, 2001). In this study, five out of the eight Phase Three principals had been in a deputy position prior to moving into principalship. The data already presented in the previous section clearly attests to the value of a deputy position as preparation for principalship and this reflects findings in other studies (Johnson-Taylor & Martin,
The literature also highlights some concerns of the deputy position being less valuable as preparation for principalship if the role has been limited in nature with the focus just being on administration, discipline or student issues (Bloom & Krovetz, 2001; Lovely, 2004). Conversely, deputy principals who have been given exposure to the pedagogical, financial and overall leadership of the school with real delegated authority are better prepared to take on the role of principal (Sieber, 2002).

Susan, a Phase Two principal of an urban school with 800 students, shared her observations on the sometimes restrictive nature of the deputy’s role.

I know some schools keep their deputy principal so busy, with organising PixiFotos or organising this and that; and so some of the biggest stuff, some of the hardest stuff, some of the strategic stuff can’t happen.

Susan went on to share that her experience was much more rewarding than the “PixiFoto” role she described above:

I was given a lot of autonomy in my role as deputy and I had a role of deputy where I really was standing alongside the principal a lot. People might see that as a waste of time and resources, but it wasn’t; it was really for preparing me as an apprentice.

In her experience as deputy, Susan had benefitted from the autonomy she was given and felt she was “standing alongside the principal” in an apprenticeship. Similarly, Browyn, the principal of a small urban school catering to children with specialised needs, also felt that while being in a deputy principal role she had been “working together” with her principal and was being prepared to take on the role of principal. Bronwyn recounted; “for the last six months of the time we had an overlap where I was actually doing a lot of things under her guidance; all the funding submissions and things like that that we worked on together”. An additional source of preparation experience can also be found at times when school leaders are asked to take on an “acting principal” role.

Both Bronwyn and Susan shared how they had benefitted from being “acting principal” during their time in the deputy’s role. Susan was fortunate to have “had two very significant stints as acting principal”. Bronwyn, too, shared of these opportunities in a positive way. “Before I stepped into this role I was acting principal when she went on
sabbaticals; so I had the opportunity to get my teeth into that type of thing”. It is these opportunities to actually be sitting in the principal’s role while they are away that gives the deputies a helpful firsthand experience of the role (Draper & McMichael, 2003; Grant, 2013).

All of the Phase Three principals who had been in a deputy role had reported positively of their wide range of exposure to school leadership while in the deputy role. A recurring theme in the data was the way in which principals sought to involve the deputy in a range of responsibilities which then, in turn, helped to prepare them for principalship.

It would really be that principals always have their eyes open as to who is aspirant. Paul gave me a lot of opportunities and those opportunities provided me with stories to tell and a job interview. (Sandra)

It is clear from the data that the previous leadership roles the beginning principals had fulfilled had served to help them prepare for principalship. These experiences gave them exposure and training in the skills and attitudes required in the role of principal. These roles gave them opportunities to learn from mistakes and from others, particularly through the guidance and nurturing of their principal. In the next section I will report on how prepared for principalship did the Phase Three group feel on the cusp of starting in the role.
Perceptions of preparedness

To investigate their perceived level of preparedness, the Phase Three beginning principals were asked how prepared they felt to take on the role before pre-commencement. The data clearly showed that all of the Phase Three participants felt well prepared and ready to take the next step in becoming a principal. Pre-commencement interviews were conducted with six out of the eight Phase Three principals. All six reported a high level of preparedness and confidence as they anticipated starting in the role. As Michael contemplated his level of preparedness he shared; “I feel very well prepared because of what I’ve done”. Similarly, Mark shared “I’m actually feeling really confident and empowered to be able to hit the ground running and make decisions”. These comments were indicative of all of the pre-commencement interviews. Although they were asked to comment in retrospect, this high level of preparedness was also very evident in the term one interviews with Sandra and Andrew.

Seven out of the eight Phase Two principals also reflected that they had a high level of preparedness before they took on the role of principal. Some of their comments are reported below:

I think I was probably one of the most prepared; of all the people I’d known who have got principalship. (Susan)

I feel that I was, in the circumstances extraordinarily well prepared. (John)

I was prepared mentally and I was prepared leadership-wise. (Ruth)
The data showed all but one of the beginning principals in both phases two and three felt well prepared and confident when they took on the role of principal. This was a very encouraging result, as much of the literature on beginning principals in the past has highlighted a prevailing feeling of unpreparedness in taking on the role (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009; Bright & Ware, 2003; Lattuca, 2012). For example, research carried out in the UK by Earley, Evans, Collarbone, Gold, and Halpin (2002) revealed that at that time only 17% of beginning principals reported feeling “very prepared” for the role while almost 10% reporting feeling “not prepared at all”.

This very high level of preparedness of the Phase Two and Three principals may reflect the benefits of the increasing attention that has been given to the preparation of principals in the past decade (Brundrett & Dering, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Young, O'Doherty, Gooden, & Goodnow, 2011). Although research into the preparedness of beginning principals has been carried out in various countries around the world there is a great need for further research into the preparedness of beginning principals of independent schools in Australia.

There was one exception to this consistent report of preparedness as one beginning principal out of the 16 participants in both phases two and three reported being quite unprepared for the role. Margaret, a Phase Two principal of a regional school, who at the time was in a teaching role, was unexpectedly approached to consider becoming the principal.

It was very unexpected, because I started teaching in the school in 2010 as a Year Three, Four, teacher and at the end of that year the principal came into my room and said “Would you like to put your application in to be principal?” I didn’t feel at all prepared for the scope of this.

Although the results indicate the principals who were interviewed felt very prepared to take on the role, it is important to consider those areas in which they would have benefitted from extra training and experience. One of those areas was experience in the financial and business side of school leadership. In anticipating challenges he would experience in taking on the role of principal, Grahame shared:

I’m pretty confident and comfortable with the actually academic side of things and the other aspects of co-curricular where I have to go into a
school, but the one area I will have to work on is actually running a business and understanding how the fluctuations in the economy and fluctuation in numbers, how that impacts on the school; and how we ensure that the school continues to run well and be financially viable.

This area also was shared by other beginning principals and will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7.

In the survey results from Phase One, the respondents indicated a moderate level of satisfaction for their preparation and training. The survey group found that their leadership as a deputy, other school leadership experiences and advice and support from other principals to be the most helpful in their preparation. When commenting on areas in which they would have like to receive more preparation 53% of the principals felt that they could have benefitted from more training in business administration 33% would have liked to have received more training in legal and compliance issues.

**Concluding remarks**

This chapter has examined the findings of this study, looking at key aspects of the preparation and sense of preparedness experienced by the participating beginning principals. In an early presentation of my research proposal, I used the following image to portray a beginning principal’s sense of apprehension as they enter the role of principal. This was based on the literature I read up to that point of time which indicated a high level of unpreparedness by beginning principals.

This data generated in this research project has demonstrated that this conception was not indicative of the beginning principals who were interviewed in the course of this study. The data, instead reflected a strong sense of confidence and preparedness to take on the role. In particular, through their formal education and extensive school leadership
experiences, these beginning principals were feeling ready and able to take the step of becoming a principal. This confidence doesn’t negate their awareness of the challenges ahead but shows their entry into principalship was to be one of confidence rather than fear.

I am fairly confident in my own right and I do think that I am well prepared. But that doesn’t mean that I’m not nervous. (Helen)
Chapter 6 — Keys to starting well

As both the beginning principal and the school community will benefit from a good start by the beginning principal in their new role, it is important to examine some of the salient components that will help this to occur. From the moment an individual accepts the job offer to become a principal, they embark on a journey of leaving and starting. In this journey there are two main challenges; that of leaving their current role and organisation well and starting in their new role well (Alvy & Robbins, 1998). It is not within the scope of this work to explore the components of leaving well, although this does merit research attention, as if the individual does not leave in a positive way, showing ongoing commitment to the school and students until they formally end their work this can have a negative impact on the staff who are remaining (Robbins & Alvy, 2004). However, it is one of the main research questions of this project to examine the process of starting well.

In the previous chapter I examined the results of this study which highlighted components which had helped the beginning principals to be prepared to take on the role. In this chapter I will outline the results related to sub question two: What are the main factors which help beginning principals to start well?

The specific factors which influence the successful start in the role and early socialisation of beginning independent school principals have received very little research attention. In all of the three phases of this study, beginning principals were asked about what had helped them to make a strong start, and about aspects of their commencement and early experiences in the role. The interviews conducted with Phase Two and Three beginning principals provided an opportunity to explore the factors which the participants considered helpful as they transitioned into the role. Data from all three phases were analysed and the following five themes emerged as key factors in helping principals to start well:

1. Pre-commencement experiences at the school;
2. An effective welcome and induction process;
3. A proactive and supportive school board;
4. Help from independent school organisations; and,
5. Being mentored and receiving support from other principals.

These five key themes will now be outlined and discussed in turn.

**Pre-commencement experiences at the school**

Throughout the interviews that focused on the pre-commencement period and their first term as principal, the participant’s initial experiences with the school were discussed at some length. The results from the study clearly indicated that pre-commencement experiences had played a significant role in helping the beginning principals to start well. All of the Phase Three principals had opportunities to interact with the school before they commenced and reported on the benefits of these experiences. Two of the Phase Three group were able to engage in significant periods of pre-commencement experience.

Through intentional pre-commencement experiences at the school, the beginning principal may be given a greater opportunity to start well in the role. Through their experiences with the school before their first official day in the role, beginning principals can “break the ice” through meeting and beginning to form relationships with leaders, staff, students and parents from the school. Also, exposure to the incoming principal can help existing school leaders and staff begin to build trust and confidence in them, which will in turn helps them to start well as trust is a vital part of establishing a viable leadership relationship (Rath & Conchie, 2008).

To have a meaningful pre-commencement experience requires the support of both the school the person is leaving as well as the one they will be commencing in. Pre-commencement exposure should be done with sensitivity and the cooperation of both the principals of the outgoing and new school as the beginning principal has neither
started at the new school nor finished at the previous school. As Grahame commented regarding the outgoing principal of the school;

    I’m fortunate that the current principal has been very generous with his time. I’ve been able to spend a lot of time with him, talking about the school and he’s allowed me to come in and be involved in a lot of other things.

As this theme of pre-commencement experience has received very little research attention, it is important to share the journeys of these beginning principals to demonstrate the benefits of these experiences.

The nature and benefits of pre-commencement experiences

All of the participants who were interviewed had, to varying degrees, some pre-commencement experience with the school. These ranged from attending social events through to active participation in leadership meetings. The following discussion of the results will focus primarily on the data from beginning principals who participated in Phase Three of the study. Data from the beginning principals in Phase Two will also be included where relevant. The pre-commencement experiences included:

- Meeting and spending some time with the board, school leaders and school community at social events. All of the Phase Three principals had opportunities to be involved in these pre-commencement experiences;

- Having some level of active participation in leadership meetings. Six out of the eight Phase Three principals commented on their opportunities to be involved in board and executive leadership meetings with varying opportunities to be involved in decision making (Grahame, Helen, Mark, Michael, Paul and Sandra); and,

- Spending extended time with the outgoing principal. Four out of the eight principals had opportunities to spend extended time with the outgoing principal. (Andrew, Grahame, Mark and Michael). For the other four, there was either no principal present at the school or they did not have this opportunity.

The types of contact and the reported benefits from these experiences will now be discussed.
Meeting and spending time with the board, school leaders and school community at social events

Most beginning principals will have some type of contact with leaders and staff from the new school pre-commencement. It would be expected that they would have already become acquainted with some of the key leaders of the school through the application, interview and appointment phases of their appointment into the role. All of the Phase Three participants commented on the value of such exposure. Although these contacts may have just been informal social occasions, it still gave both the principal, school leaders and members of the new school community an opportunity to get acquainted. For example, Helen said in her pre-commencement interview:

So far they’ve had drinks for the principal over a couple of hours on Friday night. Just a meet and greet and to be able to visualise who I am and what I stand for.

Brendon, a beginning principal who had moved from an urban school setting to take on the principalship in a regional area, commented on the benefit for himself in having the opportunity to build relationships with the leaders of the school, and also the value for his wife to have had some opportunity to meet leaders from the new school.

I’ve met the school council. I’ve met parents. I’ve met staff up there. My wife met the school council as well that was very important, so she has seen the school I’m working in and that’s really helpful for her to understand the situation I’m in…. preparing for the role is not about reading documents, it’s about getting to know the people and that’s what I’ve been doing, basically… I think the important things are actual communication between the key players. In this example it’s the Head of School, Business Manager, Head of the Junior School and the Council, the Chair of Council.

The data from the Phase Three participants showed the value of these social experiences to the beginning principals as it gave them opportunities to begin to familiarise themselves with the individuals and the culture of the new school. As transitioning into a new community or organisation can be quite challenging, this pre-commencement social interaction is an important to helping principals to start well.
The importance of these pre-commencement contacts to the beginning principals was also clear from the Phase Two data. Four out of the eight principals in the Phase Two group were already on staff at the school in which they were appointed as principal. For the other four these opportunities were regarded as being valuable in their introduction and start in the role. Elizabeth, a beginning principal of an urban school with 350 students, shared about both her introduction to the leaders, and staff of the school and the benefits of these experiences to her capacity to start well in her role:

… and then I thought back to how I was transitioned into the school and I thought “that made life a lot easier”. It was brilliant. When I got the job it was probably August last year and I wasn’t going to start until January. So first they invited me to come to a staff meeting and meet everybody, then they invited me to an afternoon tea and meet all the staff, and there was wine and some had brought cakes that they’d made from home. They invited me to the opening of the art show, which is towards the end of the year and they invited me to a Board meeting. By the time January came I felt so welcomed and I felt so much, not a part of the school, but as much as you could, I definitely felt utterly welcomed. And I thought I have benefitted from a transition which they laid on for me – how reassured I was by the process! – and I thought it was brilliant.

Clearly from Elizabeth’s experience her transition into the school was made smoother and more natural by the way she was gradually introduced to the school community. Her repeated appearances at various events meant that she was already known to the school community before she commenced in the role. In the next section I will outline the benefits reported by those beginning principals who had opportunities to be actively involved with meetings with the board and executive leadership team.

**Having some level of active participation in leadership meetings**

There was a great benefit reported by the beginning principals who were able to have more contact with and be involved in board or executive leadership team meetings pre-commencement. Six out of the eight Phase Three principals commented on their opportunities to be involved in leadership meetings and had varying degrees of opportunities to be involved in decision making. These experiences were valuable in helping them to start well.
Grahame, in moving from an urban school from the role of deputy principal to a regional school of nearly 1,000 students, indicated the value of such involvement with the school leadership. In the term one interview he commented that he had been able to have “multiple meetings” with members of the leadership team and, through this, had developed a relationship and confidence in the team members. Grahame’s access to these leaders was encouraged and facilitated by the outgoing principal as he shared;

I have been working at my new school sort of on and off getting down there. I am pretty confident in the leadership team there. They’re a very capable group of people. I feel that we have bonded pretty quickly and I enjoy working with them and I know that they are high quality people, who will do a great job. I look forward to developing that team and making sure that we can continue to work well together.

Grahame also greatly appreciated the opportunity to be involved in some important decision making. He commented; “[I] have appointed a person to the Exec. I did that as an appointment with senior members of their Executive. We did that together”. Considering that he would be the one working closely with this new leader in the future it makes sense, and is a considerate act, to have had him involved in this process. In a later interview Grahame also shared, “I was lucky I had access to a lot of the operational documents last year”.

As the relationship that a principal has between his / her board and executive leadership team is crucial to their ability to function effectively (Costello, 2010; Lucas & Valentine, 2002), there is great merit in being given opportunities to develop these relationship as early as possible. When referring to giving the beginning principal regular pre-commencement contact with the key leaders in the school and board, Brendon, a Phase Three principal of a regional school suggested, “You can’t have too much of that ... So, maximising that would be the most effective way of introducing a new principal”.

The benefits for those beginning principals who had the opportunity to spend significant time with the outgoing principal will be outlined in the next section.
Spending extended time with the outgoing principal

This research demonstrated outgoing principals can assist beginning principals in their entry into the role by spending extended periods of time with them and also facilitating a smooth hand over. In this study, the beginning principals had various amounts and quality of contact with the outgoing principal. What is clear from the results is that the outgoing principal played a beneficial role in helping the beginning principal start well by spending time with the beginning principal and, in some cases, providing opportunities for the beginning principal to shadow them in their role. Four out of the eight Phase Three beginning principals had these opportunities to spend extended time with the outgoing principal. For the other four, there was either no principal present at the school or they did not have this opportunity afforded to them. For the four who had this opportunity, this contact allowed them to ask questions and to be made aware of salient issues that they could anticipate facing on commencement.

This contact with the outgoing principal can also create a smoother leadership transition as one leader concludes in their role and passes the leadership mantle to the new principal. In his pre-commencement interview, Mark, who was in the process of moving from a Head of senior school position to the role of principal in the same urban school, shared the benefit of the outgoing principal deliberately taking steps to facilitate his introduction to the role including some degree of decision making.

What has been a real benefit for me is that I have worked really closely with the past existing principal for the last term. He’s really worked me through all the finer details and included me on important meetings …. The great thing about the current Principal is that more and more he has stepped back and let me step in to make decisions and people got used to that, so now people are just used to coming to me already. And, so, it’s not going to be new or unusual for them come the start of the year.

In reflecting on Mark’s experiences, it is clear that he benefitted greatly from the proactive progressive inclusion which the existing principal was able to provide. This process included preparing Mark for the role, including him in important meetings and decision making and allowing the staff to become familiar with him in the new role he would be taking at the start of the year.
Comments made by Ruth, one of the Phase Two beginning principals who had moved from a school leadership role in another country, talked about her valued opportunity to shadow the outgoing principal. Shadowing can be an effective way of providing guidance to those preparing for leadership (Walker et al., 2013). Ruth commented on the amount of knowledge she was able to glean during this time. The importance of this time is particularly reflected in the last section of the following comment:

> We decided, with the cooperation of the school, that we were going to do a “shadowing” process, so I had transitioned for shadowing and we were working together for the two last weeks of the term, and then through the holidays; so actually I had a month when I was with the previous principal, and it was the time when I learned everything.

Two of the Phase Two principals who were already working at the school and were moving into the principal position reported that although the intention was there, the pre-commencement experience either didn’t happen or simply led to work overload as more responsibilities were added to their already busy workload.

> There was supposed to be sort of a transition period between the previous principal leaving and myself taking over; and in theory that was a good idea, but in practice it never happened, because I was still teaching full time, so, you know, trying to get time off to spend time with him in the office, and, sort of get a grip of what was going on, it just never happened. (Margaret)

> It was announced in the Easter and I had a term of working with the principal pretty much trying to give me as much responsibility as possible. That was probably more difficult than actually being a principal, because I was running my section of the school as a deputy principal plus having to do a lot of things that he would have actually done anyway, like enrolments. (Greg)

These comments by Margaret and Greg highlight the challenges of providing greater exposure to the outgoing principal and the role for those who are continuing at the same school. Although the person is already at the school if they are not given some time relief from their current duties, this process of being guided into the role by the
outgoing principal may either not happen or bring with it some unintended consequences of stress and frustration.

In summary, the data from the beginning principals highlight a number of benefits to pre-commencement extended time with the outgoing principal. This time can help the beginning principal to:

- acclimatise to the new school;
- acquire important knowledge and information about the school;
- understand the nature and responsibilities of the role of principal; and,
- be transitioned smoothly into the role.

The final two of these points warrant further explanation. By spending time with the outgoing principal, particularly in a shadowing-type relationship, the beginning principals could see first-hand what it meant to be a principal in a particular context. It provided an opportunity to gain a fuller understanding of the role. This is important, as a crucial part of moving into a more senior role is to understand the role and make a mental adjustment for the transition. Watkins (2003, p. 18) calls this “promoting yourself” and describes it as;

Preparing yourself mentally to move into your new role by letting go of the past and embracing the new imperatives of the new situation to give yourself a running start.

This time with the outgoing principal can be a great opportunity for the beginning principal to think through the strengths they have and how these will help them in the role, and also the changes they will need to make in terms of their sense of identity and method of operation which will help them to be successful in their new role.

The last of the summary points above referred to the value of a smooth transition from one school leader to the next. By spending time with the beginning principal during the work day, and at special events, there is a tacit message of affirmation being communicated to the school community. This is important in the light of research which revealed that beginning principals were negatively impacted if this sense of affirming succession was absent (Hallam, Hite, Hite, & Mugimu, 2010). Although well accepted
and researched in the business sector, succession planning in schools has not received much research attention (Steyn, 2013; Zepeda, Bengston, & Parylo, 2012).

Garchinsky (2008) comparing succession management in business and education sectors reported that while in business succession planning was regarded as inevitable and thus requiring planning and management, schools did not place the same emphasis on planning and management of succession. The comparison also showed that succession in the education sector is often viewed from the perspective of the incoming leaders while in the business sector more emphasis is placed on the importance of the role of the outgoing leader in facilitating a smooth transition process.

The data reported in this section has highlighted the importance of the role of the outgoing principal in facilitating a smooth transition to the new principal. Outgoing principals, by their availability and support, can not only provide the incoming principal with necessary information and insights, but can also contribute to a smooth transition, thus benefitting the whole school community. In preparing for a transition in leadership, it is prudent to assess what specific knowledge the outgoing principal needs to pass on and what knowledge the new principal needs to receive to effectively lead in their new role (Fink & Brayman, 2004).

All of the Phase Three beginning principals benefited from pre-commencement experiences. These experiences helped them to establish relationships and gain invaluable insights into the school’s functioning. This experience gave them a great foundation and confidence with which to start in the position. For two of the Phase Three beginning principals, their pre-commencement experience was more substantial and beneficial. I will expand on this in the next section.

The benefits of extensive pre-commencement experiences

Two of the Phase Three beginning principals were able to have considerable pre-commencement exposure to their new school. Sandra, who was moving to a regional school with just over 700 students from an urban deputy principal position, had an opportunity to spend one week every month for the last three months of the year at her new school.
For every month; the last three months of last year, I spent a week here. I actually had done a lot of my induction prior to starting. Each month I’d come up for a week and I’d go and explore and people would come with me and things like that. I knew all of the staff by name and I knew where everything was before January. Again, it was just so beneficial and I was really grateful to my boss for letting me do that. It really meant that I could start when I got here.

This extended opportunity gave Sandra the chance to familiarise herself with the school facilities, get to know all of the staff by name with this preparing the way for her to make a strong start on day one of her commencement. This type of extended experience required the cooperation from the school she was leaving to release her for this time. In the next section I will elaborate on the extensive pre-commencement experience that Michael was able to benefit from.

Michael: A case story of extensive pre-commencement experience
One of the Phase Three beginning principals, Michael, was able to benefit from a three month pre-commencement appointment. This amount of pre-commencement experience would not be possible in many situations, but for this principal it was a huge advantage to starting well. When the pre-commencement interview was undertaken, Michael had already commenced this three month period at the new school. Michael was moving from a senior leadership position at a large urban independent school to become principal in another state at a school with over 1,500 students. He described this period as “time that has specifically been given to me as part of the contract to basically learn my new school, to get to know people and just refine my own ideas about principalship”. From the comments made by Michael in his pre-commencement interview and later in the term one interview, four main benefits of this time were evident in that he was able to; gain a deeper understanding of the role of principal through shadowing other principals, build relationships with school leaders, staff and students, begin to get staff “on board” and excited about the future and lay the foundations for a strong start. These reported benefits will now be viewed in more detail.
Gaining a deeper understanding of the role of principal through shadowing other principals

This shadowing was not simply a passive process but proactive and interactive, providing a chance for Michael to probe into specific areas of school operation and leadership styles. Interestingly, the shadowing process was not confined to the outgoing principal as Michael was encouraged to spend time with other principals from different parts of the city and country. He was able to “shadow” twelve other principals for periods of one to two days.

I’m shadowing the current principal, or outgoing principal for that time. Probably in reality about 30% of the time I shadow him. The other time I used to do a variety of things, meet with key staff and I’ve visited a number of other principals and shadowed them… So, I feel very well prepared because of what I’ve done. I think that shadowing twelve different Heads for a day or two days in some cases has been wonderfully good preparation.

Through these opportunities to shadow other principals, Michael was also able to ask questions about the nature of the role of principal that he felt were important to consolidate in his mind before commencing in the role. I have included each of these questions from an excerpt from the pre-commencement interview as they capture some of the many of the questions that are pertinent to starting as a principal. These are some of the specific questions Michael asked the principals he was able to spend time with.

- What is the most important thing that a principal does?
- What are three things that you try to do each day on the micro level?
- What would you like to have done every day, when you walk out?
- What is the biggest difference between a deputy or the equivalent and a head?
- What pitfalls are there for a new head?
- Describe the relationship with your chair of council or chairman of the Board. How often do you meet and communicate with them?
- If you could go back in time, what is something that you would do differently?
Michael made notes of the answers that were given by the principals and had done some work on collating this material. The candid answers by experienced principals in a variety of contexts provided Michael with a wealth of personal testimonials regarding the nature of the role of principal. Although this research project found that this amount of extended and focused time with other principals was unique to the study participants, it nevertheless represents a transferable concept that could be applied by others moving into the role of principal as a tangible way of helping them to start well.

**Building relationships with school leaders, staff, students and school families.**

As a beginning principal is given more time at the new school they are in an advantageous position to establish key relationships within the school community. During his three month pre-commencement experience, Michael was able to spend considerable time with school leaders, staff and students including activities such as attending a camp for 25 prefects. Time, opportunities, commitment and a keen memory helped Michael to start with a considerable advantage. “Knowing the people, I had the confidence to know my audience too. I mean, there were two hundred staff and I knew all of them on day one. That’s a significant advantage”.

**Beginning to get staff “on board” and excited about the future**

There are a number of advantages of the principal being able to build positive relationships with the staff in this pre-commencement period. As a new beginning principal begins in a school it is not uncommon for staff to have some level of apprehension about the principal and the future (Oplatka, 2004). Some amount of contact can help ease these uncertainties and can also serve to build a sense of trust which is vital to the effectiveness of the principal’s leadership (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). As Michael shared, this period helped a trust relationship to be formed between him and the school staff.

A couple of staff have said to me, “You have already made a difference, just by the fact of who you are and being here”. It has got people excited. You know, I think that all of that is really important… Trust is a big thing. You have to have that foundation of trust. This transition time is a way for people to develop that confidence and trust. So that next year you can start full on.
The way in which the staff responded to Michael through their excitement, sense of confidence and trust was not only personally encouraging but also gave him more confidence as a leader to start in the role.

**Laying the foundations for a strong start**

The main benefit of this extended pre-commencement experience was that it enabled Michael to make a strong and confident start in his leadership as principal. Although this type of extended introduction to the school is not possible in many circumstances for logistical and financial reasons, Michael’s experience clearly illustrates its effectiveness. In answering a question on how his start and transition into the role during his first term as principal had gone, Michael commented:

> Look, very smoothly; as smoothly as I could have wished for. I think in no small way, the three months I had here in transition with the then principal. Knowing the people, I had the confidence to know my audience too. I mean, there were two hundred staff and I knew all of them on day one. That’s a significant advantage... I don’t think I would have had the confidence to do that if I didn’t know the people that I was addressing and know the school to the point that I had in that three month period. That was the foundation of it; I can’t stress that enough.

This period of extended exposure to the school provided Michael with a strong foundation for his official start in the role. These experiences helped Michael to transition smoothly and confidently into the role with a comprehensive knowledge of the school, staff and leaders.

As pre-commencement experience emerged as a key factor in helping beginning principals to start well, it certainly warrants further exploration in future research. There are many logistical and financial aspects to creating such a time as well as a great sense of cooperation required between the sending and receiving schools. It also depends on the attitudes and commitment of the existing principals to not see this in a threatening fashion, but as a way to enable a smooth transition to the next phase of the school’s journey.

A metaphor that is often associated with leadership succession is “passing the baton” (Bennet, Carpenter, & Hill, 2011). In the same way that a runner in a relay team seeks
to accept the baton in a smooth and effective way, so too does the beginning principal. In order to do this, the runner needs to start running before the pass is made. This analogy represents the importance of the pre-commencement experiences afforded to beginning principals. It enables them to start their momentum of leadership and relationship building. As Mark commented on the impact of his pre-commencement experience, “I’m actually feeling really confident and empowered to be able to hit the ground running”. In the following section I will look at the importance of an effective welcome and induction process in helping the beginning principal to start well.

An effective welcome and induction process

Much can be done by the school to help the beginning principal to start well. The induction process can range from a “here are the keys” approach, right through to a well thought out welcome, induction process and formal commissioning event. As the beginning principals talked about their own personal welcome and induction, a number of helpful themes emerged which, if applied, could help beginning principals in the future to make a seamless start.

Welcoming the new principal

The welcoming of a new principal should be an exciting time in the life of a school. Although the principal has had some level of exposure to the school’s leadership, and perhaps staff, the welcome now announces to the school and greater community the commencement of the principal in his / her leadership role. For the six out of the eight Phase Three principals who were moving to a new school context, being welcomed at staff and school events gave them a great opportunity to introduce themselves and build relationships with the school and local community. Grahame, a Phase Three principal
moving into a regional school shared the value of a number of events that had been organised to introduce him to the school community.

We then had a number of parent’s functions for the parents to come and meet me and that was really good. We’re still rolling those out because our kids come from a very broad area; we’re actually going out to further away communities and having ‘meet and greets’.

As well as welcoming the new principal, the school can use this time to raise the school’s profile in the community. As Sandra commented “there was an enormous hubbub. Lots of newspaper articles and things like that”. It is a chance for the school to capitalise on this “good press” as Paul commented in his term one interview:

There hasn’t been a week here that I haven’t been in a paper. It’s all been gentle press. So it’s been good. It’s been about trying to get the name out there and the brand out there. The welcome was good. It was as polished as it could be and I think I was certainly embraced in that respect, which is really good.

The data show the value of a warm, enthusiastic and public welcome for the incoming principal, as this can be an encouraging time as they sense the acceptance and excitement of the school community.

**The induction process**

Induction is an accepted practice by organisations as they help to integrate new staff into the organisation (Antonacopoulou & Guttel, 2010). It is a guided process in which the new employee can be exposed to key organisational and logistical aspects of their workplace and they are provided with the assistance they need to begin working in the organisation (Salau, Falola, & Akinbode, 2014). For the purposes of this study, induction will be regarded as a short term proactive introduction of the beginning principal to the personnel and practical aspects of the school and its facilities. This definition, although in line with the corporate understanding and application of the term, is somewhat different to the way the term induction can be used in educational literature. Often in educational literature it denotes a period of time, up to one to two years, in which the individual is exposed to a variety of input, training and mentoring which will help them to assimilate into the role and the culture of the organisation.
As a part of the investigation into the start of their role, the beginning principals were asked to comment on their induction.

Although the experiences of the six Phase Three principals who were commencing at a new school were largely positive, two out of the six expressed considerable disappointment and frustration in the lack of practical induction they had received. Helen commented on her disappointment with her induction.

The most appalling thing that has happened so far would be my personal induction. It took, for example, six weeks to have my mobile phone go from one system to another. .. You get given a bunch of keys but nobody walks you around the school or just assumes that you’re going to know where room 701 is or what the etchings in the key stand for and what it is going to open. You get asked to pick an alarm code, which you do, but nobody says, ‘Here is one keypad and there is the other and there is the other’. You then find yourself saying, ‘Okay how do I get into this building? How do I disarm it and how do I arm it?’

Grahame, who had started work on campus at a time just before the return of the staff, reflected on the inadequate induction support he received. Thankfully, some of the maintenance staff were working on the school campus and offered him some assistance. Grahame’s comments reflect how easily the induction of the beginning principal can be overlooked which, in turn, makes starting in the role more difficult.

No one thinks about the induction of a principal. I would have liked more; it would have been nice even for a couple of the board members to come in. The only people here when I started were the maintenance guys and they were fantastic... I could sense very early that there wasn’t anything in place that should have been in place. Even keys, computers, all of those little things; I should have had a number of staff there when I started who would have taken me through instead of having to find out for myself.

This frustration with an ineffective induction was also shared by one of the Phase Two principals, Elizabeth, who shared these comments about her induction. “Absolutely none. I didn’t even find out the codes till… I asked at one point for some key phone numbers. So I mean, there was just zero induction”. This is an interesting comment in
the light of Elizabeth’s very positive comments reported in the section on spending time with the school staff. In this case although the personal welcoming and transition was encouraging, the practical induction was quite inadequate. The frustration and disappointment experienced by these principals could have been avoided with some planning by the school board and executive leadership team in terms of the practical guidance and staffing needed to make a strong start. Perhaps the cause of Grahame’s comment, “No one thinks about the induction of a principal” stems from the infrequency of new principal appointments in a school or simply from a lack of awareness of the importance of this process. Regardless of the reasons for this omission, beginning principals would be helped to start well with a comprehensive induction process.

The formal commissioning ceremony
For many new principals, their commencement is marked formally with a commissioning ceremony. Commissioning ceremonies provide an opportunity to publicly welcome, show support, formally induct the incoming principal and celebrate the beginning of a new chapter in the life of the school community. If the school has a religious association, the service has a spiritual context of support from the denominational association and also the acknowledgement of the faith leadership aspect of the role of principal (Laurence, 2013). Out of the group of the eight Phase Three beginning principals, six were becoming the principal of a school with a connection to a specific church or Christian denominational association. This percentage is an accurate reflection of the proportion of independent schools in Australia as approximately 84% of independent schools in Australia are associated with a religious denomination or a particular church predominantly from the Christian faith (Caldwell, 2010). Out of this group of six, four had a formal commissioning service with church or denominational participation, two who were staying at the same school did not have a formal commissioning service and the two that were becoming a principal of a school which had no strong religious association had a commissioning ceremony.

All six of the Phase Three beginning principals who were starting in a new school had a commissioning ceremony or service planned for them which they spoke very positively about. Paul, a principal of a regional school commented in his term one interview that his commissioning service “included people from the ASC (Anglican Schools
Commission), the local mayor and it was done by the local Bishop and everything was being covered by the local media.” Rather than seeing the commissioning as simply a formal ceremony, this research demonstrates that beginning principals can gain significant encouragement and affirmation from the occasion. The presence of family, friends, mentors and other principals can add to the special nature of this event. Sandra’s account of her commissioning service highlights the positive impact that a commissioning service can have as a time of celebration, validation, support and affirmation.

I had what I would consider a very elaborate induction ceremony of which principals from other schools came to, lots of dignitaries came up to. It was a really very special and spiritual occasion for me; not dissimilar to a wedding day almost. It was a really nice moment. I don’t think it had really dawned on me what I had personally achieved until I got to that day. It was great to get the job, but it was a real special moment when I had little children from four years of age presenting me with gifts from the school. It was a beautiful ceremony and my family were able to be there as well. The school did an amazing job with how that looked. Again, all my mentors were there, which was very important to me because a lot of them had encouraged me over the years.

In any formal event there can be some logistical issues that can take away from the special feeling of the day. One principal’s day was impacted by the weather and subsequent complaints from parents.

It was very nice to have it all formalised. It was an absolute stinking hot day. I had friends and relatives from interstate over here. It was lovely to have all of that, but it was forty odd degrees and it was actually humid here. It was not in an air conditioned venue so it was very uncomfortable…The only thing was, and this is increasingly an issue; a number of parents were very annoyed that we went ahead with it because of the heat and discomfort. (Michael)

Some thought could be given at these events to shield the principal from negative comments made by parents or side-tracks, although ironically this is probably an
accurate baptism into the role. He shared that one parent in particular “was yelling down the phone at me”. Brendon was frustrated at his commissioning service as he had been sidelined by a photographer.

The only issue I had was that I got taken away by the photographer. Straight after the ceremony when I wanted to say hello to a number of the people who were there and some people I didn’t even get to say hello to, who attended. That was a little bit of an irritation. It’s a bit like being at a wedding. (Brendon)

The nature and formality of the commissioning service will reflect the traditions and style of the school. Some thought could be given to chaperoning the principal and his / her family to avoid golden opportunities being missed for relationship building. It is clear from the interviews that this event can be a great encouragement to the principal as they are formally and publically are commissioned into the role.

Together the welcome, induction and formal commissioning of the beginning principal can assist and encourage them in the beginning of their role as a principal. This research has shown that beginning principals are helped to start well when the symbolic “handing over the keys” takes place in a planned, well organised, practical, public and affirming way. The data has also highlighted the important role that the school board can play in helping the beginning principal to start well. I will explore this theme in the next section.
A proactive and supportive school board

The role of the board in helping principals in their work was one of the most consistent and important themes that emerged during this research. School boards or councils are not only the team the principal is accountable to; they are also the ones who can and should be providing ongoing support and encouragement to the principal (Dewa et al., 2009). If there is a lack of display of this support, or tensions develop in the principal-board relationship, this can have a detrimental effect on the principal’s leadership and well-being (Gannell, 2004; McCormick et al., 2006). The positive impact of a well-functioning and supportive board cannot be under-estimated in its influence on the principal throughout their time in the school.

It was encouraging to see that most of the principals in this research experienced good board support and strong relationships with their boards. Six out of the eight Phase Three principals reported a generally strong and supportive relationship with their boards. One out of the eight Phase Three group did not have much direct contact with the board as they were a campus principal of a multi-campus school and as such were mainly accountable to the executive principal. One principal reported an ongoing strained and difficult relationship with his board and the nature of these difficulties will be reported at the end of this section.

There is a lot a school board can do to help the beginning principals to start well. One way the board can help beginning principals is through their support and encouragement. Michael, the principal of a large urban school, commented that it was extremely important for principals to experience the board, “routinely reminding, assuring the principal that he or she has their absolute support”. This support and care
were expressed in unsolicited contact from the board to Michael as he went on to comment:

    Even as recent as this week, I had a call from the deputy chair who just said – “just wanted to check in with you. You seemed a bit troubled on Monday night”. He just touched base with me and said “look, please be assured that if you want to do this you have our complete support. You just go ahead and you do it. We will support you wholeheartedly if you want to do this”. That’s just critical and he had the chair’s permission to do that; he didn’t just ring without checking.

The principals in the study also appreciated the time and effort their boards were contributing and the positive work relationships that had developed early on in their principalship. Brendon also commented on the quality relationship he had with the board and his appreciation of their work:

    I certainly like and respect the people who are on my school board. I appreciate that they’re giving up their time, mostly donating their time which is very valuable. They are good people and so it’s a pleasure to work with them.

Beginning principals can also be helped when their boards do not become involved in operational matters in the school. Helen, the principal of a moderately sized urban school, when asked about her board commented, “The Board has been sensational. They have butted out of operational matters and there’s a new chairman that is making them all stick to strategy”.

When this overt support and encouragement of the principal from the board is missing or clouded in conflict, the principal’s life becomes more difficult. One of the Phase Three beginning principal’s group experienced significant frustrations, disappointments and occasions of conflict throughout his first year which made starting well in the role much more challenging. Andrew the principal of a regional school shared these concerns in his term one interview. “Speaking frankly, I think the dynamics of working with the board is going to be the most challenging. The Board are very loaded up with certain agendas at the moment”.

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Although Andrew’s frustrations were often with the board, the focus of his concern was his strained relationship with the board chairman. In describing the chairman’s actions and the effect on his confidence, Andrew commented; “having the chairman run some fairly strong agendas hasn’t left me in a place where I am feeling confident”. With this strained relationship, Andrew was sensing an issue of control and a lack of personal support. When referring to the chairman Andrew commented:

**His key role shouldn’t be to control, it should be to lead. When he’s leading, he would be asking how I am going, he would be concerned about my wellbeing and looking to strategically utilise my skills rather than trying to run his own agenda and hope that he can convert enough of the things to get his own agenda running.**

The relationship with the board chair was strained throughout the year and reached a major conflict point in term three;

**The relationship with the board chairman has gotten to an explosive point so that was an interesting dynamic… I got an email apology. We have an external consultant working with us.**

Another challenge in his relationship with the board was the ongoing expectation by the board that Andrew and his family would become a part of the church associated with the school.

**So I’m not a member of the church. That’s what they would’ve liked, but for my family we need that space away into a church where my family is more comfortable. I see that as a significant issue for sustainability. The principal’s role will ask a lot of me, so my family needs to be in a church where they are comfortable. So the relationship with the church is a critical issue. In fact, that will ultimately be the deal maker or breaker in this role for me.**

There were also some governance boundary issues faced by Andrew during the year. As stated in an earlier chapter, the relationship between the principal and the board and particularly the board chair is crucial. An unhealthy relationship can add significant
stress to both the beginning principal and the board. This was clearly the case in Andrew’s situation.

While principals can seem confident in their role and abilities, there is also a sense of vulnerability when it comes to their relationship with the board and particularly with the board chair with regards to their tenure. This awareness of the board’s power to hire and fire did seem to make the tenure of the principal more vulnerable as Andrew commented “[W]elcome to the world of principalship. Tenure is always a bit shakier than it is as a teacher”. This vulnerability underscores the importance of the board–principal relationship starting and continuing in a positive and supportive way. A similar comment was made by Michael:

> In independent schools, your Chair at Council is probably your only real friend. And that person can actually sack you. In my case, with a weeks’ notice, you can go and just be fired… Of course the council hired me and they can sack me. [Laughs] It’s a pretty important relationship to have right.

Although most of the principals experienced positive and supportive relationships with their board, there were still some areas that were disappointing and could have been done better to help them make a strong start. Grahame shared some disappointment when he commented, “I didn’t hear from any of the Board members until week three. I would have hoped that the chairman at least would have contacted me on my first day and said, ‘Come and have a coffee. How’s it all going?’ Board members can help the beginning principal to start well by making contact and showing support, particularly at the start of the year.

Another way the boards can help principals to make a strong start is to give them an accurate picture of the health of the school and the current issues that are impacting on the school. In the promotion of the school to potential candidates there is certainly some pressure to highlight the positive aspects of the school. One of the principals in the Phase One survey group commented they would have been helped by “a clear disclosure of the skeletons in the closet”. Similarly, Brendon commented regarding the need for transparency, “That’s crucial… to be as open as possible. They are trying to attract an attractive principal, so I guess there’s a tendency to not reveal the problems”. Honest and open communication will help the new principal to start well and be aware
of the issues that need to be worked through early in their role. A similar comment was made by Paul:

While I don’t think they were particularly opaque, I think they could have certainly been more transparent about a couple of things. Remember that the situation was that I didn’t apply for the job as much as an approach. They were trying to win me; therefore the glass was half full the whole time. I did my due diligence, but I suspect that there were things that I could have learnt earlier. I understand why they were trying to get their candidate, but it did put me a little bit behind on a couple of issues.

The beginning principal’s relationship with the chairman and the rest of the board is crucial in effective governance and helping the principal to start well. As Grahame commented “I think one of the chief things is to form relationships, in particular with the chairman. I think the first thing you have to do is actually have a good relationship with the chairman. The second thing you need to do is have a good understanding of what the skills are on the board”. This study has demonstrated that beginning principals are helped to start well when they have a positive relationship with their board and that the board is supportive, respects professional boundaries and openly share the issues of concern about the school. The value of a strong relationship with the board was expressed by one of the survey respondents in the following comment. “The working relationship between myself and the school board is extremely positive and this makes for a far less stressful work environment”. Elizabeth also commented on her appreciation for her board.

I feel I’ve been helped as much as I could, I’ve got a fantastic Board, I absolutely love them; they’re passionate 40-year-olds who are professionals across a range of different areas; they’re willing to put in 120 percent.

As well as the help of the board, other leaders and the school community the results also showed that beginning principals can be helped by receiving support and assistance from organisations outside of the immediate school context. In the next section I will examine the role of independent school associations in helping principals to start well.
Help from independent school organisations

The term “independent” when applied to the circumstances of a school doesn’t have to mean alone. Independent schools can be linked to other schools through denominational associations, independent school associations and associations specific to the type of educational framework that school is based on. All of the Phase Three beginning principals shared positive comments about the assistance and support they had received from the associations their schools were members of. This assistance helped them start well in their roles through:

- resourcing and providing support from professionals who have specialised knowledge and experience;
- training courses, conferences and networking with other principals; and,
- helping beginning principals to find mentors.

I will now expand on these aspects of help from associations.

Resourcing and providing support from professionals who have specialised knowledge and experience

There was a sense of great appreciation expressed by the beginning principals regarding the resourcing and guidance they received from various state associations of independent schools. To have contact with a professional external agency meant they could receive current and professional advice on the issues they were facing. The interviews revealed some specific areas in which the experience of the association’s staff were helpful. Some areas specifically highlighted were related to dealing with unions, general human resource issues and legal issues. Sandra commented “For union and work related issues, I have been using ISQ (Independent Schools Queensland) and
their HR department. I have found them excellent with HR”. Sandra’s school was also in a denominational association which was also helpful to her as reflected in this comment, “it was almost a phone-a-friend mentality in that sense, where I knew I was going to be doing the right thing legally.”

The Phase Two principals also reported on their positive experiences with the associations they belonged to. This enthusiastic appreciation, as expressed by Elizabeth, was quite characteristic of both cohorts of beginning principals. “I can’t praise ISV (Independent Schools Victoria) enough, the depth of knowledge at ISV is quite extraordinary, I’m amazed”. John, a Phase Two principal of a large urban school, commented, “I’m on the phone to the AISNSW (Association of Independent Schools in New South Wales) lots of days around specific matters, legal advice or HR advice”. Margaret, another Phase Two principal of a small regional school, shared about recently joining the AISNSW, “seriously, like a whole new world opens up when you become members and just the depth of support is amazing. Absolutely amazing”. Bronwyn, a Phase Two principal of a small school catering to students with particular needs, also shared her perspectives of the benefits that she had received from her state independent school association:

ISV are fantastic. I’ve rung them to speak to different staff members at ISV, to get their opinion, or their advice; so they’ve been terrific. So I don’t feel like I’m isolated, but I do think that if it didn’t have those connections it would be a terribly isolating job. I think it’s really important to have a network of people that you can call on.

The comments by both Phase Two and Three principals clearly demonstrate that these associations contribute greatly to the beginning principal as they access professionals with considerable knowledge in educational leadership.

**Training courses, conferences and networking with other principals**

Independent school associations can also help beginning principals through the training courses they offer. These courses can help beginning principals navigate through the early phases of their professional journey as they provide training in key areas that are pertinent to beginning principals of independent schools. Seven out of the eight Phase Three principals had participated in training courses run by associations and
unanimously commented on the benefit of these courses through the content, the experience of the trainers and the opportunities to form relationships with other beginning principals. Margaret, a Phase Two regional school principal, commented on the New Principals course run by the AISNSW:

I tell you what, that course was the best thing that I ever could have done. It was phenomenal and it was amazing because it would be like, either I was facing an issue that I wasn’t a hundred percent sure what to do; then I’d go – because they spread it out over the whole year – and I’d end up going to one of the courses and it would cover exactly the issue that I would be wanting, or I’d learn something and a few weeks down the line would be implementing it, so it was very good, excellent.

As well as training courses, independent school associations also organise conferences which can be an encouragement to beginning principals through the content and the opportunity to network with other principals. These conferences provide an excellent opportunity for beginning principals to “bounce ideas off each other” (Grahame) and to build relationships with other principals. Grahame shared:

The AHISA (Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia) conferences, the new principals one was great and was in Canberra. Then their annual retreat at Healesville was terrific. They’re really useful for me, just talking to other principals about things that they’re doing and their experiences. I find them very useful and my mentor was at both of them so I had a lot of time to sit with him and talk to him about things, plus other people as well. They were all very good.

Mixing with and hearing the stories from other principals can also be encouraging as it can normalise the challenges and stresses the beginning principal is facing. Although beginning principals would know that their struggles are not unique to themselves and their school, it would still be heartening to hear of how other principals have struggled and survived these struggles. In commenting on a new principal’s conference, Mark shared this poignant reflection:

The biggest thing I got out of it was that they were just as human as I am and experiencing the strain, the same struggles and anxiety as I am. I wasn’t
any less capable than they were, so I think in that sense it sort of made me feel like they’re as human. They are human [laughs].

Associations can also help to create networks of principals which can provide an opportunity to develop friendships. A consistent observation made in the interviews was the importance of these friendships and networks of principals. Grahame commented on this aspect of networking; “I have also got a good network of friends who are principals and, also, I am involved in three or four networks of principals and there are plenty of people there I can ring if I need to”. As research has identified that beginning principals may feel isolated and lonely (Earley et al., 2013; Hobson et al., 2003; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006), these relationships can play a crucial role in helping the beginning principal to start well. In commenting on the support he had received from a network of other Independent principals in the same region, Michael commented:

It was really nice to feel part of a group, because it is a lonely existence, really. I mean, it is and isn’t but you can’t really have any friends on your staff; you can’t. You have to form that outside and I think that other principals are probably people who I would say are more likely to be called friends really. That has made it really helpful.

Helping beginning principals to find mentors

In this section, the role of associations in helping beginning principals to link with a mentor or a coach will be highlighted while the benefits of mentoring per se will be discussed more fully in the following section. Commenting on her state independent school association, Ruth a Phase Two principal commented, “What they do very well, when you are a new principal, they give you a coach. I have a coach and this lady is a very, very experienced principal”. Often mentors are allocated from outside the geographical area in which the beginning principal is situated. Other local principals may be more guarded about sharing their practices and experiences because of the competitive aspect of independent schooling and so as, Helen commented it is good to have “[S]omeone you can go to that doesn’t see you as a competitor and is prepared to share”.

The beginning principals overwhelmingly had positive things to say about how associations have helped them to start well. These associations can help to unite and
Mentoring and support from other principals

Mentoring can play a vital role in the support of the beginning principal. It provides a supporting relationship which can help the beginning principal work through various personal and job related challenges. All of the Phase Three group of beginning principals had linked with one or two other principals in a mentoring relationship or had developed a close supportive relationship with a small number of “mentor type peers”. (Brendon). These connections had been facilitated by various associations and / or through their existing network of contacts and friends. It was evident through the interviews that these mentors / friends played a vital role in helping the principal to start well. As principals, these individuals could understand the nature of the challenges of the job. As Paul shared, “there are few people who know what the job looks like, what the opportunities in it are, and can sympathise with you on the whole pressure of it”.

Apart from support and advice, mentors can also challenge the thinking and decision making processes of the beginning principal to help them to grow in their leadership abilities. In sharing about one of his mentors Mark commented “[H]e really challenges ideas and assumptions and so every time I walk away from conversations with him, I’ve got something more to run with”. It was also quite prevalent that the beginning principals had developed mentoring or support relationships with a number of other principals. Mark went on to talk about another more experienced principal that he appreciated who had “been in education for forty years and at the top for a long time."
He is that sort of elder type figure that I want to be able to draw on in that mature experience perspective”.

The interviews demonstrated the great value of mentoring in terms of support and professional growth. Established principals can help the beginning principal with difficult decisions and in times of frustration as Sandra commented:

So, there has been, on a day where things have felt pretty miserable ... I’ve shot off an email going, ‘don’t you just love it when’ and literally every time I get a phone call. You know, it is straight on; ‘okay what are you going to do about it?’ It’s like; you know I just needed to have a whinge today.

This sharing with an outside person who will keep the matters confidential gives the beginning principal the opportunity to vent frustrations and share concerns. Sometimes it is not appropriate for them to vent with their executive leadership team or the board as the frustration could concern these two groups. Helen, in reflecting on her mentor and her professional friends, shared the reassurance that having this small group of resource people had given her; “[S]o, that gives me confidence. Then I can get on with unpacking what’s happening without necessarily thinking that I’ve got to solve it all myself”.

**Concluding remarks**

Although there are many things that influence the strong start of a beginning principal, this study highlighted five significant themes. Beginning principals are helped to start well in their roles by having exposure and participatory experiences in the new school. It is through these experiences they begin to form relationships with members of the new school community. By having some familiarisation with the new school, the transition into the role becomes much smoother enabling the beginning principal to start well. There is an opportunity here for schools that are in the process of welcoming a beginning or established principal, to maximise the value of this pre-commencement period by planning for this period to be as productive as possible.

Helping beginning principals to start well also involves planning and resourcing a thorough induction process. The data highlighted the frustration experienced by
beginning principals when these practical induction processes were absent. In coming into a new school there is a lot to learn about the facilities and organisation. Having some staff available in the principal’s period of setting up will help them to become familiar with the new school setting. The data also highlighted the value of the general and formal welcoming of the beginning principal. Through these opportunities the school can demonstrate its warm welcome to the principal and his / her family and herald the commencement of an new chapter in the life of the school.

To start well beginning principals will need personal support. The data also highlighted the role that the school board can play in showing interest and support in the progress of the beginning principal especially in the crucial first weeks in the role. Beginning principals were also shown to greatly appreciate help and support from outside of the school context through independent school organisations and the friendship and mentoring of other principals. Through the input and support from these avenues the beginning principal can be helped as they navigate through the challenges of starting well.

In the following chapter I will examine the results relating to the major challenges faced by the beginning principals in this study.
Chapter 7 — The main challenges faced by beginning principals

The literature concerning the experiences of school principals is saturated with the theme that being a principal is an extremely demanding role. The demanding nature of the role is universally accepted and appears in almost every article that is written on this topic. Research in the past has attempted to identify the key components of the role which makes it so demanding and has also looked at the commonalities of challenges faced by beginning principals. In this study I have endeavoured to add to the understanding of these challenges by looking at a group which has largely been unresearched. This chapter will look at the main challenges faced by beginning principals of independent schools in Australia.

This study yielded a great amount of data regarding this theme. The participants were very open in sharing their challenges and struggles. The Phase Three participants were asked to share the challenges they were facing in the pre-commencement interview and in the four interviews throughout the year. The Phase Two principals were asked about the main challenges they had faced in their interview and the survey respondents were asked to rate 51 items in terms of the degree of challenge they had experienced.

To present a coherent and representative overview of the challenges faced by the participants in the study is a challenge in itself. The data yielded a great diversity of challenges and a sense of variability. The diversity and volume of challenges was reflected in a comment made by one of the Phase Two principals.

When you start talking to a principal about challenges you can talk an entire day. (Ruth)

Apart from the diversity of the types of challenges, the comments of the beginning principals also revealed a sense of variability. Paul alluded to this in the following comment when referring to the questions about the major challenges he was facing.

They’re not actually that easy to respond to in that it’s sort of all over the place and it depends on which day you ask the question as to what the responses are.
This variability in the challenges faced by each principal in the study during the year demonstrated that many of the challenges faced by beginning principals reflect both the context of their school and what is happening for them at the time.

Overall, despite the variety and variability of the challenges faced by the Phase Three principals, five main challenges clearly emerged which reflected their common experience and struggle of being a beginning principal. This chapter will focus on reporting and discussing these challenges. The challenges reported by the Phase Two principals and the survey respondents will also be integrated into the discussion. From the experiences of the Phase Three principals, five main areas of challenge emerged clearly from the data. They were:

- the intensity of the role;
- staffing issues and the development of a strong executive team;
- understanding the culture of the school community and building positive relationships;
- enrolments and finances; and,
- dealing with critical incidents.

I will now expand on these challenges. The overarching challenge reported by all Phase Three and Phase Two participants concerned the intensity of the role of principal. In the following section this theme and the subthemes which contribute to the overall intensity of the role are examined.
The intensity of the role

The data showed that the greatest challenge of being a beginning principal is coping with the intense nature of the job. Being a principal is an extremely demanding and all-consuming task. All of the Phase Three and two beginning principals reported on this intensity, as well as it emerging as the highest rated source of challenge in the survey. The data showed that this overall intensity is produced by a combination of factors. The main themes that emerged to describe the nature of this intensity were the demanding workload, the weight of responsibility and the challenge of becoming the senior public figure leader. In this section I will expand on these themes and also look at some of the personal consequences reported by the participants as a result of the intensity of the role.

The demanding workload

Being a school principal comes with a huge and demanding workload. The principal is required to attend, respond to, and to think about a plethora of activities which represent the multifaceted nature of school leadership. This workload is both emotionally and physically demanding and requires the principal to work long hours (Lovely, 2004). Workload can be described by the amount and range of work, the nature of the work and the time required to do the work. In the following section these will be examined.

The amount and range of work

The workload of a principal is both greatly varied and voluminous (Peterson, 2001; Samuels, 2008) and, as noted previously, all of the Phase Three principals commented on the challenging nature of the variety and amount of work. Sandra summed it up well when she commented that there were “10,000 different things” in her head at “one
The daily work flow can also move quickly between completely different types of activities and issues to deal with leading to many beginning principals being overwhelmed with the volume and pace of work (Sackney & Walker, 2006; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). The “breadth” of activities was reflected in comments made by Brendon.

I work reasonably quickly but it’s the breadth of things … You might go from a situation with an individual who has a particularly stressful situation or set of circumstances; you’re trying to sort that out with them which may be quite an emotional situation. Then you go to the other extreme within a minute; that meeting concludes then something totally different. You’ve got to suddenly switch thinking to a totally different paradigm. Sometimes you don’t have any notice. It’s better if you can prepare yourself for the next meeting but sometimes it’s just not possible. You’ve got to try and understand very quickly, what the next context and subject matter is and switch. Yeah it’s an interesting challenge.

Similarly, Helen gave a descriptive sample of the range of issues that a principal can encounter. I include this quote to further paint a picture of the incredible diversity of issues faced by beginning principals.

..the kid who has to get suspended, the parent who’s caused trouble, the kid that has exposed himself, the one that rings in and sends the school into lockdown because he has done something on the switchboard that says, I’ve started a fire. It’s all that sort of stuff. The kid who is on suicide watch, the parent who is going to blow the wife’s brain out because she’s been able to take the child away… you’re dealing with all of that every day. That’s not even to come across the natural things that happen. High wind alerts and because we’re covered by natural fauna and flora, you need to say right, no kids on the oval, no this, no that [laughs]. Then you’re running a father’s day breakfast and a music showcase and a parent information evening and parent teacher interview… it all happens non-stop.
These thoughts on the breadth of the role were also reflected in all of the interviews with the Phase Two principals as they shared their experiences of working in so many facets of school life.

I think the breadth and the scope of the job, I don’t think anybody can prepare you for that; when you actually get into the position it is so much broader than you could ever imagine and you’re expected to be an expert on anything from building through to education. It’s just so broad and I find that has been very challenging. (Margaret)

The amount and range of work that the beginning principal was required to do was a major aspect of the intensity of the role. This finding was also evident in the survey results. The ratings for all of the 51 items can be found in appendix D. The highest rated challenges all concerned some facet of the workload with the highest rated challenge being specifically “managing workload”.

This result is also consistent with other research which indicates that beginning principals can feel very challenged by the huge demands placed on them (Male, 2006) and the volume, diversity and unpredictable nature of their work (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Longitudinal research has identified the quantity of the work as being the greatest source of stress for Australian principals and deputies (Riley, 2014a) and that the workload of principals is significantly higher than that of the general population (Riley, 2014b). Although the ranking of this challenge in research of beginning principals varies slightly, it does feature strongly in most research (Earley et al., 2013; Gentilucci et al., 2013; Hobson et al., 2003; Webber, Scott, & Scott, 2014; Woodruff & Kowalski, 2010). It is not just the level of the workload but also the nature of that work the beginning principals found challenging.

**The emotional and physical nature of the work**

The intensity of the role is also brought about by the emotional and physical nature of the role. In the previous comments by Brendon and Helen the activities and occurrences they mentioned all contained some level of emotional and physical engagement. The data clearly showed that seven out of the eight Phase Three beginning principals reported on how the emotional and physical demands presented a significant challenge for them in their first year in the role.
Being a beginning principal involved many challenges that were emotionally and physically draining. As Mark commented “I don’t think you can prepare for the emotional side of it.” Many of the issues related to problems with and decisions about staff and students had a strong emotional component to them. Some of the more serious issues that the principal can face can have a large emotional toll. Sandra shared how coming into contact with serious child safety issues and being exposed to the sadness and struggles that students faced was emotionally demanding.

For me, that was just a world I have never lived in. I think that really hit me emotionally, where you go home and you hug your own kids. I just wanted to go home and sit with the dogs and the kids. No one really knew why I was home early that day. Again I can't share that with anybody. The teacher knows a little bit but I have got to hold that. I think that is sometimes a big stress, personally, where you really are genuinely concerned for the welfare of a child. I certainly have never had experience personally or professionally with that. That has probably been my heartache this year. That certainly wasn’t on the job description.

As reflected in her comments, coming into an awareness of serious issues in the lives of students was emotionally challenging, stressful and her heartache for the year. The emotionally challenging aspect of the work also featured in the Phase Two group and is summarised well by comments made by Ruth which add the challenges of dealing with negativity and the constant exposure to sadness and hurt.

This job can destroy a person that doesn’t have this steel in them, you know? You are a beating bag, all the time. The amount of negative thoughts, happenings that are poured on you every day, you are just drenched with unhappiness, with hurt… It’s very draining emotionally.

As well as sadness and concern, the nature of the work of principals can also cause a great sense of stress. Paul commented on the toll of the emotional strain possibly leading to burnout; “I think burn out can actually come from emotional anxiety and strain as much as the workload”. Ruth, a Phase Two principal, commented on the overwhelming nature of the stress.
Stress is just immense, it’s just sickening sometimes, it’s just one of the moments when you cannot breathe because it’s so stressful.

As well as being emotionally draining, the role of principal is also physically challenging. The term “physicality” was used by Brendon to reflect the physical expenditure required for the principal to be involved in a never ending involvement in a wide range of activities. The following comments by Sandra exemplify this aspect of being a principal and describe it as “another intensity”.

I was in an assistant principal role and I worked really hard and really long hours. I think the surprise was I knew I was a hard worker, but the type of work I am doing now requires a different endurance. That’s probably what surprised me, because if you’d said to me that I’d have meetings back to back all day that would never have worried me. I was able to manage that and do a lot of my paperwork at home and things like that. Although I am always back to back, there are still lots of other things that I want to be able to do. I have got to be walking around the whole campus so that I am seen. I just think that I was a bit surprised that I didn’t have the endurance. It is not the same endurance.. Yeah, resilience and endurance; a different endurance level now.

The term “different endurance” is important to consider as, initially, the physicality of the role left Sandra “absolutely exhausted” although she had been in a high pressure assistant principal role and was used to working long hours. There are long hours required to fulfil the role of principal but, as the next section will explore, it’s more than the long work hours that makes the role intense and demanding.

Long work hours without a sense of completion

It was not surprising to find that the beginning principals in the study were working long hours. The long hours worked by principals is consistently found in research findings both here in Australia and internationally (MacBeath, 2011; Walker, 2009). As Helen commented; “[I]t’s relentless. It’s impossible to do for me, in less than six days a week”. Interestingly, this study found that the reality of working long hours was not the most challenging aspect of their experience. In the next section I will discuss the data
that indicated it was the demanding and unfinished nature of the work rather than the hours worked that was the greatest concern for the beginning principals.

The data showed that the long work hours were not, in themselves, the greatest concern for seven out of the eight Phase Three group. As indicated in Chapter 4, most of the Phase Three group had felt that their previous leadership positions had introduced them to long work hours. When commenting on whether the workload was concerning him, Michael shared that he accepted that the role required a total commitment of himself.

Look, no, not really. I might say I’m a workaholic. Education is my life, which sounds a bit weird, I know. I’m used to almost devoting your whole life to a school and not just the giving of one’s time, but giving of one’s self. So, I am very happy with that. That is my identity. That’s my way of doing things. So, no, it’s not a concern for me.

The challenge of the long work hours was centred more on the demanding nature of the work and the frustration that, even with the long hours, the work could not be completed.

I get to school at quarter past six in the morning, I leave at quarter past six at night time; I do that every day unless I’ve got a night function at school. I can't dedicate much more time to it and I’m never ahead of the game. (Paul)

A comment by a Phase Two principal Susan, highlights that it is the un-ending nature of the job and the overall demands rather than the long work hours that are the most challenging.

A school like this I’m doing about 70-75 hours a week. It’s not overly sustainable I don’t think for a long, long period of time. Having said that, I quite enjoy the hours I do do, and I like to work. I’m okay to work 75 hours a week if I think I could sort of complete the work, but I have over 700 emails sitting in my inbox. I’ve read them all – and I trash and delete as I go – so that’s 700 that I’ve had to keep in order to either remind me to do something; or I’ve got to ask a question. I think it’s a simplistic view to talk about hours because there are a lot of hours in the job, but you can’t complete it within those hours. So if I could go home and say “I’ve done 70
hours this week, but I’m up-to-date with my email, I’m up-to-date with this, I’ve done the reading, I’ve been to all of these events, fantastic”, I think that would be much more do-able.

There a number of issues raised in these comments by Susan. First, she is working 70-75 hours each week. Second, she would be agreeable to work these hours if there was a sense of completion to the work-week in working those hours. This sentiment was also shared by one of the survey respondents. “The long hours, the constant interruptions and not having time to do all that needs to be done.” Third, the comment regarding emails reflects the huge volume of emails that are received by principals but also that there were 700 emails that had been read by her and represented ongoing issues or items for further reference, attention and decision making. Fourth, Susan also alludes to the unsustainability of working these hours. The unsustainability of the work hours were a major concern to one of the Phase Three and three of the Phase Two participants.

Andrew, a Phase Three principal, did share his concerns about the long hours without adequate time off and his concerns about the sustainability of these hours:

That will be fourteen weeks straight at work; perhaps somewhere between sixty five and seventy hours a week. So there have been some public holidays that I have worked. I need to take a break for personal health and also for family relationships and the like. I think for me, personally, workload issues are a significant issue this term. The workload is not sustainable.

A real concern over sustainability of the work hours was also reported by two in the Phase Two group. Terri, who reported a regular working week of 80 hours shared:

I generally work from eight till midnight or one o’clock every night, at home, to do the admin I don’t get done here, but I think that’s pretty standard.. I think I’ve had three days off this year.. I couldn’t do another year like this.

Similarly, Elizabeth commented, “Yeah, I’d be hard pressed to get it lower than 70. I can’t maintain it at this level”. The long work hours were also reflected in the survey respondents with the mean reported work hours being 62.4 with a standard deviation of
8.9. One of the survey respondents commented; “I wouldn’t want to do anything else, I would just like to do it for 10 hours less each week”.

Even though the work hours weren’t the major challenge for seven out of the eight Phase Three group this did not mean they weren’t aware of and concerned with some of the negative impact on themselves and their families from working those long hours. Webber, Scott, et al. (2014) found that developing a work / life balance was the most challenging aspect of being a beginning principal.

In summary, the Phase Three principals were all working long hours. Although these hours had potential negative impacts on their wellbeing, as well as their personal and family lives, the group were prepared to work these hours. The challenge was found more with the intensity of the workload and the feeling that the “job is never done”. It is also important to note that three out of the sixteen beginning principals in the Phase Two and Three groups expressed serious concerns about their ability to sustain these work hours into the future. Because I am a psychologist, these results have raised some concerns which I will explore in the next section.

**Some concerns raised by these findings**

As the long hours worked by principals is well established in the literature, it does raise three concerns which warrant comment. First, there seems to be a sense of normalisation of very long work hours. This means the principals accept that they will need to work these hours if they are to be in the role of principal. More research needs to be undertaken to look at the effects of the normalisation of long hours and the workload of principals. I suggest that a sense of acceptance by principals and their boards that long work hours and high workload are “par for the course”, may discourage initiatives into reducing workload and hours being developed. Herein also lies a dilemma for school boards, as if they employ and are responsible for the welfare of someone to do a job that is “too big for one person” (Grubb & Flessa, 2006, p. 535), how can they fully discharge their duty of care of this employee. Certainly this demands more investigation and boards could be encouraged to set up systems to monitor and respond to the physical and psychological needs of principals.

Another offshoot of this possible normalisation is the question of how this acceptance of long work hours influences the principal’s expectations of other staff or how their
expectations are perceived by staff. Helen commented on her awareness of this as she didn’t want her staff to feel they needed to work the hours she did. When commenting on her work hours impacting on others she said:

I know it is not normal and I don’t want them to think that that is what I am expecting. We need to find a balance and for them to understand that I survive on five hours of sleep and I am fine. When they get emails at four thirty in the morning, they might think, ‘Oh my god’. That’s not what I am expecting.

Helen’s awareness of this issue, in reality, might not translate into the staff not feeling challenged by her long work hours. Clearly Helen, like many of the beginning principals, has a high capacity for working long hours, but how their work habits influence others around them amongst the school staff would be worthwhile investigate further.

The second concern I have is that, although most of the beginning principals accepted the long work hours and displayed a personal capacity to maintain them, this does not mean that these hours would not lead to a deleterious impact on their wellbeing and personal relationships in the future. There have been numerous studies conducted which examine the negative effects of excessive work hours on health, psychological wellbeing and personal relationships (Bannai & Tamakoshi, 2014; Caruso, 2006; Haines, Marchand, Genin, & Rousseau, 2012). Research in Australia has also demonstrated that the high work demands placed on principals is having a deleterious effect on their wellbeing (Riley, 2014b). There is a difficulty in defining the boundaries of excessive workload and work hours as it is influenced by cultural and personal factors. Bell, Otterbach, and Sousa-Poza (2011) refer to a European Parliament standard which considered work weeks which were over 48 hours in a given 7 day period to be detrimental to health. When we see the work hours reported in this study, the hours are significantly higher than this standard.

The effect of long work hours is also multiplied if the individual finds it difficult to detach from work or “switch off” and recharge when not working (Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2010). The term “time poverty” has been used to describe individuals who do not have enough time to become involved in activities outside of
their work life which would enhance their sense of wellbeing (Kalenkoski, Hamrick, & Andrews, 2011). More research is needed to thoroughly examine the impact of these work hours on both beginning principals and their families in terms of psychological wellbeing, health and the quality of family relationships.

The third area of concern for me is the three principals (in the Phase Two and Three groups) who had expressed significant concern over the sustainability of these long hours. With the hours they were working ranging from 70-80 per week, they had already realised that these hours could not be maintained. There is a real risk that, if their struggle with the work hours isn’t addressed and systems put into place to help them with their workload, over time this could lead to burnout. Burnout is a condition of physical and emotional exhaustion that can result from extended exposure to job stressors and long hours with little time to recover (Bagi, 2013; Embriaco, Papazian, Kentish-Barnes, Pochard, & Azoulay, 2007; Hudson, 2005; Pranjic, Nuhbegovic, Brekalo-Lazarevic, & Kurtic, 2012). Psychological literature suggests there are personality traits that can increase the person’s risk of burning out (Ghorpade, Lackritz, & Singh, 2007; Gustafsson, Persson, Erikson, Norberg, & Standberg, 2009), and so it is reasonable to assert that some beginning principals may be more prone to burnout than others.

In addition to the emotionally and physically demanding workload and the long work hours, principals may also be susceptible to burnout resulting from a blurring of their sense of personal identity with their role identity (Casserley & Megginson, 2009). Although needing more clarification the statement made by Michael may reflect this type of identity blurring. In referring to the all-consuming nature of the work, Michael reported; “So, I am very happy with that. That is my identity.” Also, it is not only those who struggle with workload that may burnout as sometimes those who are very successful and confident in their work can be insidiously worn down by the workload over time (Karl & Fischer, 2013).

Another factor contributing to the intensity of the role experienced by the beginning principals was the great weight of responsibility they felt.
The weight of responsibility

The data showed that a contributing factor to the intensity of the role is the huge sense of responsibility that comes with being a beginning principal. Although all of the Phase Three principals supported and practiced some form of distributed leadership, there was still a very strong sense of the “buck stops with me” and they were sometimes expected to take responsibility for decision making in areas in which they did not have expertise.

In commenting on his first executive leadership team meeting, Paul shared the impact of this sense of responsibility; “you sit at the top of the table and there’s this overwhelming reality that everything rests on your shoulders”. Although in past leadership positions the beginning principals have been a part of difficult decision making, once in the role they are the ones ultimately responsible for the decisions, as Mark shared:

One other principal said to me, ‘When you’re the one loading the gun, it is different to the one who pulls the trigger’. So there is a whole level of responsibility and isolation that comes with making that final decision.

Although responsibilities and decision making may be divested to other leaders in the school, if problems develop, the principal will still be the one who will have to take ultimate responsibility. It is the challenge of feeling responsible for the things that happen in such a large community of people that can add extra pressure on the beginning principal.

I think that the biggest challenge is everything; the “buck stops with you” with everything. So, no matter what is happening across the whole school, if something goes wrong it’s going to impact on you as a principal. I think the biggest challenge is having a good overall oversight of the entire school, and this is a school with three campuses. I knew it would be hard. I mean, it’s just that you’ve got the weight of the world on your shoulder sometimes and you worry about things and how things are going to work out. (Grahame)

These comments by Grahame illustrate the challenge of the weight of responsibility and how it contributes to the overall intensity of the job. The challenge of the weight of responsibility was also shared by three out of the eight Phase Two groups with Ruth and Terri both commenting on the buck stopping with them. Greg also shared:
There is constant pressure that’s always there. You are the one that’s responsible in the end for the final decision, and it’s relentless.

The other challenge of responsibility stemmed from beginning principals needing to make decisions about areas in which they didn’t have expertise. One of these areas can be building projects. Mark shared that it had been challenging for him to work through a long term building plan as he didn’t feel he had the qualifications to do such a task. The following comments illustrate the challenge of a having to make decisions in a field very different from the beginning principal’s educational background and experience. Paul commented on the challenge of the “learning curve” of leading building projects:

You’re an English teacher with a degree in Shakespeare and you’re getting a building and putting it over there because that’s where you think it should go. And then afterwards, I walked home and thought, ‘Crikey, I just moved a building’.

This deep sense of responsibility felt by beginning principals was also the major challenge found by research examining the challenges faced by beginning primary school principals in Chicago. Spillane and Lee (2014, p. 444) found:

With their sense of ultimate responsibility came increased stress, a constant alertness to what might go wrong, and an inability to leave the job behind even on weekends. This stress was manifest in novices’ reports of things such as sleep loss, physical exhaustion, frustration, nervousness, and constant worrying.

This experience of a sense of ultimate responsibility was a significant challenge to the beginning principals in the study, particularly in the first three months, as the weight of this responsibility came as a real shock. Once again this raises a concern which warrants more attention.

A concern raised by these findings
I believe there should be some concern that, despite efforts to decentralise and distribute leadership in schools, this has not necessarily led to a lessened sense of ultimate responsibility in beginning principals. In term three, all of the Phase Three group of principals were asked about their views on, and the benefits of, distributed leadership
within their school. All spoke favourably about the importance of distributed leadership and that it can ease the pressure on the principal. Through various applications of distributed or shared leadership, responsibilities can be shared with other leaders and individuals within the school context (Spillane, 2005). However, in light of the results of this study and the findings by Spillane and Lee (2014), more research is warranted, examining whether distributed or shared models of leadership actually reduce the principal’s sense of responsibility. If the burden of responsibility still falls primarily onto the principal’s shoulders structurally and legally, then research could be carried out to determine what changes could be made to lessen this sense of ultimate responsibility for the beginning principal.

Adding to the intensity of the role is the challenging nature of being in a public senior leadership role. In the following section I will focus on this challenge and its components and consequences.

**Becoming a senior public figure leader**

Stepping into a senior leadership role which is very visible to the school community and the outside world can be a challenging experience. The Phase Three principals shared their challenges in the areas of redefining themselves as a senior leader of a large community, the public nature of the role and the professional isolation and loneliness they had experienced.

**The challenge of becoming the senior leader of a large community**

To become a senior leader involves more than accepting a position and occupying an office as the transition represents a journey in which the beginning principal redefines themselves and their leadership style (Cheung & Walker, 2006). Grahame called this transition in adjusting to the role of principal, a “change of mindset”. He commented; “You’re the leader of the community. You’re the leader of this organisation and the implications that go with that”. Mark commented on this same process of redefining himself not just as a leader in the school but also regarding his place in “society”. Michael too, commented on his surprise at the realisation of the size of the community the school had an impact with; “[I]n a community like this, you’ve got four thousand people if you count all the parents and students up; it’s a lot of people”.

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An extra challenge school principals have when compared to CEOs and corporate leaders is that they need to be organisational and educational leaders. This adds another level of intensity and complexity to the role. Susan, a Phase Two principal of a large urban school, commented on her observation that the expectations made of principals especially of fee paying schools have actually increased over time despite many years of discussion about making the role more realistic. She poignantly shares the balancing act that principals have as they demonstrate organisational and educational leadership of a large organisation and community:

I think the biggest challenge – is as a leader you’re like a CEO. It’s a 26 million dollar business; you’re running the business. You have got all the things that happen when you’re a CEO, but as a principal you’ve actually got another form of leadership; so if you’re doing transformational leadership or whatever; but you’ve got something called instructional leadership. I’m meant to lead the education process in this school.

Susan went on to make the valid point that CEOs of many organisations are not necessarily required to be a leader in a specific field whereas principals must be educators and are expected to lead the pedagogical development of their schools. This duel aspect of principalship is well documented and creates another level of challenge for the beginning principal as they are expected to show instructional and transformation leadership (Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Marks & Printy, 2003; Robinson, 2010). This dual emphasis could also be extended to include a third component, that of managerial leadership (Valentine & Prater, 2011). It is these additional facets to the leadership of the beginning principal that can be challenging to achieve and hold in balance. Susan commented on her experiences; “[T]he biggest challenge for me is combining all that normal CEO stuff plus the instructional leadership; and that is the biggest challenge” These sentiments were repeated by other Phase Two principals.

Another challenge is the public nature of the role. Four of the eight Phase Three principals made specific comments about the challenges of being in the public view. As Michael talked about being “looked at and pointed at” at a school fair early in the year, he went on to make the point that the principal is “seen not so much as a person anymore as a figure”. Helen also commented on the cost and pressure of being in the public “office” of principal:
Everything is public. I guess had you had a more anonymous job, you’d be able to deal with things differently. Especially, when I have just been put up as a particular package. You need to protect the integrity of the office because, whether you like it or not, you are a role model and these people bought the package.

The terminology used by Helen and Michael of the principals being seen as a “figure”, “package” or “role model” highlight the public nature of the principals role and the challenges this can bring. Moller (2012, p. 454) refers to this aspect of being a principal as their “public face” where:

He or she is engaged in a public performance before colleagues, parents, students and citizens, and is performing within a role that is in many ways prescribed by the dominant culture and by the organizations for which they work.

Michael’s comments about not being seen as a person but a figure are very insightful. Beginning principals need to work in this public arena sometimes at a cost to their own self-expression. Helen shared the cost of the public face in that personal struggles cannot be expressed authentically:

It’s an interesting one that you face as a leader and particularly as a leader of a school. It has to do with your own private life. Your private life may be falling apart and you cannot show that face.

With the school principal often being regarded as the quintessential face of the school this no doubt, will create another level of pressure for them. Referring back to the concept of emotional labour introduced in Chapter 2, this “public face” of the beginning principal adds to the emotional cost of fulfilling the role in accepted and expected ways (Gallant & Riley, 2013; Hochschild, 2012; Morris & Feldman, 1996; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004).

As well as being under public view and scrutiny, the beginning principals also commented on how this impacted on the way they communicated with others. They reported that they needed to exercise a greater level of awareness and control in the words they used lest their words be taken out of context or acted on in an unintended
way. Paul shared that he felt almost everything he said was taken as a “dictum of law”. Michael, too, shared this pressure to be careful about his words:

You’ve got to be very careful about what you say because even though it’s good to be seen to have a sense of humour and so on, you’ve got to be really careful. You’ll be quoted and misquoted and you’ll just have to accept that. You can at least minimise the chance of it going wrong by being more guarded. Err on the side of being more guarded if you can.

As an added pressure, the nature and impact of the role of principal extends to their spouses conversations as well, as Mark shared:

Even outside of school times, you have to watch what you say. Even my wife does and I have to be careful, unfortunately, about what I tell her, just to protect her so that things don’t sort of come back to haunt us. It’s unfortunate and it’s a very confronting reality. I remember a former principal of mine saying to me that when you get to the position, you actually have less freedom than you did beforehand. They were probably right.

With the taking on of such a public figurehead role, beginning principals need to adjust their sense of identity, be more cognisant of their public image and be circumspect in their conversations. Despite being such a public figure and the leader of a large community, another offshoot of this senior leadership position can often be a sense of social isolation and loneliness.

The sense of professional isolation and loneliness
The nature of a senior leadership role can lead to the beginning principal feeling a sense of professional isolation or loneliness (Izgar, 2009; Skelly, 1996). Despite being surrounded by and interacting with thousands of people, principals can be challenged by the new relationship they have with those around them and the restrictions this brings. Seven out of the eight Phase Three principals commented on the challenge of these feelings of loneliness and social isolation as something that was a part of the acclimatisation to the role. In their interviews, there was certainly a sense that the expression “lonely at the top” (Sandra) was true of their experience with it being quite challenging at times, as Mark shared:
I have had a couple of moments where that sense of feeling has been quite overwhelming … I think probably the most confronting thing of all is; early in term two is just the reality of how isolated you really are in the position.

The challenge brought about by the significant sense of isolation was also mentioned by three out of the eight Phase Two principals. Comments by John, “[I]t’s a very isolated role”, and Ruth “incredibly lonely position”, show the depths of this sensed loneliness. This sense of loneliness comes as a part of the role and not necessarily from being a new person in the school community. Terri, a Phase Two principal who moved into the role after being in the school community for many years shared:

I’ve been here nearly twelve years, so I know the place, but I’ve found the role quite overwhelming at times; and lonely. Very lonely. It can be quite isolated.

These results reflect previous research into the challenges faced by beginning principals as reviewed in Chapter 2 (Earley et al., 2013; Hobson et al., 2003; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). There is a growing general acknowledgement of the sense of loneliness experienced by senior leaders and the possible negative effects of this experience (Saporito, 2012). In the corporate sector, a survey of CEOs revealed that 50% of CEOs reported experiencing loneliness, with first time CEOs being most susceptible to these feelings. Also, nearly 70% of the first time CEOs who were experiencing loneliness reported that it had negative effects on their work performance (RHR International, 2012). Considering that loneliness is a commonly experienced challenge of becoming a principal and that it brings emotional distress as reflected in the comments made by the principals in this study, the question arises regarding how beginning principals can be helped in this area. Certainly beginning principals could be helped by acknowledging this sense of loneliness and seeking support from mentors and others (Hamman, 2013; Saporito, 2012). There is scope for more research which explores the negative effects of professional isolation on the principals well-being and performance and how these feelings can be managed in a constructive way.

In summary, the main challenge faced by the beginning principals in this study was the intensity of the role and workload. This intensity is partly brought about by the huge amount of activities and responsibilities that the beginning principal is required to fulfil.
It would be a tome of work to compile an exhaustive list of all the things a principal is involved in. This can be seen from the list of 51 possible areas of challenge that formed the basis of the survey that was used in Phase One. Then through the interviews at least 30 additional specific areas of challenge were mentioned. Even in adding these two together, these 81 challenges are not an exhaustive list although exhausting to contemplate.

Adding to the weight of the workload is also the great sense of responsibility that the beginning principal must accept from day one. This, coupled with the challenges of becoming a public leader / figurehead, further adds to the intensity of the role. There seems to be a compounding rather than an addition effect of all of these challenges. This finding is consistent with previous research and leads to a future question for research to look at how this intensity can be reduced or principals helped to respond to it in a way that is sustainable and promotes a greater sense of wellbeing.

The second area of challenge reported by the beginning principals in this study concerned dealing with staffing issues and building a strong executive leadership team. I will outline and discuss this in the next section.
Staffing issues and the development of a strong executive team

Beginning principals are required to build healthy relationships with their staff. This involves getting to know them, offering support, working through conflict and managing performance issues regarding their teaching practices. Dealing with staff issues emerged as a major challenge that the beginning principals in this study faced. This theme pervaded all of the interviews as the beginning principals shared various aspects of their struggles with staff members. The most frequent challenge with staff concerned dealing with underperformance as well as a culture of underperformance. Other issues concerned staff members being resistant to change, dealing with conflict amongst staff members, dealing with the stress and issues that staff were facing, and the important quest to develop a strong and effective executive leadership team. In the following sections these issues will be explored in turn.

Working with underperforming staff

Dealing with underperforming staff was a major challenge faced by the beginning principals. Six out the eight Phase Three principals shared their challenges with underperforming staff members at various times throughout the year. Mark shared that this was his major challenge in his first year as principal.

The most ongoing one I’m dealing with that’s difficult is underperforming staff. I think that’s definitely at the top and speaking to other principals in their first year, they would probably say the same.

Although every organisation has to work through the challenge of underperforming staff, it can be extremely challenging for a beginning principal, especially if there hasn’t
been a pre-existing culture of appraisal and the staff have become complacent with respect to their performance. Helen, referred to complacent staff members as being her second biggest challenge of the first year as principal. She commented; “[S]taff who are in their comfort zone. I don’t want to use the word lazy but they are just almost a sheltered workshop”. Andrew also commented on this challenge:

Part of the structural issue is that we haven’t had an appraisal system operating; people aren’t used to being held accountable… I’m hoping to more clearly define to people what excellent teaching looks like in a school context; about getting them to do some self-evaluations and start actually giving them specific criteria to be able to measure themselves up against.

John, a Phase Two principal, commented on the challenge of confronting a “culture of nice” and that contemplating giving more direct evaluative feedback and managing underperformance was “the stuff you lie awake at night and toss and turn on”.

A further aspect of this challenge involves dealing with underperforming leaders within the school. As leaders have a great impact on their teams and the overall effectiveness of the school (Sammons, Gu, Day, & Ko, 2011), the beginning principal needs to respond to any significant performance issues they become aware of.

I’ve got a couple heads of department here that are not, in my mind, doing their job properly. They both know that and I have had very frank conversations with them. I am going through a process to either have them address the areas of issue or move on or move to something else. (Michael)

As well as managing performance, the beginning principals in this study also reported the challenge and frustration of dealing with resistance from staff and conflicts amongst staff members.

**Working with staff members who are resisting change or who are in conflict**

As a beginning principal begins to lead the school into change, it is not uncommon that they will experience some resistance from staff members (Starr, 2011). Michael commented on some people “blocking” or putting up “barriers to change” in a “conservative environment” where “people tend not to like change”. Comments by
Andrew and Helen reflected the frustration of dealing with staff who were passively resisting changes and not speaking openly about their attitudes and concerns.

One of the aspects of managing a team of staff is dealing with the conflicts that occur between staff members. All of the Phase Three principals shared the challenges of dealing with staff in conflict. Sometimes these conflicts are new while other times they reflect a pattern of unhealthy relationships that have not been dealt with in the past. Helen commented on the challenge of “putting bushfires out the whole time” and Michael shared these thoughts on dealing with strained staff relationships:

I find I am always managing people who are struggling or relationships between faculties. Whether that is just because at this stage I'm finding there are things that have just been dysfunctional and haven’t been dealt with and need to be; then in the long term it will settle down and people will still feel much more at ease.

One of the challenges is not only in responding to patterns of unhealthy relationships and attitudes but also guiding the team into a more positive pattern of relating to each other for the future. In commenting on the sometimes “robust” nature of meetings Paul shared:

It takes a while to turn it around into a far more positive view. Generally, they’re fairly – not quite volatile – but fairly opinionated people and negative in the way that they look at things. That’s the work of a few years I think.

Two of the Phase Three principals commented on the challenging process of enterprise bargaining. In particular, Brendon regarded this as the biggest challenge of his first year in terms of the time it absorbed and the angst it created amongst the staff.

It’s taken a long time and it has caused a lot of angst for staff. In our case we are a school within a single SBU (Single Bargaining Unit). We are not part of a network so our teachers are being represented in discussions with management. It becomes us against them in one school rather than some of them from the Anglican school’s network where representatives met
separate to schools and represented all schools. In this case it becomes fairly’ relatively personal; management versus teachers in a sense.

The involvement of unions also was cited by two of the Phase Three principals as adding to the challenge of dealing with staff conflict.

The union comes in here and says that you must consult. I said that I don’t need to consult on matters that have to do with the efficiency and the operations of the school... The union issue; that passive resistance and the ‘just because she wants it, it doesn’t mean she can have it’ approach with the unions.

Building a healthy relationship with the relevant union and being familiar with enterprise bargaining is an important part of the beginning principal’s experience (Robbins & Alvy, 2004).

In reviewing the studies related to the challenges of beginning principals, the challenges of dealing with underperforming staff and staff resisting change or who are in conflict have consistently been found (Earley et al., 2013; Hobson et al., 2003; Webber, Scott, et al., 2014; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). In addition to conflicts and resistance staff members can also face personal challenges which in turn can have an effect on the beginning principal as he / she seeks to provide support to them.

**Responding to the stresses and problems that staff are facing**

In a community of staff which in some schools can be quite large, the beginning principal will also become aware of the stresses and difficulties faced by staff members. Responding to these situations can be quite challenging and emotionally draining. Here are two examples.

The other thing has really been managing staff stress. So, just really digging in deep there and finding out the burdens that staff are feeling and try to hear them and actually take some proactive steps to relieve some of that so they can really focus on their teaching and learning. (Mark)

Staff who have got cancer and somebody with MS and somebody whose husband has had a heart attack and this and that. I am thinking that I seem to
have an unusually high amount of personal issues in a school of this size. (Helen)

Although care giving by the principal can have a real effect on staff morale and performance (Roffey, 2007; Sanzo et al., 2011; van der Vyver, van der Westhuizen, & Meyer, 2014), future research could examine the preparation of beginning principals as caregivers and the emotional impact on them for being actively caring amongst their school staff. In the next section I will examine the challenge that the beginning principals reported in the area of building a stronger executive leadership team.

**Building a strong and effective executive leadership team**

When a beginning principal starts his / her leadership they do so with an existing senior leadership team. As the team leader, they need to build healthy relationships with team members, assess their effectiveness and strengthen the team’s cohesiveness and effectiveness (Lencioni, 2012). Five out of the eight beginning principals shared their challenges with building a strong and effective executive leadership team.

Some of these challenges included concerns with individual team members’ suitability for their roles.

Now we’ve got an executive team that has some people that really aren’t leaders on it. They’re coordinators at best and not doing that very well so we are in a holding pattern with a temporary coordinated structure for this year, which will need to be reset for next year. (Andrew)

Michael shared a number of challenges he had faced with some members of his executive team. He had concerns over the effectiveness of some members of the team and had found some to be resisting initiatives for change.

There are a couple of people there who probably would prefer not to go in some of the directions that I want to take the school. On the executive we’ve got a couple of people who really are quite resistant to some of the ideas of some of the other members of executive. (Michael)

Overall, as Michael looked back over the challenges of his first year, one of his top three challenges was gaining enthusiastic commitment from his leadership team to the
directions in which he and the school board wanted to head in. Adding to this was the challenge of dealing with a bursar who was overstepping his sphere of control:

He is getting into educational decision making when his job is to advise me financially, not even to make financial decisions of a big nature, because I’m the one that makes those. I’ve already spoken and had a critical conversation with him to say that look, as wonderful as you are at your job and he is a brilliant financial manager and a brilliant corporate operator -- his belief, his ideology about education, his belief about the way the school should go is contrary to mine. I can’t have that.

Adding to this was a strained relationship which this executive team member had with the school board leading Michael to feel caught as the “meat in a sandwich”;

There’s tension between the business manager and the chair of council. Of course, they are the two people with whom my relationship is most important. I am in the middle of that so I’ve just got to be careful about how that is managed. That is always the difficult one. That is such an important part of your support system, the council and the Board. If there are some strains in relations, I guess that is another dynamic. It is not necessarily you, but it is another member of your leadership too, so that is a very meat in a sandwich sort of position to be in. (Michael)

Two of the principals from both Phase Two and Three groups talked about a concept which is vital to understanding the relationship between the beginning principal and his / her executive leadership team. There is a sense that the principal can’t really be comfortable with their team when they have doubts about the quality of those already in it or have had the chance to appoint their own team members. As Michael shared, “[I]t’s not your school really, until you appoint your own senior management team and executive team.” Similarly, John from the Phase Two group shared this same challenge.

Staff management is the big one. It’s particularly the executive staff leadership. [sigh] You step into a team that you haven’t built, but they’re the ones that you have to work with while trying to establish a relationship, trying to work out where people’s respective strengths and weaknesses are; trying to come to understand the various histories and networks and
connections that are there in the background. It takes time to get your head into that head-space. And then, the process of helping people to improve their practice. That’s an area that I don’t think I was particularly well prepared for prior to; but I can see that’s the main game; helping the leaders to lead better is the main game.

If the beginning principal has concerns over the suitability of certain members of the team, then they have an additional challenge of deciding how and when to act on these concerns. The imperative to act is predicated by the impact of underperforming leaders in the overall organisation’s growth and development. For Paul, this decision and action were taken within the first year, as he decided to ask all senior staff to re-apply for their jobs.

I’m at an interesting point at the moment where I’ve told all of my senior staff their jobs are up for grabs from other people. So, a bit of nervousness is there amongst the senior staff and of course that’s potentially an unsettling move. I guess my job is to make sure that I’ve got the right people doing the right job.

To help beginning principals face the challenge of building a strong leadership team, more research and practical applications of current knowledge is needed. Research carried out in the corporate sector showed new CEOs are often hesitant to make changes to their senior leadership team and often simply accept that they will continue to lead the same team in the same way as has been done previously (Wageman et al., 2008). Hambrick (1995, p. 111) identified the top five issues related to the CEO’s concerns with their senior leadership team as being that of; “inadequate capabilities of a single executive, a common shortcoming of several members of the whole team, harmful internal rivalries, groupthink (or excessive like-mindedness), and fragmentation”. Lencioni (2012) argued that, although the importance of building a strong and cohesive leadership team is rarely disputed, few organisations invest enough time and effort into actually building strong teams. Clearly, beginning principals would benefit from preparation and training in this area. They would also benefit from having the tools and methodologies that are useful for building stronger teams.
The first year of a beginning principal’s life involves their socialisation and assimilation into the new school community. In this section I have examined the challenges that the beginning principals faced with their staff. In the following section I will examine the challenge that the beginning principal has as a “newcomer” in understanding the culture of the school and building healthy relationships with the wider school community.

Understanding the culture of the school community and building positive relationships

The data showed that, for a beginning principal one of the biggest challenges is to become familiar with the school’s culture and to establish and maintain positive relationships with staff, students and parents. While all of the six Phase Three principals who were starting in a new school commented on these challenges, three rated this aspect of familiarisation and relationship-building as being in the top three challenges of the year. This result is not unexpected as it logically follows that a principal’s ability to understand and work positively with members of the school community will be a vital element of their ability to lead that community effectively. The Phase Three principals reported on the challenges of understanding the nature of the culture of the school, the intricacy of relationships that existed in the school and the building and maintaining of positive relationships within the new school community.

One of the greatest challenges for beginning principals is to come to understand the nature of the culture and the intricate web of relationships that exist within the school. As Paul commented, this had been the greatest challenge of his first year in the role:

In the broad sense, it is learning a new community and I guess a new culture and being able to negotiate the nuances of that community. In a smaller
community like this too, when you step it’s very hard not to step on some toes.

Michael also rated this as the main challenge for the first year.

I guess I’d say firstly the - even though I’m good at it - discovery. It takes time to discover the subtleties of relationships between the multitude of people and bodies within such a big organisation. There are so many little subtleties and intricacies that it takes a long time to learn and become aware of. It is a challenge in a place with two hundred staff and sixteen hundred kids; it’s a huge challenge.

From the data this challenge seemed to be more related to the first year of becoming a principal as none of the Phase Two principals shared this challenge in their interviews. It is logical that the peak of this challenge exists in the entry and early socialisation of the beginning principal (Weindling, 2000). Although this challenge is articulated in the literature, there is scope for research looking into how principals can come to an accurate understanding of the school culture and the intricate web of relationships that exist within the school community. Ashton and Duncan (2012) suggest that the beginning principal making time to meet formally and informally with individuals and stakeholder groups is an important way to build a strong connection with the community.

Beginning principals also face the challenge of building and maintaining healthy relationships with members of the school community. In reflecting on the three greatest challenges of the year, Sandra talked about the challenge of maintaining strong relationships with others, particularly the staff members.

Every staff member has given me a hug as I’ve given them their little present. It’s not the most expensive thing, but when you’ve got a hundred and thirty of them, I wanted to symbolise again. So for me, the challenge has been to be consistent and I suppose fair, having the opportunity to speak with everybody, which again is exhausting.

Sandra’s comments show that, while building and maintaining relationships had gone well for her, it had been a challenge that had been tiring. Similarly Michael in the quote
above also shared that, while this was the greatest challenge, it was something he did well.

In this chapter so far, I have outlined the challenges reported by the beginning principals in the areas of the intensity of the role, staffing issues and building strong relationships with the school community. Another challenge faced by the beginning principals was the practical, financial side of leading a school organisation. The following section will examine their experiences in the areas of school enrolments and the financial side of school operations.

Enrolments and finances

Four out of the eight Phase Three principals commented on the ongoing challenges they faced regarding enrolments and their financial impact on the school’s functioning. Enrolments directly impact on the overall financial health of the school, through the fees that are paid and the government support the school receives (Wilkinson et al., 2007). When enrolments are less than targeted, the financial pressures impact on budgeting and sometimes lead to staff restructuring.

Our numbers are down, so I’m in the process of doing some executive restructuring and financial considerations to try and find half a million dollars as well. (Andrew)

The same process needed to be taken at Grahame’s school, which had experienced a decrease in enrolments before his commencement. Although Grahame had worked through a restructuring process, the challenges caused by the unpredictability of enrolments was still a concern to him:
I’ve had about ten students who have left the school or indicated they’re going to leave the school. Everything was going really well up until that point, I was confident with numbers, I was confident with staffing. It’s amazing how quickly things can turn around.

The enrolment numbers affect not only the financial position of the school and its staffing, but also the tone of the school staff. Brendon shared of the “ongoing stress” of enrolments in a small school and the positive effect of gaining ground in this area; “If you can have the enrolments, you’ve got the money and the school becomes more upbeat in terms of its tone and psychology”. Brendon commented that the push to increase enrolments was one of the most challenging aspects of his first year in the role and that, for both him and the board, increasing enrolments had been the top priority.

Reaching and maintaining enrolment targets and working through the budget implications of changes in enrolments has been found in other studies to be a challenge for beginning principals (Earley et al., 2013; Hobson et al., 2003; Nelson, de la Colina, & Boone, 2008; Quong, 2006; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Robbins and Alvy (2004) suggest that beginning principals are often more concerned about the financial budgetary aspects of their role than other areas. Enrolment numbers of a school affect its financial “bottom line”, which in turn influences many aspects of the school’s functioning such as staffing. Restrictions and reductions in school finances will influence the way that the principal staffs and assigns staff to roles (Cavanagh, 2011). Although the challenge of enrolments and budget will be unavoidable for many beginning principals, it is important that any preparation of principals raises their awareness to this challenge and helps beginning principals to understand the dynamics of enrolment numbers and strategies for creating growth in this area.
Working through critical incidents

Unfortunately school communities can at times experience tragedies, crime and sad events. During these critical incidents, principals are expected and required to respond appropriately and guide the school community through the time of distress. In this study, three out of the eight Phase Three principals reported experiencing, and being challenged by, critical events that occurred during their first year as principal. For two of the Phase Three group these incidents posed significant challenges which overshadowed other things that were happening in the school. In the next section I will examine the extremely challenging nature of these critical incidents.

In Sandra’s first year journey she had to deal with the death of one the school’s students and a case of alleged rape of a student.

I had an alleged rape that I had to deal with. For me that was an enormous challenge, because I was challenging myself to make sure the process was right and that I was being caring and doing everything I needed to do from the girl’s point of view. I had to really work hard from the parents’ point of view, but also the institutional. I felt like I was all of that and then the legal side obviously came in. That was an enormous learning opportunity and that was challenging.

Grahame reported feeling good about his first year until unexpectedly he became aware of the arrest of one the staff members. His description of the event and its consequences illustrate the huge impact that critical incidents can have on beginning principals.
I’ve had a critical incident at the school which is the biggest challenge I’ve ever faced. It involves a teacher at our school who has been arrested and so that’s probably going to be the thing that marks my entire year, unfortunately and probably years to come too.

For Grahame, the challenge of dealing with this event made the other challenges of the year pale into insignificance. Not only was it a stressful process but, as Grahame reflected, it would be one that would continue in its repercussions well into the future. He commented on the toll of this incident on his overall wellbeing:

It’s been tough. Probably the last four weeks have been horrendous. It has knocked me around enormously in terms of sleep, in terms of anxiety; I haven’t been exercising anywhere near as much as I was. I really feel beaten around the ears at the moment, I’d have to say.

When asked about his preparation and training to handle such an incident Grahame commented:

Look, I have done a lot of training in that area. It’s when it happens. We enacted a plan straight away. I think we dealt with it as best we could. What you don’t plan for is the emotional hit that comes with it. Whilst you might deal with these things -- we used to have mock scenarios at my previous school. We’d call the executive in and we’d go through them. It’s when you put that emotional overlay and that guilt and all those other things; you can’t prepare for that.

From his comments it becomes apparent that, no matter how thorough and effective the training a beginning principal receives, nothing can totally prepare them for the wave of feelings and thoughts that arrive when they are actually in the situation. His comments also highlight the importance of beginning principals having procedures in place and having worked through possible scenarios. Grahame needed to organise for a psychologist to come in and meet with some of the staff and him.

This incident and how others were reacting to the situation was of great concern to Grahame. In the midst of a strong year and positive start to being a principal, this
incident caused Grahame tremendous angst and caused him to even question why he had taken on the role.

I wake up every morning and think, why did I do this? I had a very good job and I didn’t have to be in charge of the whole school. It’s just been a really negative thing personally, emotionally and physically. Yeah, it’s not been good.

Only two out of the eight beginning principals reported on being seriously affected by critical incidents. Nevertheless, I would argue that critical incidents need to be regarded as one of the greatest challenges faced by beginning principals because of the severity of the impact on them when they do occur. Previous research has identified the challenging nature of critical incidents to beginning principals (Earley et al., 2013; Quong, 2006). The following definition exemplifies the common criteria that are used to define critical incidents.

**Critical Incident** - A crisis event that causes severe impact, such as significant disruption to the school routine, an emergency management situation, loss of a sense of control, or threat to the safety of students and staff. It may be sudden or protracted, extremely dangerous, involve police or emergency services personnel, and generally be outside the normal range of experience or expectation of the people affected. (ACT Government Education and Training, 2013, p. 1)

Some of the types of critical incidents that can occur in schools are the death of students (Balk, Zaengle, & Corr, 2011), sexual abuse of students by teachers (Jaffe et al., 2013) and the suicide of students (Robinson et al., 2011). One of the survey respondents shared; “[T]he death of a staff member engaged in a school activity was without doubt the most challenging time for me and for the school community”. Just these few examples of the types of critical incidents that can occur highlight the extremely traumatic nature of these events and the impact they can have on the school community.

 Principals are aware of their responsibilities to create a safe environment for both students and teachers, and schools are mandated by most educational authorities in Australia to have plans with which the school can respond to and work through critical incidents (O’Brien, Mills, Fraser, & Anderson, 2011). In critical incidents, principals
have the ultimate responsibility to ensure that these plans are adhered to (ACT Government Education and Training, 2013). The school staff and greater community can also benefit greatly from the caring and wise leadership shown by the principal as he / she leads the school through the trauma and consequences generated by such an incident (Hanhimaki & Tirri, 2009). The principal’s role is quite challenging in these situations as they need to deal with students, staff, parents and often the media (Barron Ausbrooks, 2010). Through Facebook and other social media platforms, news of these incidents travels very quickly through the school community which requires the school leadership to manage the “rapidly rising emotions fuelled by new and overwhelming information” (Balk et al., 2011, p. 159).

Although in recent years more attention has been given to studying the emotional aspects of school leadership (Yamamoto, Gardiner, & Tenuto, 2013) there is scope for more research to be carried out, looking at the emotional toll of these incidents on beginning school principals. Critical incidents require wise and caring leadership in which the principal is not only a manager but an active participant in the emotions and grief associated with the incident (Tarrant, 2014). Principals are open to experiencing secondary traumatic stress as they listen and respond to emotionally shocking stories and seek to help traumatised individuals (O'Halloran & Linton, 2000; VanBergeijk & Sarmiento, 2006). Critical incidents can have a traumatising effect on many students, teachers and parents. I recall once being asked as a psychologist to be a support person in a school in which a student had committed suicide. A room had been set up for any students to go to who felt they needed some type of support. In that experience I realised that traumatic events also trigger memories and past experiences for other students and there were a number of students there who were upset about past traumatic events in their lives.

Following on from the finding in this study reported earlier in this chapter of the great sense of responsibility felt by beginning principals, it would follow that these critical incidents would weigh heavily on their hearts and minds especially if there had been some negligence on the school’s part. It would also be valuable to look at the cumulative effect on principals if they experience a number of these critical incidents in succession. The data indicates that, when they occur, critical incidents quickly rise to the top of the list for the challenges of being a principal.
Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have reported on the five main areas of challenge experienced by the beginning principals in this study. Each of the themes covered, in themselves, comprise of many other challenging facets. This study found that the most challenging aspect of being a beginning principal is found in the sheer intensity of the role. This intensity comes as a result of the compounding of many aspects of the role of principal such as the workload, sense of responsibility and the challenges associated with becoming a senior public figure leader.

The second area of challenge reported by the beginning principals concerned their dealings with staff members in a variety of contexts. These ranged from working through performance issues, resistance to change, conflict and adequately caring for staff in the difficulties they were facing. Another important staffing issue was the challenge of building a strong executive leadership team through relationship building, performance evaluation and making changes to the team.

The third area of challenge reported in this chapter was the challenging process of the beginning principal coming to understand the school community and to build and sustain strong relationships within that community. The fourth area examined the practicalities of school functioning with the challenge of enrolments and their effect on the overall financial health of the school. Lastly, the significant impact of critical events on beginning principals was discussed.

In relating these findings to the challenges framework first discussed in Chapter 3 and then incorporated into the survey, Table 7 shows how they can be represented in the three categories of personal, interpersonal and organisational challenges. Originally critical incidents were categorised into the interpersonal category. Although critical incidents involve dealing with many people at a difficult time, in the light of the huge emotional toll that can accompany these incidents, I would suggest that this item be placed in the personal challenge category. I have included the school culture and building relationships challenge into the interpersonal section. The table shows that the top five challenging experiences of the beginning principals in the study represented all of the three main areas.
Table 7  A categorisation of the major challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of challenge</th>
<th>Areas of major challenge</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal challenges</td>
<td>The intensity of the role</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dealing with critical incidents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal challenges</td>
<td>Staffing issues and the development of a strong executive team</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding the culture of the school community and building positive relationship within the school community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisational challenges</td>
<td>Enrolments and finances</td>
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In Chapter 3, possible challenges relating to principalship in an Independent school were identified, namely; the challenges posed by marketisation and competition between schools, the added expectation of faith leadership and governance and issues with the board. These possible challenges merit some comment as they were partially reflected in the data. The issue of marketisation and competition can be linked to the challenge of gaining and maintaining enrolments which occurs in competitive and consumer driven context.

With respect to the issue of faith leadership, the comments shared by the beginning principals were largely positive. Faith leadership was seen as a valued and unique aspect of being a beginning principal of an independent school which is linked to a particular church or denomination. As Michael commented:

    Spiritual leadership of this job is an added dimension that you can’t get in a non-church school, that’s correct. Look, that is part of my life anyway, so that doesn’t hold any fears or anything for me.

Faith leadership was also regarded as being a “good part of the job” (Grahame) and a source of strength and opportunity to exercise pastoral care as reflected in these comments.

    My faith helps me. I am able to pray and reflect deeply for that little person which helps me know that I am not the only one looking out for him. (Sandra)
I suppose in some ways that’s something that I find very exciting about the whole job, is that there is that whole dimension to it, because I love the pastoral side to it. (Margaret)

Only one principal (Andrew), experienced a challenging aspect of faith leadership as he was feeling pressured to attend the church that was associated with the school rather than one which his family felt drawn to. Similarly, Andrew was the only beginning principal in both the Phase Two and Three groups that had found working with the school board problematic, as he struggled with his relationship with the board and particularly with the board chair as previously reported in Chapter 6. Overall, the principals in the study experienced healthy relationships with their board.

The purpose of this study was to highlight the experiences and challenges faced by beginning principals of independent schools in Australia. Having examined the major challenges faced by the beginning principals, in the next chapter I will report on what the beginning principals found to be the most rewarding aspects of the role and what messages the beginning principals wanted to pass on to those who may be considering becoming a principal.
Chapter 8 — Rewarding aspects of being a beginning principal and their messages to aspiring principals

Having examined the challenges of the role in the previous chapter, it is a crucial part of understanding the experiences of beginning principals to outline the enjoyable and appealing aspects of the role. These factors will represent the underlying rewards and joys of the role which have motivated the participants to pursue principalship and will hopefully continue to enthuse and inspire them throughout their careers. The data strongly indicated that, the participants really enjoyed being a beginning principal and spoke highly of the role. The data also showed that the three main areas which they found rewarding were building relationships with students and seeing their development, working with the staff of the school and the ability to make decisions and influence the vision of the school.

In this chapter I will examine these results and compare them with previous research in this area. The Phase Three group were also asked to share some parting messages to aspiring principals at the conclusion of their final interview. Although being a slight detour from the specific research questions being examined, the comments do add some insights into their experiences in their first year and give the participants a voice to speak and provide guidance to aspiring principals. I will also report on these messages and the themes they reflect.

**Rewarding aspects of being a beginning principal**

The fourth research question in this study examined the rewarding aspects of being a beginning principal. The Phase Three principals were asked to comment on the rewards of the role in each of their interviews during their first year in the role. The Phase Two principals were asked to comment on the rewarding aspects of the role as were the survey respondents. Before looking at the specific aspects of the role the principals found rewarding, I will introduce this section by looking at the positive way the participants described their experiences of being a beginning principal.
Being a beginning principal is an enjoyable and rewarding experience

The data showed that the beginning principals really enjoyed their role and found it very rewarding. All of the Phase Three principals spoke enthusiastically about the nature of their role at various times of the year. In sharing some of their comments, I would like to draw attention to the level of enthusiasm with which the principals spoke about their roles as evident in the following excerpts from four out of the eight Phase Three principals:

Is this the best job I’ve ever had? I’d say, Yes it is. I couldn’t be happier. (Michael)

I just love the job. If you said to me today that I could never do this job again, I would be devastated. (Sandra)

The job is fabulous and I am not sorry I took it for a minute … best job in the world. (Helen)

I enjoy every aspect of it because it is dealing with a really wonderful thing, which is learning. Being involved in learning is fabulous. (Brendon)

A similar sentiment was expressed in these comments by the Phase Two group:

I think it’s a great job. (Susan)

I don’t imagine myself doing any other job. I really love this job. (Ruth)

I really enjoy it and I’ve never had a day here – which is pretty amazing considering, you know, the very challenging children that we work with –
I’ve never had a day where I’ve thought, “Oh God, do I have to go to work?”, and so I’m really lucky. (Bronwyn)

The Phase Three principals in particular, were, overall, extremely excited and appreciative of being in the role. Some of the beginning principals commented that the challenging nature of the role contributed to their enjoyment of the role. It is important to note that even though the challenges presented in the previous chapter were, at times, extremely demanding and difficult, these challenges also presented an opportunity for the beginning principals to be stretched professionally and to grow and learn. In many ways, these challenges can be an incentive for taking on the role. For example, one the challenges of the role presented in Chapter 7 reflected the incredible variety and busyness of the role. Although demanding and tiring, it is this diversity that can be enjoyable. The following comments by two of the Phase Three principals demonstrate this point.

I enjoy the diverse nature of the job. (Mark)

There is so much variety of experiences and dilemmas and things you have to deal with. It’s not just like a job where there is basically one thing coming across your desk. That is a reflection of being a principal; there are so many things to talk about. I’ve enjoyed being really busy with new work. (Paul)

Similarly, three of the Phase Two group also expressed this sentiment

Professionally even though this job is so terribly difficult, it’s challenging and it changes every day and I really like that, so I don’t imagine myself doing any other job. I really love this job. (Ruth)

It sounds weird, but in many ways it is that variety that I love, even if that is one of my biggest challenges, it’s also for me what makes this job so amazing, is that it’s not the “same old, same old” every day, and you don’t know, you just don’t know what’s going to happen in a day and I really love that. (Margaret)

No day is ever predictable and look, I think in some ways, I think that’s what’s enjoyable about the job. (Terri)
One of the survey respondents summarised this well by saying “Variety! Adrenalin and challenge. The sense of meaningful work - these are real people whose lives are really being shaped for good”.

Although two of the Phase Three principals had experienced some difficult times, one with his board and the other with a critical incident, they both still commented on many aspects of the role they had found rewarding. Understandably these participants were less exuberant about the overall experience of being a principal.

The data clearly showed that these beginning principals saw their experience in the role as both challenging and rewarding. Much of the literature concerning the experiences of beginning principals concerns the challenges associated with the role. The negative aspects of the role have received much attention in research (Bass, 2006) and in the media both here in Australia and particularly in the US (Thomson et al., 2003). On the other hand, studies have demonstrated that the principalship is a rewarding and enjoyable experience. For example, a study with beginning principals in Scotland by Cowie and Crawford (2008) reflected the enthusiasm these principals had for their roles. In a similar vein, studies looking at more experienced principals have also found a strong sense of job satisfaction.

Many studies have found that principals have a high sense of job satisfaction. Research conducted by Metlife (2008) revealed that 68% of the principals in the study reported a high level of job satisfaction with 78% strongly agreeing with the comment that they love being a principal. Other studies have also shown that most principals have a strong sense of job satisfaction (Darmody & Smyth, 2011; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Wylie, 2008). Research looking at 1,200 secondary school principals in Victoria found that 90% reported a high degree of job satisfaction and that:

Principals and assistant principals almost universally love their job. They think of themselves as privileged to have such an important and rewarding vocation (Saulwick & Muller, 2004, p. 21).

Although it is understandable that the research emphasis has been geared to understanding the challenges of being a principal, more research is needed to establish and then promote the key motivating and energising factors of the role (Bass, 2006; Thomson et al., 2003). The research already carried out in this area supports the
satisfying and rewarding nature of being a principal, but very little work has been done to explore the nature of the rewards in more depth. This study found that there were three overall themes which represented the most rewarding aspects of being a beginning principal. The data from all phases of this project showed that the top rewards were:

- building relationships with the students and seeing them grow;
- working with the school staff and seeing them develop, and;
- being able to make significant decisions and influence the vision of the school.

The following sections will examine the data supporting these findings.

**Building relationships with the students and seeing them grow**

From the data, the most enjoyable and rewarding aspect of being a beginning principal was working with the students. This theme was shared by all of the Phase Three and seven out of the eight Phase Two principals. In terms of enthusiasm and positivity throughout the year this was clearly the most rewarding aspect of the role. The principals commented on various aspects of their relationships with the students and enjoyed building relationships with the students, seeing them grow and in action. In presenting the data I will also make some distinctions about how their comments reflect their relationship with students as a principal as distinct from a classroom teacher who I would expect have the same enthusiasm for building relationships with students.

**Building positive relationships with the students**

There was an overwhelming appreciation and sense of fulfilment expressed by the beginning principals in their opportunity to build relationships with the students of the school. It was clear from the results that these beginning principals had a deep
appreciation for the students and enjoyed seeing positive relationships develop between them and the students. Sandra commented enthusiastically about the rewarding nature of being in a positive relationship with students.

I love the kids. I love the fact when I walk through the school, whether I sit in with a Year Nine class or if I am cuddled to death by my preppies and things like that I just love the fact that what I do is making a difference for these seven hundred kids. I walk around and it is, ‘Oh Mrs Woodward is here’, you know, I mean something to them. I think that is because I am connected and I get that; that is what I wanted to do. That is where I just go, ‘Woohoo, this is just great’. They see me as someone worth giving a hug on the way through and telling me that they’re going to Disneyland on the holidays and I am part of their lives. So, for me it’s all about the kids. Absolutely love the kids to bits and that has been a highlight.

Sandra’s comments highlight the opportunity that a principal has to interact with a wide range of ages. As distinct from a classroom teacher who would primarily relate to children of their grade or section of the school, the beginning principal has the opportunity to interact with all the children. Whereas a school teacher may feel they are making a difference in the lives of their students, a beginning principal may feel they are making a difference in the lives of all the students of the school. This was reflected in Sandra’s comment; “I just love the fact that what I do is making a difference for these seven hundred kids.” Beginning principals can make an impact in the lives of students of all ages.

Brendon also shared this genuine care for the students when he commented; “I think our students have been terrific. I really like the kids”. Michael jokingly reported that he had a “rock star status with the kids” and how another principal who was visiting the school “was almost brought to tears by the reactions of some of the kids” to him as they walked around the school. Paul commented on an opportunity to connect with a Year Twelve student as they ran together at a cross country race. This comment typifies the desire of these principals to connect with students as much as possible and use that time to encourage students.
What was really nice about that was that this guy and I had this conversation in an informal way where we didn’t have to look at each other, but I brought into account these things, because he is a bit lax. He could be anything you know. You don’t have to be a principal to do that but I guess it’s my privilege to be able to do it. I get the feeling he’d probably listen to me a little bit more than he would to some others. That’s exhilarating.

As Paul commented, other teachers and staff could have done the same thing but that he felt his words of encouragement might have had more impact as they were coming from him as the principal. This could be another distinction between a class room teacher’s and a principal’s relationship with student as they perceive that as the principal their words may have more impact in the lives of students.

Some of the beginning principals commented on how rewarding it had been to build relationships with challenging students. Bronwyn, a Phase Two principal in a small school catering to children with behavioural challenges, shared a warm story of the rewards of helping a struggling student:

The kids are fantastic and, even when there are problems; some of them just come out with the most gorgeous things. I had a child in who had been getting so many suspensions for aggressive behaviour and as he was leaving my office I said to him, “Greg, I need you to try really hard today. Remember to keep your hands off... if you’re feeling frustrated you can come in, and you can get me if you need to.” And he turned around and he said “I love you too Bronwyn” and I thought it’s beautiful to know that he knows that I care about him. He was a trial and a half, that boy; but you know, that comment just made it all worthwhile, all the effort.

Beginning principals would have a wider range of opportunities to meet with students who are having problems than a classroom teacher. This can provide them with further opportunities to build relationships with student while positively influencing behavioural and academic outcomes. As well as building positive relationships with the students, the beginning principals also expressed the rewarding nature of seeing students grow and in action.
Seeing students grow, learn and in action

It was clear from the interview data from across the year that the beginning principals enjoyed seeing the growth in students and watching them in action at concerts and other larger events. Greg, a Phase Two principal, shared; “[T]he fruit of that through the kids’ lives and the changes in families’ lives, to me, would be the best thing about the job”. Terri, a Phase Two principal commented on the privilege that she saw in working with parents to see growth and development in the lives of their children:

I don’t even mind the discipline side of it with kids, because I just love to see the changed behaviour and working in partnership with the parents to see kids reach their full potential. I just think it’s an absolute privilege to be able to get alongside parents and families in raising their children; but I never take that for granted.

Grahame, a Phase Three principal, shared how rewarding it was for him to see the students in action:

Working with the kids is fantastic; anything to do with them is great and just things that they are involved in. The best things are when the kids have performed or done something and I’ve been able to go and watch. The school play, music soiree, those sorts of things… they’re the best things, when you actually see the kids in action. That’s when you really feel good. The best things were the relationships I have formed with the kids.

Susan, a Phase Two principal, commented on how rewarding it had been to recently attend three school assemblies, one which had been run by the school prefects. She commented:

The school captains got up at the first one (assembly) of the term and did a medley of songs, changing all the lyrics and saying about last term and what’s going to happen this term; and you know, the kids were just sitting there, they were laughing, they were just enjoying themselves, they were respectful, they were respectful and joyous, you know; and it’s a calm place, it’s really calm. And so, my answer is the reward comes from when I get a feeling – and it’s as nebulous as that – that the students are happy, that they’re engaged and that they’re actually engaged in learning as well.
Both Grahame and Susan’s comments highlight the privilege school principals have in being able to watch the performances of students throughout the school. In this way they can see the final product of the teachers and students hard work and can sit back and appreciate it.

In summary, the biggest reward reported by the beginning principals in Phase Two and Three was overwhelmingly the opportunity to build relationships with the students and be a part of their growth and development. This result was also present in the survey findings. Out of the 31 responses to the question of what they enjoyed the most about the role, the most frequent answer which was mentioned by 18 (58%) involved the students. One respondent summed this up well in saying, “The children, this is why we do what we do” and another shared this comment about what they enjoyed most about the role; “Celebrating student achievements, sharing times with students on camp and in learning activities”.

Other research has also shown that this connection with students and their development is a key factor in the job satisfaction expressed by principals in general (Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Research conducted with principals in Victoria showed that 97% reported that making a difference in the lives of their students was the most rewarding aspect of being a principal (Saulwick & Muller, 2004). In research looking at the motivations for aspiring to principalship, “intrinsic service-oriented reasons of desiring to make a difference, having a positive impact on people and students, making a difference in the lives of students was the highest motivating factor” (Bass, 2006, p. 25).

Although relationships and the growth of students was the most rewarding aspect of the role, it was also intertwined with working with staff and seeing them develop as it is through the staff of the school that quality education will result.
Working with the school staff and seeing them develop

The second facet the beginning principals found the most rewarding is working with their staff and seeing them develop. All of the Phase Three principals shared various aspects of their relationships and working with staff as being a very rewarding aspect of the role. One of the main elements to providing quality education is the quality of the school’s teaching staff (Block, Crochet, Jones, & Papa, 2012; Slater, Davies, & Burgess, 2012). It is not surprising that when beginning principals are appointing quality staff, working with them and helping them to develop, it provides a very satisfying aspect of the role. Although they may have had some involvement in staff selection and development in their previous leadership roles, being a principal gave them a greater opportunity to play a part in this vital area of the school’s functioning. In this section I will look more closely at these three areas of working with the school staff.

Making quality staff appointments

Principals have an important role in appointing quality staff members to their teams (Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011). As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the greatest challenges faced by beginning principals was dealing with underperforming staff and so it is not surprising that the data revealed beginning principals felt a great sense of satisfaction from successful team appointments. Elizabeth, a Phase Two principal commented on how rewarding her staff appointments had been:

The people that I have employed, I’ve just been tickled pink that they’re absolutely the right kind of person, and that’s exciting because you just feel that it’s helping the other staff that they’re working with; it’s lifted the expectations of the school; it’s meant that the teaching is happening to a
higher degree, which means that, I feel confident that the children are learning, so those things are the sorts of things that made me happy.

As Elizabeth’s comments portray, good staff appointment decisions have a number of benefits for the tone of the school and the existing staff leading to a higher level of education and learning for the children. Michael also commented on the rewarding nature of making some quality appointments to key middle management positions through his first year. As with all staff appointments there is always a risk of the person not working out in the position, so it is rewarding when the personnel selected prove to be a good fit in the school and can effectively carry out their responsibilities.

**Working with staff, helping them to develop and seeing them being effective**

Another rewarding aspect of being a beginning principal is being involved in the professional development of staff members. Michael commented on the rewarding nature of being a “good developer of staff” as he encouraged professional development and saw staff members promoted and offered exciting opportunities in other schools. In commenting on a professional development initiative of his in which groups of ten staff were created across various departments and roles to form learning groups, Michael commented:

A lot of those people would never know one another if they didn’t do it, let alone learn what they do. Anyway, what I’m saying is that has breathed a whole lot of ‘professional learning’ sort of approach of life to people. They’re fired up about learning which is good. The best teachers are the best learners; I’ve got no doubt about that. As a result - because I’ve offered a lot of special projects and promoted people and given people opportunities to explore passions and lead in that area - what’s happened already is that four people - four of my staff - it might sound bad but I don’t think it’s bad, I think it’s good - four of my people have been promoted to significant positions in other schools.

Just as there is a real sense of satisfaction in seeing students grow and launch out from the school ready to make an impact so, too, can be the satisfaction of seeing staff members grow towards their potential, even at the loss of their presence at the school to other schools. Terri, a Phase Two principal, also commented on the rewarding nature of
“building community, building teams amongst the staff, finding people’s strengths and seeing them really grow in those areas”.

Some of the principals expressed their delight in seeing teachers perform well and being very committed to the direction the school was going in. Grahame shared this as a source of satisfaction;

… when you go and watch a teacher teach and they’re doing a wonderful job. For me, the thing is getting into the classroom and seeing people teach and being able to see how good they are and what they do.

Paul also appreciated his staff trying hard and working in well with the direction of the school:

I’ve really enjoyed getting to meet the people who are doing their best. I think we’ve got a staff who have pretty much bought into the rhythm in which it’s working and the way in which I am doing things, which has been good.

Working with and helping staff was also the second most cited enjoyable aspect of being a principal by the survey respondents, with 29% sharing the rewarding aspects of working with their staff. This result is also consistent with previous research into the experiences of beginning principals in which the rewarding aspects of working with quality teachers and school leaders to provide a higher quality of education were consistently expressed (Sackney & Walker, 2006). There is a scarcity of research which delves deeper into the rewarding aspects of beginning principals working with staff and more work could be done to focus on these aspects.

From this study the two greatest rewards of being a principal are working with the students and the staff. I will now examine a third area which was reported as contributing to the rewarding nature of the role. Beginning principals appreciated and enjoyed being in a position where they could make significant decisions and influence the vision and growth of the school.
Being able to make significant decisions and influence the vision of the school

The third theme that emerged from the data is that the beginning principals enjoyed the opportunity the role gave them to make significant decisions and influence the vision of the school. Five out of the eight Phase Three principals cited this as one of the greatest rewards of being in the role. Helen reported enjoying the responsibility that came with decision making leading to change and growth:

> The fact that I get to make my own decisions! That comes with, at the end of the day, if I don’t get it right, I am the one that is going to cop it. I think the fact that I’m now held accountable for the decisions and directions of the school. That’s what I have really enjoyed; that relationship building and changing culture, reinvigorating a place.

After being in a deputy principal role for 13 years, Andrew appreciated being in a role where he could be more strategic and help shape the school’s vision for the future:

> Having sat in the deputy’s chair for thirteen years, to actually have an opportunity to set vision is a good thing. Being a good deputy principal is helping somebody else’s vision be effective. To have a more strategic role is enjoyable. I have enjoyed seeing the dynamics of getting a team working together. We want to work more on a shared leadership model than what’s been in the past. So, getting people to have input into decisions and owning decisions and implementing them.
Big picture strategic planning is an important part of the role of principal (Hallinger, 2011). In commenting on the future building plans and the overall vision of the school, Michael commented:

I absolutely love the big picture nature of this job and my relationships with the board and the parents and friends association for that matter, too. I love the big picture; stand at the front gates looking out rather than looking in.

Michael also went on to share of the excitement he felt as he saw people getting on board with the vision:

I have absolutely no doubt that I’ve got a critical mass. When I say critical mass, I think I’ve probably got ninety to ninety five per cent of people completely excited and fired up and on the train. I can tell that just from the way people are talking and that is really reaffirming.

Mark also shared of his highlight in being in a role that could really influence outcomes:

Feeling like you have got the influence and the capacity to make things happen. I think that has been probably the highlight of it all. So, really working hard to build a strategic plan and starting to see some of those goals come to fruition as well.

The survey responses echoed this aspect as 29% reported this was a major source of reward. The results, overall, were summarised well by this comment by one of the survey responses; “Working with students and families, building a team spirit on staff and thinking through new directions and vision”. Another of the survey respondents commented on their enjoyment of; “[S]eeing changes implemented and benefits reaped because of initiatives that began inside my head! And seeing staff appointments that are working out well!”

This opportunity to be able to make significant decisions and influence the vision of the school has been reported in previous research. The ability to “initiate change” was found to be one of the top motivating forces influencing individuals to seek the principalship (Bass, 2006) and in the top three rewarding aspects of the experiences of beginning principals (Sackney & Walker, 2006; Shoho & Barnett, 2010). Influencing and shaping the school’s educational vision is one of the most crucial ways that
principals can impact the effectiveness of the school (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Kurland, Peretz, & Hertz-Lazarowitz, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). The results of this study indicate that beginning principals appreciate being in a role in which they can play a greater role in shaping the school’s future, thus helping both students and teachers.

Beginning principals’ messages to aspiring principals
The final question that was asked of the Phase Three principals gave them an opportunity to send a message to aspiring principals. Although diverting from the core research questions of this study, I included this question to give them a final opportunity to share their passion and lessons learnt with those who are perhaps thinking of becoming a principal or are about to start in the role. This section will report on the comments made by each of the Phase Three principals. Although throughout this thesis the data have been reported thematically, I believe that the parting words of each of the principals should be reported separately and in this section I have mostly allowed the participants own words to express their individual messages to aspiring principals.

Andrew’s message
Andrew’s parting words encouraged aspiring principals to examine their core motives and to consider how open they are to personal growth and helping others to grow. He shared the importance of having a “servant leadership” perspective:

To my mind, servant leadership, particularly a Christian school, is the only way you’ll survive in that. So the first thing is, Why do you want to be a principal?-Because it’s really going to be serving a lot of people and that’s
where it comes down to. So, examine the motives that you have and see if you’re in it for the right reasons.

This is a poignant reminder of the core motivation for aspiring to become a principal. A person can become a principal as a career move or a core belief that being of service to others is a worthwhile thing to do. The second part of his message asked aspiring principals to examine whether they are, in fact, “teachable” as moving successfully into the role of principal will require personal growth:

Number two is how much are you prepared to reinvent yourself and deal with your weaknesses as well as your strengths, because your success or your school’s success will require you working at not just your strengths. The principalship is a wide job so you’re going to have to be able to deal with your weaknesses or develop organisational capacity to deal with your weaknesses.

**Brendon’s message**

Brendon encouraged aspiring principals to be themselves and not model their actions off other principals or the expectations of others. Brendon shared:

The key one that many people have said is to be yourself. Trying to be like some other principal or as someone else wants you to be… They choose you because of what you are… There isn’t the perfect principal in all ways for all people. It's impossible to be all things to all people, so you have to fall back on what you are; be true to yourself in other words.

Brendon’s words are a reminder to leaders to fulfil the role in their way and as a reflection of their personality. Aspiring principals may feel pressured to emulate a certain principal or style of leadership, however, they need to be true to themselves. Brendon’s second point was to encourage beginning principals not to try to do and achieve everything but to think through and choose their actions and priorities.

Secondly, you have to do what is positive and reasonable. There are a zillion things that you could do or more things or better things or whatever, but you can only do what’s manageable and reasonable and sustainable, but doing it positively is very good. Maybe part of that might be choosing your battles,
because you can only do so much, d what’s positive and what is reasonable and sustainable.

**Grahame’s message**

When asked about what he would say to those considering becoming a principal, Grahame joked “Yeah don’t do it. [laughter].” Considering the extreme challenges he had faced through a critical incident with a staff member, this comment had more than a little truth in it. Grahame went on to say:

I would encourage someone to think very carefully before they did it. I would also encourage them to think very carefully about their lead up to it as well. I think I’ve had one of the best career lead ups to being a principal. I have seen younger people who are just keen to jump into that principal seat and I always say to them, “Take your time and experience each level before you move on. Make sure you don’t jump any steps. Take your time and go through all of the steps before you get there, because it is a very difficult job.” Even with all the preparation I have had, it’s been much more difficult than I ever imagined it would be.

Grahame also recommended to beginning principals, “Know your policies and know your staff” and act on staff that are creating concerns. His final suggestion was that it is vital for beginning principals to connect with the school community:

I went to anything that was going on in the school to spend time with the kids and parents. I know that was a really positive thing at the start. I don’t think it’s sustainable, but I think in my first year that was probably the most important thing I could do, to get out and just to see what everyone does and get to know people.

**Helen’s message**

Helen unreservedly encouraged those who are aspiring to become principals and “have a heart and a head for education and young people” to pursue this dream. Helen’s enthusiasm for the role was evident as she shared:

I would grab the job with both hands. I would seize it in a second because it is one of the most satisfying jobs when you’re out there on gate duty or yard
duty, or walking down to the canteen, or at sports, at camps and you connect with one little human being and you think, “this is why I do this job.”

She followed this comment with one piece of advice: “staying healthy and exercising every day” was a great help to her in the role. This is important advice as the data demonstrated the nature of the role is extremely demanding both physically and emotionally.

**Mark’s message**
Mark stressed the importance of cultivating strong relationships with staff members. He argued that these relationships can be built up by lots of smaller wins and paying attention to the everyday needs of staff members. Mark shared:

It’s the little things that actually matter in the first year. I think staff relationships are vital. My theory at the beginning was motivation and acceptance comes through small wins. Often people come into the role and think they have to have big visions and create big plans. The staff often aren’t connected with strategic planning or master planning or big vision ideas. They are more concerned about whether they’ve got a filing cabinet in their office, or whether they have two meetings or one meeting during the week. It’s those smaller issues for them that are the big issues. What I’ve found is by constantly throughout the year making myself psychologically available to staff, like having a presence around the school, I’m able to tap into those things that give me an opportunity to create small wins with staff. I think that actually builds greater motivation and acceptance than trying to have the big one that everyone thinks is fantastic. You gain a lot more momentum through that.

As we have seen that one of the key motivating factors for principals is being involved in creating vision, Mark’s point is important to consider as people’s relationships with their leaders usually precede “buy in” for larger picture vision as Maxwell (2002, p. 155) writes, “People buy into the leader, then the vision”. Mark also followed on with a comment relating to the importance of humility in leadership and the principal’s ability to forgive themselves when mistakes are made.
Michael’s message
Michael’s first comments exhorted aspiring principals to make sure they have the desire and big vision for the role. He commented; “It has got to matter to you. It’s got to be a burning desire within you. First of all, you’ve got to have the dream and be able to think big”. Michael went on to make the point that aspiring principals need to have the personal resilience and strength to be able to cope with the demands of the role:

Secondly, you’ve got to have the resilience, inner strength and fortitude. Not just to get there at any cost, but to have it matter to you enough. There are absolutely sacrifices; there’s no question about that. You have to be willing to make personal sacrifices for the common wealth. You’ve got to have an incredible amount of self-belief and resilience, I think, and a real desire to do it, because if you haven’t, you’re going to be doing a lot of damage to yourself and others.

In his comments, Michael also referred to the principal being able to continue often without much direct encouragement. Although personally experiencing encouragement, Michael suggests that this is not always there for principals and so they can’t be reliant on constant affirmation:

As a principal -- I’m lucky that I do get lots of people here because they’re great people, but mostly I know that doesn’t happen. I know our previous principal used to say that he had to ask people how that speech was, because people wouldn’t come up to him and say that was a great speech. They would be afraid to give feedback and certainly afraid to pay compliments publicly.

Paul’s message
Becoming a beginning principal has certainly been shown to be a learning curve for the principals in this study. Paul commented on the enjoyable nature of the learning aspect of being a beginning principal in that a lot of situations are new and challenging.

I said the major thing is -- certainly in this job --is that I have fulfilled my major wish. I wanted to learn, I wanted to be invigorated by a job rather than to go around the process again and again and again. I wanted to be in a situation where what I was doing, I was doing partly for the first time,
mostly informed but having to work hard to get across it all. I’ve certainly experienced that. The learning curve, particularly in a business sense has been really strong.

Paul also made three practical suggestions that would help those preparing for and entering the principalship. The first was to make sure to take time out to think. Although Paul had struggled to fulfil this commitment in his own practice, nevertheless he felt it was an important aspect of school leadership:

I can tell you the things that I probably haven’t done and probably won’t ever do, but I think it is really important that you put some time away to think. I’ve been told that a million times by anyone who’s done that job in the past and I have failed to do it. I have put something called no fill in my diary every week for an hour or so. I don’t think I’ve yet used that hour. I'm constantly meeting with people and doing things.

The second suggestion which likewise he had also found quite challenging to put into practice was to maintain some teaching in class time. Paul suggests to future principals, “They should stay in the classroom. At one level they’ve got to be in there because it’s your sanity. It means you know children, the whole school sees you as a teacher and not just a principal and all those things”. The final advice Paul wanted to pass on is for future principals to try to not take things personally.

You’ve got to maintain that in every way, and as I say, it’s not personal. A lot of things will be directed at you that are not actually about you. It’s the ability to dodge and weave those - dodge and weave the hate in them I suppose, which really means you can survive and thrive. I have to say that I am nowhere near dodging and weaving the intent of those things. I think that’s a long process of learning because it’s hard to be human and not feel those things, but I am better than I was.

Sandra’s message
Sandra’s words to aspiring principals encouraged them to seek out learning experiences with their current principal. By getting as close as possible to the action, the beginning principal will develop a greater appreciation for the challenges of the role. Sandra shared:
Always remember to take every opportunity, and to ask your boss where possible, can I shadow with you and, where possible, can you share the challenges. Whilst principals have to make it look easy, they’ve also got to show - it’s okay for me to look at people and say I am looking forward to a break. If I had somebody here who is really aspirant, I will be really thinking more about what I can share to help them get ready for that position.

As Sandra shared that principals often seem to be confident and doing well, they need to be authentic and share with others the struggles and challenges they are facing. This will help aspiring principals to gain a fuller appreciation for what the role entails.

**Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have reported on the rewarding aspects of the role of being a beginning principal. The results indicated that, overall, being a beginning principal was considered to be a very rewarding and enjoyable role. This result presents a healthy balance to some of the difficulties and challenges reported on in Chapter 7. Although some of these challenges were not rewarding and enjoyable, other challenging aspects of the role, such as the great diversity and variety in the work, were considered as appealing. The three specific aspects of the role the beginning principals found the most rewarding were their relationships with the students, working with the staff and their ability to make significant decisions and influence the vision and direction of the school. These results were consistent with other research in this area, although there is room for more specific research into these rewards and how to utilise this to further promote the position of principal to existing school leaders.

This chapter also reported on the comments made by the Phase Three beginning principals to aspiring principals. Although the comments, overall, were positive and encouraged aspirants to continue on their journey, there were some comments which exhorted aspirants to examine their motives, teach-ability and personal resilience for the role. The Phase Three principals also gave some important suggestions for those embarking on principalship for the first time. As the research focused on the journeys of these principals in their first year in the role, it was an appropriate ending to the data collection for them to share what they wanted to about the role.
The following chapter will review the conclusions relating to the four underlying research questions of this study and present some recommendations to aspiring and beginning principals, the boards of independent schools and to the associations who are involved in assisting independent schools in Australia.
Chapter 9 — Conclusions and recommendations

In this chapter, I will gather together the main findings of this study and present some recommendations for action. This study has examined the experiences of beginning principals of independent schools in Australia. The study has been exploratory in an area which has received very little research attention. The data have been gathered from three phases of the research project. In the first phase, a survey was used to gather data from beginning principals who were in their first four years in the role. From the survey respondents, eight principals who were in their first two years in the role were then interviewed in Phase Two of the study. The final phase of this research followed the journey into principalship for eight beginning principals. They were interviewed before they commenced in the role and four times during the course of their first year. In this chapter I will outline the findings of this study, present some conclusions and finally some recommendations.

An overview of the findings

The data identified a number of salient components to the effective preparation of beginning principals. Seven out of the eight Phase Three beginning principals had completed masters degrees with two having completed doctorates. It was found that masters degrees with a strong business and management aspect were perceived as the most beneficial as preparation for the role. These tertiary studies, combined with leadership courses and years of previous leadership experiences, were very helpful in their preparation for the role. The data also showed the benefits of having been in a deputy principal role which provided a wide range of responsibilities and exposure to the overall running of the school. The results also showed that, as they approached commencement, the principals in the study reported a high level of preparedness and confidence in taking on the role.

The results also highlighted the key elements which helped the beginning principals to make a strong start in their roles. The value of pre-commencement experiences at the school was clearly demonstrated. These experiences ranged from informal social meetings, active participation in leadership meetings right through to extensive pre-commencement experiences. These experiences helped the principals to begin to form relationships with the leaders, staff and students of the new school community. These
pre-commencement experiences contributed to a greater sense of confidence for both the principals and the school staff and enabled them to “hit the ground running”. The data also indicated that an effective and well-planned welcome and induction into the school was beneficial and more attention could be given to the practical induction of the principal rather than a “here are the keys” approach.

The study clearly showed the great value of a proactive and supportive board in helping the beginning principal to make a strong start. The principals in this study were aided in their transition into the role by boards that were openly supportive and through the beginning principal having a strong relationship with the board chair. Only one of the Phase Three principals didn’t report a good working relationship with the board and that, for him, tensions with the board and board chair had negatively influenced his start in the role. The beginning principals in this study were appreciative of the help they received from various state independent school associations and spoke highly of the level of professional support and training that these organisations had been providing. The data also showed the value of mentoring and informal support from other principals in the transition process.

This study found the most challenging aspect of becoming a principal was the intensity of the role. The key factors contributing to the intensity of the role were the emotionally and physically demanding nature of the work, the demanding workload, the weight of responsibility and the pressures associated with being a senior public figure / leader. The beginning principals also found it challenging to deal with underperforming staff members, conflict amongst staff, responding to staff with personal difficulties and taking the necessary steps in building a strong senior leadership team. One of the other major challenges in the transition was coming to an understanding of the culture of the school and forming strong relationships with those in the school community. Beginning principals were also challenged by maintaining and growing school enrolment figures and dealing with the impact of enrolments on school budgeting. Finally, although not occurring frequently, the data showed that when they did occur, critical incidents became one of the most challenging aspects of school leadership and were associated with deleterious effects on the beginning principals’ wellbeing.

The results also demonstrated that beginning principals enjoy and gain great personal satisfaction from their work. The most rewarding aspect of being a principal was the
chance to build positive relationships with the students throughout the school and have an impact on their growth. The beginning principals also found it rewarding to be a part of the successful recruitment and development of their staff. They also reported a great sense of reward from being in a leadership position in which they could make significant decisions and shape the vision and development of the school.

Main conclusions and a conceptualisation of work intensification

In studying the journeys of beginning principals in independent schools in Australia, the data have shown that the beginning principals in this study were well prepared and ready to take on the role of principalship. Comments by Michael, “I feel very well prepared because of what I’ve done” and Mark, “I’m actually feeling really confident and empowered to be able to hit the ground running and make decisions”, are indicative of the high level of preparedness. Only one of the sixteen Phase Two and Three principals expressed that they had felt quite unprepared to take on the role.

The data also showed that beginning principals found the role very rewarding. This is reflected in the enthusiastic comments from Sandra “I just love the job. If you said to me today that I could never do this job again, I would be devastated’ and Helen, “The job is fabulous and I am not sorry I took it for a minute… best job in the world”. It was encouraging to see that, despite the challenges of the role, beginning principals found it to be very rewarding and in many ways that challenging and multifaceted nature of the role added to their sense of job satisfaction.

The results also highlight a paradox that exists concerning a leader’s decision to become a principal, knowing that the intensity and nature of the role will actually take them away from some of the components they found satisfying in previous roles. For example, the beginning principals reported that working with students was the most satisfying aspect of their role. This is an interesting paradox as they have progressively moved from a classroom teacher’s role into school leadership resulting in spending less time with students. An answer to this could be found in seeing the nature of influence that individuals can have on the lives of others which reflect their position in the organisation.
Although a beginning principal would not be able to build the quality relationships that a classroom teacher can with their students, they are able to play a role in which they can make a more global impact in the lives of many more students and their families than a classroom teacher can. In taking on the role, the beginning principals can potentially positively impact the lives of thousands of students and their families. Thus, their impact on the lives of students is expressed more through the development of a healthy school organisation. This also reflects the second and third aspects that they found rewarding in that they can influence and work with more teachers than if they were a classroom teacher and make significant decisions which will potentially help the school to grow.

From the challenges they faced, it was the intensity of the role that was the most concerning as such intensity could have detrimental effects on their longevity in the role and future wellbeing. Although, probably being buoyed by the excitement of finally being in the senior role, the intensity of the role was very much a part of their experiences and some of the Phase Two and Three participants were already concerned about their ability to sustain that level of intensity indefinitely. This fact returns the discussion to the question of whether the role in its present form is too big for one person to adequately fulfil. It seems that the role is one of being a “super principal” (Garrick, 2010), an heroic figure leading the school. In the twenty first century this is how the role is perceived and experienced. Linking back to previous discussion in Chapter 2 of the concepts of work intensification and emotional labour, this issue warrants more attention and action.

The ongoing intensification of the role of principal is concerning. Over time, more has been added to the responsibilities and workload of teachers and principals with very little being taken away to reduce the pressure (Eckman, 2006; Fink, 2010).

Comments made about the work hours by Susan highlight concerns over long term sustainability.

A school like this, I’m doing about 70-75 hours a week. It’s not overly sustainable I don’t think for a long, long period of time.

Susan went on to comment on the frustration of not being able to achieve a sense of completing her work despite the hours she was working.
The issue is greater than that of an increased workload; as MacBeath (2006) suggests, the intensification represents a compounding effect of contributing factors. Intensification not only adds pressure to the role, but it can influence teachers’ and principals’ self-perceptions of efficacy as it can lead them to doubt their capacity to deliver on all expectations (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). Although there has been little research focus given to the intensification of the role of principal in Australia, on a broader level, intensification is a growing issue which is receiving more attention in other work sectors (Burchielli et al., 2006). Clearly more research is needed in the Australian context to understand the intensification of the role of principal and how this can be addressed.

Running parallel to and being interrelated with this growing awareness of the intensification of the role has been the pursuit and popularisation of alternative models of school leadership such as distributed leadership (Bush, 2013a; Youngs, 2009). As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are various understandings and applications of distributed leadership, but at the core is the idea that the responsibility of leadership be spread out through multiple formal and informal leaders in the school (Glen, 2009; Larsen & Rieckhoff, 2013). Although gaining considerable popularity amongst educational leaders, there is a need for more comprehensive theoretical development of distributed leadership and more empirical evidence examining its overall effectiveness (Gronn, 2008; Gunter, Hall, & Bragg, 2013; Harris, 2013; Lumby, 2013; Youngs, 2009). There is also a research need to further develop the “how” of distributed leadership and explore whether distributed leadership actually reduces the intensity of the role for principals.

In responding to the intensification of the role of principal, I believe there are two key issues for research, thought and application. One is to more clearly identify the drivers of this intensification and the other is to develop strategies of action that will begin to de-intensify the role. Despite the awareness of the intensification of the roles of teachers and principals, very little research has been carried out to specifically identify the key drivers of this process (Burchielli et al., 2006).

There are many internal and external factors which research has shown to be drivers of this intensification. Intensification is a product of the interaction of individuals, the school working context and the expectations which are placed on schools and their staff
(Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). At a macro level, there are possible societal and political drivers of intensification. As accountability and a public scrutiny of educational performance have increased, so, too, has the pressure being placed on school principals (Gronn, 2003b; Hodgen & Wylie, 2005; Youngs, 2009). The increasing commoditisation of education and competition between schools for enrolments is a driver which is fuelled by external factors and perpetuated by schools as they vie for enrolments in the educational marketplace (Connolly & James, 2006). Principals have to deal with the increased accountability required by the government and also the consumer attitude of parents which, if unsatisfied, may lead to them enrolling their children elsewhere (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2008).

Adding to the pressure on students and school leaders is the influence of “hyper-parenting”, in which parents set increasingly high standards and expectations of their children and the school. Honore (2009) argues that the results of this “hyper-parenting”, coupled with increased standardised testing, often leads to increased stress in students and questionable academic improvements. Despite the increasing pressure on schools to improve educational delivery, there has not been a similar challenge to parents to consider their influence on their child’s learning and general wellbeing (Hargreaves, 2009). These are some of the bigger societal drivers that have contributed to the intensification of the role. With a clearer delineation of all the main drivers, attention could then be placed on creating ways of reducing the effect of these drivers leading to some de-intensification of the role.

In the following diagram (Figure 3), I have suggested a possible conceptualisation for understanding the intensification of the role. The intensification of the role of principal can be depicted by a spiral, with the vertical axis representing time and the horizontal axes representing the various driving forces which, as they increase, cause the spiral to increase in circumference. Some of the possible internal and external drivers are labelled in the diagram. The increasing expanding spiral represents the level of intensity in the role. The intensity of the role has already reached a level in which the role is considered by many to be too big for one person (Gunter et al., 2013). As current research is clearly showing the negative impact of this work intensity on the wellbeing of principals there are growing calls for this issue to be addressed.
The education sector is one of Australia’s biggest employers. So, when disturbing evidence emerges about the occupational risks and poor psychological health and wellbeing of school principals across the country, this represents a significant national challenge. (Riley, 2014b, p. 13)

As the work intensifies, so does the risk of problems such as burnout and strained family relationships. As each beginning principal has different levels of resilience and capacities for work, there are no specific markers that could signal a warning although with the intensity reported in this study and in other literature it can be argued that the work intensity of principals is already at a serious level. Future research could aim at identifying more of the key drivers so that macro and micro response may be formulated that will begin to de-escalate the situation.

Figure 3  A theoretical representation of the intensification of the role

I believe that this study had two core purposes. One was to add scholarly knowledge to an area that has not received much research attention, namely the journeys of beginning
principals in Australian independent schools. The other core purpose of this study was to identify core issues of concern and attempt to facilitate real change where it is needed. I believe that one of the limitations of research, such as this project, is that the insights gained may not make any real impact on the actual experiences of the target population being studied. Although I am not in a formal leadership position in an educational system, I can still attempt to facilitate change through the presentation of my findings and advocacy to principals, school boards and associations of independent schools. Therefore, the following recommendations will spring from the findings and represent realistic applications of the knowledge gained through this endeavour.

**Recommendations**

**Three main recommendations**

From the findings I now make three main recommendations, followed by another twelve general recommendations relating to various aspects of the results from the four research sub questions. The three main recommendations are:

Recommendation 1: Further research be conducted to clearly identify the main drivers of the intensification of the role of principal and strategies created that would lead to a de-intensification.

Recommendation 2: School boards, in conjunction with their beginning principal, identify and seek to reduce areas of significant work pressure.

Recommendation 3: Beginning principals be provided with focused learning experiences through courses and ongoing coaching / mentoring which can help them to develop greater resilience.

These will now be discussed in turn.

**Recommendation 1**

Further research be conducted to clearly identify the main drivers of the intensification of the role of principal and strategies created that would lead to a de-intensification.

The first main recommendation stems from a concern over the intensification of the role of principal. This is a long term and broad scale recommendation. For there to be real changes to reduce the intensity of the role, there needs to be changes in thinking and
acting for principals, school boards, schools, parents and society in general. It would necessitate some attempt to de-commoditise education and to lessen the scrutiny and fixation with educational results by the community at large. It would also involve schools investigating how, by the increasingly competitive nature of education, they are, themselves, self-perpetuating this driving force for intensification. Finally, this task may involve governmental consideration of the demands and expectations made on principals and schools. As research has demonstrated that governmental and public accountability of performance is one of the drivers of this intensification (Gronn 2003b, Hodgen & Wylie, 2005; Youngs, 2009), perhaps some consideration of this government push should be undertaken considering that there have been some negative consequences. Also, political parties could be encouraged to be careful when creating politically motivated policies which can change with the prevailing winds of politics. The development of an effective and realistic education system and its accountability will surely require a bi-partisan approach from our political parties. There is a growing awareness of the pressures faced by principals in Australia and a call for action that something needs to be done to review their work practices and implement strategies that will improve their sense of wellbeing (Riley, 2014a). However, the call for future research in this recommendation while vital, will not bring any relief for aspiring and beginning principals in the near future. Therefore, I would like to suggest two other main recommendations that could be applied in the short term and would hopefully bring some help to beginning principals with respect to the intensity of the job.

Another question that warrants further understanding is how much of the intensity of the role occurs because of the real nature of the job or as a result of the self-expectations and the perceived expectations of others. More light could be shed on this question by working with individual principals and examining their work habits to identify those areas that do not essentially belong to their job description and thus could be carried out by other school leaders.

**Recommendation 2**

School boards, in conjunction with their beginning principal, identify and seek to reduce areas of significant work pressure.

This recommendation would encourage local attempts at de-intensifying the role. Instead of waiting for theoretical answers regarding the future of the role of principals,
beginning principals and their boards can proactively embark on their own journey seeking to make the role more manageable. Considering that answers and solutions may take a long time to arrive or may never come, leaders are well placed to take on their own reform initiatives in the local context (Fullan, 1998).

For this recommendation to be implemented effectively, there are at least two main areas which would need to be addressed. First, school boards of independent schools would need to be made aware of the nature and negative consequences of the intensification of the role of principal while highlighting that, as the employing body, they have a duty of care to help the principal to thrive in the role. As the employing body it is important for the board to be aware of and have a genuine concern about the pressures and work hours of the role as typified in the following comments:

That will be fourteen weeks straight at work; perhaps somewhere between sixty-five and seventy hours a week. So there have been some public holidays that I have worked. I need to take a break for personal health and also for family relationships and the like. I think for me, personally, workload issues are a significant issue this term. The workload is not sustainable. (Andrew)

School boards could be given access to current research into the challenges faced by beginning principals and be alerted to the possible detrimental consequences to their wellbeing arising from these challenges. The dissemination of this information could be achieved through written reports, articles, through conference presentations and training workshops. The aim would be to raise the awareness of school boards to these generic issues and also be more attuned to the particular challenges that their own beginning principal is facing.

As well as being cognisant of these challenges, the board can then take the next step to demonstrate their commitment to facilitating some changes to alleviating some of these challenges. This would include some introspection on whether the board itself is contributing to the intensification of the role through any unrealistic expectations or under-resourcing. This would also mean a greater awareness by the board of the beginning principal’s personality, strengths and leadership style, realising that no one leader is strong in every aspect of leadership. Beginning principals should be
encouraged to concentrate on their areas of strength with support from others in areas in which they aren’t as strong (Buckingham & Coffman, 2005). This would also mean the board understanding fully their role in the support of the principal. This would go some way in answering one of the questions raised by Burchielli et al. (2006) as to who actually supports the principal. The school board has a legal and moral obligation to provide support for the principal. This could be done in various general ways with, perhaps, one board member having a specific responsibility in being aware of the overall wellbeing of the principal and proactively showing care and support in times of need.

Second, there needs to be a high level of authenticity and strength in the relationship between the beginning principal and their board which would allow principals to express some vulnerability. Although experienced by all the beginning principals, I wonder whether their burdens and sense of isolation as expressed in the following comment from Terri is ever shared with boards. Terri shared “I’ve found the role quite overwhelming at times; and lonely. Very lonely. It can be quite isolated”.

Although expressing vulnerability can be difficult for a strong senior leader, it is an important component of building a strong team relationship with the board if the expression of vulnerability is reciprocal (Lencioni, 2012). Through such an authentic and ongoing process, the individual areas of challenge the local beginning principal faces as a product of the specific school context and their personalities would be addressed in some way. While this recommendation looks at some local attempt to de-intensify the role, attempts could also be made to help the beginning principals develop a stronger sense of resilience to be able to respond to the demands of the role.

**Recommendation 3**

Beginning principals be provided with focused learning experiences through courses and ongoing coaching / mentoring which can help them to develop greater resilience.

In recent years there has been more attention focused on the importance of resilience in leadership. Resilience is regarded as one of the most important qualities of effective leaders (Bennis, 2007) and has been identified as one of the top four attributes contributing to success in the role of principal (Notman, 2012). In summarising common definitions of resilience, Steward (2014, p. 54) writes:
Definitions of resilience include references to persisting in the face of difficulty; maintaining hope against the odds; being optimistic; being courageous; having inner resourcefulness; showing the capacity to recover quickly from setbacks; having moral purpose.

The theme of resilience as being the “capability to ‘bounce back’ from adversity” is a key feature of the definition (Harrison, 2013, p. 98). Being resilient helps school leaders to not just survive the challenges, but to learn and grow from them (Patterson & Patterson, 2009). The following comment by Grahame concerning the impact of a critical incident within the life of the school on his wellbeing illustrates the real need for resilience that is required for principals to be able to “bounce back” from the challenges they will inevitably face:

It’s been tough. Probably the last four weeks have been horrendous, I’d have to say have knocked me around enormously in terms of sleep, in terms of anxiety; I haven’t been exercising anywhere near as much as I was. I really feel beaten around the ears at the moment.

Resilience can help beginning principals to navigate through the emotional dilemmas and challenges the role will bring (Notman, 2012) and to cope more effectively with the isolation and loneliness that they often face (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). Although a component of resilience may stem from existing personality traits, there is also a strong sense that it is something individuals can learn and develop (Winwood, Colon, & McEwan, 2013). Resilience can be developed naturally as the individual responds to difficult situations. It can also be enhanced through debriefing, self-reflection, mentoring (Cameron & Brownie, 2010) and through personalised training courses (Notman, 2012). These methods and courses could be facilitated by associations of independent schools as a part of their principal preparation and ongoing development programs. The results of this study and other research in the field could be included to introduce the types of challenges they are likely to face and be supplemented with discussion of the particular challenges they are facing in their local context.

Very little research has focused on how resilience may be developed in school principals (Lazaridou & Beka, 2014; Steward, 2014). Beginning principals would benefit from courses and coaching which could facilitate the development of increased
resilience. To aid with the assessment and development of resilience, a number of scales which have already been developed could be utilised (Paul & Pooja, 2014). These assessment tools could be used to gain data on whether the training that has been provided is actually increasing the resilience of principals. The educational community may be able to utilise courses and programs that already exist in other work sectors to deliver quality programs in this area. The aim of this third recommendation is to help beginning principals become more resilient rather than simply teach them about resilience.

These three main recommendations would involve the participation of beginning principals, researchers, independent school associations and local school boards. They represent a possible way to ease the intensity of the role of principal while concurrently strengthening principals for the challenges they face. In the following section I will present another twelve recommendations for action.

**Other recommendations relating to the specific research questions**

The following twelve recommendations stem from various aspects of the findings related to the major research questions which examined the preparation of beginning principals, factors which contributed to helping them to start well, the main challenges and rewards of being in the role. The twelve recommendations are:

- **Recommendation 4:** Those in senior school leadership positions who are considering becoming a principal should be encouraged to complete a Masters’ level degree, preferably one with a strong business and management component.

- **Recommendation 5:** That principals be encouraged to provide their deputies with responsibilities and leadership experiences in a wide range of areas in the life of the school.

- **Recommendation 6:** That school boards and aspiring principals be made aware of the value of pre-commencement experience and be encouraged to pro-actively maximise this opportunity.

- **Recommendation 7:** That school boards, in conjunction with the incoming principal, be encouraged to create a plan for the welcome, induction and a
commissioning event, ensuring that beginning principal receives adequate support and practical orientation to the school.

Recommendation 8: That boards and beginning principals be encouraged to commit themselves to building authentic and productive relationships and strong team dynamics.

Recommendation 9: That school boards consider including mentoring for the principal as a part of their work contract and expectations.

Recommendation 10: That school boards encourage beginning principals to consider working with a leadership coach, particularly in the areas which they find particularly challenging.

Recommendation 11: That existing principals have access to mentor training and participation in a mentoring network of principals of independent schools.

Recommendation 12: That principal preparation and development programs provide training in the area of the performance management of staff, conflict resolution with staff and best practice guidelines for building strong leadership teams.

Recommendation 13: That beginning principals be made aware of effective processes that can help them to build strong relationships within their new school community and have access and training in relevant organisational culture diagnostic tools.

Recommendation 14: That research is conducted which focuses on the impact of critical incidents and multiple critical incidents on beginning principals.

Recommendation 15: That the testimonials of beginning principals regarding the rewards of the role be further utilised in the promotion of principalship to school leaders.

In the following sections I will briefly discuss these recommendations.
Recommendations regarding preparation for principalship

Recommendation 4

Those in senior school leadership positions who are considering becoming a principal should be encouraged to complete a Masters’ level degree, preferably one with a strong business and management component.

As reported earlier in the chapter, the participants shared the benefit of post-graduate courses which contained a business and leadership component as this was one of the major learning challenges they faced in stepping into principalship. Having a master’s level qualification is appropriate for school leaders as they lead a teaching staff who are required to have a bachelor’s degree (Brundrett et al., 2007).

Recommendation 5

That principals be encouraged to provide their deputies with responsibilities and leadership experiences in a wide range of areas in the life of the school.

The data also clearly demonstrated that the previous leadership experiences of the participants contributed greatly to their preparation for principalship. All of the eight Phase Three principals had come from previous school leadership positions into principalship with five out the eight Phase Three principals having been in a deputy or assistant principal role. For the ones who had been in a deputy role, the data showed they had benefitted greatly from being given a diversity of responsibilities and experiences. This result reflects other research which has demonstrated that the deputy position does not necessarily provide effective preparation for principals if it is too narrow in focus and responsibilities (Sieber, 2002). The following recommendations reflect the data which highlighted the factors which helped the beginning principals to start well.

Recommendations regarding helping beginning principals to start well

Recommendation 6

That school boards and aspiring principals be made aware of the value of pre-commencement experience and be encouraged to pro-actively maximise this opportunity.
One of the main aspects that contributed to a good start in the role was the time the beginning principals were able to spend at their new school, pre-commencement. This time, exposure and participation significantly helped them in the early phases of their socialisation and assimilation into the role and the new community. Although there are many factors that would influence a beginning principals’ ability to spend significant time at the school in which they will commence, the benefits of engineering this time are clear from the results.

Recommendation 7

That school boards, in conjunction with the incoming principal, be encouraged to create a plan for the welcome, induction and a commissioning event, ensuring that beginning principal receives adequate support and practical orientation to the school.

The data also highlighted the important role played by an effective welcome, induction process and a formal commissioning ceremony in helping the beginning principal to start well. The data showed that the practical induction of the beginning principal is often unplanned and overlooked. Therefore, this important introductory phase in the principal’s life would benefit from proactive preparation by the school board and principal together.

Recommendation 8

That boards and beginning principals be encouraged to commit themselves to building authentic and productive relationships and strong team dynamics.

The data also confirmed the importance of the school board proactively supporting the new principal. The relationship between the principal, the board, and particularly the board chair, is crucial to effective school governance. There is an imperative for both the principal and the board to do everything possible to ensure that this relationship is strengthened and maintained. To supplement Recommendation 2, I believe that it is important to highlight the importance of the board / principal relationship and to foster the development of healthy and effective relationships between beginning principals and their boards. This commitment could be in some written agreement committing the principal and the board members to agree to work at building healthy team dynamics through their behaviours, attitudes, communication, commitment to conflict resolution
and team building development exercises that will facilitate the development of a strong working relationship.

Recommendation 9

That school boards consider including mentoring for the principal as a part of their work contract and expectations.

The data showed the positive impact of beginning principals having a mentor. Whether this mentor is arranged through an independent school association or through the beginning principal’s own network, mentoring plays a vital role in helping principals to start well in the role. Mentoring can play a vital role in helping to support, encourage and guide beginning principals (Daresh, 2004; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2004; Parylo et al., 2012). Beginning principals having mentors should be regarded as an essential element of their work experience and therefore highlighted as an expectation by the board.

For mentoring to be effective, some thought and planning needs to be given to the system through which mentors and mentees are “matched” and supported (Bozeman & Feeney, 2008). Organisations taking on the role of organising mentoring programs also need to be cognisant of the need to have adequate training and support for mentors and be aware of the possible limitations of the mentoring process (Ehrich et al., 2004). Daresh (2004) encourages that aspiring principals be made aware of the value and access to mentoring as it will be helpful to them as they begin in a principal role. In addition to mentoring, beginning principals can be helped through more specific leadership coaching.

Recommendation 10

That school boards encourage beginning principals to consider working with a leadership coach, particularly in the areas which they find particularly challenging.

With the rise of an awareness of the importance of mentoring, it is important to draw some distinctions between mentoring and professional coaching (Lochmiller, 2014). Coaching is generally regarded as a process which is delivered by professional coaches and is more goal and performance oriented than mentoring, which is usually provided by more experienced professionals in the same field as the mentee (Bloom, Castagna, &
Through coaching, the beginning principal can be helped to navigate through the particular socialisation and professional challenges they are facing. In a three year study on coaching with beginning principals (Lochmiller, 2014) it was found that the coach’s input adapted and changed as the beginning principals became more familiar with the role. Bloom et al. (2003) argues that beginning principals need both mentoring and coaching as they both have different aims and outcomes.

**Recommendation 11**

That existing principals have access to mentor training and participation in a mentoring network of principals of independent schools.

To increase the quality and effect of mentoring, more attention could be paid to training possible mentors and creating mentor networks which can further encourage the growth of mentors.

**Recommendations regarding helping beginning principals with the challenges that they face**

The issue regarding the intensity of the role has been the focus of the three main recommendations that I made earlier in this chapter. The following three recommendations reflect the other findings related to the challenges that are faced by beginning principals.

**Recommendation 12**

That principal preparation and development programs provide training in the area of the performance management of staff, conflict resolution with staff and best practice guidelines for building strong leadership teams.

This recommendation results from the findings that the beginning principals in this study found dealing with staff issues and the process of developing a strong executive leadership team quite challenging.

**Recommendation 13**

That beginning principals be made aware of effective processes that can help them to build strong relationships within their new school community and have access and training in relevant organisational culture diagnostic tools.
As coming to know the people in the new school community and the culture was identified as a major challenge, beginning principals could benefit from training in this area and particularly with any methods or diagnostic programs which are designed to examine organisational culture.

**Recommendation 14**

That research is conducted which focuses on the impact of critical incidents and multiple critical incidents on beginning principals.

Dealing with critical incidents also emerged as a challenging aspect of the role. The building of resilience, as addressed in Recommendation 3, would hopefully help beginning principals cope with critical incidents, particularly when they have a number to deal with, but more research is needed which can explore this aspect of school leadership.

**Recommendations reflecting the finding regarding the rewarding aspect of principalship**

**Recommendation 15**

That the testimonials of beginning principals regarding the rewards of the role be further utilised in the promotion of principalship to school leaders.

This study also examined the rewarding and enjoyable aspects of being a beginning principal. This was important to include, and not just in a token way, as it completes the picture of the experiences of principals as they take on what we have seen already is a very challenging role. The data clearly showed that being a beginning principal is a very rewarding and fulfilling role. Such positive testimonials, coupled with a balanced presentation of both the rewards and challenges of the role, could be used to promote the role of principal to potential aspirants. An important question to consider is “who is most effectively placed to promote the role of principal as a career choice?” Often, testimonials of those who have positive first hand experiences are the most effective way of promotion when compared to advertising and promotion by the system itself (Ries & Ries, 2004). This is relevant, considering some findings which found that although 88% of Scottish principals were very positive about being in the role, only 46% would recommend the role to a colleague (MacBeath et al., 2012). Just as potential
principals could be dissuaded from pursuing principalship by the comments of existing principals, so too could they be inspired to head towards and prepare for this role.

**Limitations of this study**
The two main limitations of this study were the limited sample size for the quantitative component of the research and the question of generalisability of the results gained from the qualitative components. The small number of respondents to the online survey substantially limited the analysis and use of the data. The survey results were helpful in triangulating the main findings of the other components of the research project and contributing some basic statistical information and reflective comments. The limited sample of participants for the qualitative components of the research raises a question as to the generalisability of the findings to the larger population of beginning independent school principals in Australia and internationally, as independent schooling takes on various forms throughout the world. As the results reflect similar findings into the experiences of beginning principals in other countries, greater confidence can be placed on seeing these results in a more generalisable way.

**Final remarks**
At the beginning of this research project I set out to develop a clearer understanding of the experiences of beginning principals of independent schools. Through this research I have developed a deeper appreciation for the role of principal and for the individuals who accept this challenge. Being a beginning principal, while rewarding, is also very demanding. I believe that school boards, independent school associations and the greater society have a role to play in supporting and assisting beginning principals. While acknowledging their huge impact in the education of our young people, little has been done to de-intensify their roles.

I believe that there is a real threat to the wellbeing of all principals if the intensity of the role is normalised and accepted as “par for the course”. As introduced in Chapter 7, I think that if the unrealistic demands are simply accepted as the norm for principals, then this will discourage any moves to challenge and change the situation with a “business as usual” mentality continuing indefinitely into the future. For there to be real change and relief brought to principals, the situation will need to be regarded as being serious and important. Unless this happens there is little likelihood of any proactive interventions
taking place which will begin to address these real concerns. Hopefully, this study has added some data that will be helpful in raising these concerns and offering some suggestions that can assist in this process of making the role more realistic so that principals can thrive indefinitely as they continue to accept the mantle of educational leadership.

I consider it a privilege to have journeyed with these beginning principals and to have heard their stories first-hand. Their co-operation and openness aided my research in a significant way. It has been inspiring to witness their commitment, professionalism and vision for making a real impact in the education of the students entrusted to their care. In conclusion, I would like to leave the reader with this comment made by Helen, as it aptly describes the experience of being a beginning principal.

It is the best job in the world with some of the most prickly moments imaginable.
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Appendices
Appendix A    The Invitation to Participate in the Survey

Dear Principal,

I would like to invite you to take part in a short (approx. 15 minute) online survey which is a part of the PhD research I am undertaking with Griffith University.

This research is looking at the challenges faced by new principals in Independent Schools and their perceived preparedness for the role. The results will hopefully provide a current snapshot of the main challenges that principals are facing and would be helpful information for those involved in the preparation and support of principals in their early years.

*If you are in the first four years of being a principal in an Independent School and have not previously been a principal* please click on the following link to access the survey.

The survey is anonymous. At the end of the survey there is a way that you can save your responses. The final results of this research will be distributed to all those who have been invited to take part. More information regarding the survey can be found on the welcome page.

https://prodsurvey.rcs.griffith.edu.au/Challenges

Thank you for your assistance in this project.

Kind regards,

Stephen Bagi B.Sc (hons), Grad Theol, MAPS, MAICD, (Rev)

Consulting Psychologist

0433 371 614

Research Supervisors:

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School of Education and Professional Studies  
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Appendix B  The Online Survey

It would be greatly appreciated if you could take part in this research by completing this online survey. As the surveys are anonymous, please be assured that you will not be identified from your submitted survey.

This research is being conducted by Stephen Bagi in association with Associate Professor Peter Grootenboer and Dr Barbara Garrick as part of a doctoral research project through Griffith University’s School of Education and Professional studies.

The aim of the research will be to examine the challenges faced by those who are in their first four years in the role of principal of an Independent School and have not previously been a principal and to assess their perceived level of preparedness. It is hoped that the results from this research will provide a current snapshot of the major challenges faced by those beginning in the role of principal and the impact that their preparation and training has had in helping them to be prepared to take on this role. These results could help schools, educational institutions and associations to be more effective in their preparation and support for new principals.

If you are in your first two years in the role and would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview, there is a link at the end of this survey to record your contact details. Your contact details will not be linked to your survey responses to ensure confidentiality.

The results of this research will be made available to all of those principals who have been approached to take part of this research and will be included in a doctoral thesis, various publications and presentations.

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact

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The Griffith University Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the committee through the Manager, Research Ethics, Office for Research, Bray Centre, Nathan Campus, Griffith University (Ph 07-3755 5585 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au).

There are 20 questions in this survey

General information : The responses with a red asterisk are mandatory.
1. What is your gender?
Please choose only one of the following:
- Female
- Male

2. In which year of being a principal are you currently in?
Please choose only one of the following:
- 1st year
- 2nd year
- 3rd year
- 4th year

3. Is the school where you are currently the principal;
Please choose only one of the following:
- Primary
- Secondary
- Combined

4. How many student are there in your school?
Please choose only one of the following:
- Less than 200
- Between 200 - 500
- Between 500 - 1,000
- Between 1,000 - 1,500
- Over 1,500

5. Is the school where you are currently the principal in an area which is;
Please choose only one of the following:
- metropolitan
- regional
- remote
6. Please rate how challenging you have found the following aspects in your role as principal.

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<td>Staying healthy through diet and exercise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Achieving improved academic performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being frustrated by the existing culture and values amongst the staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working through conflict or tensions between yourself and other staff members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with consumer attitudes and expectations of parents</td>
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<td>Finding adequate time for long term strategic planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding other principals with whom you can share your highlights and lowpoints</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solving problems with school buildings and site management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coping with fatigue</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Balancing diverse stakeholder needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working through legal actions by staff</td>
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<td>Being concerned over issues of student safety within the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiating positive organisational changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with possible media and community negativity directed at Independent Schools</td>
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<td>Working effectively with administrative staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Completing administrative work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

7. Are there any additional comments you would like to make regarding the challenges mentioned in the previous question?

8. Please identify any other aspects of your role that you have found very challenging.
9. What have been the highlights in your experience of being a principal?

10. What do you enjoy most about being a principal?

11. What do you enjoy the least about being a principal?

12. Approximately how many hours per week are you currently working?

13. How have you found your experience as a principal so far?
   Please choose only one of the following:
   - much easier than you expected
   - easier than you expected
   - about what you expected
   - more challenging than you expected
   - much more challenging than you had expected

14. How effectively were you prepared and trained to take on the role of principal?
   - not at all
   - slightly effectively
   - moderately effectively
   - quite effectively
   - very effectively

15. How much training and preparation did you receive regarding how to lead effectively in the crucial first six months of a senior leadership position?
   - none
   - minimal
   - some
   - adequate
   - considerable

16. How well thought through and effective was your welcome and induction into the role of principal?
   - not effective
   - minimally effective
   - moderately effective
   - effective
   - very effective
17. What could have been done to make your induction and welcome into the role more effective and meaningful to you?

18. In your preparation to become a principal, how helpful did you find the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unhelpful</th>
<th>Minimally Helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Reasonably Helpful</th>
<th>Very Helpful</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous experiences in a school leadership position</td>
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<tr>
<td>Previous experiences as a deputy or assistant principal</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advice and support from other principals</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Completing a principal preparation course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undertaking post-graduate studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Your own reading and research into the role of principal</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring or coaching</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. What do you think could have been done to better prepare you to take on the role of principal?

20. In what areas of your role would you have liked to have received more preparation and training?
Appendix C  Consent Form for Interviews

Dear ….,

As a research requirement I need to have your consent for this interview. I have attached an information pdf about the project.

Below is an agreement statement. If you are happy to proceed could you please return this email to me which indicates your consent.

Many thanks

Stephen Bagi

Interview consent statement

I …………… consent to my participation in the research project: Becoming a principal of an Independent School : Challenges and perceptions of preparedness which is being conducted by Stephen Bagi in association with Associate Professor Peter Grootenboer and Dr Barbara Garrick as a part of a doctoral thesis through Griffith University’s School of Education and Professional studies.

I understand that my participation in this interview is voluntary and confidential and that no information will be used in any way as to reveal my identity. I understand that an audio recording will be made of the interview.

Information about the research and privacy

Thank you for being a part of this research by completing the online survey and making yourself available for an interview. This interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed time in person, by phone or skype. The interview will be approximately 60 minutes in duration and will involve questions regarding the challenges that you have faced in your first two years as a principal of an Independent school and your perception of preparedness for these challenges.

This interview is being conducted as a part of research in association with Associate Professor Peter Grootenboer and Dr Barbara Garrick as a part of a doctoral thesis through Griffith University’s School of Education and Professional studies. The aim of the research will be to examine the challenges faced by Independent School Principals in their first four years in the role of principal and to assess their perceived level of preparedness. It is hoped that the results from this research will provide a current snapshot of the major challenges faced by those beginning in the role of principal and the impact that their preparation and training has had in helping them to be prepared to take on this role. These results could help schools, educational institutions and associations to be more effective in their preparation and support for new principals.
During the interview I will be taking notes and an audio recording and subsequently will make some transcripts of the interview. There will be no references to your identity in the reporting of the contents of the interview and demographical or general comments about those who took part will be kept to a minimum so that their identities are not inferred.

The recorded material and notes will not be made available to anyone outside of this research project. All recordings will be destroyed after transcripts have been finalised. All transcripts will be stored on a password protected computer and locked filing cabinet for a period of three years and then destroyed.

The Griffith University Ethics Committee has approved this project. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this project, you may contact the committee through the Manager, Research Ethics, Office for Research, Bray Centre, Nathan Campus, Griffith University (ph 3755 5585 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au).

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me.
Stephen Bagi
0433 371614
stephen.bagi@griffithuni.edu.au

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(07)555 28916

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School of Education and Professional Studies
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(07)555 29790

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and / or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at www.griffith.edu.au/privacy-plan or telephone (07) 3735 5585.
## Appendix D  The Ordered Survey Ratings for the Possible Areas of Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managing the workload</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.025</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding adequate time for long term strategic planning</td>
<td>3.72</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding enough quality time with your family</td>
<td>3.67</td>
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<td>Dealing with the amount of emails and general correspondence</td>
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<td>Dealing with interruptions during the day</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dealing with underperforming staff</td>
<td>3.51</td>
<td>1.011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staying healthy through diet and exercise</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaching enrolment targets</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.517</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coping with fatigue</td>
<td>3.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Achieving improved academic performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responding to the amount of people seeking some time with you</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting to the amount of responsibility that is associated with being a principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with staff negativity and reluctance to engage in new initiatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coping with stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with unrealistic expectations of you as the principal</td>
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<td>Initiating positive organisational changes</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Being frustrated by the existing culture and values amongst the staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing a cohesive and effective senior leadership team</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.108</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managing the amount and pace of decisions that need to be made</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helping staff to stay motivated</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dealing with the influence of the legacy, practice and style of the previous principal</td>
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<td>Prioritising your work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensuring that staff professional development is at a high standard</td>
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<td>Solving problems with school buildings and site management</td>
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<td>Dealing with feelings of professional isolation and loneliness</td>
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<td>Recruiting new staff members</td>
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<td>Implementing new Government initiatives</td>
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<td>Responding to critical incidents</td>
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