

**THE SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION ~  
RE-FORMING THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF  
THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
of the degree of Master of Educational Leadership**

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**November 1998**

TH 371.0712 COU  
39339053972599  
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The spiritual revolution  
: re-forming the nature  
1998.

## ABSTRACT

Catholic schools are not the places they used to be! This research paper attempts to bring some understanding as to why this assertion is valid by pursuing, firstly, a clearer definition of the contemporary nature and purpose of the Catholic school and, secondly, the consequent challenges to Catholic school leaders to respond to the challenges with some sense of purpose rather than hope.

The notion of a “Spiritual Revolution” is advanced to express many of the features of an upheaval in spirituality so diverse and powerful that it is challenging many of our traditional understandings and assumptions about the real purpose of the Catholic school.

The role of Catholic school leaders in having a vision for the future which will speak cogently to the issues and questions of our times is also explored. The challenge presented to school leaders is to “seize the moment” so that we provide for our communities schools which are genuinely Christian bearing faithful witness to our mission.

This research paper aims to inform all groups involved in the planning for and establishment of Catholic schools of the future. Data about the perceived nature and purpose of Catholic schools was collected from eight principals of the Mackay region. This was done via an initial interview of all Principals which was then followed up with a questionnaire, focussing on three areas:

- a) The purpose of the Catholic school;
- b) The changing nature of the Catholic school;
- c) Challenges to the role of the Principal.

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The data collected from these questionnaires was analysed and presented under key themes which emerged.

The study concluded that:

1. Catholic schools, on a continuum between two often conflicting paradigms, have moved away from the "traditional" role paradigms of catechesis, institution, dependency (parish school) and representative democracy to the more relevant paradigms of evangelization, community, co-existence (small Christian community) and participative democracy.
2. The Catholic school is experiencing a degree of acceptance and appeal within the community because it has taken the lead in this area, whilst some other areas of the Church are experiencing a diminishing role because they are still operating out of the "traditional" paradigms.
3. The key to what is currently happening in Catholic schools seems to be based on the fact that Catholic schools are now more accountability, thoughtful and reflective in their approach. Supporting this approach is the fact that school communities have embraced so fully the principles and process of Renewal. Catholic schools are seen to be very aware of the need to re-form the way in which the substance of catholic beliefs is presented in the light of a new, emerging "group mentality" (Thornhill, 1997).
4. Leaders of the Catholic school have a keen sense of their own spirituality and value people-centred practices.
5. Leaders of the Catholic school have the ability to live with the mystery of life, "dance with confusion" (Duignan, 1996), and embrace chaos.

## **DECLARATION**

I certify that this thesis does not contain without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any university, nor being submitted for any other degree. To the best of my knowledge and belief, information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references given

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I thank the principals of Mackay Catholic schools who contributed invaluable to the thesis by sharing their experience and wisdom through interviews and a questionnaire survey.

I am indebted to Dr Dennis McLaughlin and Dr Gayle Spry for their guidance, assistance, enthusiasm and encouragement given to me throughout this course of study.

I also acknowledge the assistance of Dr John Lyons for his assistance in making sense from all the data, and my colleague, Simon Watkins, for his proof-reading.

Finally, my wife, Maree, and children, who have shown nothing but support throughout the four years of study, even though they were often left to shoulder much of the burden in my absence.

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## Chapter One

### The Research Defined

#### 1.1 Introduction to the research

The future facing school leaders is a mixture of excitement, anxiety and uncertainty. Predictions abound about the nature of society and, in particular, schools in the third millennium. Hamel and Prahalad, quoted in Whitby (1995, p.2) paint one such view of the future world.

*"We are standing on the verge, and for some it will be the precipice, of a revolution as profound as that which gave birth to modern industry. It will be the environmental revolution, the genetic revolution, the materials revolution the digital revolution, and , most of all, the information revolution. Entirely new industries, now in their gestation phase, will soon be born. Existing industries - education, health care, transportation, banking, publishing, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, retailing and others - will be profoundly transformed. Cars with on-board navigation and collision avoidance systems, electronic books and personally tailored multimedia educational curricula, surgeries performed in isolated locales by a remote controlled robot, and disease prevention via gene replacement therapy are just some of the opportunities that are emerging to reshape existing products, services and industries."*

Hamel and Prahalad speculate about the challenges and opportunities presented by the various imminent or current revolutions in progress affecting almost every aspect of life in every part of society. They neglect to highlight though, a revolution which is presenting perhaps the greatest single challenge to leaders of Catholic schools, the "spiritual revolution" (O'Murchu, 1997, p27). Contemporary scholars such as O'Murchu, O'Sullivan, Morwood and Groome, amongst others speak of this revolution in terms of upheaval and transformation.

O'Murchu (1997) contends that the "new upsurge of spirituality is itself one manifestation of a world undergoing global transformation on a scale not known to humanity for many millennia" (p9). O'Sullivan (1997) likewise states the situation in terms of a "silent schism" adding that "what the church needs now is not a modest course-correction, not a little fine tuning of the system, but a fundamental reorientation" (p16). Morwood (1997) puts the case very clearly. "We are living through what may well be the greatest time of change in Christian history" continuing that there has been "an extraordinary breakdown of the religious culture" (p1). Groome (1998) describes this notion in terms of a "spiritual awakening" and a "renewed consciousness of the hunger of the human heart that only Transcendence can satisfy" (p323).

The spiritual revolution presents a challenge for Catholic school leaders firstly, to rethink the hitherto widely accepted and "official" view of the nature and purpose of the Catholic school, and secondly, to respond in such a way which is both authentic to the Gospel message, whilst leading to a serious engagement with the contemporary issues and concerns of post modernist society. It is a challenge which strikes at the very heart of the continued existence of Catholic Schools and forms the focus and the purpose of this thesis.

## **1.2 Research Site**

The research of this thesis was completed using data collected from the principals of eight Catholic Schools located in Mackay, a thriving city of 70 000 people. The city has a strong Catholic population made up of many nationalities, including a comparatively large percentage of families of European backgrounds who have played a major role in shaping the particular character of the local Church community. The most influential of these groups has perhaps been the Maltese community who still play a significant role in the life of the local Church. This is particularly evident in the faithful adherence to

traditional ceremonies more closely associated with the European Church than with the Australian Church.

This influence on the local church has only served to enrich the Catholic community and has contributed substantially to the very esteemed and influential position the Catholic Church enjoys within the city.

Mackay itself has experienced strong economic growth for many years, significantly better than many other Queensland regional centres. The reasons for this include the extensive sugar cane industry centred within Mackay and the surrounding areas, as well as being the main support centre for many of the mining towns located to the west of Mackay. Several mines have established offices in Mackay as well as preferring to house their workforce in Mackay, transporting workers to and from the mine site by bus. Tourism is also an area experiencing growth within Mackay, although the centre for the main tourist areas is Airlie beach, located one hour north of Mackay.

These reasons provide strong employment opportunities for young people.

The eight schools chosen for this study reflect the diverse nature of Mackay and its hinterland. The five primary schools range in location from Sarina, a small town thirty minutes drive South of Mackay, to Walkerston, a semi-rural school in a rapidly growing area, to St Mary's and St Joseph's, two long established inner city schools located on opposite sides of the river, to MacKillop and Emmanuel, both relatively new schools in high growth corridors towards the Northern suburbs. The schools range in size from 550 students at Emmanuel to 180 at Walkerston. The two high schools included in this study, are Mercy College, a junior secondary college with 600 students from years 8, 9 and 10 and St Patrick's College, a Senior College catering for 450 students in Years 11 and 12.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Research

Catholic schools are not the places they used to be! This paper attempts to bring some understanding as to why this assertion is valid, whilst, at the same time, presenting a clearer definition of the contemporary nature and purpose of the Catholic school and consequent challenges to Catholic school leaders. In doing so the study focuses on two key questions. Firstly;

- ❖ What is the REAL nature and purpose of contemporary Catholic schools leading into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as opposed to the hitherto widely accepted or “official” view?
- ❖ Secondly, what challenges and opportunities does this present for Catholic school leaders?

In order to gain some insight into the first key question, it is necessary to explore the notion of “the spiritual revolution” as proposed by O’Murchu and supported by other contemporary scholars.

These writers contend that, because of a major upheaval and transformation in perceptions of “traditional” religion, our basic understandings of the purpose of the Catholic school is now being called into question, and long-held assumptions about the nature of Catholic schools are no longer valid in the light of this revolution.

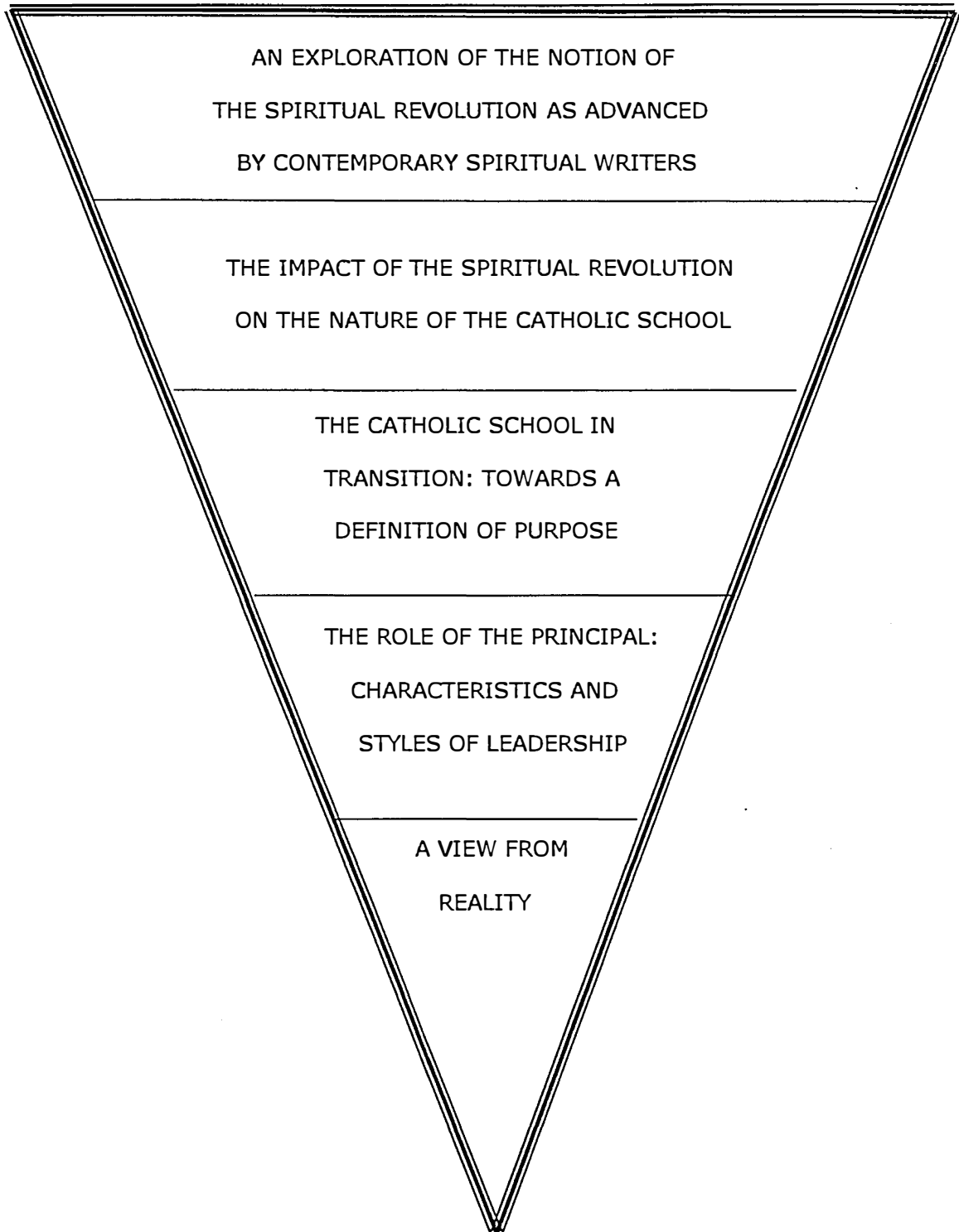
The second key question demands clarification and new insights into the most appropriate response from Catholic school leaders. The paper attempts to focus on the questions raised about the role of the Principal in being an effective agent of change. Such questions include:

- ❖ What characteristics of the leader and leadership styles are now called for?
- ❖ How do leaders of Catholic Schools maintain an authentic balance between all of the multi-directional forces acting upon the mission of the school?

The research then explored the experiences of eight serving principals of Catholic Schools in the Mackay region.

In pursuing the insights offered by the various authors and the experiences of the principals the sequencing and development of data was shaped to provide the most comprehensive overview. The approach follows a funnel sequence, which pursues the research topic from the broad, global conceptual framework narrowing to the reality of the local experience. In other words, from the theoretical to the practical. Diagrammatically, the purpose of the research can best be represented thus:

## Diagrammatic Representation of the Research Framework:



#### **1.4 Design of the Research**

The design of the research is very much connected to and determined by the purpose as outlined in the previous section. The purpose of this research is to both explore and seek an understanding of the current situation rather than to establish or identify a set of universal laws or rules which seek to explain or control the situation. The nature of this research topic demanded that an interpretative, qualitative approach be pursued. The qualitative approach seeks to "produce 'interpretative' accounts of phenomena" (Candy, 1989, p3) contrasting with the quantitative approach which aims to produce "law-like generalisations" (Candy, 1989, p3). This approach, according to the authors in this area, is best achieved through collating and analysing the experiences and understandings of the people involved.

The data collection strategies chosen for this research were the informal, unstructured interview and the questionnaire. Eight principals from Catholic schools in the Mackay Region were selected and each agreed to participate in the study.

Principals were interviewed at some length using a set of guideline questions which allowed each participant to identify issues which were relevant to their particular context. A closer analysis and examination of this data uncovered themes and issues which were common to all contexts.

These themes then formed the basis of a questionnaire which allowed each participant the freedom to reflect and explore the issues more fully, which in turn, provided data which was more relevant to the aims and purpose of the study.

Data from the questionnaires was collated and arranged according to the previously identified themes. The approach chosen for the analysis of the data was the interpretive-descriptive method. The key elements in this approach as identified by researchers such as Dey and Sarantakos are :



- 1) Describing (summarising, coding and categorising)
- 2) Classifying (identifying salient themes and issues emerging from the data)
- 3) Connecting (drawing conclusions and identifying areas for further study)

### **1.5 Significance of the research**

The underlying assumption of this research that Catholic schools are currently in a state of transition is beyond debate. Critical to an understanding of the future of Catholic schools is an understanding of where Catholic schools have come from, an historical perspective, the current state of play in Catholic schools, a contemporary perspective, and, importantly, some understanding of the shape Catholic schools will need to take in the future.

The first two perspectives form and give shape to the third. Without some serious study of the current changes impacting on the mission of the Catholic school, encompassing a "re-founding" (Arbuckle, 1993) of the basic values and beliefs underpinning the existence of Catholic schools there will be more hope than purpose associated with the shaping of future directions for the Catholic school.

This study provides both the background to the changing social and cultural milieu in which Catholic schools exist and function, and some understanding of the ways in which Catholic Schools are responding to the challenges presented. The study also attempts to provide a view from reality, the views of eight Catholic school principals who provide an insight into their understanding and experience of the Catholic school in transition.

The insights gained from this study highlight some conscious and deliberate attempt on the part of Catholic school leaders to act in such a way which allows the Catholic school to respond appropriately to the needs of its community whilst maintaining authenticity with the Mission of the Church.

This requires, on the part of the leader, some rethinking and clarification of the purpose of the Catholic school, which in turn, will influence the particular leadership characteristics and styles needed to direct the school towards established priorities.

These insights, whilst not necessarily applicable across wider contexts, raise questions pertinent to Catholic Education generally. The pursuit of these questions is a necessary step in the development of Catholic schools which are effective and relevant followers of the Gospel.

## **1.6 Outline of Thesis**

This research paper is presented in five chapters. Chapter One defines the research topic and provides information which assists the reader to understand and appreciate the purpose of the research.

Chapter Two of the thesis provides a review of the literature pertinent to the study. This review is organised under the broad headings of:

- a) Exploration of the Spiritual Revolution and its impact on the Catholic school;
- b) A review of the Nature and Purpose of Catholic schools;
- c) Contemporary leadership characteristics and styles.

Chapter Three outlines the design of the research in terms of methodologies and methods and approaches to data analysis. This chapter provides the rationale and justification for the choice of instruments and methodology.

Chapter Four is the analysis and presentation of findings. The results of the questionnaire are presented in detail

Chapter Five is the Review and Conclusions. In this chapter research results are synthesised under the major emergent themes. The chapter concludes with the conclusions drawn from the analysis of data.

## Chapter Two

### Review of the Literature

#### 2.1 Purpose of the Research

Catholic schools are not the places they used to be! This paper attempts to bring some understanding as to why this assertion is valid, whilst, at the same time, presenting a clearer definition of the contemporary nature and purpose of the Catholic school and consequent challenges to Catholic school leaders. In doing so the study focuses on two key questions. Firstly;

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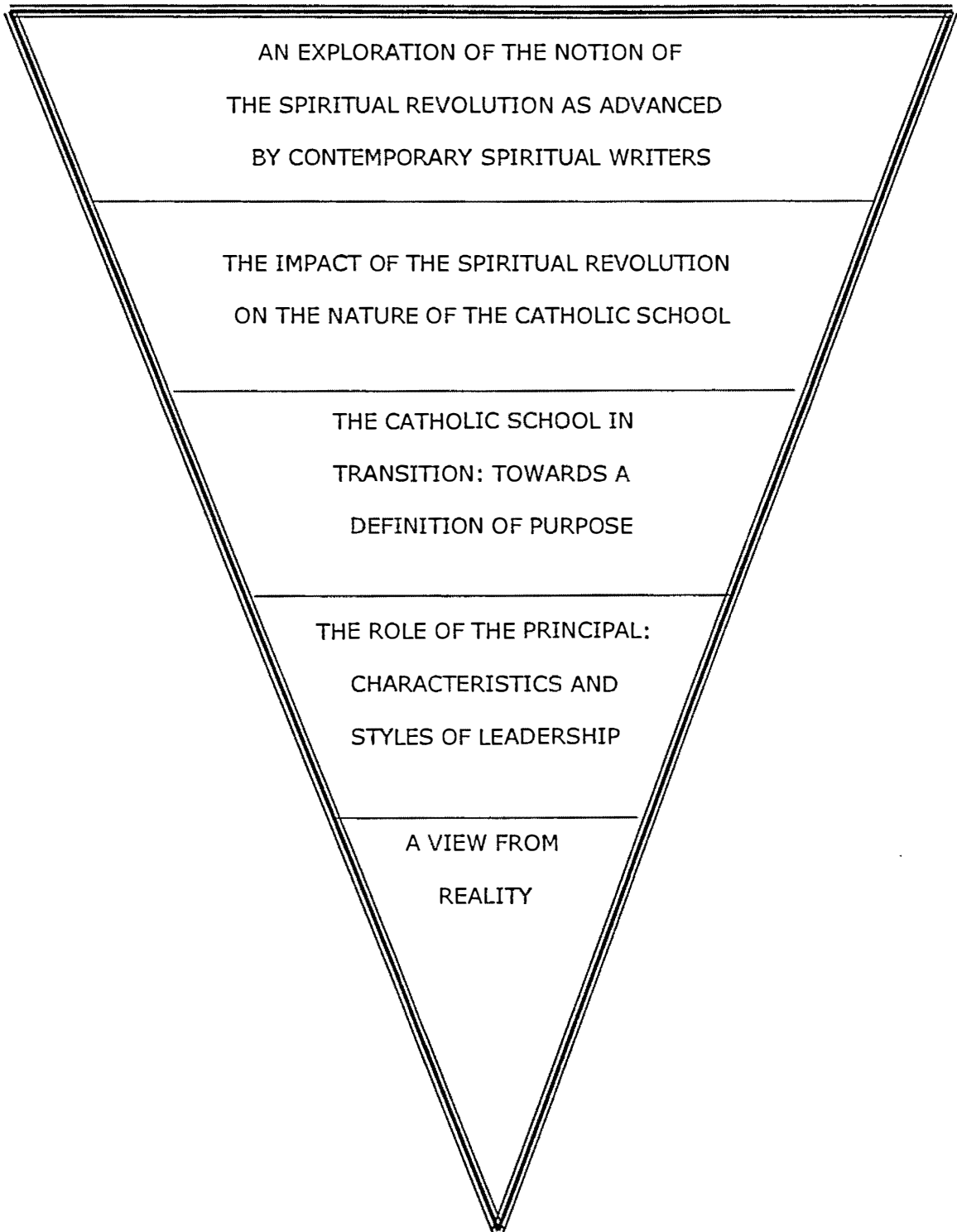
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Diagrammatic Representation of the Research Framework:



## 2.2 Defining Spirituality

Much is currently being said and written about contemporary spirituality. What, though, do we understand by the term "spirituality"? A brief outline of the changing understanding of the concept gives an interesting insight into the move away from the institutional and public understanding to an understanding which is both more communal and personal.

Originally the word "spirituality" encompassed "the characteristic patterns through which people expressed their beliefs, particularly in prayers and devotions" (Crawford & Rossiter, 1995, p 27). The emphasis in this model is on the public and external expression of one's beliefs as if one had to prove the depth and extent of one's faith beliefs through an external display of a set of behaviours. In a broader sense, to speak of a person's spirituality may also include "the patterns of thinking, spiritual reading, believing, feeling, talking and praying that are behind and which motivate behaviour" (Crawford & Rossiter, 1995, p27). Taking this notion even further they contend that a person's spirituality describes the relationship between what is believed and how those beliefs influence actions, an idea taken up by Morwood who suggests that each person has a particular image of God and a consequent relationship with God. Spirituality is "simply the manner in which we allow these images and thoughts to direct the way we live" (Morwood, 1997, p97). Groome likewise accentuates the personal and communal dimension defining spirituality as "people's relationship with God, or with however they name the Ultimate Value at the center of their lives" (Groome, 1998, p329). The Christian spiritual journey, Groome continues, "is into right relationship with God, self, others, and, creation, permeated by justice and compassion. It is sustained by prayer~personal and communal~and lived through a Christian community for the coming of God's reign in the world" (Groome, 1998, p340). This description of spirituality comes closest to capturing the essence of "the

spiritual revolution" (O'Murchu, 1997, p27) which is the subject of much of the literature review.

### **2.3 Perspectives of 'the spiritual revolution'**

Spiritual writers such as O'Murchu, O'Sullivan, Groome and Morwood contend that challenges experienced by the Catholic school are symptomatic of a wider spiritual revolution stemming from a growing disconnection between what are seen as the traditional Church beliefs, attitudes and practices and the search for spiritual meaning and nourishment by many people.

According to O'Murchu this situation represents a far wider breakdown and disintegration of many of the world's institutions, "a cultural Calvary that defies rational explanation" (O'Murchu, 1997, p26). He suggests that this signals such a "paradigm shift, a cultural, global Resurrection that it requires a profound change of mind and heart to comprehend its meaning. As a counter-cultural movement of our time, the 'new age' seems to be evoking an eminently timely spiritual revolution, one that could rock the foundations of Christendom, but not the central challenge of Christianity" (O'Murchu, 1997, p27).

Thomas Groome contributes a different perspective by suggesting that, spirituality once seen as something as a fad in the public arena, is now becoming "something much more" (Groome, 1998, p322) than simply a passing bandwagon. Evidence of this can be gained by a visit to any bookstore where books on spirituality are heading the best-seller lists. As well, "high-powered executives are doing 'retreats', ordinary people are going for spiritual direction, and enough young people are buying Gregorian chant to send recordings to the top of the charts" (Groome, 1998, p323). He proposes that "this spiritual awakening is significant and reflects people's abiding desire for something more than possessions or personal success. It hints at a renewed

conscientiousness of the hunger of the human heart that only Transcendence can satisfy" (Groome, 1998, p323).

Other writers, such as Duignan (1998), express this "hunger of the human heart" in terms of a search for meaning through authentic community values, suggesting that " many people, young and old alike, are looking outward for signs or signals of recognition, acceptance, trust, and love. They are probing for possibilities that will make some sense of their lives in an increasingly global and interdependent world. Young people, especially, no longer feel constricted (as they would see it) by 'the faith of their fathers' or by externally imposed, legalistic and rigid structures and rules. They can no longer be commended or pressured to 'be community'" (p58).

The spiritual revolution should be considered as such in the true sense of a revolution. As is the case with all revolutions, the effects are far-reaching and on-going. Many authors have attempted to describe the enormity of the changes.

"We are dealing with a phenomenon that defies human comprehension. We are witnessing a movement of our time motivated or driven by a creative evolutionary force over which we humans have little or no control. We are being carried along by a new surge for meaning, which, contrary to many religious beliefs, is not drawing us away from the world but plunging us more profoundly into it, not alienating us from the divine but re-connecting us with the God who co-creates at the heart of creation. not surprisingly therefore, the new spiritual search takes on global significance for many of its adherents." (O'Murchu,1997,p 12).

O'Murchu contends that the revolution is not only confined within the boundaries of Christianity, but is a response to a basic need and desire in all people by virtue of their humanity.

"Modern spirituality confronts the Christian community with the urgent need to retrieve the subverted vision of God's New Reign. The challenge arises not just from within Christianity itself as its increasingly disillusioned membership voice



their discontent about the role of Christian witness in today's world. It is in fact the world itself that is seeking to reclaim the vision of the Basileia, because that vision speaks so cogently to the critical questions of our time" (O'Murchu, 1997, p162).

Similarly, O'Sullivan argues that it is now time for a fundamental change to the structures and priorities which have for so long dominated our mindset. "What the church needs now is not a modest course-correction, not a little fine tuning of the system, but a fundamental reorientation of the way it is run to bring it into line with the Gospel and the best elements of its own tradition. It needs to use power as an instrument of service, not of domination, and to exercise it in dialogue, not in dictation" (O'Sullivan, 1997, p16). O'Sullivan continues this theme calling for a "little less institution and more community, to be a little less Catholic and a little more catholic, and to introduce into the life of the people of God credible and effective structures of popular participation" (O'Sullivan, 1997, p35).

#### **2.4 From Religion to Spirituality**

The search for meaning and relevance which underpins the spirituality movement reflects a wider yearning for some substantive authentic values and understandings which are not being offered through traditional institutions.

Institutions will be judged successful in their mission only as far as they are able to manifest in their structures and guidelines the authentic values and beliefs which underpin their existence. There is in all of us "the divine restlessness which underpins and motivates all our spiritual aspirations" (O'Murchu, 1997, p34). "The new upsurge of spirituality is itself one manifestation of a world undergoing global transformation on a scale not known to humanity for many millennia" (O'Murchu, 1997, p8). This growing trend has major implications for the institutional Church as she strives to maintain a message and a presence which is both relevant to the

contemporary needs of today's world and authentic to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, a Church which "celebrates both the present reality and future challenge of the Basileia" (O'Murchu, 1997, p33).

Many authors contend that religion as we know it today is under question. O'Murchu questions whether the age of formal religion itself is coming to an end, as many would see it as "a serious hindrance to the realisation, articulation and appropriation of our spirituality" (O'Murchu, 1997, p68).

Many of those on this spiritual journey claim that " formal religion, with its trappings and power games, is proving to be a major obstacle to spiritual growth and development" (O'Murchu, 1997, p31). Evidence of this challenge felt by many people is expressed well by Morris West when he states "I had to confess though that I loved the Church in which I was born and baptised, I could not live with her in peace" (West, 1996, p13).

One of the real problems alluded to by West suggests that "much of our inherited spirituality was shaped by religious thought patterns and worldviews that are now questionable" (Morwood, 1997, p98). The increasing number of Catholics willing to question this worldview has come about because "the beliefs, attitudes and practices we inherited in our Catholic upbringing was shaped at a time when the church was the centre of Western Culture" (Morwood, 1997, p2). Even the relatively short span of time between successive generations demonstrates clearly the huge differences which can occur in the way the same thing is viewed. Within generations these polarised positions can form, sometimes as a reaction to the particular model of church which characterised a persons upbringing.

An example of this is the role of the priests in the church. Many would argue that within the church the priesthood is still the same whilst the world in which it operates is far different. "Those who were experts at explaining the obligations of Sunday Mass, abstaining from meat on Friday or marriage in the church have now to discuss such issues as nuclear war, racism, sexual abuse and gay and lesbian relationships" (Ryan, Catholic Leader, 29 June 1998).

Declining numbers of priests has forced a new understanding of the role of the laity, who in many respects are accepting as their role aspects which were once considered the exclusive domain of the clergy. This has brought about a great deal of joy for some and for others considerable pain.

These situations are symptomatic of the fact that “people think differently, react differently, have new aspirations, a new sense of what is possible, new hopes and dreams. In the church there is a new consciousness of the dignity conferred by baptism and the responsibility for the mission of the church rooted in baptism” (Morwood, 1997, p4).

This new consciousness has led to a basic change in how people view the church and their place in it. Morwood (1997) highlights three characteristics of people now making up the majority membership of the church. These characteristics impact on the way in which people respond to the current church and its structures. He contends that:

- 1) People are now less likely to give unquestioning obedience to church authority in the context of western culture which urges individuals to take personal responsibility for decisions affecting their lives;
- 2) People will make their own personal judgements about the religious worldview which they are experiencing or have experienced through childhood and carefully re-examine it in terms of their current worldview. This is certainly true for many of today’s adult churchgoers who are more likely to be better educated (many more people are taking on theological studies and/or taking advantage of the adult education facilities being offered) and of more worldly experience than previously before. There is a resultant changing paradigm in the way our church is understood, reflecting the view that “the Catholic faith is not in its essence about creed, code and cult. Its core is a spirituality founded and focused on God the Father through Jesus Christ and

empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is this which enables a person to live, as it were, from the inside out, to grow, develop and deepen in a life of union with God. Its motivating source is prayer: it is that which enables, empowers and gives dynamism" (O'Sullivan, 1997, p192);

- 3) There is an demand that people be treated as Christian adults on a personal faith journey capable of taking responsibility for their own decisions.

Catholics now have a choice of immersing themselves in the traditional "package" offered by the church and adopting a siege mentality to guard against any modern influences or, alternatively, to become educated so that we better "understand and be conversant with key influences which impinge on our faith, then engage in the challenging task of deepening our appreciation of what we believe in the light of these influences" (Morwood, 1997, p3).

## **2.5 The Catholic School and the Spiritual Revolution**

Each of these predictions of future scenarios and the challenges presented by the spiritual revolution can be hotly debated, however one thing is abundantly evident, that the rapidly changing world order and the increasing desire of people to reflect more deeply about their spirituality, is presenting new challenges to those who have a desire to build a church inclusive of all people seeking an authentic encounter with the Transcendent through a Catholic faith community. For school leaders who accept this challenge, it will inspire a new paradigm as to the nature and purpose of Catholic schools if those schools are to have a significant and meaningful impact on the lives of the increasing number of families choosing a Catholic education for their children. Einstein's insightful observation that we live in a world "in which everything has changed except our way of thinking" (Kelly, 1993 p.13) suggests that any long term

solution will require more than just tinkering with existing structures and assumptions.

It is apparent that Catholic schools are very much the face of the Church today and that much of the outreach into the community is through Catholic schools. "Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that for the majority of Catholics, parents and children, the Catholic school is the only experience of Catholicism they choose to have" (Fahy, 1992; Quillinan, 1997; McLaughlin, in progress; O'Brien, 1998; Watkins, 1997, quoted in McLaughlin, 1998). McLaughlin advances this idea further suggesting that "in contemporary Australia, for most Catholics, the Catholic School, more than any other Church instrumentality, plays a significant contribution to witnessing to and being the catalyst for the promotion of the reign of God" (1998. P19).

Some of the significant changes impacting on the contemporary Catholic school are advanced by McLaughlin (1998):

- "Passing of the conduct of almost all Catholic Schools from religious to lay Catholics;
- apparent demise of religious orders and the rapid decline in the number of clergy;
- major disenchantment among many Catholics with the institutional Church;
- almost total disappearance of any 'Catholic culture' which was influential in the lives of previous generations of Catholics;
- decline in the participation of young adults in worshipping communities."

That Catholic schools are being seen by many as being on the cutting edge of a church in transition, upheaval and chaos places them on a continuum between two very different paradigms. Given our position of being practical followers of Christ, a revolutionary of his time, our response can and should be seen in terms of being revolutionary. It is obvious that Catholic schools cannot hope to have the solution to every problem, however we can plant the seeds in this first movement of the "revolutionary church" (Beare, 1995), particularly in the minds and hearts of students. Central to our understanding of the impact on

Catholic schools of this spiritual revolution is our own vision of church and the image or metaphor of church we can most comfortably identify with. For it is this image or metaphor which will guide our personal commitment to renewal and growth.

The church of recent times, with its heavy institutional emphasis, has been likened to a fortress (O'Murchu, 1997 & Treston, 1997) emphasising such things as rules, sharply defined roles and respect for authority. Whilst this model of church may have been useful in confronting the perceived problems and the particular cultural milieu of the time, it does not now truly reflect the religious, cultural and social context of modern Catholic schools. This model represents a

particular mindset or paradigm where spiritual growth is discouraged, treated with suspicion, and the basis for decision making is hierarchical and very much governed by rules and laws.

Opposing this view is the metaphor of the church as a pilgrim people of God on a journey searching for meaning and trying to bring about a new world order based on justice, equality and authenticity. Other fellow travellers are welcomed, with the pilgrims going out of their way to invite others to join the group. This metaphor is very much concerned with being "the champion of, and catalyst for, the 'new', not the guardian and watchdog of the old" (O'Murchu, 1997, p47). It is "a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind" (Lumen gentium, n. 10). The spirit of these pilgrims is the spirit reborn through Vatican II, the most contemporary call to renewal in the church. This spirit is one which calls us to be "open, needy and developing" (West, 1997, ABC Radio).

I believe that this spirit has implications for Catholic schools in the way they respond to the call to be and build church and should reflect in the nature and purpose of modern Catholic schools. What then are the features which make up the nature of contemporary Catholic schools?

### **2.5.1 Openness to conversion**

Catholic schools are primarily concerned with personal transformation or conversion. Integral to this conversion is a spiritual dimension. It goes further than just good people doing good things. "Let the renewing of your minds transform you, so that you may discern for yourselves what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and mature" (Romans 12:2). In effect all students have the opportunity to experience the Transcendent.

Being open to all possibilities and challenges is a central characteristic of personal transformation. "It must become a reality to which all are committed and which shapes their lives" (Thornhill, 1988, p183). The initiative for transformation comes from within rather than from any outside source, and is motivated by a desire to bring ourselves and our community closer to living out the Gospel message. It is aimed at bringing about change by changing the signposts of the message as opposed to changing the message to maintain relevancy and authenticity.

It is a call to active participation in the church's mission. "It is a call to which all must respond according to the gifts of the Spirit they have received" (Thornhill, 1988, p186). The call to renewal is not one directed firstly at the school as an organizational entity but rather a personal call to each person involved so that through personal transformation real and sustainable change occurs to the people involved and therefore to the organization as a whole.

### **2.5.2 Community**

Catholic schools are also concerned with fostering quality relationships in community by recognising our need for building personal relationships with our God through prayer and reflection, and also our interpersonal relationships with others, "a relationship which is both human and divine" (The congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, p91). The principle of community underpins what

many authors believe to be crucial if an organisation is to reach its potential. Many scholars name the principle of community in different terms. Clegg (1991) talks about "inclusivity", Bulasureja (1991) refers to "right relationships", Senge (Gaffney 1984) uses the term "alignment, whilst Handy (1995) describes "mini-communities" and Ludwig (1995) speaks of this concept in terms of "connectedness". All agree though that "changing school cultures is based on philosophical assumptions of partnership and values about people as co-constructors in shaping the schools of tomorrow" (Snyder et al, 1995, p30). The aim is to develop a community where people work together for a common purpose (Spry and Sultmann, 1994, p15). The challenge presented to Catholic schools is about working with and relating to others. "For it is in the person of our neighbour that we most often encounter God" (Bokenkotter, 1985, p288).

It is a recognition that personal transformation cannot occur in isolation from other people, "relationship to the other is inherent in relationship to oneself" (Kelly, 1993, p19). "Loving God means living in a limitless open circle of often disconcerting inclusion" (Kelly, 1993, p.20). "The new reign of God..... is about people and the quality of relationships that exists (or should exist) among people" (O'Murchu, 1991, p.46). These relationships are characterised by: "inclusiveness (especially of the poor and marginalised), justice, compassion and care, gentleness and peace and, above all, the fundamental equality of all people" (O'Murchu, 1991, p46).

In schools this means looking at the ways in which we offer to all community members the experience of community, encouraging an understanding and commitment to the common good rather than the goals of excessive individualism. The "major concern in renewal is the growth of people not things" (Spry and Sultmann, 1994, p46).



### 2.5.3 Authenticity

It is the role of the Catholic school to promote spiritual transformation as a continuous, ongoing and lifelong habit "to carry the work of Christ himself" (Thornhill, 1988, p178), of reading the signs of the times and "interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (Thornhill, 1988, p179) to bring about a new world order, which means for those working in Catholic Schools making the reign of God real in our schools.

Being authentic in daily practices requires reflection on current practices and where and when necessary, a commitment to change and renewal to help initiate practices and procedures which are consistent with core values and vision. "Members of the school community prepare themselves for administrative leadership by making a commitment to spiritual journey through prayer, meditation an the Scriptures, works of justice and the Sacraments" (Spry, 1996, p8).

Issues of justice and equality are central to the authenticity of Catholic schools. This could be as simple as respecting the differing circumstances of each of the students and their families, the poor and marginalised in particular, or the empowerment and liberation of students in the use of technology. It is putting our faith into practice. Catholic schools have had a history of service to the materially poor, which remains an imperative, however, the Vatican Document "The Catholic school on the Threshold of the Third Millennium" also identifies "the new poor" ~ "those who have lost all sense of meaning in life and lack any type of inspiring ideal, those to whom no values are proposed and who do not know the beauty of faith, who come from families which are broken and incapable of love, often living in situations of material and spiritual poverty, slaves to the new idols of society which, not infrequently, promises them only a future of unemployment and marginalisation" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1998, p16). The Document continues with the challenge that "to this new poor the Catholic school turns in a spirit of love" (p 16).

Central to the ability of the school to be authentic to its mission is the concept of self-renewal. Self-renewal is vital if schools are to bring about the reign of God, and thus respond meaningfully to the demands of interpreting the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. There are many ways which schools may promote and apply self-renewing practices. Many of the authors in this area recognise the importance of a personal commitment to renewal, "a heart and mind change" (Crowther, 1992, p87) on the part of school leaders.

These people make the practice of self-renewing principles a part of their leadership style and operation.

There are, though, more formal structures which provide school communities with the opportunity to review structures, practices and priorities in the light of the Mission Statement. The concept of renewal is important in the way schools respond to the demands of the spiritual revolution.

## **2.6 Self-Renewing processes in Catholic Schools**

One of the distinguishing features of communities which recognise their need to be open to change is their commitment to renewal. A brief review of the literature reveals the ever-present tension between the way we would like things to be and the way they are. One recurring theme centres around trying to retrieve that part of our existence which for one reason or another has been lost. O'Murchu talks about churches and religious systems as having "lost sight of the Kingdom agenda" ( p47). DuPree argues that we are in danger of losing our tribal stories in our move to institutional values and scientific leadership. He continues that we are beginning to "forget who we are" (1989, p72), whilst Thornhill contends that the Church has "gone into institutional mode and forgotten its mystery" (1988, p72). As a church alive and functioning in Australia society we need to review what kind of sign we are as a local church to other Australians (Edwards, 1989).

Others see the problem as one of a "split between the Gospel and culture" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, p.20) From a philosophical viewpoint Habermas and Starrett both talk about the continuous state of tension originating from the different agencies which we act upon and which act upon us. From an educational perspective the danger lies in the "subordination of educational systems to increasingly rationalized systems of production and control" (Evers & Chapman, 1995, p51). Whilst for others the "loss of meaning and loss of freedom in everyday life" is evidence for the need for Renewal in our lives (Evers & Chapman, 1995, p49). The overall theme coming from all of the authors though seems to reinforce the tension between the commitment to our personal needs and principles and those imperatives of the system which can be at cross purposes to our own.

The real challenge and opportunity presented to us through renewal is to take up the challenge of Vatican II, namely:

"What does it mean to be a believer, a Catholic and a member of the Church?" (Wojtyla, 1979, p9) in today's world. If, through renewal we are able to move closer to coming to grips with this challenge then not only are we improving our relationship with our God but by reaching out to others, through evangelization, in our community and beyond we bring a little more of Christ into our world. Sippel asserts a similar goal of renewal, suggesting that renewal aims to "change traditional authoritarian structures in schools so that decisions can be shared; foster values which facilitate equality, participation and a sense of human emancipation" (1989, p284).

## **2.7 Towards a Definition of Purpose**

There are as many understandings of the purpose of the Catholic school as there are people to give them. Given the data presented so far in this research paper highlighting the "spiritual malnutrition" (O'Murchu, 1997, p28) of modern times which has tended to produce a one-dimensional world

characterised by a loss of our grasp of spiritual beliefs and values, there seems little purpose in the Catholic school pursuing aims which are not cognizant of this reality. One such outdated view is advanced by Professor John Haldane who contends that "the primary function of Catholic schools, therefore is to provide forms of education through which the essential doctrines and devotions of Catholicism are transmitted" (Haldane, 1996, p133). This ideal view fails to consider the context in which Catholic schools operate today. Several Vatican Documents have attempted to define more clearly the purpose of the Catholic school. These include:

- a) The Declaration on Christian Education (1965);
- b) The Catholic School (1997);
- c) Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith (1982);
- d) The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (1998).

The most recent Document from the Vatican "The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium" recognises the reality that "rapid structural changes, profound technical innovations and the globalisation of the economy affect human life more and more throughout the world" (p5), "the scope of educational functions has broadened, becoming more complex, more specialized" (p5), the growing needs of "the socially and economically disadvantaged" (p16) and "the extreme pluralism pervading contemporary society" (p5) are all manifest in the Catholic school community. Any stated purpose then must reflect these factors. The Document advances a statement which highlights certain fundamental traits which should characterise the educating community. These are:

- a) "the Catholic school as a place of integral education of the human person through a clear educational project of which Christ is the foundation;
- b) its ecclesial and cultural identity;
- c) its mission of education as a work of love, and;
- d) its service to society" (p7).

Thomas Groome also advances the purpose of the Catholic school in terms of community, service and spirituality. He states that:

"Catholic schools should be communities that form students to be citizens who care for the common good and people of faith identity committed to the reign of God in the world" (Groome, 1998, p203).

He further clarifies the purpose by advancing that the mission of a faith community entails the functions of "word, welcome, witness, welfare and worship" (Groome, 1998, p 204).

## **2.8 Implications for the organization and administration of schools**

The spiritual revolution has placed school leaders under a great deal of scrutiny as they grapple with an appropriate response to the changing demands of meeting the needs of the school community. Bhindi and Duignan refer to the new demands on Catholic schools as "environmental complexities and turbulence" contending that these changes "have brought to the forefront fundamental issues and tensions relating to leadership, organization structures, culture and management practices" (Bhindi & Duignan, 1997, p118).

It is demanded that educational leaders move forward with some degree of purpose and confidence rather than being swept along or engulfed by other forces. Responding purposefully rather than hopefully is the challenge to school leaders. "Transforming schools into responsive learning communities is the challenge for educators as we prepare for a new century" (Snyder et al, 1995, p 2).

The implications for the leaders of Catholic schools are significant. Catholic schools are not the places they used to be. Models of organization and administration based on views of a church and families seeking enrolment in Catholic schools which conflict with reality need to be challenged.

The impact of these contrasting paradigms will manifest significantly in the administration and organization of Catholic schools. Our response to this situation as leaders of Catholic Schools will be very much determined by our own worldview and understanding of the evolving role of the Catholic School in the educational mission of the Church. Our worldview will determine and influence much of what we do and how it is done. Leaders in Catholic education need to clarify where they stand and what they stand for, as the lacuna between a theoretical need for God and a commitment to action (Spry, 1996) is bridged. Our response must be manifest in the leadership through our understanding of the changing nature and purpose of Catholic schools which will, in turn, largely determine the administrative and organizational practices (Spry, 1996).

This process of clarifying our core values and vision provides a touchstone to judge what is good, and, in turn, those procedures which need to be realigned to bring them into harmony with the agreed values and vision. The process is essentially one of establishing clearly why certain courses of action are or should be followed and identifying, because of this understanding, areas of administrative leadership which need changing. This then brings a certain authenticity to the ethos of the school, "the way things are done around here" (Flynn, 1993).

## **2.9 Implications for School Leadership**

Leadership theory and practice is very much an issue in most modern organisations with the move away from the heroic individualism which has characterised our understanding of leadership until modern times (Whitehead, 1987). The Church as an organisation of committed and longing people is no different. Whitehead asserts that "as a community of faith, our experience of leadership has undergone a dramatic shift over the past quarter century" (Whitehead, 1987, p30).

Christian leadership is at the heart of the type of response we make to our Baptismal call to bring about the reign of God here on earth (Edwards, 1987). Opinions on the direction and shape of this response vary widely, however, many writers agree on the necessity of good leaders and good leadership to the process of communities achieving their goals and continuing their search for excellence. Carroll contends that "no community can function without some form of leadership that enables the community to survive and achieve its goals" (Carroll, 1991, p35). Whitehead states further that "there has been a significant transformation in the way that leadership is understood in the social sciences". (1987, p30). All of the writers argue strongly for a particular style of leadership which they believe best fits the current social context of today's church.

To understand this change in more detail it is necessary to examine firstly what the authors put forward as their understanding of leadership and, secondly, what they are saying about leadership in terms of its various structures and styles.

## **2.10 Definition of Leadership**

The literature reveals two concepts which are significant to showing a relationship between "the spiritual revolution" (O'Murchu, 1997, p27) and a pertinent response by Catholic School leaders. In trying to link the concepts of leadership and spirituality the authors seek to broadly define the process or action of leadership to contrast the interrelationships between the two areas. Scott objectively defines leadership as "to show the way by going in advance; conduct, escort or direct; to cause to follow some course of action or line of thought" (Scott, 1994, p64). She contends that viewing leadership in this way neglects the spiritual aspects of leadership, and therefore neglects the growth and maturity which comes through a collaborative view of leadership.

Whitehead, likewise, defines leadership simply as “the exercise of initiative and influence in the achievement of a group’s goals” (Whitehead, 1987, p46), and spends considerable time outlining the changes in our understanding of leadership from what one person in a group has to something that people in a group do together.

Carroll, whilst not providing a definition of leadership as such, talks about leadership in terms of power and authority. He discusses the implications for leadership in a time of change when traditional models of church leadership ~ hierarchical, clergy-based and paternal ~ have for many people, “lost their aura of invincibility and absoluteness” (Carroll, 1991, p34).

Edwards, as well, takes a similar line defining leadership as “the influence that a person exerts within a community” (Edwards, 1987, p95). He continues by analysing various styles of leadership and argues strongly for a Scriptural grounding for leadership rather than “a self-justifying leadership” (Edwards, 1987. p95).

Crawford and Rossiter advance the notion of teachers as spiritual leaders in their schools, highlighting the importance of developing a personal and corporate spirituality which become a powerful force in the lives of students at the school.

Having now gained an insight into the authors’ understanding of leadership it is important to consider the structural contexts within which leadership occurs and the quest for community .

### **2.11 Leadership and Community**

The first insight common to all authors is that leadership in any organisation cannot be seen as the sole property of one individual, rather a complex set of relationships between people (Scott, 1994, Whitehead 1987, Carroll, 1991). Scott, in examining two opposing organisational structures, which she refers to as hierarchical and circular, points to the fact that it is very much the



organisational structure which entrenches certain leadership styles and discourages others.

The prevailing leadership structure in the Church ~ hierarchy ~ she contends is flawed to the extent that "so much is assumed and unchallenged about the person in the position" (Scott, 1994, p73) and that many leaders wield power without legitimate authority (Carroll, 1991). The reality of this structure is that leadership is defined by personality and status rather than personal qualities and contextual considerations. "Leadership is a characteristic of the social system more than of any single person within the group" (Whitehead, 1987, p48). Effective leadership depends on the right person being in the right place at the right time ~ it is both personal and contextual (Whitehead, 1987) which is contrary to the hierarchical structure which "tends to promote a pernicious individualism that tears at what few threads of community might exist" (Scott, 1994, p74). Whitehead concurs with Scott's assessment referring to possible by-products of the hierarchical structure as "paternal and "autonomous leadership" (p154) and "unilateral power" (p151).

By contrast, the alternative model of organisational structure, the circular model, emphasises the position of the leader as the enabling centre of a team (Scott, 1994). In this structure the leader exercises power with other group members rather than power over.

An important aspect of this type of structure is its "relational character" (Carroll, 1991, p10) which is variously referred to by other authors as "connectedness" (Scott, 1994, p88), "inclusion and intimacy" (Whitehead, 1987, p162), "reciprocal interaction and mutual dependence" (Whitehead, 1987, p50) and "order of relationship" (Ranson, 1996, p52). Whitehead strongly promotes this circular model of organisational structure saying that "any understanding of power which is limited to the unilateral image is necessarily deficient, since it fails to recognise the most central element of social transaction, its relational aspect" (Whitehead, 1987, p 50).

Within the confines of organisational structure the leadership styles practised by key personnel is more and more being called into question. This call to be more accountable is motivated by a desire by group members that leadership styles be more inclusive, participative and co-responsible. Connected to this call also is the expectation that leaders are authentically in tune with the soul of the community not just to individual aspirations. Given this expectation it is necessary now to examine some of these leadership styles.

## **2.12 Leadership Characteristics and Styles**

In his article, "Leadership in the local church in the light of the New Testament", Dennis Edwards presents a detailed account of six styles of leadership which he contends are both authentic to the Gospel message and effective in their outcomes. These characteristics are of personal qualities and attitudes as distinct from the organisational structures mentioned above. Three of these characteristics have been selected for elaboration.

### **2.12.1 Leadership from below rather than above**

This style demands from the leader a conscious decision to "attempt to stand with, and share the perspective of those who are pushed to the margins of church and society" (Edwards, 1987, p100). It is an attempt to view life experiences through the eyes of the marginalised, poor and oppressed. Edwards contends that "this suggests that leadership in the Christian community will be a leadership which goes to be with those at the margins, which shares life with them, and enables them at times to come to the centre of the community" (Edwards, 1987, p248). He continues by saying that only when it is from below can leadership truly be said to be inclusive.

### **2.12.2 Participatory Leadership rather than Unilateral Leadership**

Participatory leadership is very much rooted in the activities of the early church and has been reinforced as late as the second Vatican Council. The call from Vatican II is to "a more participative and co-responsible church" (Edwards, 1987, p102) which challenges the hitherto unchallenged notion of ordained ministers having sole responsibility for the mission of the church. The word used by Edwards to describe the participatory style is "synergos" meaning co-worker or collaborator. It is recognition that the potential of any group is greater than the sum of its parts.

### **2.12.3 Empowering Leadership rather than Overpowering Leadership**

Overpowering leadership fails or decides not to recognise or acknowledge the contribution or potential of the group members other than the designated leader. The emphasis of the empowering leader is on the personal formation of members and the building of community. Words used to describe this style of leadership include "reciprocity", "empathy", "fearless challenge" and "mutuality" (Edwards, 1987, p105).

### **2.13 Spirituality ~ A Vital Quality of Leaders**

To view objectively the concepts of spirituality and leadership is to deny the inter-relatedness of the two areas. Scott suggests that for too long spirituality has been viewed as simply a component of leadership which, if possessed by the leader adds a faith dimension to that person's actions. However, like Scott, many of the authors would suggest that the opposite is true and that

leadership is a part of our spirituality which influences our understanding and therefore our style of leadership.

Scott (1994) reinforces this point when she says that the emphasis in many organisations is on developing a structure to achieve the group's goals and then trying to add a spiritual dimension. Scott calls this the separation of our public and private lives reserving the spiritual for the private realm and leadership for our professional and public lives" (Scott, 1994, p66).

"Even in organisations that use the words of the spirit, the emphasis remains primarily on equipping people to do rather than helping individuals to understand and connect their own personal mission with that of the organisation so that the doing takes on the combined spirit and energy of the integration of the public and private" (Scott, 1994, p84).

Scott also makes the point that the emphasis of a successful organisation is often equated with "concrete measurable results" (p77) which become more important than "process, relationships, or building community in relationship with the outside world" (p77). She believes that not enough attention is given to "the nurturance of the spirit" (p84) in staff and organisations in general. Spirituality enables staff or group members to explore deeper their organisation's culture which connects meaning to action. Crawford and Rossiter refer to this as "corporate spirituality" (Crawford and Rossiter, 1996, p28).

Whitehead also picks up this theme describing the need for any group to act as a community so that group processes can best occur and therefore reach the goals of the group. Whitehead describes this process in terms of developing a sense of "inclusion", "intimacy" and "security" within a group. In other words getting in touch with the core mission of the organisation. Applied to the Church she states that this process involves the effort to develop more adequate structures of mutual service and mutual empowerment in the community of faith.

## **2.14 Pertinence to Contemporary Leadership and Spirituality**

The current experience of leadership in the Church is a mixture of styles and structures which flow from widely varying images and models of church. A common theme from the literature is calling for a new understanding of leadership away from hierarchical structures and the individual, unilateral style of decision making which is a hallmark of this structure, to a circular structure where leadership is seen more in relation to a "social setting than an attribute of an individual" (Whitehead, 1987, p66). The call for leaders and ministers is to a process of "refounding" (Arbuckle, 1993), that is, to go back to the call of Jesus to be and to build church.

The second point from the readings pertinent to contemporary leadership and spirituality is an emphasis on the mission of Jesus rather than on the church which is the instrument for achieving that mission. O'Meara (1983, p 26) makes the point in strong terms: "Jesus Christ preached not a religion nor an institution, not even himself. He preached the kingdom of God".

We are challenged to examine existing structures and, if necessary, replace them with structures more in tune with the mission of Jesus. This is a real call to the majority lay members of the church to become involved at the grass roots and decision making levels.

The third implication for contemporary leadership and spirituality is for a commitment to leadership styles which are authentic to the mission given to us by Jesus. Talk of collaboration, equity and justice must be put into practice in leadership styles. In other words there should be a narrowing gap between our resolve and our rhetoric.

Finally, there is a practical implication if change is to happen. The skills necessary to build a collaborative and participative church or school community must be learned and taught to enable change to happen. The situation of having many people with goodwill and no skills is a real possibility. Goodwill alone will not bring about meaningful and permanent

change. There has to be a commitment on the part of the relevant authorities to include the formation of group members as a priority when budgeting both time and money. This situation will only eventuate with leaders committed to leadership styles and structures which promote the meaningful participation of all group members.

## CHAPTER THREE

### DESIGN OF RESEARCH

#### 3.1 Purpose of the Research

"Catholic Schools are not the places they used to be!" This paper attempts to bring some understanding as to why this assertion is valid, whilst, at the same time, presenting a clearer definition of the contemporary nature and purpose of the Catholic School and consequent challenges to Catholic School leaders. In doing so the study focuses on two key questions. Firstly:

- ❖ What is the REAL nature and purpose of contemporary Catholic Schools leading into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as opposed to the hitherto widely accepted or "official" view?
- ❖ Secondly, what challenges and opportunities does this present for Catholic School leaders?"

In order to gain some insight into the first key question, it is necessary to explore the notion of "the spiritual revolution" as proposed by O'Murchu (1997) and supported by other contemporary scholars. These writers contend that, because of a major upheaval and transformation in the perceptions of "traditional" religion, our basic understandings of the purpose of the Catholic School is now being called into question, and long-held assumptions about the nature of Catholic Schools are no longer valid in the light of this revolution.

The second key question demands clarification and new insights into the most appropriate response from Catholic School leaders. The paper attempts to focus on the questions raised about the role of the Principal in being an effective agent of change. Such questions include: What characteristics of the leader and leadership styles are now called for? How do leaders of Catholic

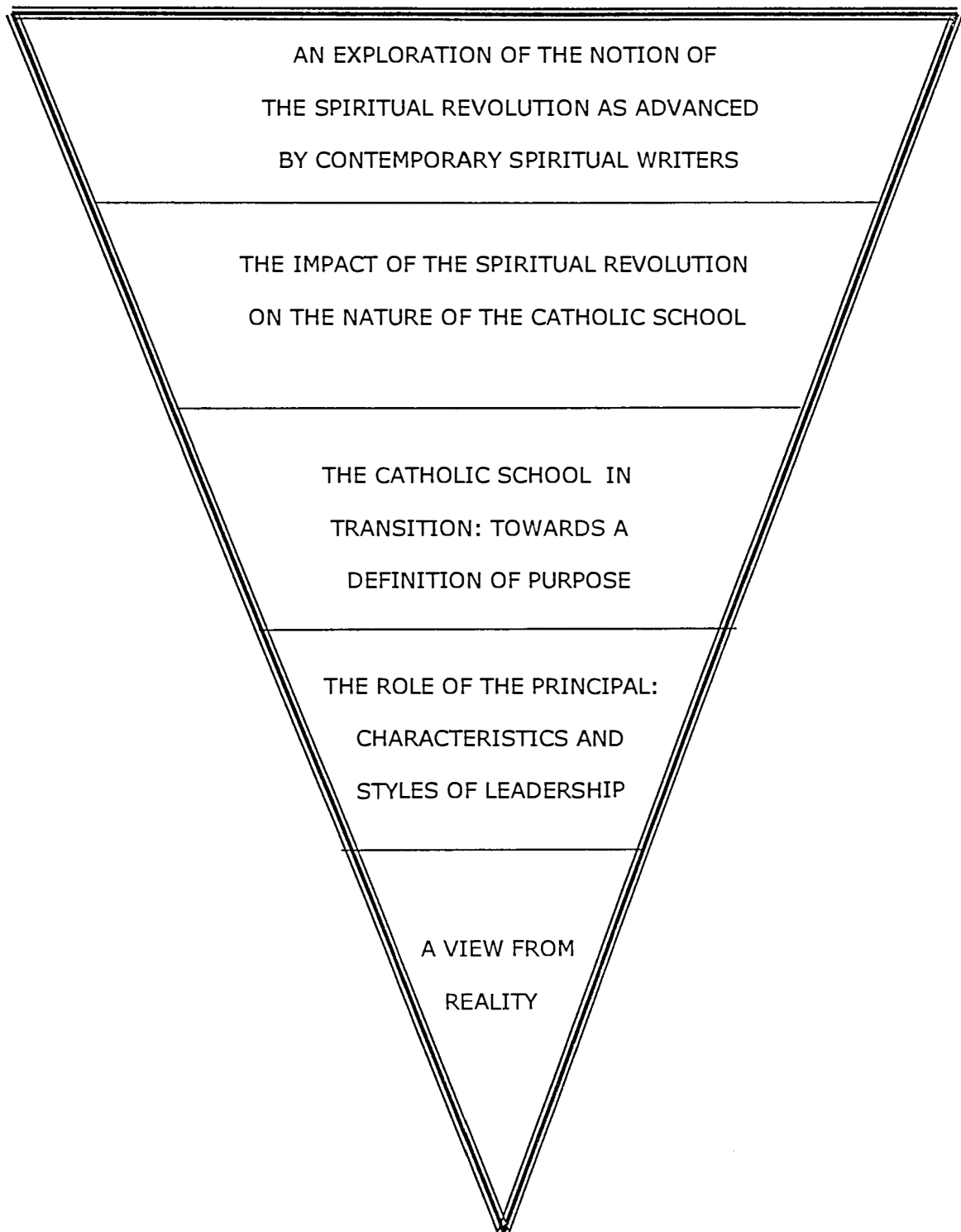
schools maintain an authentic balance between all of the multi-directional forces acting upon the mission of the school?

The research then explored the experiences of eight serving principals of Catholic schools in the Mackay region.

In pursuing the insights offered by the various authors and the experiences of the principals the sequencing and development of data was shaped to provide the most comprehensive overview. The approach follows a funnel sequence which pursues the research topic from the broad, global conceptual framework narrowing to the reality of the local experience. In other words, from the theoretical to the practical. Diagrammatically, the purpose of the research can best be represented thus:



## Diagrammatic Representation of the Research Framework:



### 3.2 Type of research needed

The history of social research can be traced back to the Greek philosophers of Socrates and Plato who "turned the course of research back to speculation and mysticism" (Sarantakos, 1993, p2). It is "a complex and pluralistic process, diverse in purpose and methods, and based on a varied theoretical and ideological structure" (Sarantakos, 1993, p30). It is characterised by complex and varied processes which reflect the diversity of both the aims of any research and methods employed by the researcher. Whilst the "driving force behind any type of social research is its philosophical framework" (Sarantakos, 1993 p16), the dominant paradigm of the researcher will determine the aims of the research. Generally, the aims of social research are included amongst those listed below:

- ❖ to *explore* social reality for its own sake or in order to make further research possible;
  - ~ to *explain* social life by providing reliable, valid, and well documented information;
  - ~ to *evaluate* the status of social issues and their effects on society, and
  - ~ to make *predictions*;
- ❖ to understand human behaviour and action;
  - ~ to emancipate people;
  - ~ to suggest possible solutions to social problems;
  - ~ to empower and liberate people;
- ❖ to develop and/or test theories.

(Sarantakos, 1993, p16)

### 3.3 Methodology

This type of research employs a diverse range of methodologies. It is necessary though to explore the connection between the methodology and the dominant paradigm. Sarantakos (1993, p30) defines a 'paradigm' as " a set of

propositions that explain how the world is perceived.” The methodology “translates the principles of a paradigm in a research language, and shows how the world can be explained, handled approached or studied” (Sarantakos, 1993, p30). The distinction is made between methodology and method, a topic which is covered later in this section.

Researchers differ as to the number of paradigms influencing the selection of methodologies and methods and in doing social research. Whilst for some there are “as many paradigms as there are groups of like-thinking social scientists” (Sarantakos, 1993, p31), for other researchers, such as Lather, there are two only, namely the positivist and post positivist paradigms. Sarantakos, amongst others, contends that this classification is too general and proposes the positivistic and interpretive approaches as well as critical theory which he includes as a third paradigm. The main paradigms are represented below:

Table 3.2.1 Principal Paradigms in the Social Sciences

<i><b>Positivistic</b></i>	<i><b>Interpretive</b></i>	<i><b>Critical</b></i>
Positivism	Symbolic interactionism	Critical sociology
Neopositivism	Phenomenology	Conflict school of thought
Methodological positivism	Ethnomethodology	Marxism
Logical positivism	Hermeneutics	Feminism
	Psychoanalysis	
	Ethnology	
	Ethnography	
	Sociolinguistics	

(Sarantakos, 1993, p31)

The important facets of each of these paradigms in terms of its viewpoint with respect to: perceptions of reality, perceptions of human beings; views about the nature of science; and notions about the purposes of social research is presented below in Table 3.2.2:

Table 3.2.2 Theoretical perspectives in the social sciences (Sarantakos, 1993, p38/39)

Criterion	Positivistic	Interpretivism	Critical Perspective
Reality is ..	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Objective, 'out there'</li> <li>❖ Perceived through the senses</li> <li>❖ Perceived uniformly</li> <li>❖ Governed by universal laws</li> <li>❖ Well integrated for the good of all</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ subjective</li> <li>❖ created, not found</li> <li>❖ interpreted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ between objectivism and subjectivism</li> <li>❖ complex: appearance and reality</li> <li>❖ created by people, not nature</li> <li>❖ in tension, full of contradictions</li> <li>❖ based on oppression and exploitation</li> </ul>
Human beings are...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ rational individuals</li> <li>❖ obeying external laws</li> <li>❖ without free will</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ creators of their world</li> <li>❖ assigning meanings to the world</li> <li>❖ not restricted by external laws</li> <li>❖ creating systems of meanings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ dynamic, creators of their destiny</li> <li>❖ oppressed, exploited, alienated, restricted</li> <li>❖ brain-washed, misled, conditioned</li> <li>❖ hindered from realising their potential</li> </ul>
Science is...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ based on strict rules/procedures</li> <li>❖ deductive</li> <li>❖ nomothetic (based on laws)</li> <li>❖ relies on sense impressions</li> <li>❖ value free</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ just common sense, (no science)</li> <li>❖ inductive</li> <li>❖ ideographic</li> <li>❖ relies on interpretations</li> <li>❖ not value free</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ between the positions of positivism and interpretivism (conditions shape life, but can be changed)</li> <li>❖ emancipating, empowering, relying on both and on system dynamics</li> <li>❖ is not value free</li> </ul>
Purpose of research:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ to explain facts/causes/effects</li> <li>❖ to predict</li> <li>❖ emphasises facts</li> <li>❖ emphasises prediction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ to interpret the world</li> <li>❖ to understand social life</li> <li>❖ emphasises meanings</li> <li>❖ emphasises understanding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ to get below the surface to expose real relations</li> <li>❖ to disclose myths and illusions</li> <li>❖ emphasis removing false beliefs/ideas, emancipation and empowerment</li> </ul>

Although the three paradigms as outlined above are clearly defined and delineated, in reality they share many common principles and despite internal diversity, demonstrate many basic similarities. "These basic principles reflect the theoretical and methodological basis of the perspectives and determine to a large extent the way in which research should be conducted" (Sarantakos, 1993 p39). If a certain worldview is advanced, if the purpose of the research is clearly in a particular direction and if human beings are perceived according to certain contexts and criteria then methods have to also complement this framework and fit within the particular theoretical and methodological constraints of the paradigm in question.

As a result of these similarities and differences in the various paradigms, two major methodologies have emerged.

They are qualitative methodology and quantitative methodology. Sarantakos (1993) lists a third methodology, namely critical methodology, which is yet to be accepted among social scientists as distinct and independent of the other two.

In principle, there is little difference between the two methodologies as both set out to collect data for further analysis or future research. It is in fact the nature of the theoretical framework and design of the methodology which determines the choice of one method in preference to the other. For example, interviewing may be designed as a tool for use in quantitative research (a structured, standardised interview) or for use in qualitative research (a semi-structured interview).

An analysis of the two methodologies outlining the perceived differences between the two is presented in figure 3.2.3.

Table 3.2.3 Selected Pivotal Differences Between Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methodologies (Sarantakos, 1993, p53)

Feature	Quantitative methodology	Qualitative methodology
Nature of reality	Objective; simple; single; tangible sense impressions	Subjective; problematic; holistic; a social construct
Causes and effects	Nomological thinking; cause-effect linkages	Non-deterministic; mutual shaping; no cause-effect linkages
The role of values	Value neutral; value-free inquiry	Normativism; value-bound inquiry
Natural and social sciences	Deductive; model of natural sciences; nomothetic; based on strict rules	Natural and social sciences are different; inductive; ideographic; no strict rules; interpretations
Methods	Quantitative; mathematical; extensive use of statistics	Qualitative, with less emphasis on statistics; verbal and qualitative analysis
Researcher's role	Rather passive; is the 'knower'; is separate from subject-the known: dualism	Active, 'knower' and 'known' are interactive and inseparable
Generalisations	Inductive generalisations; nomothetic statements	Analytical or conceptual generalisations; time-and-context specific

The nature of this research topic demanded that an interpretative, qualitative approach be pursued. This type of approach is based on the assumption that any human situation "can only be understood from the standpoint of the individual actors" (Candy, 1989, p3) and that human behaviour cannot be measured nor is it governed by general laws. Conversely, the positivist, quantitative approach is steeped in the objective, empirical traditions based on scientific method and scientific truth (Candy, 1989, p3). The qualitative approach seeks to "produce 'interpretative' accounts of phenomena" (Candy, 1989, p3) contrasting with the quantitative approach which aims to produce "law-like generalisations" (Candy, 1989, p3). It is for these reasons that the qualitative approach to the design of the research was chosen.

Assumptions which underpin this approach include:

- ❖ "the belief that any event or action is explicable in terms of multiple interacting factors;
- ❖ an acceptance of the extreme difficulty in attaining complete objectivity;

- ❖ the view that the aim of inquiry is to develop an understanding of individual cases, rather than laws or generalisations;
- ❖ the context makes a difference;
- ❖ a recognition that inquiry is always value-laden"

(Candy, 1989, p4).

Other authors such as Wilson express similar understandings in terms of the "naturalistic-Ecological Perspective" ~ that "human behaviour is significantly influenced by the settings in which it occurs" (Wilson, 1977, p247) and the "qualitative-phenomenological hypothesis" which asserts that "the social scientist cannot understand human behaviour without understanding the framework within which the subjects interpret their thoughts, feelings and actions" (Wilson, 1977, p249). This type of approach does not seek to explain the situation rather to understand it.

Sarantakos (1993, p107) confirms the choice in favour of the qualitative methodology stating that "choice has to be made on theoretical and methodological principles." He suggests that the choice in favour of this type of research is made under the following conditions which apply to this case:

- ❖ "When there is a need to study reality from the inside rather than from the outside, that is, to understand it from the point of view of the subject.
- ❖ When there is a need to capture reality as it is, that is, in interaction.
- ❖ When the researcher wishes to approach reality without preconceived ideas and pre-structured models and patterns.
- ❖ When the researcher wishes to capture the *meaning* and the regularities of social action."

(Sarantakos, 1993, p107)

### **3.4 Research methods**

The data collection strategies chosen for this research were the interview and the questionnaire.

### 3.4.1 The Interview as a Data Collection Tool

The interview as a data collection tool (or method) for social research has validity because "it is prepared and executed in a systematic way, it is controlled by the researcher to avoid bias and distortion and is related to a specific research question and a specific purpose" (Sarantakos, 1993, p177). There are many types of interviews, each employed according to the criteria surrounding the type and context of research being undertaken. For this research project the selection of the interview type was seen as important in the light of the stated purpose of the research. The specific type of interview format chosen is variously described as "semi-structured" (Burns, 1997, Sarantakos, 1993) or "the general interview guide" (Patton, 1990). The type of interview format employed has the additional features of being unstandardised, individual, open and focused (Sarantakos, 1993). The criteria distinguishing these interviews from others include:

- ❖ The use of open questions only, that is, "the respondent is free to formulate response the way he/she finds it most fitting" (Sarantakos, 1993, p179);
- ❖ They usually involve interviewing one person at any one time;
- ❖ The structure of the questions is flexible;
- ❖ The interviewer has more freedom to change the format, structure and order of the questions to better meet the goals of the research question. "The discussion is meant to be free and open, with the interviewer guiding rather than leading and restricting the respondent" (Sarantakos, 1993, p185).

An interview schedule was developed to gain an insight into how principals thought about the changing nature and purpose of Catholic Schools due to the Spiritual Revolution, the impact of the current changes on the role of the principal and the resultant changes to the mindset of what was now important to each principal in maintaining the integrity of the Catholic School, whilst responding purposefully rather than hopefully to the changes.



This method allowed the informants the flexibility to "focus on the crucial issues of the study" (Burns, 1997, p330) which permits "a more valid response from the informant's perception of reality" (Burns, 1997, p330).

This supports the rationale that "the only person who understands the social reality in which they live is the person themselves" (Burns, 1997, p331). Other authors such as Patton refer to this reality as "the inner perspective" (Patton, 1990, p278). The semi-structured interview "limits the effect of the researcher's preconceptions and biases and beliefs in directing the line of interviewing" (Burns, 1997, p344). Patton contends that the "purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 1990, p278). The interview strategy begins with the assumption that "the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 1990, p278).

The advantages of the semi-structured interview include:

- ❖ rapport between interviewer and interviewee. Sarantakos (1993, p188) likewise believes that a feature of interviews of this type "require the development of trust, collegiality and friendship between interviewer and respondent";
- ❖ sensitivity to the perspective of the informant;
- ❖ the informant's response is more natural, less contrived. (Whilst this is true it also is important that the respondent has a "high ability to verbalise views, opinions and ideas" (Sarantakos, 1993, p189);
- ❖ the informant feels more at ease, less threatened.

(Burns, 1997)

Some of the disadvantages include:

- ❖ lack of comparability between interview data;
- ❖ salient points may be inadvertently omitted.

(Patton, 1997, p287)

- ❖ possible influence of the interviewer on the response of the respondent;

- ❖ less anonymity afforded by this method may influence the judgements made by the interviewer;
- ❖ less effective in the discussion of sensitive and/or controversial issues where respondents may feel hesitant to discuss their feelings or opinions.

(Sarantakos, 1993, p199)

To record data a taped copy of each interview was collected. This was done to:

- ❖ provide an accurate copy of the transcript of each interview to assist with the analysis of the data;
- ❖ to ensure fewer distractions for both the interviewer and interviewee;
- ❖ to minimise the corruption of data through the interviewer making certain judgements about what information is valid and worth noting;
- ❖ to afford the interviewer better opportunities to listen.

### **3.4.2 The Questionnaire as a method of Data Collection**

The use of the questionnaire in the Social Sciences is not new. "In most cases, questionnaires are employed as the only method of data collection" (Sarantakos, 1993, p157). Like all methods, the questionnaire has both advantages and limitations. A synopsis of the research by writers such as Bailey, 1992; Kidder, 1981; Mosser and Kalton, 1971; Selltiz et al., 1979; and Sarantakos, 1993, into the advantages and limitations of this method of data collection is presented below.

Advantages:

Questionnaires:

- are comparatively less expensive to use than many other research methods, particularly those requiring the employment of researchers to complete data collection;
- produce very quick results, and afford the respondent some flexibility when it comes to completing the questionnaire;

- eliminate much of the risk of bias which is a significant factor in methods such as the interview, when an interviewer is present to, consciously or unconsciously, direct the responses. The presence of an interviewer can also place pressure on the respondent to withhold important information for fear of what the interviewer may feel or think;
- provide a consistency and uniformity which other methods cannot, since all respondents receive the same questions presented in the same way;
- The data collected from questionnaires is more likely to be the result of some reflection and thought rather than an "off the cuff" answer which may be the case with other methods.

### **3.4.3 Limitations:**

The limitations of the questionnaire as a research method reflect the fact that having a researcher present when the data is being collected, such as the interview, can be helpful in enhancing the quality of the information obtained.

The following are the most common limitations found by the researchers:

- Questionnaires do not allow for further discussion and clarification of questions or responses;
- The enthusiasm of the respondent to complete the questionnaire cannot be enhanced by the researcher, which may also result in partial or non-completion of the questionnaire;
- There is no opportunity for the researcher to collect additional information whilst the survey is being completed, which may be relevant to the study;
- The circumstances under which the questionnaire was completed is unknown to the researcher.

(Sarantakos, 1993, p159)

### 3.5 Structure of the Questionnaire

Researchers agree that the structure and format of the questionnaire are crucial elements to the success or otherwise of attaining the desired goals. Sarantakos (1993, p158) suggests three main elements which minimise the risk of respondents misunderstanding or mis-interpreting the reason for the questionnaire and any relevant instructions which may assist in filling out the questionnaire in the intended manner. These elements are: "the cover letter, the instructions and the main body". (Sarantakos, 1993, p159).

The cover letter sets the scene for the respondent, outlining:

- The objectives of the study and why it is being undertaken;
- Where the questionnaire fits in the overall research proposal;
- The fact that any information volunteered and the identity of the respondents will be anonymous and confidential, and;
- Necessary instructions for the questionnaire to be completed properly.

(Sarantakos, 1993, p160)

The instructions for completing the questionnaire should be concise and include the important message of the respondent not trying to respond in a way which simply pleases the researcher.

The final aspect is the main body of the questionnaire format which will be treated in the next section of this project.

#### 3.5.1 The Questionnaire Format

The format of questions is a significant contributing factor to the outcome of the research being undertaken. Sarantakos, (1993) highlights four issues which may contribute to the questionnaire achieving its desired purpose. The four issues are:

- ◆ the types of questions;
- ◆ the order of questions;
- ◆ the length of the questionnaire, and;
- ◆ the presentation of the questionnaire.

For the purposes of this research project choices were made in favour of open-ended questions rather than fixed-alternative questions. Open-ended questions allow the respondent the freedom “to formulate their answers in the way they consider most appropriate, in their own way and in their own words” (Sarantakos, 1993, p164). This was particularly true because the questions asked each respondent to reflect on and respond to complex issues.

One limitation of open-ended questions is the amount of information which can sometimes be produced, extending the time and work needed to evaluate the data received.

### **3.6 Research participants**

For the purpose of data collection eight principals of Catholic schools in the Mackay region were selected to be interviewed and to complete a questionnaire. This type of sampling, “judgemental sampling” (Charles, 1995, p98) or “purposeful sampling” (Stainback & Stainback, 1984,p297) “is more appropriate to qualitative research” (Charles, 1995, p98) where certain segments only of the population are required for study.

A profile of the eight informants providing details of the backgrounds and experience is given below in Table 3.6.1:

Table 3.6.1: Informant profile grid

Informant	Age			Experience in Catholic Schools			Experience as Principal of Catholic School			Sector Primary/Secondary		Gender
	25-35	36-45	>46	< 10	11-15	>16	< 5	6-10	>11	Prim	Sec	
A		✓			✓		✓				✓	F
B			✓			✓			✓	✓		M
C		✓				✓			✓	✓		M
D	✓			✓			✓			✓		M
E		✓			✓		✓			✓		M
F		✓			✓				✓	✓		M
G			✓			✓	✓			✓		F
H			✓			✓			✓		✓	M

The purpose of the study required the collection of data from principals of Catholic schools. Whilst it is acknowledged that the sample outlined above may not reflect the wider profile of all principals or even those in Catholic schools the sample does fulfil the requirements of this study, in that those principals chosen were informed and held well thought out ideas on the research topic.

### 3.7 Validity and reliability issues

The requirements of using research methods which produce valid and reliable data highlight the "need to clearly articulate the strategies chosen in order to provide a framework from which the data collected can be more understandable and perceived in proper perspective by others" (Stainbeck & Stainbeck, 1984, p297). These authors contend that "the probabilities for worthwhile findings are enhanced if careful attention is paid to methodological

considerations" (Stainback & Stainback, 1984, p297). Sarantakos (1993), likewise, contends that qualitative researchers try to achieve validity "not through manipulation of variables, but rather their orientation towards, and the study of, the empirical world" (p76). This relies heavily on the selection of "appropriate methods of data collection and analysis" (Sarantakos, 1993, p76) or through the employment of specific accepted measures of validity such as:

- ❖ Cumulative validation ~ the results of one study can be validated if they are supported by the findings of similar studies;
- ❖ Communicative validation ~ the results are validated through the continued questioning of participants after the initial study is completed;
- ❖ Argumentative validation ~ validity of the results is ensured through presentation of the results so that they are easily followed and tested; and
- ❖ Ecological validation ~ the results of the study are considered to be valid if collection of data occurs in the natural setting of the participants, with consideration given to appropriate methods and social context of participants (Sarantakos, 1993, p77).

### **3.7 Selection of informants**

The criteria for the selection of informants is important to ensuring the validity and reliability of the data collected. Issues such as bias and distortion need to be offset with the selection of a variety of informants taking into account "relevant variables which may include age, role, status, and/or subgroup affiliation" (Stainbeck & Stainbeck, 1984, p297).

Other key factors in this decision included:

- ❖ a desire to balance aspects of experience, age, gender;
- ❖ inclusion of both primary and secondary sectors;
- ❖ an existing rapport with all those being interviewed;

- ❖ an overwhelming indication of a willingness to co-operate from all informants.

(Charles, 1995)

All informants were selected prior to the start of the research, and indicated their willingness to participate to the study. It was felt that the selection of informants using alternative methods such as "snowballing" (Stainbeck & Stainbeck, 1984, p297) were not warranted as all informants were to be asked to contribute in all areas under study, rather than pursuing issues and adding informants according to the issue at hand.

### **3.9 Selection of Settings**

As with the selection of informants "there are also considerations involved in selecting a setting" (Stainbeck & Stainbeck, 1984, p297). The timing of any interviews also may influence the type of information and responses forthcoming from informants. As well, the interaction between the informant and setting must be considered as a possible influence on the response of informants. "Data provided by subjects may vary based on the place, activity engaged in, or social variables operating in a setting at the time the data are collected" (Stainback & Stainback, 1984, p298).

For the purpose of this study, all informants were interviewed at the school, in the principal's office at each of these locations. The type of information being sought was of a personal narrative type and the selection of the settings was not a factor in influencing the depth, type or volume of information collected.

### **3.10 Role of Researcher**

The role of the researcher can influence the type of data collected. Stainback & Stainback (1984) contend that "it should be stressed that the data collected and the subsequent conclusions drawn are, of necessity, qualified by the role



the investigator assumes within the research site" ( p298). The question of the influence of the investigator on the data collected can be minimised by the rapport built between the investigator and the participant/s and the role adopted by the investigator (Stainback and Stainback, 1984).

Another researcher refers to this relationship as "the insider-outsider" relationship and states that it is "a persistent problem for both parties" (Elliot, 1988, p155). The problem, he contends, has "become increasingly complex as the dimensions considered to be relevant to the problem have broadened with experience of a greater variety of research styles and the particular problematics they pose" (Elliot, 1988, p156). The styles range from the objective methods of the detached observer and critical theorist to the subjectivist methods of the participant observer and neutral broker (Elliot, 1988, p165).

The aim of the researcher in this exercise was to view the participants as co-researchers. Hence, prior to each interview some time was spent to discuss the purpose of the research and the justification behind the choice of the research methods. All interviews were interactive between researcher and participant. This approach emphasises the "fact that the person being studied has feelings, values, needs and purposes which condition his (sic) participation in the research, and which can enrich and validate the study which elicits them as much as it can sabotage the study which ignores or suppresses them" (Elbaz, 1983, p58 quoted in Clandinin, 1986, p27).

The role of the qualitative researcher in this process is seen as twofold by Maykut and Morehouse who suggest that "it is to be acutely tuned-in to the experiences and meaning systems of others - to indwell - and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p123).

The role adopted for this research was one of a peer principal with an interest in the thoughts and insights which could be supplied by each of the informants. As mentioned previously, a positive rapport existed between the

researcher and informants, something which had been built over a period of time interacting with each of the subjects on a professional and personal basis. It was considered unnecessary because of this existing situation, for prior preparation to be undertaken to establish or improve the rapport. The strength of the rapport was a contributing factor to the quality and depth of information which was collected. The threat which may have existed under circumstances where such a rapport did not exist may have led to informants being less open and willing to share the type of information required.

### **3.11 Collection of data**

There is general agreement amongst researchers that a relationship exists between the validity and reliability of data collected and the number of research methods employed to collect the data. "One's scepticism might be warranted in inverse ratio to the multiplicity of techniques or categories employed" (Wolcott, 1975, p121). The use of interview techniques in conjunction with participant observation, for example, would serve to establish a link between theory and practice, rhetoric and practice.

Other writers express a similar concern, which they refer to as the concept of "triangulation" (Stainback & Stainback, 1984, p300, Sarantakos, 1993, p155). Patton describes the concept of triangulation as "a process by which the researcher can guard against the accusation that a study's findings are simply an artefact of a single method, a single data source or a single investigator's bias" (Patton, 1980, p332).

Three types of triangulation are relevant to this study:

- a) data;
- b) investigator, and;
- c) methodological.

(Patton, 1980)

Sarantakos contends that triangulation is employed to allow the researcher:

- ❖ "to obtain a variety of information on the same issue;
- ❖ to use the strengths of each method to overcome the deficiencies of the other;
- ❖ to achieve a higher degree of validity and reliability; and
- ❖ to overcome the deficiencies of single method studies." (Sarantakos, 1993, p155)

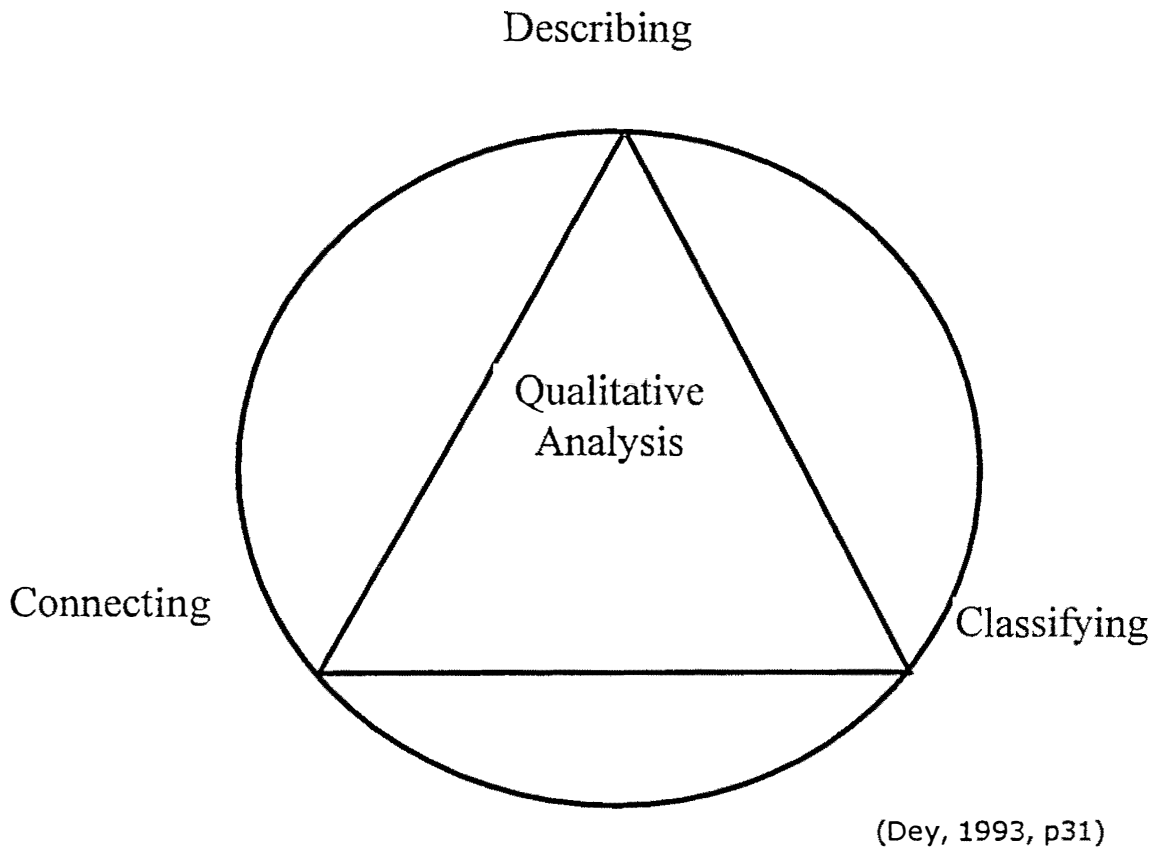
Alternately, particular strategies, such as the constant comparative strategy, rely less heavily on achieving validity and reliability of data through the employment of multiple techniques as they do not begin with a definite theory or hypothesis which they seek to prove, rather to identify patterns and relationships from a wide variety of particulars.

### **3.12 Data Analysis**

Qualitative analysis involves the researcher attempting "to uncover the meaning" (Sarantakos, 1993, p298) contained within the collected data by searching for "trends, patterns, and relationships that are relevant to the research question" (Sarantakos, 1993, p297). There are many approaches available to researchers to analyse and interpret data. The approach chosen for the purpose of this study is the interpretive-descriptive approach (Dey, 1993, p31).

The purpose of the researcher in this study is to firstly provide an accurate descriptive narrative based on the collected data and secondly some interpretation and analysis of the data to provide some "recognisable reality" (Mykut & Morehouse, 1994, p122) for those involved in the study. Dey emphasis the cyclical nature of this process identifying the three key elements as describing, classifying and connecting. This process is best represented diagrammatically as shown below in Figure 3.12.1:

Figure 3.12.1 Process of Data Analysis



Dey's diagrammatic representation of the process of data collection and analysis highlights the nature of ethnographic research as an evolutionary process, each stage guided and determined by the results and information collected and uncovered in the preceding stage.

Sarantakos advances a similar cyclical process of qualitative analysis. Like Dey, he identifies three phases of the cycle:

- Stage 1      Data reduction ~ summarising, coding and categorising
- Stage 2      Data Organisation ~ identifying salient themes and issues  
emerging from the data
- Stage 3      Interpretation ~ drawing conclusions and identifying areas for  
further study

For the purposes of this research project I intend to use this process to analyse the data.

### 3.13 Summary of Research Design

Table 3.13.1 Summary of research design

#### Research Questions

What factors do principals see as forming the essence of Catholic Schools in the 90's? What challenges and opportunities does this present for Catholic school leaders?

Information required	How	When
What are the challenges facing Catholic Schools in the 90's?	Background reading and research	Feb-June
Characteristics of leaders and leadership styles	Background reading and research	Feb-June
Nature and Purpose of Catholic schools	Informal Interviews	September
What 'things' do principals set out to promote and foster in their schools?	Informal Interviews	September
What are the common leadership issues emerging in Catholic schools?	Informal Interviews	September
What are the common themes which emerge from the first round of interviews?	Questionnaires	October

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Purpose of the Research

"Catholic Schools are not the places they used to be!" This paper attempts to bring some understanding as to why this assertion is valid, whilst, at the same time, presenting a clearer definition of the contemporary nature and purpose of the Catholic School and consequent challenges to Catholic School leaders. In doing so the study focuses on two key questions. Firstly:

- ❖ What is the REAL nature and purpose of contemporary Catholic Schools leading into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as opposed to the hitherto widely accepted and "official" view?
- ❖ Secondly, what challenges and opportunities does this present for Catholic School leaders?

In order to gain some insight into the first key question, it is necessary to explore the notion of "the spiritual revolution" as proposed by O'Murchu and supported by other contemporary scholars. These writers contend that, because of a major upheaval and transformation in the perceptions of "traditional" religion, our basic understandings of the purpose of the Catholic school is now being called into question, and long-held assumptions about the nature of Catholic schools are no longer valid in the light of this revolution.

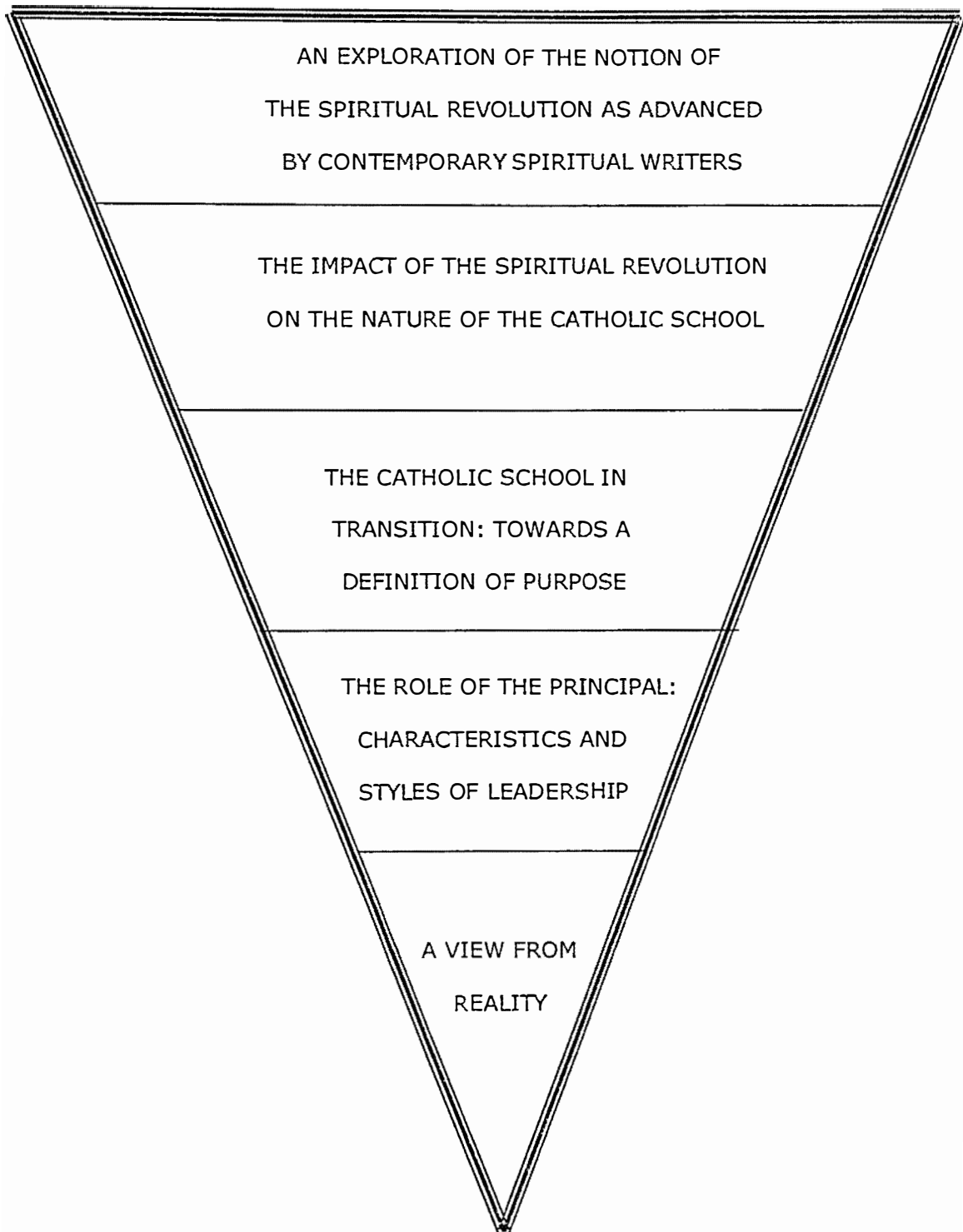
The second key question demands clarification and new insights into the most appropriate response from Catholic School leaders. The paper attempts to focus on the questions raised about the role of the Principal in being an effective agent of change. Such questions include:

- ❖ What characteristics of the leader and leadership styles are now called for?
- ❖ How do leaders of Catholic Schools maintain an authentic balance between all of the multi-directional forces acting upon the mission of the school?

The research then explored the experiences of eight serving principals of Catholic Schools in the Mackay region.

In pursuing the insights offered by the various authors and the experiences of the principals the sequencing and development of data was shaped to provide the most comprehensive overview. The approach follows a funnel sequence which pursues the research topic from the broad, global conceptual framework narrowing to the reality of the local experience. In other words, from the theoretical to the practical. Diagrammatically, the purpose of the research can best be represented thus:

## Diagrammatic Representation of the Research Framework:





## 4.2 Design of the Research

Due to the nature of the research and the type of information sought a qualitative approach was pursued, more particularly an interpretive, descriptive approach, which allowed for a picture of the data to unfold as information was gradually collected.

The first goal was to interview eight serving principals in the Mackay region. These interviews were seen as a pilot study to gain a sense of the some of the issues and concerns shared by the principals. Each of the interviews was of an informal nature allowing for a broad discussion encompassing pertinent issues to the study. Prior to the interviews a number of key and focus questions were developed from the research concepts. These questions then formed the basis for drawing up a schedule of questions to be used in the interviews, as shown in Table 4.2.1.

Table 4.2.1 Table showing the development of informal interview schedule from research concepts:

<b>Research Concepts</b>	<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Focusing Questions</b>
The essence of Catholic Schools	WHAT is the principal's understanding and experience of the changing nature of Catholic Schools?	WHAT changes have impacted on the nature of the Catholic School? HOW does the principal view the "new" nature of the Catholic School? WHY does the principal hold that view?
The Catholic School in transition.	WHAT influence have these changes had on the purpose of the Catholic School? WHAT is the principal's understanding and experience of this state of transition?	WHAT are the changes which have impacted on the purpose of Catholic Schools? WHAT pressure have these changes placed on the purpose of Catholic Schools?
Responding to the Challenges	WHAT do these changes mean for the role of principal? WHAT vision do principals have for their schools?	HOW are principals responding to the changing purpose of the Catholic School? WHY are principals responding in this way? HOW has your role changed because of these changes? HOW have these changes impacted on your vision of Catholic Education? WHAT features make an authentic Catholic School?

Once the key and focus questions were identified the schedule of guide questions for the interview were developed. These questions were designed to be a focus for discussion but not limit or confine the feedback from principals.

### 4.3 Informal Interview Schedule

The purpose of Catholic Schools:

- In your opinion what is the purpose of Catholic schools?
- In what ways does this differ from what was previously understood to be the purpose?
- Why have you come to this understanding?

The changing nature of Catholic Schools:

- In your opinion how has the Catholic School changed in the last 30 years?  
You may like to consider changes relating to  
a) students; b) staff; c) the general school community.
- Why do you think these changes have occurred? What have been/are the major influences?
- In your experience what impact have these changes had on the nature of the Catholic school?
- What are the characteristics which make up the nature of the contemporary Catholic School?

The challenges to the role of principal:

- In what ways have these changes impacted on your role as principal?
- In what ways does your role as principal differ from a state school principal?
- What are some of the things you believe important and set out to foster/achieve in maintaining an authentic Catholic School?
- Do you experience any tension between your official role as principal of a Catholic School and your own evolving personal spirituality and beliefs?
- Which aspect of your role causes you greatest tension?

From initial analysis of the interview data several key themes emerged which were then chosen as headings to act as points around which the information collected through the questionnaire could be synthesised and collated. The results of the interviews were used to devise a questionnaire with more specific questions focussing on the pertinent issues raised during the interviews. The idea of using the information collected from the interviews as a pilot to provide a sharper focus for the questionnaire proved successful as it uncovered the key issues which were worthy of further investigation.

The data collected through the questionnaire was analysed. From this analysis four themes emerged. It is under these four headings or themes that most of the data is presented. Data collected on the leadership characteristics and styles of principals is synthesised and presented in section five.

#### **4.4 Findings**

All participants agreed that Catholic schools, like all schools were in a state of transition. Expectations placed upon schools from a variety of influences, including governments, systems, employers and parents, demanded that schools respond in appropriate ways to a new understanding of the purpose of schools. Catholic schools were no less immune to these influences and were seen to be further challenged by the added dimension of the demands of the "spiritual revolution" (O'Murchu, 1997, p27).

The questionnaire sought information in five key areas:

1. Perspectives on the purpose of the Catholic school;
2. The impact of changes on the role of the school;
3. The models of church influencing the nature of schools;
4. The way in which schools are responding to the challenge;
5. Implications for leaders.

#### 4.5                    **Section One: Perspectives on the Purpose of Catholic Schools**

##### 4.5.1 Question One:

The document "The Catholic School on the threshold of the Third Millennium" states that the Catholic School has a "fundamental duty to evangelise". Do you agree that the purpose of the Catholic school is fundamentally one of evangelisation?

There was general agreement amongst principals that the Catholic school has a significant evangelising role and that the role of school is fundamentally to evangelise. One respondent stated that the role is both catechesis and evangelisation as "there is still an element (albeit fewer) where we are supporting and reinforcing what a 'Catholic' family unit is doing to educate its family in faith" (Principal C). All respondents qualified their responses stating that this was not the sole purpose of the Catholic School. "Its purpose today is broader eg. to provide a sound general education" (Principal B)

##### 4.5.2 Question Two:

In your opinion does this represent a change in purpose of the Catholic school from what was previously understood and expected?

All respondents agreed that there had been a significant change. The change has occurred because of the different school profile which now exists. "Our role is now focussed more on 'bringing the Good News', rather than 'deepening an already developed faith commitment'" (Principal E).

#### 4.5.3 Question Three:

What are the factors which have caused or contributed to this change?

The major reasons cited by respondents were:

- a) A greater number of "nominal" and "unchurched" Catholics;
- b) Religion and Religious Education are not seen as being as important as they once were;
- c) A greater number of non-Catholics enrolled by parents and accepted by schools for a variety of reasons, reflecting the shift from exclusivity to inclusivity in society as a whole;
- d) Virtually a total lay staff who express a different spirituality to religious staff;
- e) Fewer adherents to the model of Church as Institution.
- f) The formation of the Catholic Education Office which has developed policies on student enrolment etc. (This is seen as a positive step);
- g) The diminishing parish/school connection.

#### 4.5.4 Question Four:

Can you cite examples of changes in the way things are done in your school because of this change of purpose?

Most responses pointed to a range of implications for the school in educating students about the etiquettes and meaning of traditional Catholic rituals and doctrine.

The main examples cited by respondents were:

- a) Less emphasis on "traditional" prayers and celebrations such as benediction and the rosary. Fewer school/class Masses – more non-Eucharistic celebrations;
- b) A broadening of the RE curriculum away from straight Church doctrine and practice;

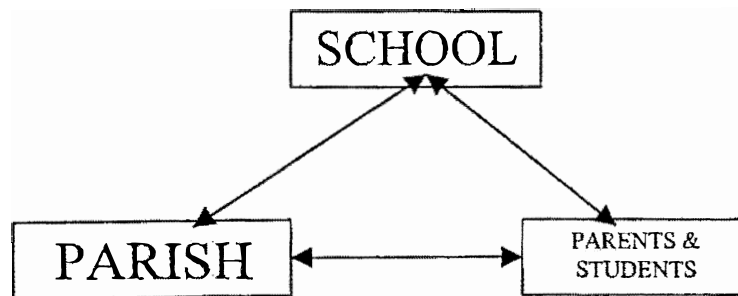
- c) No assumptions are made about the religious knowledge, practices of students. The symbols/rituals previously taken for granted now have to be consciously addressed, taught and practiced;
- d) More mindful and respectful of the faith traditions of other Christians.

#### 4.6 Section Two: The Impact of the Changes on the Role of the Catholic School

##### 4.6.1 Question One:

In reality, what role does the parish play in providing members of your school community with an experience of God and Church?

All respondents cited the diminishing role of the parish in the lives of staff, students and parents. Some respondents spoke of the school as becoming the new focus of the faith community. The school is now the mediating influence between the parish and parents and students. Diagrammatically the relationship has changed from:



to:



A summary of the responses is listed below:

Staff:

- a) One respondent volunteered that 75% of staff members attend Mass regularly, but not necessarily in the same parish as the school. "The 'close knit' feeling is no longer relevant because staff 'live all over town' (cf. the past) and many staff don't practice" (Principal C). Some schools make a conscious effort to worship in the school parish once per term.
- b) Occasional input from Parish Priest at staff meetings;
- c) Involvement in Parish Sacramental Programs

Students:

- a) Involvement in Sacramental Programs;
- b) Use of church for worship, hymns, prayer;
- c) Some are, with their parents, active member of the Parish eg altar servers;
- d) Priest attends Year 7 Camp for one day and conducts Mass;
- e) Occasional classroom visits.

Parents:

- a) Weekend Mass;
- b) RCIA Program;
- c) Adult Faith Education Programs.

4.6.2 Question Two: In your opinion, does this represent a change in the role parishes have traditionally played in the life of the school community?

All respondents acknowledged a significant change in the role of the parish in the life of the school community. All respondents recognised clearly the separation of parish and school which has resulted in a weaker relationship. The diminishing contact which most of the families involved with the school have with the parish was seen as contributing significantly to this situation, compared to the 25 to 30 hours children spend at school each week. One



respondent added that "parishes must learn to capitalise upon the links the school has with families if it is to be effective" (Principal C). Other responses included:

- a) Parishes have become lifeless, with active involvement of a small group and passive involvement of the rest;
- b) The school has a clear sense of purpose and strong community support, whilst the parish seems to have lost its sense of purpose and direction;
- c) Staff, parents and students tend to identify more with the school rather than the parish.

#### 4.6.3 Question Three:

In what ways, if any, has this change impacted on the role of the School? What has been the reaction of your school community? (if there has been significant change).

All respondents stated strongly that the changing role of the parish had impacted significantly on the role of the school. The fact that for many students the school is their closest, and for some only, experience of church has placed a greater responsibility on schools and greater effort has to be expended than a generation ago to ensure that all hear the message of the Gospel. The diversity of the school community is unified by the commitment to school not to the parish. One respondent stated that most parents now see the role of the school in terms of straight educational objectives, suggesting that most are now looking for quality general education rather than Religious Education.

#### **4.7 Section Three: The Models of Church influencing the Nature of Schools.**

##### 4.7.1 Question One:

Which characteristics of the models depicted above (see questionnaire ~ Appendix 1) most closely describe the current situation in your school community?

All respondents noted elements of all four models within their school communities, with the two most dominant models being Church as Institution and Church as people of God and community. Most noted that for almost all staff and most parents the Church as people of God and community is the most preferred model. One respondent identified the Parish Priest as operating predominantly from an Institutional model of Church whilst another stated that many parents still have a paradigm of Church as Institution which they still connect with the Parish possibly explaining their reluctance to be involved in parish activities.

From the model of Church as Herald, most staff and parents try to live the Word by example, favouring a much less overt proclamation, although this was seen to be more from staff than parents.

The Model of Church as Servant was seen as something which flowed from seeing the Church as the People of God. Students were said to learn the Church as Herald and practice Church as Servant through school-based experience. The servant model is gaining a higher priority all the time, however, doubts were raised by one respondent as to whether the characteristics of this model are grounded in Church or basic humanitarianism.

#### 4.7.2 Question Two:

Are there aspects of your school community which are still tied to the institutional church?

All respondents acknowledged the presence of "institutional" aspects to differing degrees within their school communities. Most cited decision-making which involved the parish priest whilst one noted that this institutional element is very much entrenched within a "system" where the "Church hierarchy is not subject to assessment, not able to be fully challenged, not accountable, able to place demands on schools with no right of refusal and able to draw conclusions about a school without evidence and have them taken as Gospel" (Principal E). Another responded with the insight that what some people see as "guidance" others see as hierarchical control.

Other aspects mentioned included the enrolment policy of a school which gives preference to Catholics in the parish and second choice to Catholics from other parishes, and the sometimes "irrational connections to tradition" (Principal C).

#### 4.7.3 Question Three:

In your school is there a move away from these elements to more community/family based ideals?

All respondents indicated that this transition was occurring within the school community, however, several suggested that the same transition was not occurring to the same extent within parishes. One respondent cited the question of power as being at the heart of this issue, suggesting that there seems to be a perception by clergy that they have lost control of the parish school and therefore part of their "power". Another respondent took this point further adding that different 'influence techniques' are needed rather than the use of hierarchical power.

Another response suggested that the school's second role was to create "a sense of positive community" (Principal C) which connects with what gives human beings meaning in life.

#### 4.7.4 Question Four:

What are some of the features of this transition?

The most common response was the need to work towards the achievement of the common good, with one respondent stating that "it is easy to forget we are all on the same side" (Principal F). Most respondents acknowledged the need for respect for and listening to the differing points of view. Another respondent cited the fact that there is generally now more awareness of Church documents stressing the primacy of the role of parents and the need for the parents and school to work together for the good of the children as well as a greater awareness by staff students and parents of the need to be "a community for others".

Other responses included:

- a) A greater sense of identity and being valued for students and parents;
- b) The parish using, in a positive way, the school as a gathering point of believers.

### **4.8 Section Four: The way in which School Leaders are responding to the Challenge.**

#### 4.8.1 Question One:

In your opinion, are Catholic Schools now more accountable, thoughtful and reflective in their approach to what they do? What specific structures exist which underpin and support such an approach?

All respondents agreed that Catholic schools are more accountable, thoughtful and reflective in their approach. One respondent identified three levels of accountability: The Church, the system ie. The Catholic Education Office and the school community. The point was made that the expectation of accountability to these groups demanded that schools be more thoughtful and reflective than ever before.

The following were listed as the specific structures designed to assist schools be more thoughtful and reflective about their practices:

- a) School Boards;
- b) The wider role of the P&F;
- c) School Renewal process;
- d) Structured shared decision-making among staff;
- e) Appraisal of personnel;
- f) School Development Plans;
- g) Curriculum Documentation and Supervision.

#### 4.8.2 Question Two:

What benefits have come from such an approach?

All respondents noted major benefits. These included:

- a) A far more open, reflective and dynamic approach to school development;
- b) A better quality of education for all students;
- c) The benefits of decision-making based on the Shared Wisdom Model;
- d) The sense of ownership and responsibility by staff, and, to a lesser extent, parents;
- e) Fewer 'ad hoc', short term and inappropriate decisions;
- f) Schools are now more 'human' and 'responsive' organisations with a new emphasis on inclusivity.

One respondent suggested that the benefits had come at the cost of higher stress levels.

#### 4.8.3 Question Three:

How has this impacted on the way your school responds to the needs of students?

The most common response is that schools now cater more effectively for the needs of a larger proportion of children in schools. This has come from more awareness of the needs of children and access to more options in the way of personnel and resources to support those needs.

One respondents stated that there is now much more intervention to assist the social, emotional as well as the academic needs of children. Another response highlighted the awareness and support for the poor within school communities.

### **4.9 Section Five: Implications for Leaders ~ Styles and Characteristics.**

#### 4.9.1 Question One:

What impact has the nature of change outlined above had on your role? What challenges has it presented? What opportunities have emerged?

Responses from all principals were consistent that the main challenges presented included:

- a) Higher expectations placed on the school from many sources, leading to more meetings and paperwork;
- b) Dealing with a small element of parents whose vision of school and Church differs markedly to yours;
- c) Living with the fact that parents will challenge more readily decisions made or not made within the school;

- d) School leaders see their roles in terms of being facilitators rather than power and authority, which presents the challenge of 'acquiring' a new set of skills.

Opportunities which have emerged included:

- a) To make better, more informed decisions;
- b) To improve the quality of education offered;
- c) To work with others;
- d) A closer link between our behaviour and our Christian underlying principles.

#### 4.9.2 Question Two:

What are the characteristics of your leadership style and personal approach which enable you to "live with" the changes outlined above?

Leadership Qualities:

The most common responses all reflected some commitment to the building of relationships within the school community. The responses included:

- a) Shared leadership ~ shared wisdom, a real appreciation of the value of shared decision-making;
- b) An ability to appreciate another's point of view;
- c) Collegiality, partnership, team-building, inter-dependence;
- d) Creation of high trust-low threat relationships;
- e) Sense of humour.

Personal Spirituality:

- a) An awareness of the role of principal as one of ministry in Jesus' name;
- b) Human spirituality is central to our purpose;
- c) A whole new equation which connects personal spirituality and what the Catholic school is trying to do.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **REVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **5.1 Purpose of the Research**

"Catholic schools are not the places they used to be!" This paper attempts to bring some understanding as to why this assertion is valid, whilst, at the same time, presenting a clearer definition of the contemporary nature and purpose of the Catholic school and consequent challenges to Catholic school leaders. In doing so the study focuses on two key questions. Firstly:

- ❖ What is the REAL nature and purpose of contemporary Catholic schools leading into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as opposed to the hitherto widely accepted or "official" views?
- ❖ Secondly, what challenges and opportunities does this present for Catholic school leaders?

In order to gain some insight into the first key question, it is necessary to explore the notion of "the spiritual revolution" as proposed by O'Murchu and supported by other contemporary writers.

These writers contend that, because of a major upheaval and transformation in the perceptions of "traditional" religion, our basic understandings of the purpose of the Catholic school is now being called into question, and long-held assumptions about the nature of Catholic schools are no longer valid in the light of this revolution.

The second key question demands clarification and new insights into the most appropriate response from Catholic school leaders. The paper attempts to focus on the questions raised about the role of the Principal in being an effective agent of change. Such questions include:

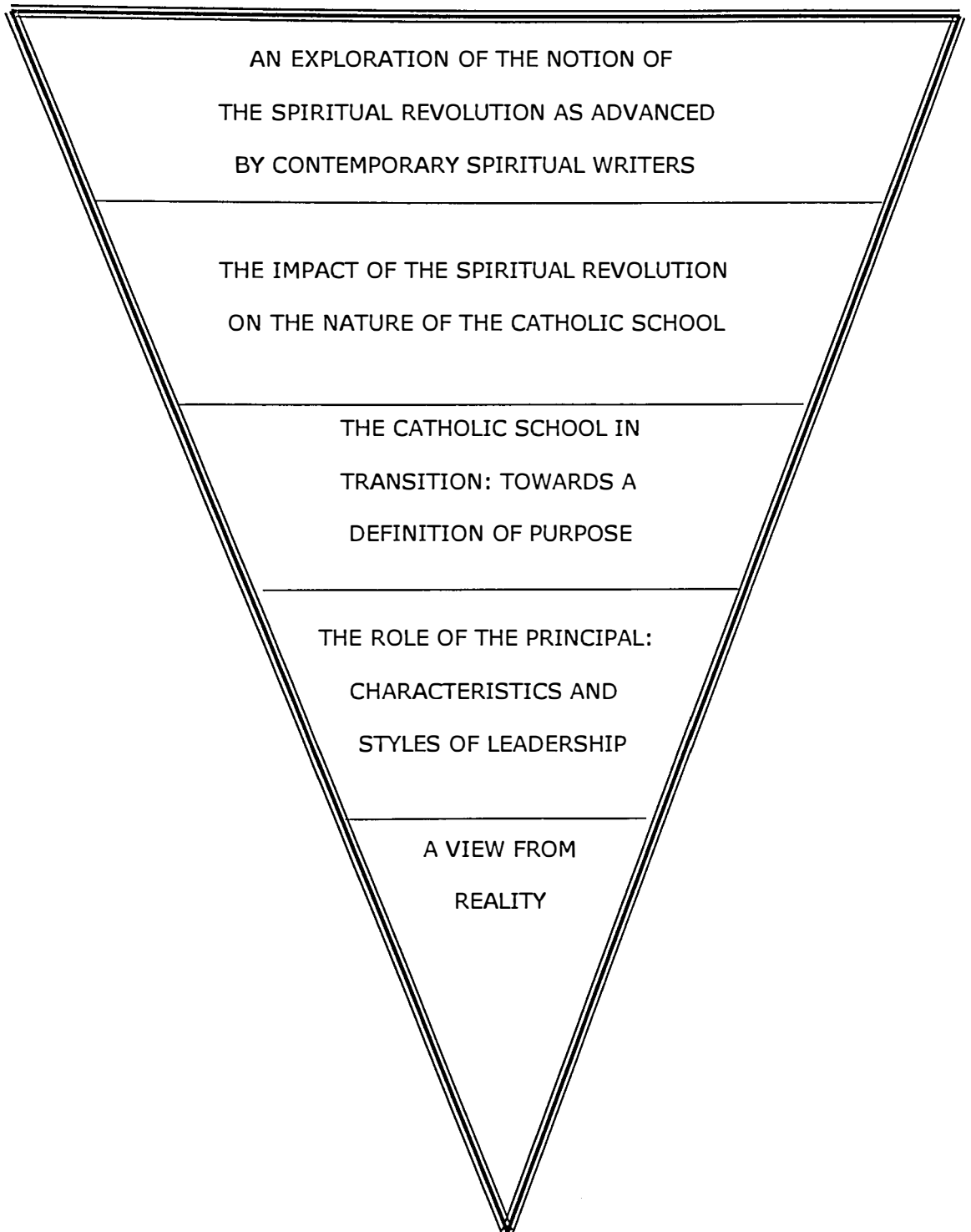


- ❖ What characteristics of the leader and leadership styles are now called for?
- ❖ How do leaders of Catholic schools maintain an authentic balance between all of the multi-directional forces acting upon the mission of the school?

The research then explored the experiences of eight serving principals of Catholic schools in the Mackay region.

In pursuing the insights offered by the various authors and the experiences of the principals the sequencing and development of data was shaped to provide the most comprehensive overview. The approach follows a funnel sequence which pursues the research topic from the broad, global conceptual framework narrowing to the reality of the local experience. In other words, from the theoretical to the practical. Diagrammatically, the purpose of the research can best be represented thus:

## Diagrammatic Representation of the Research Framework:



## 5.2 Synthesis of the Research

Four key themes have emerged from the research. These themes signpost the preferred direction of Catholic schools as identified by school leaders. They are a precise synopsis of the response to challenges expressed in the literature.

All of the research reinforces the idea of an ongoing transitional nature to the Catholic school. The themes then reflect this transitional nature with the Catholic school being placed somewhere on the continuum between incompatible paradigms.

They are:

- a) From catechesis to evangelisation;
- b) From Dependence to Co-existence ~ Parish School to Small Christian Community;
- c) From Institution to Community;
- d) From Representative Democracy to Participative Democracy.

### 5.2.1 From Catechesis to Evangelisation:

The transition from catechesis to evangelisation was clearly identified by the research findings as fundamental when defining the purpose of the Catholic school. The changing nature of the school student profile reflects the wider fundamental conversion of people to a worldview which calls into question many of the understandings and long-held assumptions about Church and in particular, Catholic schools.

Church Documents written in the 1970's and 80's suggest that, in the minds of the authors, at least, the role of the Catholic School was seen as one of catechesis. The Vatican Document "Evangelisation in the Modern World" states that Catholic schools continue to be sought as "a valuable means of catechesis" (p 16). The document "The Catholic School" following a similar understanding states that Catholic schools are "a valid meeting place for those

who wish to express Christian values in education". Likewise responses from principals suggest that the role of the school at this time was clearly seen as "a consolidation of faith for Catholic families already practising the faith" (Principal E).

The process of catechesis is understood as "the handing on the Gospel to those who have a degree of spiritual, liturgical, sacramental and apostolic maturity" (McLachlan, 1998, p2).

The once significant role of the school community in catechesis is now recognised rightly as being firmly the role of the family which is the key influence on the nurturing of children's faith. "A generation ago the purpose would have been seen as catechising the already evangelised" (Principal B). "Thirty years ago the main aim was to pass on the faith. The 'new' ethos comes from an understanding that families pass on the faith whilst schools educate in faith" (Principal B). The crucial elements in the process of catechesis are the family and the wider faith community. Research data shows clearly that, whilst this assumption is true in theory, for the vast majority of families and parishes, in particular, it bears little resemblance to reality.

"Fewer and fewer children have any real knowledge of any religion let alone the Catholic religion ~ parents don't see it as relevant or parents leave it up to the child to decide for themselves" (Principal D) and again, "about 15% of children can bless themselves or show any Catholic characteristics" (Principal D).

Evangelisation is defined as "the actual proclamation by word and example of the Good News of Christ to the nations" (Arbuckle, 1990, p9). "Our role is now focussed more on "bringing the Good News" rather than "deepening an already developed faith commitment" (Principal E). This view is consistent with the views expressed by the Vatican's Congregation for Catholic Education in its recent publication *The Catholic School on the threshold of the third millenium* which states clearly that the Catholic school has a "fundamental duty to evangelise" (1998, p6).

Several key reasons were cited by principals which were seen to be contributing to this situation.

The most significant reason is the changing nature of the Catholic school, especially in the area of enrolment, which is manifest in two main areas: firstly, the higher numbers of children of other faiths seeking enrolment in Catholic schools and, secondly, the general decline in the variety and depth of children's faith experiences.

The "Third Millennium" document recognises the reality of this situation stating that "the school is undoubtedly a sensitive meeting point for the problems which besiege this restless end of the millennium" (1998, p8), and further that "the Catholic school is thus confronted with children and young people who experience the difficulties with the present time. Pupils who shun effort, are incapable of self sacrifice, and perseverance and lack authentic models to guide them, often in their own families. In an increasing number of instances they are not only indifferent and non-practicing but also totally lacking in religious and moral formation" (1998, p9).

According to all principals these situations have forced schools to change focus in an effort to adequately come to grips with their role of evangelisation. This situation is in line with a general move in society towards greater acceptance of a variety of worldviews, cultures and practices. "A shift from exclusivity to inclusivity in society as a whole" (Principal E).

### 5.2.2 From Institution to Community

All principals rated the development of a sense of community very highly amongst their goals. This aspiration is given clear support in "The Third Millennium" which states that " while respecting individual roles, the community dimension should be fostered, since it is one of the most enriching developments for the contemporary school" (1998, p19).

Some respondents felt that the move away from institution to family is "compatible with the general distrust of institutions in society" (Principal G). The school, according to the respondents is now clearly less associated with the "institutional" aspects of the Church, although, at times, aspects of the "institutional" church are still very much part of the dynamics of the day to day operation of the school. This influence was seen to be mainly from the Parish Priest and to a lesser extent a small, well organised and informed group of parents, with no reference being made to staff members. The data also shows that in general, staff of Catholic schools are very supportive of this move away from institution to community. Closely associated with this shift is the reduction in the numbers of religious staff in Catholic schools.

Schools are clearly leading the way in presenting a model of Church as the people of God, characterised by teamwork, involvement, shared ministry and decision-making and inter-dependence. Evidence of this is reflected in the principles underpinning the way in which schools are organised and operate. Schools have demonstrated a transparent preference for community, right relationship and the human person over institution, convention and law. "Schools are now less sterile places ~ more awareness of kids and where they're heading ~ what's going on in their total lives ~ more values based, more holistic approach. We are more aware of what we teach in all subjects and how we can infuse values through all subjects (Principal G).

This view is consistent with that expressed in *The Third Millennium* document which states unequivocally that "the Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons. The person of each individual human being, in his or her material and spiritual needs, is at the heart of Christ's teaching: this is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school" (1998, p11).

"Only a church deinstitutionalised, delegalised and declericalised can hope to recapture this central concept without which its existence is largely a charade" (O'Murchu, 1997, p86-87).

### 5.2.3 From Dependency to Co-existence ~ Parish School to Basic Christian Community

The research data confirmed the declining role of the parish in influencing the faith life of staff, parents and students associated with Catholic schools. "Whereas in days gone by mass was a feature of the majority of Catholic families' weekends, it appears that this is no longer the case" (Watkins, 1997, p50).

In fact the evidence is that "only 19% of Catholics regularly attend Mass" (Dixon, 1996, p92). "This evidence suggests that fewer and fewer people are choosing to participate in the activities of the Parish, a situation which contrasts starkly with the increasing numbers of families who, for a variety of reasons are choosing the Catholic school as their only experience of Catholicism" (Fahy, 1992; Quillinan, 1997; O'Brien, 1998; Watkins 1997; McLaughlin, in progress).

The Oceanian Bishops, also have accepted the reality of this situation, noting in their final proposal from the recent Synod "Catholic schools are a priority for evangelisation throughout Oceania as they are often the only point of contact for many students and their parents with the Church and with God" (Bishops of Oceania Synod, 1998). "Schools are now the contact with the Church ~ the understanding adults have with the church now is what they see in our school" (Principal C).

A significant reason for this situation is the decline in the sense of community and belonging once felt by many people within parishes. "The parish no longer provides a community for the vast majority of Catholics that it once did" (McLaughlin, 1998, p3). Diamid O'Murchu presents a similar argument stating that "People in general do not experience community through their churches and consequently increasing numbers look elsewhere for that experience" (O'Murchu, 1997, p86-87).

There was a general understanding among Principals of the importance of searching for ways which would strengthen the relationship between school and parish. Presently, though, there was a general consensus of opinion that most of the initiative for this was coming from the school with little if any, in some cases, coming from the parishes.

This situation has led to schools were being seen more and more as small faith communities, leading one principal to contend that "the traditional roles have practically reversed. The parish is part of the school ~ not the school part of the parish" (Principal E).

#### 5.2.4 From Representative to Participative Democracy

The move from representative towards participative democracy was seen as a logical response by Catholic schools, given the body of evidence which suggests that past paradigms are no longer relevant for these times. The participation of the community in decision making processes has made a significant difference leading to:

- a) an improvement in the quality of education, and;
- b) schools more effectively meeting the needs of a larger proportion of students.

This approach is creating new assumptions about the purpose of schools. Assumptions made previously about schools and their purpose are no longer valid, if they ever were. "We don't assume those things anymore, the assumptions were not valid then (30 years ago), we just churned out people who accepted those things without knowing why" (Principal G).

This has "made a difference in practice ~ we have fewer Masses, public prayer, but, we are now more thoughtful about what we do about them ~ their structure, we think about it, think about background to it, look at values behind it and see what behaviour changes we're hoping will happen and attitude changes" (Principal G).



The key theme identified in the research which is crucial to this change is the notion of renewal. Catholic Schools are seen to be in a constant process of reviewing their mission in the light of changing times. This has made Schools more accountable to the major stakeholders. "Parents are more willing to question current practices" (Principal D). "People no longer trust the institution of the school, for example, 'brother said that ....' or 'the school said that ....' is no longer taken as Gospel. We are now much more aware of what we are saying and doing and we are better able to justify why we are saying or doing it" (Principal G).

This has led to a greater integration of faith and culture and culture and life. Structures identified as leading to and contributing to the attainment of this goal include:

- a) School Boards;
- b) School Renewal processes;
- c) Appraisal processes.

These structures have "made us more thoughtful ~ the institution is no longer there as a model, but rather a framework. We attach ourselves to the scaffolding of that framework and use that as a support for what we are trying to do for kids" (Principal G).

Schools are now more professional ~ more accountable for what we are doing with the kids academically, especially in the spiritual sense also (Principal D).

"Since the Catholic school can be of such service in developing the mission of the people of God and in promoting dialogue between the Church and the community at large to the advantage of both, it is still seen as of vital importance even in our times" (*The Third Millennium*, 1998, p21).

### **5.3 Characteristics of Leaders and Leadership Styles**

Catholic School leaders were seen to be the crucial element in initiating and facilitating change. Respondents reinforced the goal of leadership styles and

characteristics being in tune with and actively promoting values and principles which are consistent with the mission of the school.

Leaders are seen to be as effective as they are authentic in their daily practices. Consistency with espoused principles was seen as important, whilst also realising the ever present and stressful situation of working with people whose vision for the school may be seriously different to that of the principal and general view.

The common consensus of necessary characteristics were:

- a) A desire and ability to work with people, being open to the other's point of view. This includes the important skills of shared decision making, consultation and partnership.
- b) Being open to change, and being able to live with a certain amount of instability;
- c) A deep personal spirituality based on a sense of ministry in the name of Jesus and a commitment to live and proclaim His Word.

#### **5.4 Conclusions of the Research**

The assumption underlying much of the research presented in this paper is that Catholic schools are not the places they used to be. In fact, the evidence of research points to the fact that they are profoundly different in nature and purpose to the schools of even 20 years ago. The research also indicates clearly that what is now needed from school leaders is a clear and informed vision for the future of Catholic schools. The transitional forces vying for the attention of Catholic schools demand that leaders be very clear about the values and principles which will shape the Catholic school of the future.

This study provides a detailed and extensive synthesis of the contemporary social and cultural forces which are manifest in the profile of the Catholic school. These forces provide the school with both challenge and opportunity in reflecting on its mission and purpose. Without some serious study of the

current forces impacting on the mission of the Catholic school, encompassing a "re-founding" (Arbuckle, 1993) of the basic values and beliefs underpinning the existence of Catholic schools there will be more hope than purpose associated with the shaping of future directions.

This study has provided both the background to the changing social and cultural milieu in which Catholic schools exist and function, and some understanding of the ways in which Catholic schools are responding to the challenges presented.

The research data collected from the eight serving principals provided further insight into how the challenges outlined in this paper are being met in creative and effective ways. Far from shrinking from the task at hand there is an overwhelming spirit of optimism amongst the principals for the future of Catholic schools. The current transitional nature of the Catholic school is seen by principals as presenting both challenge and opportunity.

The research reported in this paper has reinforced the importance of maintaining an informed position. The level of awareness and education on the part of each principal added greatly to the confidence with which the challenges were confronted.

From the understanding gained from this study there is a conscious and deliberate attempt on the part of Catholic school leaders to act in such a way which allows the Catholic school to respond appropriately to the needs of its community whilst maintaining authenticity with the mission of the Church.

This requires, on the part of the leader, some rethinking and clarification of the purpose of the Catholic school, which in turn, will influence the particular leadership characteristics and styles needed to direct the school towards established priorities.

The insights gained from this study, whilst not necessarily applicable across wider contexts, raise questions pertinent to Catholic Education generally. The pursuit of these questions is a necessary step in the development of Catholic schools which are effective and relevant followers of the Gospel.

Results of the research indicate that leaders of Catholic schools are aware of the need for continuous re-formation of purpose and mission. Schools have moved along the continuum between conflicting paradigms, rejecting previously held assumptions about the purpose of the Catholic school towards an understanding which takes into account changes in society, parental expectations and religion. These incompatible paradigms are:

- a) From Catechesis to Evangelisation;
- b) From Institution to Community;
- c) From Dependency (Parish school) to Co-existence (Small Christian Community);
- d) From Representative Democracy to Participative Democracy.

The study concluded that:

1. Catholic schools, functioning somewhere on a continuum between two often conflicting paradigms, have moved away from the "traditional" paradigms often associated with the nature and purpose of the Catholic school such as Catechesis, Institution, Dependency (Parish School) and Representative Democracy to more germane paradigms of Evangelization, Community, Co-existence (Small Christian Community) and Participative Democracy.
2. The Catholic school is experiencing a degree of acceptance and appeal within the community because it has taken the lead in this area. Other areas of the Church, such as some Parishes, where this transition is not occurring, are experiencing a diminishing role in influencing the faith life of members of the community because of an adherence to what could be called the "traditional" paradigms. The challenge, recognised by school leaders, is for schools to build closer relationships with other Church agencies, particularly parishes.

3. The key to what is currently happening in Catholic schools seems to be based on the fact that Catholic schools are now more accountable, thoughtful and reflective in their approach. Supporting this approach is the fact that school communities have embraced so fully the principles and processes of Renewal. These include Catholic School Renewal, formative and summative appraisals for teachers and members of administration teams. Catholic schools are seen to be very aware of the need to re-form the way in which the substance of Catholic beliefs is presented in the light of a new, emerging "group mentality" (Thornhill, 1997).
4. Leaders of the Catholic school have a keen sense of their own spirituality and value people-centred practices.
5. Leaders of the Catholic school have the ability to live with the mystery of life, "dance with confusion" (Duignan, 1996), and embrace chaos.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

**Copy of the questionnaire:**

- Principals' perceptions of:**
- a) **The purpose of the Catholic school;**
  - b) **The Changing nature of the Catholic school;**
  - c) **Challenges to the role of the Principal.**

Dear Colleague,

Re: follow up Questionnaire

Many thanks for your assistance so far with my research. The results of the initial interview with you were very fruitful and have raised some good issues for further investigation. In considering the topic of my research project "The Spiritual Revolution: Re-forming the nature and purpose of the Catholic school" I have been able to organise the information from the interviews under four main headings. These headings (not listed in the survey) basically synthesise the information and point to some strong interview data showing Catholic schools in a state of transition, from what they used to be to something new. As well I am interested in the impact these changes are having on your role in the school.

I would be grateful if you might have the time to jot down some thoughts specifically on the questions below. This will allow me to further organise and refine the data.

Would a week be too soon to collect them from you? Or alternatively, you could send them to St Francis Xavier School, PO Box 5495, Mackay Mail Centre, 4760.

Kind regards,

Pat Coughlan



4) Can you cite examples of changes in the way things are done in your school because of this change of purpose?

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**SECTION TWO**

5) In reality, what role does the parish play in providing members of your school community with an experience of God and church?

Staff: .....

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Students: .....

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Parents: .....

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6) In your opinion, does this represent a change in the role Parishes have traditionally played in the life of the school community?

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7) In what ways, if any, has this change impacted on the role of the school? What has been the reaction of your school community? (if there has been significant change)

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9) Are there aspects of your school community which are still tied to the institutional model of Church?

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10) In your school is there a move away from these elements to more community/family based ideals?

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11) What are some of the features of this transition?

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**SECTION FOUR**

9) In your opinion, are Catholic Schools now more accountable, thoughtful and reflective in their approach to what they do? What specific structures exist which underpin and support such an approach?

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10) What benefits have come from such an approach?

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11) How has this impacted on the way your school responds to the needs of the students?

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**SECTION FIVE**

**IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERS**

12) What impact has the nature of change outlined above had on your role? What challenges has it presented? What opportunities have emerged?

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13) What are the characteristics of your leadership style and personal approach which enable you to facilitate and “live with” the changes outlined above?

Leadership Qualities: .....

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Personal Spirituality: .....

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Other: .....

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