

# ***The Mission of the Catholic School and Role of the Principal in a Changing Catholic Landscape.***

**Submitted by**

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## STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee (Appendix 1).

Signed:

  
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**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> March 2010**

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape.

The context of this research is set within a Catholic landscape of radical change. Declining allegiance to institutional Church and disintegration of parishes as a focal point for sacramental and community life are indicative of paradigmatic shifts in understandings of Catholic life. In spite of these changes, Australian Catholic schools continue to enjoy widespread popularity and steady growth in enrolments (McLaughlin, 2005; Smith, 2007). This changing Catholic landscape has implications for the way in which the Catholic school seeks to fulfil its mission and for the role of the Catholic school principal.

In exploring the research problem three key interconnected concepts were identified:

1. The mission of the Catholic school
2. The role of the Catholic school principal
3. The changing Catholic landscape.

Each concept is examined through a review of current literature and the experiences and perceptions of selected participants, namely, Catholic school principals, employing authorities and clergy. The research is concerned with the changing nature of Catholic school communities as a result of a transformed ecclesial, social and educational landscape. The historical context of the evolution of Catholic schools is researched and presented as essential background to an understanding of the implication of these changes, in particular, the implications for the role of the Catholic school principal in negotiating the current school environment.

The following research questions emerged from a synthesis of the literature. These questions focus the conduct of the study.

1. *How do principals/employing authorities/clergy perceive the mission of the Catholic school?*
2. *How do principals/employing authorities/clergy perceive the role of the Catholic school principal?*

For purpose of this research it seemed appropriate to conduct the study within the epistemological framework of constructionism. The theoretical framework is from the interpretivist approach, and more specifically, symbolic interactionism.

The methodology adopted is case study. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire given to all participants, followed by semi-structured interviews and focus groups with principals. Data analysis utilised an inductive approach including both simultaneous and iterative phases.

The research concludes that in the two important areas of Catholic school mission and the role of the principal there is fundamental disparity in the thinking and understandings of those responsible for the governance and administration of schools. This study confirms the presence of two dominant, contrasting paradigms within the enterprise of Catholic education. This has resulted in an inconsistent understanding of how Catholic schools should most appropriately respond to the challenges of social, educational and ecclesial changes. This has major implications for principals who strive to promote a compelling Catholic identity which is credible and yet authentically ecclesial against a background of perceived resistance by some key stakeholders. The research concludes that there is a need for an urgent review of the impact of the rapidly changing Catholic landscape on the way Catholic schools understand and promote their mission. This research confirms the results of similar research in this area and poses additional questions which may be the catalyst of further research into this topic.

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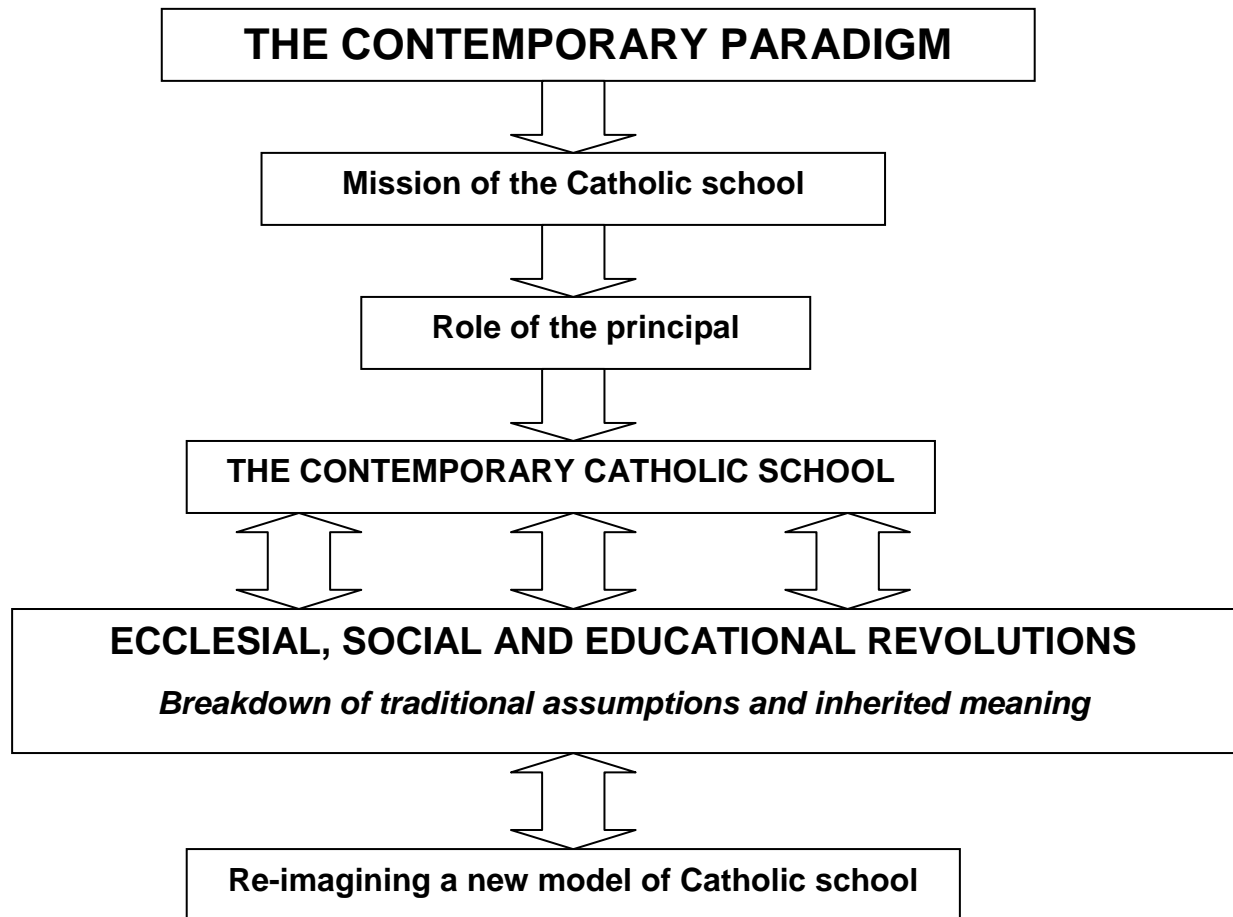
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## **CHAPTER 1      IDENTIFYING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

### **1.1      *Introduction***

My involvement in Catholic Education for 28 years has encompassed both teaching and administrative positions, including 17 years as principal. This experience has spanned a time of profound and far-reaching social, educational and ecclesial transformation resulting in an altered Catholic landscape. As a result every aspect of the life of the Catholic school is open to challenge. This is symptomatic of an environment where all schools are progressively expected to manage issues of escalating complexity and ambiguity emanating from a growing number of stakeholders. At the same time the role of the school principal is becoming increasingly complex and more professionally demanding (Fullan, 2008). Serious analysis of the reasons behind this reality invites speculation and debate, however, it is clear that the extent and complexity of issues which principals are expected to engage and process is escalating (Cahill, Wyn & Smith, 2004). These particular observations have major leadership implications for contemporary Catholic schools.

The contemporary Catholic school operates within the intersection of numerous interrelated contexts, each with variant and pluralistic worldviews and beliefs (Mellor, 2005). For the Catholic school the most important of these are the ecclesial, social and educational contexts. Each of these contexts presents profound challenges to long established, fundamental assumptions about Catholic schools. Changes to these contexts have facilitated paradigmatic movements in understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal. This has not only resulted in uncertainty as entrenched assumptions and inherited meanings no longer resonate with the new Catholic landscape, but also promise and opportunity as new images and understandings of the Catholic school emerge. This process of change is represented below in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1** *The changing Catholic landscape impacting on the mission of Catholic schools and the role of the principal*

## **1.2 The research context**

### **1.2.1 Geographical context**

This research is situated within the Diocese of Rockhampton, Queensland, a distinctive and in many ways autonomous entity under the authority of the Bishop. The Diocese extends south to Bundaberg, north to Mackay and west to Longreach (see Figure 1.2).



**Figure 1.2 The geographic context of this research project**

(Source: *The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia*, 2000)

The Diocese covers some 414 385 square kilometres and has a total population of nearly 400,000 of which 24.6% are Catholic. There are 81 Mass Centres clustered within 31 parishes throughout the diocese. There are currently 13 active priests serving these communities (Australian Catholic Education Statistics Working Group, 2007).

Catholic schools in the Rockhampton Diocese generally experience strong, growing enrolment figures (ACESWG, 2007). A new primary school opened in 2005 with another opening in 2009. In 2006, there were 14 420 students enrolled in Catholic



schools and colleges in the Rockhampton Diocese. Of these, 7 998 were enrolled in the primary sector and 6432 were enrolled in the secondary sector. In the Rockhampton Diocese almost 4 in every 10 (38%) students is non-Catholic. This compares with the Australian average of approximately 2.5 in every 10, or 24%. 25 of the 38 schools have a non-Catholic enrolment between 30% and 49%. Three schools have a non-Catholic enrolment exceeding 50%. Overall, primary schools have an average of 34% non-Catholics while secondary colleges average 42% non-Catholic students (ACESWG, 2007).

There is a lack of specific data available for the Rockhampton Diocese to quantify involvement in parish life, particularly attendance at Sunday Mass, however, national data shows the percentage of the Catholic population at Mass on a typical weekend in 2001 at 15.3% with anecdotal reports suggesting a continued decline in attendance even among people who were regular Mass attendees and active parishioners for many years of their adult lives (Dixon, 2006).

Within the Rockhampton Diocese, the Diocesan Catholic Education Office acts as an agency of the Catholic Church and is responsible for the provision of a range of educational services to the 30 primary schools and 8 secondary colleges under its authority. Two Religious Institute secondary colleges are also located within the Diocese and fall under the direct authority of the Bishop.

Within the Catholic Education Office, the Diocesan Director has authority for leadership, administration and management of Catholic Education in the Diocese. This authority encompasses the three key areas of Educational Ministry:

- Adult Education and Faith Formation
- Religious Education in State Schools
- Catholic Schools and Colleges.

As such the Director ensures the optimal use of all resources and the efficient and cost-effective delivery of services (Heenan, 2006).

The Diocesan Catholic Education Office administrative structure comprises the Director and a Leadership Team of eight Assistants to the Director – Finance, Administration, Mission, Curriculum and four Assistants to the Director – Schools, each responsible for one of four regions of schools. The Diocesan Catholic Education Office has responsibility for staffing of primary schools, the process of school review and improvement, and performance reviews of principals and senior leaders. Clergy also have a significant involvement in these processes including the selection and appointment of principals.

Catholic schools are represented at both State and Federal levels. The Queensland Catholic Education Commission negotiates and advocates on behalf of the Rockhampton Diocese and the other four Queensland dioceses in the State political arena and also in some national government initiatives. The National Catholic Education Commission (NCEC) represents the interests of all Catholic schools throughout Australia at the Federal level.

Catholic schools receive approximately 80% of recurrent funding through State and Federal Government grants. The remaining 20% comes from fee collection processes and local fundraising efforts. Catholic systems are accountable to the State and Federal Governments for the disbursement and expenditure of Government grants. Systems and school administrators are charged with the responsibility to do this in a way that does not compromise the values and ideals of Catholic education.

### **1.2.2 Ecclesial context**

The changing ecclesial context of Catholic schools poses significant additional questions for leaders of Catholic schools (McLaughlin, 2000). Such realities, including a crisis in faith in the institutional Church, declining numbers of clergy, a largely nominal and other-than Catholic school community, fragmentation of the parish as a focal point for sacramental and community life, and a very different social dynamic in the make-up of the Catholic school community, only serve to invite close critique of the authentic mission of Catholic schools and role of the principal in enacting that mission. These forces are shaping a unique and urgent reality for schools.

Constant change and total chaos and complete confusion and deep, deep alienation is the very nature of life in a world aspin with technological change, adrift in space and engulfed in the globalisation of industry, economics, politics, race and even religion (Chittister, 2003, p. 24).

Catholic schools are now managing an increasing number of people seeking leadership and direction from key school personnel in areas which were once indisputably the role of the priest (McLaughlin, 2002, Spry, 2005). An immediate example of this is the parish-based, family-centred Sacramental programs which require co-ordination and management by school personnel. This situation is indicative of the choice by community members for a closer spiritual connection with key school personnel, including the principal, than with clergy. In fact the school is generally considered as the new “church of choice” for many within the Catholic community. Moreover, expectations on the role of the principal as a member of the parish community is a mounting source of tension as principals are called upon to accept roles which were once fitted clearly within the realm of clergy. Declining numbers of clergy reduces their capacity to adequately cater for the administrative and pastoral needs of the parish community and challenges traditional understandings of the principal as the educational leader of the school community (Australian Catholic Primary Principals Association (ACPPA), 2004). The new generation of leaders of Australian Catholic schools work in a period “where the past is known but no longer instrumental and where the future is intuited but has yet to be realised with effective agency” (Ranson, 2006).

Traditional metaphors portraying the principal as guardian or custodian, protecting and defending Catholic identity through traditional rituals and practices are viewed as outdated and peripheral to the modern Catholic landscape. There is a growing reluctance amongst principals to function in a system that seems intent on protecting and preserving an outdated and largely irrelevant culture and maintaining structures which have lost credibility and importance to the lives of the majority of families, not to mention the leaders themselves (Tinsey, 1998). This presents a “tricky” issue for thoughtful and educated principals.

For many laity, including Catholic educators, this failure to name and seek healing for the sins of the institution leads to further disillusionment with church leadership and reinforces the feeling that the Church is incredible and, therefore, irrelevant. It is only from a theology of *ecclesia semper reformada*

that a credible and relevant dialogue with the world and with 'the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties' of the people of our time can take place. If that spirit is absent in the deeds and actions of the Church, all of our words are counter-productive (Mulligan, 1994, p. 69).

The principal has considerable influence in promoting and developing a culture faithful to the mission to bring about the reign of God in a way which is authentic to the Gospel, while leading to a serious engagement with the contemporary issues and concerns of post-modernist families (O'Keefe, 2003, O'Sullivan, 1997, McLaughlin, 2000). The growing divide between the principal's understanding of the nature and purpose of the Catholic school and the "official" or "traditional" understanding as espoused by Church documents and Church leadership presents a real problem. Principals are expressing a very different understanding of their role, particularly in the area of faith leadership. Many principals make only "nominal or ritual acknowledgement of faith leadership as central to their roles" (Grace, 2002, p. 135), choosing to view their role in terms of "faith in action in the wider world" (Grace, 2002, p. 136). Moreover, significant differences in perceptions of the principal's role by clergy and employing authorities add to the complexity of the principal's lifeworld (Slattery, 1998). There are concerns that the authentic identity of Catholic schools is being diluted to dangerous levels, while others would argue that the recent directions being taken by schools is in harmony with the fresh spirit of Vatican II (McLaughlin, 2008). Clearly there is a need to review the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in this era of fundamental change.

### **1.2.3 Social context**

For Catholic schools, the contemporary social context is fundamentally disparate to any other time in their history. The influence of contradictory worldviews is manifest in ways which are unique to these times. Challenges and opportunities presented by the current social context demand a very different response if the Catholic school is to continue its presence and influence as a counter-cultural agent of evangelisation. The validity of old assumptions is being challenged by the social reality of Catholic school life (Parramatta Diocesan Catholic Schools Council (PDCSC), 2005). Given the current positive reputation of Catholic schools this challenge is a timely warning for them to re-imagine a distinctive vision for a future faithful to their mission. Scenarios of change and disorder shaping the perspective and value systems of the

current generation of staff, students and their parents, predominantly Generation X and Y, present a serious challenge to understandings of an authentic mission of modern Catholic schools (Mackay, 2008). Maintaining an authentic Catholic identity given the nature of this social context and the rising status of Catholic schools within the general community is part of this challenge.

Catholic education makes a significant contribution to society and is generally considered highly within the educational community. (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000). The challenge is to articulate the distinctive elements which define its mission lest the Catholic school becomes merely “a religious parallel of state government bureaucracies” (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000. p. 25), lacking a distinguishing identity which keeps the mission of Jesus at the heart of the school (Collins, 2007; Flynn & Mok, 2002). This complex environment presents a real challenge to principals. Not surprisingly, any attempt to define the role of the principal in this environment exposes conflicting beliefs and understandings. It is clear that any long-term resolution will require more than just tinkering with existing structures and assumptions. “We must replace tinkering with best practices and audacity” (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2002).

It is not surprising then that Catholic schools are grappling with profound structural and philosophical changes attempting to effectively equip and shape a new generation of students. Momentous social developments on a global scale, and the consequent impact on the worldviews of staff, parents and students, have signalled the need for radical, deep and pervasive changes to schooling which in turn present unprecedented challenges for school leaders to review their role in the light of current practices and understandings (Beare, 2001). Of particular note is the role of parents in the life and operation of the school, and the influence of a market culture on school values.

The growing role of parents, leading one researcher to coin the term “parentocracy” (Grace, 2002, p. 31), and an increasingly influential market culture typify the competition for the values which shape and exemplify current education realities. In an increasingly secular world, the prominence of acquisitive values and competitive individualism is seriously at odds with the aspirations of the Catholic school as a vital

contributor to the evangelising mission of the Catholic church. Increasing numbers of “un-Churched” families, encroaching middle-upper class clientele and the growing consumerist culture challenge schools to re-imagine a future which acknowledges “that not everything which expresses the Church’s life in the present will continue in the future, where God’s people will have different needs” (Lennan, 2009).

#### **1.2.4 Educational context**

The increasing demands and complexity of the principal’s role signals a timely warning to reconceptualise the role in ways which take into account the altered landscape of the Catholic school principal. “Despite all the attention on the principal’s leadership role we appear to be losing ground, if we take as our measure of progress the declining presence of increasingly large numbers of highly effective, satisfied principals” (Fullan, 1996, p. 1). Additionally, demands and expectations emanating from the turmoil of a church experiencing diminishing allegiance and community fragmentation present new and challenging ambiguities for principals.

The role of the principal to “guide their school through the challenges posed by an increasingly complex environment” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2004, p. 4) recognises the new demands of a constantly changing educational environment. The influence of social, cultural, political and globalisation forces on the purpose and outcomes of education adds complexity to the role of the principal (D’Arbon, 2004). “The definition of the very job of the principal has undergone fundamental change” (Fullan, 1998, p. 2).

Understandings of the role as instructional leader are being superseded as the role is reconceptualised to encompass and reflect the broader, multi-dimensional realities of the principal’s work. “The role is increasingly becoming one of community leader” (Macmillan, Meyer & Sherman, 2001, p. 36) with responsibilities not confined to the needs of the immediate school environment but extended to the needs of its many communities.

The “leadership’ aspect of the role is expected at a deeper level, requiring more than experience and competence in a series of administrative skills. “Leadership is much more a matter of who the leader is than how the leader applies leadership principles

or adopts leadership style. Real leaders are authentic” (Starratt, 2004, p. 65). Expertise and interior enterprise have usurped experience as essential credentials for the role of principal (Duignan, 1999).

It is not surprising then that there is a strong call for visionary, spiritual and authentic leadership in Catholic schools (Duignan, 2004). Principals are being called to look beyond the reality and envision a new future encompassing the spiritual, social and educational formation of their school community (Mellor, 2005). Principals are now being challenged to be the “architects” and creators of culture, rather than its guardians and defenders (Cook, 2001). In this context there is wide ranging debate about what constitutes the role of the principal and which elements effectively and authentically promote the mission of the Catholic school.

### **1.3    *The Research design***

This research explores the different perceptions and understandings held by key stakeholders of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal. Fundamental to this research is the expanding understanding of the concept of the principal’s leadership role in a school community which, for vast majority of Catholic families, is the only contact they choose to have with the Catholic Church. The research also explores the influence this is having on the role, almost by default, given the changing Catholic landscape.

Two research questions emerge from the literature review to focus the study. These are:

1. *How do principals/employing authorities/clergy perceive the mission of the Catholic school?*
2. *How do principals/employing authorities/clergy perceive the role of the Catholic school principal?*

Given the nature of the study and the research questions, the following research design seemed the most appropriate framework.

<b>Epistemology</b>	Constructionism
<b>Theoretical Perspective</b>	Interpretivism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symbolic Interactionism</li> </ul>
<b>Methodology</b>	Case Study
<b>Methods</b>	Open-ended Questionnaires Semi-structured Interviews Focus groups

***Figure 1.3 Summary of the epistemological paradigm and theoretical framework, methodology and methods.***

### **1.3.1 Epistemology**

This research is based upon a constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998). A constructionist epistemology honours the assumption that knowledge and meaning as constructed by the participants forms the basis for making judgments and decisions. This study is primarily an exploration of the understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. It seeks to understand those meanings or constructions of reality held by principals, employing authorities and clergy.

### **1.3.2 Theoretical perspective**

The focus of this study is the reconstruction of knowledge and meaning through interaction between the participants and between the participants and their context. The theoretical perspective of interpretivism “places importance upon both the interaction between actors within a social context and also between those actors and their context” (Burgess, 1985, p. 4). The particular focus of this research then is an examination of the network of interaction between the research participants, in this case principals, clergy and employing authorities, and their context, the Catholic school, which shapes meaning.



### **1.3.3 Symbolic interactionism**

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is interpretivism, and the chosen research orientation is symbolic interactionism. A symbolic interactionist approach presents life as “an unfolding process in which individuals interpret their environment and act upon it on the basis of that interpretation” (Morrison, 2002, p. 18). Symbolic interactionism is the interaction between an individual and the society within which that individual operates and constructs meaning. The emphasis is on basic social interactions, entering into “the perceptions, attitudes and values of a community” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

Symbolic interactionism is a perspective, that is, one way of understanding reality and is based on the premise that “meanings arise through social interaction” (Chalmers, 1998, p. 11). In fact “meaning is always open to negotiation” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 26). This approach “focuses on the human being and tries to understand human behaviour” (Charon, 2001, p. 12), since humans use assumptions, values and beliefs to organise perceptions and control behaviour (Charon, 2001). Symbolic interactionism as the theoretical framework places primary importance on the social meanings that people, in this case principals, clergy and employing authorities, attach to the world around them. It adopts the perspective of those being studied (Charon, 2003). This perspective attempts to capture “the essence of the human being as a social being, a creator, a product and a shaper of society” (Charon, 2001, p. 6).

### **1.3.4 Research methodology**

Methodology is the selection of a model which “entails theoretical principles as well as a framework that provides guidelines about how research is done in the context of a particular paradigm” (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 6). Methodology provides a rationale to orchestrate the use of particular research methods. The choice of an apposite methodology complements the unique character and purpose of the study. There are a number of methodological approaches within the interpretivist perspective which the researcher can engage. In the context of this study the chosen methodology must assist the researcher complete an in-depth investigation of the interactions between the various aspects that shape the role of the principal as well as identify patterns

emerging from the data analysis. Case study is an appropriate methodology to achieve these outcomes.

### **1.3.5 Case study**

This research project uses case study as a research methodology. The focus of the study is the perceptions and understandings held by key stakeholders of the mission of the Catholic school and role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The goal is “not the production of general conclusions” (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000). It is the “particularity and ordinariness” (Stake, 2000, p.437) which is of intrinsic interest to the researcher. Therefore this will be an intrinsic case study. Case study allows for the collection and inductive analysis of rich, descriptive data, interpreting the results and then theorising about the patterns and themes which emerge. Through this case study the construction of understanding will be managed through the description of perceptions and judgements made by the participants.

### **1.3.6 Participants**

The case study is bounded within an Australian Catholic diocese and the three groups chosen for the study. It involves the study of perceptions and actions of three cohorts of participants, namely, principals, employing authorities and clergy. The groups are naturally bounded by their work areas and professions. The first group comprises five serving principals of Catholic primary schools within the chosen diocese. The diocese is divided into four regions loosely clustered around four major regional centres. These regions comprise schools diverse in character, size and location. The inclusion of a variety of principals in the diocese ensures a rich diversity of perspectives and experiences emanating from different communities.

The second group of participants comprises representatives of Catholic employing authorities. To ensure a proportionate spread of opinions and views, a group of six people in supervisory roles higher than principal level were selected. Not all of the selected personnel have previous experience in the role of principal, and of those that have, many have been out of the position for an extended period of time.

The third group comprises five members of the clergy within the diocese. These participants were selected as representing the wider clergy community who continue

to have significant input into the selection and appraisal processes for principals as well as, in some cases, the day-to-day running of the school. The views of this group could place significant pressure on the principal to act out the role according to a very different worldview and expectations. By virtue of their position the clergy perspective must be included as a significant influence on the life of the principal.

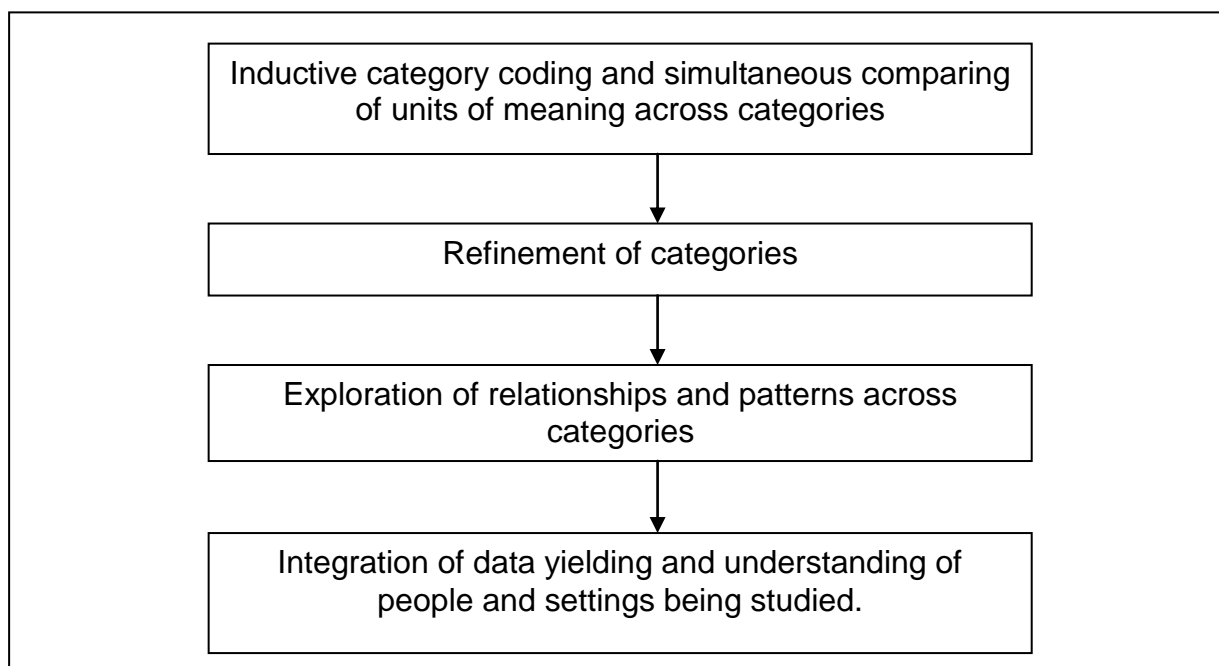
### **1.3.7 Data gathering strategies**

Data gathering strategies have been chosen to support the purpose and unique character of the research project. It is important that each strategy provides a vehicle to encourage the personal reflective journey from personal values and meanings to action that is volitional, authentic and valued by the community. Strategies are designed to penetrate the social construction of reality as understood by each principal. The strategies chosen for this research project are:

1. open-ended questionnaire
2. semi-structured interviews
3. focus groups

### **1.3.8 Analysis of data**

There are many approaches available to researchers for the analysis and interpretation of data. For the purposes of this project, data will be analysed by scanning and coding the data using the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is represented in the following diagram.



**Figure 1.4 Process for the analysis and interpretation of data**

(Maykut & Morehouse, 1994)

## **1.4 Significance of the research**

This research is significant for three reasons. Firstly, the research explores and documents the interaction between the “lifeworld” and “systemworld” (Habermas, 1964; Spry, 2000) of the Catholic school principal. This is significant because mounting research confirms the changing nature of Catholic school communities and a transformed Catholic cultural landscape. Two important outcomes of these changes are:

1. Catholic schools are almost the only contact many Catholics are choosing to have with the Church (Tacey, 2003)
2. Catholic schools are a very effective agency of the Australian Church in “witnessing to and being the catalyst for the promotion of the reign of God” (McLaughlin, 1998, p. 19).

These outcomes have implications for the role of the principal as the key agent in the shape and direction of the school community. Furthermore, this research project

identifies the significance of important contextual factors shaping the nature of Catholic school communities giving rise to the need for a critical rethink as to the purpose of Catholic schools. While official Church documents articulate a mission for the Catholic school, there is a sense that this mission needs to be re-imagined and renewed in the light of the changing Catholic landscape and the new reality of school communities (CCE, 1988, 1998).

Secondly, this research provides a forum for unheard and muted voices to be documented and presented. There is a paucity of information documenting perceptions held by Catholic school principals concerning their role. Literature advancing the “official” view of the purpose of the Catholic school and the role of the principal is readily available, however, this research will add to the body of literature representing the personal views of three key stakeholders in Catholic Education, namely, principals, clergy and employing authorities.

Thirdly, this research contributes different perspectives and understandings of the role of the principal and the purpose of the Catholic school, as well as identifying areas of similarity and difference between the major stakeholders with a view to rationalizing scarce resources to the most effective advantage.

## **1.5 *Outline of the thesis***

The purpose of the research is to explore understandings and perceptions of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The research examines this topic from the perspectives of three key stakeholders in the life of Catholic schools, namely, principals, clergy and employing authorities. A brief outline of the structure of the thesis is given below.

**Chapter One: The Research Defined** situates the study in terms of context, purpose, significance and structure. This introductory chapter also identifies the common threads which show the developmental and sequential nature of the study from literature review, to collection of data, and finally to the discussion of the findings and conclusions.

**Chapter Two: Defining the Research Problem** seeks to contextualise the study by presenting a thorough summary of the historical and contextual influences which have shaped the life and character of contemporary Catholic schools. This chapter documents the evolution of Catholic schools in Australia and traces how the mission of the Catholic school has similarly evolved in response to the prevailing social, political, economic and ecclesial influences of the time. This chapter also provides an overview of the changing Catholic landscape dominated by two very distinct and disparate paradigms.

**Chapter Three: Review of the Literature: Identifying the Research Questions** is a review and synthesis of the literature and research pertinent to this topic. The review of the literature identified the salient and emerging themes surrounding the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal. This chapter also seeks to clarify some of the characteristics of the current generations making up the bulk of our Catholic education communities.

**Chapter Four: Design of the Research** is the presentation of the research design and methodology. This chapter outlines the methods employed for data collection

**Chapter Five: Presentation and Analysis of the Research Findings** is the presentation of the data and the identification of emergent themes which are used to sort and organise responses from participants

**Chapter Six: Discussion of the Research Findings** is the discussion of the research findings under the emergent themes from the analysis of the data presented in Chapter five. This chapter seeks to interpret the findings of the research generated in Chapter five.

**Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Recommendations** is the review of the findings around the research questions. Conclusions and recommendations are presented.

## **CHAPTER 2      DEFINING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

### **2.1      *Purpose of the research***

The purpose of this research is to explore understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The research examines this topic from the perspectives of three stakeholders in the life of Catholic schools, namely, principals, clergy and employing authorities. A brief synopsis of available literature on this topic indicates disagreement amongst different groups associated with Catholic schools. The diversity of perspectives invites closer scrutiny of the mission of the Catholic school and how Catholic schools operate in a contemporary environment.

This chapter defines the research problem in the light of the changing contextual environment of Catholic schools. An historical perspective is crucial to an understanding of the challenges and expectations confronting those responsible for the governance and administration of Catholic schools.

### **2.2      *Historical perspectives: Organisational constructs***

The decision by the Australian Catholic Bishops in the late 1800s to set in motion a separate Catholic school system signalled the genesis of an education system which today caters for almost 20% of school students in Australia (Smith, 2007). The determination to sustain this service even through a period without government financial assistance confirmed a belief held by the Bishops that education should encompass all dimensions of humanity - physical, academic, aesthetic as well as spiritual. In this period of adversity and hardship Catholic schools operated within a well defined and tightly controlled mission (McLaughlin, 2000c). The Congregation of Catholic Education (CCE) envisioned the purpose of a separate Catholic school system

as an expression of the reality of the Church, having by its very nature a public character. Catholic schools, like state schools, fulfil a public role, for their presence guarantees cultural and educational pluralism and, above all, the freedom, the right of families to see that their children receive the sort of education they wish for (CCE, 1977).

As a result of the Bishops' decision and with the co-operation of religious orders "a uniform system of parochial primary education was developed under the auspices of the parish or religious orders" (Spry, 2000, p. 131). The evolution of the system of Catholic schools in Australia has been shaped by a number of important events since that first momentous decision. Of these, two relatively recent events of the early 1960's and 1970's impacted acutely on the future of Catholic education in Australia. Firstly, pronouncements following the Second Vatican Council gave impetus to serious reflection on the purpose and role of the Catholic school within the life of the Church. These events contributed to a decision by Church authorities to review the organisational structure of the Catholic education system which at the time was "at best outdated, at worst defunct" (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000, p. 30). Secondly, the decision by the then Whitlam Labor Government to significantly increase Commonwealth grants to Catholic schools for recurrent purposes provided Catholic school authorities with much needed sustained funding to employ additional lay teachers and improve facilities (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000).

### **2.2.1 Movement to centralisation**

The crux of the debate centred on "the correct degree of centralisation/decentralisation for Catholic education and for Catholic school 'systems'" (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000, p. 30). This reflected a deeper philosophical conundrum for Church authorities as on the one hand it made good economic sense to take advantage of economies of scale for the effective application of Government funding, while, on the other, a centralised system ran the risk of creating a bureaucracy and shifting decision making away from the parish community. A critical dynamic leading to a decision to centralise was the refusal of the Commonwealth Government to negotiate funding arrangements with individual schools which "significantly increased the responsibilities and influence of these new educational bureaucracies" (Spry, 2000, p. 132).

Complicating the debate was the declining contribution to schools by religious communities both in numbers and the consequent loss of a particular charism which nurtured the "invisible pedagogy" (Grace, 2002) that upheld the presence and vitality of a distinctive Catholic school culture and identity. Recruitment of increasing numbers of lay staff and a need to become more professional and accountable to



outside agencies meant that the system was less forgiving of the sometimes eccentric practices of past years where, for example, teachers were paid according to the parish priest's assessment of how diligently they had worked during the week. This period also signalled an increased involvement of parents in the operation of the school particularly through active Parents and Friends Associations, and later through membership of School Boards. With an increasing reliance on lay staff parents were generally less forgiving of the teaching methods which had in the past been accepted with a "sister/brother knows best" attitude.

The decision for a more centralised administration system reflected the widely-held conviction of that time that "schooling could only be adequately delivered within a strong centralist structure" (Butts, 1961, p.17 quoted in Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000) and also the reality for some schools (30% of Catholic schools in NSW) which, if left to their own devices would not be viable without systemic support (Flynn & Mok, 2002).

That original decision was the genesis of today's professional structures. A centralised structure had certain inherent efficiencies and also challenged the environment of some Catholic schools where "decisions on Catholic education policy may and have been made on criteria that are not educational" (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000, p. 35). The emergence of Catholic Education Offices also challenged the over-riding belief by many that "Catholic schools must remain embedded in their local parish and regional school communities" (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 231).

The rapid movement towards a centralised model generated far-reaching implications which inevitably impacted on the role of the principal. The advent of the Catholic Education Office placed principals in the position of serving three masters: the Catholic Education Office, the Parish Priest and, ultimately, the Bishop (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2006). The influence of the parish priest on decisions regarding the day-to-day operation of the school and on the selection and further appointment of principals continued to impact on the principal's role (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000). This situation gave rise to "the most fundamental internal control struggle in Catholic schooling" (Grace, 2002, p. 31), which "readily lent itself

to abuse” (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000, p. 35) and often worked against the stated purpose of promoting the reign of God.

Unilateral decision-making affecting the operation of the school was indicative of this internal struggle and symptomatic of the difference between parish and school leadership in understanding of the role of the principal in particular and the mission of the Catholic school in general. An example of the latter point was the decision of the Bishop of the Sale Diocese, Jeremiah Coffey, to remove the parish priest of Morwell who refused Communion during school Masses to children who did not attend Sunday Mass. This decision was later overturned after an appeal to Rome by a section of the Morwell parishioners to Rome. The second challenge presented by a centralised structure was to the idea of the school as an agency of the parish.

The well documented decline of the parish as the “primary community” for Australian Catholics exacerbates an already difficult position, and appreciably alters the relationship between parish and school (English, 2007). The centralist model challenges the duty of the Catholic school to “define its authenticity through the development of community” (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000, p. 36). The promotion of community values over an increasing acceptance of acquisitive and secular values is a distinctive feature of Catholic school ethos and identity. Bureaucratic models of governance, motivated by ideals of efficiency and productivity present a further challenge to “the community model which schools are successfully grappling with” (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000, p. 36). The centralist model also raises questions of authority between the various governing entities.

The emergence of Catholic Education Offices provided a professional, unified voice to represent the interests of Catholic school communities; however, it failed to address satisfactorily the relationship between the employing authority and the canon law authority of the parish priest in the governance of the school. Investing power and authority in people who have little or no expertise in the issues and elements of education and who have lost credibility in the eyes of the community creates an obvious source of tension, which often masks a deeper ideological struggle between the respective leaders. In dioceses where the financial nexus between school and parish still exists, the potential for decisions to be compromised on the grounds that a

harmonious relationship with the parish priest is, in the end, a better career move than fighting for what is appropriate for the school is very real (Tinsey, 1998).

Clustering of parishes has further complicated this struggle as parishes now may contain a number of primary and secondary schools. This decision has impacted on the role of the principal as the principal seeks to express a particular vision to promote the reign of God through the daily operation of the school. This important concept is at the heart of the mission of the Catholic school. The reign of God is at the centre of Jesus' proclamation in the Gospels and expresses a vision of a radical transformation of human hearts and social, political, economic and religious institutions (Fuellenbach, 1995). The reign of God takes expression within the community when relationships are founded on Gospel values. While structural, external influences are an important determinant to the role of the principal, just as influential is the changing nature of the staff, students and families which make up the Catholic school community.

### **2.3    *The local context***

While an awareness of the broad historical context of the growth of Catholic schools is essential to an understanding of the dynamics shaping the operation of current Catholic schools, it is also important to be aware of how these challenges and issues are reflected in the local context of the Rockhampton Diocese which is the focus of this study.

The Diocese of Rockhampton, Queensland, is a distinctive and in many ways autonomous entity under the authority of the Bishop. The Diocese extends south to Bundaberg, north to Mackay and west to Longreach. The Diocese covers some 414 385 square kilometres and has a total population of nearly 400,000 of which 24.6% are Catholic. There are 81 Mass Centres clustered as 31 parishes spread throughout the diocese. There are currently 13 active priests serving these communities.

The Diocesan Catholic Education Office acts as an agency of the Catholic Church in the Diocese and is responsible for the provision of a range of educational services to the 30 primary schools and 8 secondary colleges under its authority. Two religious

institute secondary colleges are also located within the Diocese and fall under the direct authority of the Bishop. The Diocesan Catholic Education Office administrative structure comprises the Director and a Leadership Team of eight Assistants to the Director – Finance, Administration, Mission, Curriculum and four Assistants to the Director – Schools, each responsible for one of four regions. The Diocesan Catholic Education Office has responsibility for staffing of primary schools, the process of school review and improvement, and performance reviews of principals and senior leaders. Clergy also have a significant involvement in these processes, including the selection and appointment of principals.

Catholic schools in the Rockhampton Diocese generally experience strong, growing enrolment figures (ACES, 2007). A new primary school opened in 2005 with another in 2009. In 2006, there were 14 420 students enrolled in Catholic schools and colleges in the Rockhampton Diocese. Of these 7 998 were enrolled in primary sector and 6 432 enrolled in the secondary sector. In the Rockhampton Diocese almost 4 in every 10 (38%) students is non-Catholic. This compares with the Australian average of approximately 2.5 in every 10 or 24%. 25 of the 38 schools have a non-Catholic enrolment between 30% and 49%. Three schools have a non-Catholic enrolment exceeding 50%. Overall, primary schools have an average of 34% non-Catholics while secondary colleges average 42% non-Catholic students (ACES, 2007).

No specific data for the Rockhampton Diocese are available to quantify involvement in parish life, particularly attendance at Sunday Mass; however, national data shows the percentage of the Catholic population at Mass on a typical weekend in 2001 at 15.3% with anecdotal reports suggesting a continued decline in attendance even among people who were regular Mass attendees and active parishioners for many years of their adult lives (Dixon, 2006).

## **2.4 *Disenchantment and the loss of traditional Catholic culture***

Until relatively recently the Catholic Church was characterised by a distinct, identifiable and strong Catholic culture which afforded the Church “a strong sense of identity” (Treston, 2000, p. 10), and provided a type of “identity security” (English, 2007). Clear Catholic identity emerged from and exemplified a comparatively

different socio-political and spiritual landscape. During this period, many of the Church agencies sought to cultivate a distinctive Catholic sacred culture through particular practices and rituals which ideally established lifelong habits, “a womb to tomb” (O’Keefe, 2003, p. 95) experience. It was assumed that Catholics lived “in a world in which the sacred was mediated through a variety of channels...the sacraments of the church, the intercession of the saints, the recurring eruption of the ‘super-natural’ in miracles...a vast continuity of being between the seen and the unseen” (Berger, quoted in Grace, 2002, p. 12).

A process of enculturation proved very effective in ensuring that new members were initiated early into the Catholic way of life, or “habitus” (Grace, 2002, p. 38), characterised by “an all-pervasive sense of the sacred in the midst of the profane; a sense of consecrated service; a discipline of time and study, a discipline of the body and mind; a strong awareness of sin (and the associated guilt); and a reflexivity about the ultimate purposes and final end of human existence” (Grace, 2002, p. 39). Strict safeguarding of the culture discouraged openness and reflection.

Crucial to the success of this enculturation process was the absolute trust and unquestioning loyalty afforded to religious and clerical leaders. This allowed and promoted a culture of non-participative, menial involvement by the laity, especially women. The guiding philosophy was one of “pray, pay and obey” (O’Keefe, 2003, p. 101), in fact the church of this era was marked by “the primary virtues of duty, loyalty and obedience” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 91).

Catholic schools were a very important, powerful and effective agency of this enculturation process. Passing on the faith was seen as a crucial element of their role and the success of this role was measured largely and rather crudely in terms of attendance at the Sacraments, particularly Sunday Mass (Quillinan & Ryan, 1994).

Catholic schools were “a means for the Church to assume a social profile out of a sectarian history, which were clearly their genesis and their mission” (Ranson, 1996, p. 57). In fact it could be argued that “Catholic schools were constructed as defensive citadels for minority communities anxious to preserve the transmission of the Faith and of its spiritual and moral codes and symbols” (Grace, 1997, p. 72), “in a hostile

external environment characterised by a dominant Protestant order, continuing anti-Catholic prejudice and the growing influence of secularisation” (Grace, 2002, p. 7).

Responding to these challenges visionary leaders, generally clerical, established clear direction and goals for the Church designed to protect and shield the future of the Church. Local church communities gratefully accepted these goals and worked tirelessly to ensure they were achieved. Children attending Catholic schools could not help but “soak-up” the Catholic culture through osmosis and emerged from these schools with a very Catholic view of the world.

## **2.5 *Influence of ecclesial, social and educational revolutions***

Educational, social and ecclesial revolutions have profoundly challenged traditional Church authority, beliefs and practices (Mellor, 2005). These revolutions, including the continuing influence of the second Vatican Council, have provoked shifts in thinking about the practice of the Catholic faith which would have been inconceivable a generation ago (O’Keefe, 2003). Each has contributed to “an extraordinary cultural upheaval..... as millions, even billions, of people forget, quietly design out or actively repudiate their ethnic, religious and moral traditions .....”(Cupitt, 1997, p. 79).

Given these changes it is not surprising that the “sacred fortress mentality” (Treston, 1997, p. 16) which served previous generations well has crumbled, exposing existing structures and assumptions as awkward and extraneous to contemporary family and social life (O’Keefe, 2003). “The rigid boundaries which buttressed this Catholic identity began to crumble in the face of external forces of rapid social change and internal renewal movements” (Treston, 2000, p. 10). In spite of unprecedented criticism and calls for change, the Catholic Church’s response remains “inward looking” and “hostile to-the-world” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 31). Significantly though, the very certainty and stoicism, which was once seen as effective and appropriate for previous generations, has become a millstone, a barrier to change and renewal rather than the strength it once was (O’Keefe, 2003). One clarion call for change and renewal came from the second Vatican Council.

The second Vatican Council (1961-1965) initiated a period of unprecedented change and revitalisation of the Catholic Church (Hornsby-Smith, 2000). The Catholic worldview came under serious challenge from other more influential worldviews resulting in a sharp and irretrievable decline in confidence in, and allegiance to, many aspects of the Church structure, tradition and teaching. A rapid decline in Mass attendance is the most obvious illustration of a serious disconnection between families and the institutional Church, which has irreparably altered the Catholic landscape (ACES, 2007). The disconnection has been so complete that it almost certainly has resulted in the disappearance of traditional Catholic culture (McLaughlin, 2002) and the “substantial dissolution of the distinctive Catholic subculture of fifty years ago” (Hornsby-Smith, 2000, p. 371).

The wide-ranging effects of these changes have impacted on every Church agency, including Catholic schools. These changing realities have been well documented and have changed the way Catholic life and tradition are understood and lived. They include:

- An almost completely lay administration of Catholic schools;
- The almost complete disappearance of members of religious orders in Catholic schools;
- The very successful integration of Catholic identity into mainstream Australia, a type of “embourgeoisement, and greater social mobility” (Hornsby-Smith, 2000, p. 370) which was greater amongst the Catholic population than any other group;
- The enrolment of children of other faiths into Catholic schools;
- An increased percentage of non-Catholic, or non-practising Catholic teachers and pupils;
- A perceived lack of credibility with the Church’s responses to moral and societal problems;
- An ageing population of ‘practising’ Catholics;
- A better educated and more theologically literate laity;
- The continued secularisation of Australian society;
- A decreasing sense of identity with a particular religious denomination;

- Being dependent on Government funding to the extent that Catholic schools could no longer exist without it.

(McLaughlin, 2001; Gilroy, 1998; Belmonte et. al., 2006)

Together, these factors coupled with the emergence of influential secular worldviews have led to a Catholic landscape characterised by:

- A decline in the number of worshipping Catholics, in particular young adults (Tinsey, 1998, ACES, 2007);
- A decline in the moral authority of the Church and its leaders coupled with increasing dissent by Catholics from many of the Church's teachings (West, 1994; Angelico, 1997). In fact, Catholics "differentiate significantly between credal or core beliefs (which continued to attract high levels of assent), non-credal or more peripheral beliefs (including papal authority) (Collins, 2008), personal and social morality, where many Catholics considered the clerical leadership to lack both credibility and legitimacy, and institutional rules and regulations (which were regarded as no longer incurring effective religious sanctions, and to which conformity was largely dependent on such pragmatic considerations as convenience and self-interest)" (Hornsby-Smith, 2000, p. 372) ;
- A general community disenchantment with, and movement away from, the institutional, "hierarchical 'mechanistic' understanding of Church to a 'People of God' model in which all members contributed their own gifts and talents to the missionary endeavours of the Church" (Hornsby-Smith, 2000, p. 371; Tacey, 2003; Collins, 2008). This reflected a greater understanding of "the concepts of collegiality and participation by all the People of God" (Hornsby-Smith, 2000, p. 371). The response of Church authorities to these changes has failed to address this disenchantment because "in spite of much rhetoric about collaborative ministries, there is little evidence of a significant shift of diocesan resources of lay formation and training for pastoral roles" (Hornsby-Smith, 2000, p. 373).

A crucial consequence of the loss of Catholic culture is the disconnection of ordinary Catholics from the institutional Church, signalling a "deepening disenchantment" (Monagan, 2003, p. 285) that matches a far wider breakdown and disintegration of



many of the world's institutions, "a cultural Calvary that defies rational explanation" (O'Murchu, 1997, p. 26). A frequently encountered term describing the spiritual milieu which makes up the Catholic school community is "alienation". The major contributing factor to this phenomenon is "massive social change" aptly described as "today's only social certainty" (Chittister, 2003, p. 24). When social change occurs without an accompanying spiritual dimension, it "leads to social chaos; social chaos leads to confusion, and confusion leads, social psychologists tell us, to alienation" (Chittister, 2003 p. 24). "Alienation", Chittister tells us, "is that feeling of rootlessness and disorientation of soul that comes with a loss of social bearings and fixed values and immutable standards and clear consensus on the things that count. It is a direction without destination, a voyage without values" (Chittister, 2003, p. 24). Alienation has been similarly described in terms of "disaffection" (Buggy, 2007) and disconnection, recognising that "we are increasingly confronted with the problem of disconnection: from our authentic sense of self; from intimacy with others in personal relationships; from our fellow citizens" (Gaffney, 2003, p. 83).

The depth of change and the demographic trends confirm a "rootless society" (O'Keefe, 2003, p. 100). Scholars nominate a growing group in society known as the "disaffected fringe" (Rees, 2003). In spite of this overwhelming evidence of alienation, researchers contend that many people still possess a deep hunger, "a profound and authentic desire of twenty-first-century humanity for wholeness in the midst of fragmentation, for community in the face of isolation and loneliness, for liberating transcendences, for meaning in life, for values that endure" (Barry, 2003, p. 47).

Notwithstanding this hunger for meaning and connectedness, there is a clear rejection of the institutional Church's authority over personal lives, a questioning of the basis of many of the doctrinal teachings of the Church which have formed the basis of Catholic life, and a willingness to pursue and embrace alternative models and sources of spiritual meaning and sustenance, once provided, albeit inadequately for some, by the parish community (McLaughlin, 2002, Collins, 2008). "The remoteness of the Church from the realities of the world has come at a terrible price, and it is a price that horribly exemplifies the loss of the most basic authority among the very people entrusted with it. Clerical abuse of the faithful, particularly minors, is

simply the most obvious example of ecclesiastical 'clubiness' separating the Church from reality" (McGillion, 2003, p. 52).

Significantly, the rejection of the Church as having any relevance to, or influence over, personal lives is mostly manifest in parish faith communities. There is a sense that "many Catholics, particularly the young, as well as the married, the divorced, the gays and many women believe the current institutional church appears to be incapable of understanding them or appreciating their life context" (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 35). The outcome is disengagement and "disaffection" (Buggy, 2007) resulting in escalating numbers of nominal Catholics (O'Sullivan, 1997; McGillion, 2003). This scenario is symptomatic of a serious disconnection and disintegration of the traditional allegiances, devotion and respect which once existed between the church and the faithful (Arbuckle, 1993; Bryk, 1993; Chittister, 2003; Groome 2002). Others have described reasons for the situation in terms of "theological poverty or timidity of a church leadership that does not seem to have the will or the creative imagination to fashion new structures that would meet the daunting pastoral challenges of our contemporary Catholic experience" (Mulligan, 1994, p. 43).

Entrenched within this environment, Catholic schools are attempting to respond earnestly to a plethora of worldviews influencing the life choices and behaviour patterns of the Catholic school community. It is no coincidence that Catholic schools have chosen a model of collegiality in their efforts to meet the pastoral challenges of the community. This approach reflects "a significant movement in our culture ... from a culture, which tells, to a culture, which converses" (Treston, 2000, p. 126). Schools are endeavouring to discover new ways of connecting with the spiritual dimension of the community by displaying a commitment to dialogue, acceptance and a pioneering spirit (Chittister, 2003). This emanates from an understanding that when:

old institutions and yesterday's leaders lend their energy only to resist rather than light the way down the new road, when standards become uncertain and integrity blurs because more energy is being put into rebuilding the age that is dying instead of giving soul to the age that is coming to life, we get out of touch with what matters, what really matters (Chittister, 2003, p. 24).

It is clear that the role of the Catholic school in assisting the community to connect with what really matters and “promote a sense of community and a compelling philosophy of life” (O’Keefe, 2003, p. 100) is crucial to any meaningful response to the current search for meaning and spirituality.

## **2.6     *The legitimacy debate***

The “new spirit of openness” (Grace, 2002, p. 28) and renewal which flowed from Vatican II initiated a debate on the legitimacy of Catholic schools. The spirit called upon Catholics to “come out of the enclosed and defensive structures of Catholic educational institutions and act as a ‘leaven’ in the secular world” (Grace, 2002, p. 28). The defensive stance previously adopted by the Church served the purpose of catechesis well, as the strong link between family, parish and school provided a consistent and clear message to a compliant community. Catholic schools as they existed served to reinforce the Catholicity of students from strong religious families and had minimal impact on the lives of other students (Greeley & Rossi, 1966). This was certainly a legitimate rationale for existence; however, in an era of profound change significant questions are now emerging. No longer can the Catholic system continue “to run in practice on its nineteenth-century justifications” (Grace, 2002, p. 29). The decline in faith in the institutional church coupled with “the weight of tradition, along with religious exclusivity, has all but eroded the communal base of the official churches, and consequently increasing numbers look elsewhere for that experience” (O’Murchu, 1997, pp. 87-88). There is evidence to suggest that the Catholic school is perceived as the new church of choice by the vast majority of the Catholic community.

### **2.6.1   Catholic schools as the new Church**

Catholic schools continue to experience steady growth in enrolments (Smith, 2007), reversing the experience of many Church agencies, particularly parishes. Catholic schools are seen as places that offer something which connects with the personal lives of the families who make up the community, a safe place for spiritual reflection and experience (Ryan, Brennan & Willmet, 1996).

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 (McLaughlin, 2000). Indeed, “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” (McLaughlin, 1998, p. 19). 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, 2000; O’Brien, 1998; Watkins, 1997). Further research concludes that “in a time of dramatic transformations in the institutional Church arising from Vatican II reforms and in a larger social context marked by increased secularisation, Catholic schools were crucial to the transmission of the faith in changed circumstances” (Grace, 2002, p. 84). The enterprise of Catholic Education is crucial to this process because, unlike other Church agencies, “Catholic schools have an impact independent of parental background” (Greeley, 1998, p.183).

At a superficial glance, the unprecedented enrolment interest in Catholic schools suggests an endorsement of what is being offered and how it is offered. In reality, though, this success presents an important dilemma. Catholic schools have become the face of the Church for the majority of families attending the school. This provides an unprecedented opportunity for evangelisation, and to provide the community with a personally meaningful experience of the Transcendent. Conversely, Catholic schools need to define and articulate a clear and authentic mission which will enliven a genuine Gospel culture. Devoid of probing and scrutiny, Catholic schools run the risk of becoming superficially Catholic “tailoring themselves not so much to the mission but to consumer demand” (O’Keefe, 2003, p. 101), and becoming “incorporated into a secular marketplace for education which may weaken their relation with the sacred and the spiritual and the distinctive culture of Catholicity itself” (Grace, 2002, p. 4). Against this setting, Catholic schools could be judged as being mission effective in their roles or alternatively merely recycling worn and hackneyed stereotypes which students are politely acknowledging and just as politely ignoring as personally irrelevant. This paradox presents a challenging dilemma for the principal.

The appeal of Catholic schools should be a distinctive Catholic culture which connects meaningfully with the life stories and faith journeys of families. While exam records and state of the art resources are important, far more important for many parents “is the pastoral approach of the schools and their values. Both they and their children seem to appreciate Catholicism when it is expressed as an ancient and wise spirituality, and as an integrated and coherent world view which includes a commitment to social justice and to the rights and dignity of every individual” (Pepinster, 2005, p. 2). It is encouraging that “many parents sense that a Catholic school might help their children to develop the self-discipline, moral resilience and spiritual maturity so necessary in surviving exposure as young adults to the winds of secularism and materialism in our society” (Hume, 1997, pp. 25-26).

The success of Catholic schools in general cannot be viewed as indicative of a resurgence in the life of the Church. Close analysis of families shows little intersection of school and parish. There is a temptation that “Catholic schools be maintained as some kind of prop for the Australian church endowing it with the illusion of vibrancy when it is clearly in decay. Catholic schools can easily become a ‘Clayton’s’ church” (Ranson, 1996, p. 57). In an era when organised religion is becoming a “marginal anachronism”, Catholic schools have “a distinctive and compelling reason to exist” (O’Keefe, 2003, p. 105).

## **2.7    *The changing Catholic landscape***

Catholic education operates within the intersection of sometimes variant and pluralistic worldviews and beliefs. Within the Catholic education system itself an aura of rhetoric and hyperbole has grown unchecked with some “content to maintain the simultaneous co-existence of contradictions in values and practices in our school system” (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 1). The changing nature of Catholic schools confirms that “much of the rhetoric describing contemporary Australian Catholic Education has little basis in reality” (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 1). Certainly the Church and schools prior to the 1960s were seen as “a kind of ‘sacred canopy’ which covered the Catholic experience and galvanised the Catholic identity” however “two important qualities of a vital organism that were not prominent... were a sense of history and a dynamic openness to change” (Braxton, 1980, p. 56).

Global changes have altered the way in which the world is viewed, and called into question the previously accepted and unchallenged Catholic worldview. This has resulted in significant changes to the Catholic landscape to a point where it is difficult to define or identify elements of the current milieu as being solely or uniquely Catholic. “There is to be found in each Catholic school a diversity of religious background and a pluralism of interest in and commitment to the Catholic faith” (Arthur, 1995, p.201). Indeed, what was once an easily identifiable Catholic culture has largely disappeared (McGillion, 2003) and “any distinct Catholic identity has, for the most part, been absorbed into mainstream Australia” (McLaughlin, 2002). It seems that the original reasons for founding the Catholic school have disappeared (O’Keefe, 2003).

This new consciousness has led to a basic change in how people view the Church and their place in it. “People who inherit the Catholic faith, and even those who are finding it afresh, are adjusting the way they appropriate it for themselves” (Pepinster, 2005, p. 2). The crisis faced by the institutional church:

is far more profound than simply falling attendance at Mass, increased practice of artificial birth control, an aging clergy and a decreasing number of vocations, and the unfortunate longevity of some anachronistic customs of clerical control that simply refuse to die. These are but symptoms of the more fundamental nature of the crisis. There is today a different way of understanding reality (Mulligan, 1994, p. 99).

Religion no longer defines who we are, where we work, the sporting team we support and who we marry, as it once did. “Identifying oneself as a Catholic means something quite different to what it did fifty years ago, and this can be clearly seen in the generational differences between families” (Hornsby-Smith, 2000, p. 371). These basic changes manifest in three broad characteristics of people now making up the majority of the Church. These comprise a combination of the Baby Boomer generation, Generation X and Generation Y, each of which has characteristics indicative of very different worldviews (Morwood, 1997). These characteristics impact on the way in which people respond to the current Church and its structures. The new consciousness is manifest in the following ways:

- People are 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;
- 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.
- There is a demand that people be treated as Christian adults on a personal faith journey capable of taking responsibility for their own decisions (Morwood, 1997).

“The clarion call of the laity in regard to all aspects of Church life is ‘transparency and accountability’” (O’Keefe, 2003, p. 102). This call reflects a very different understanding of the Church and a belief 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 and powers and gives dynamism (O’Sullivan 1997, p. 192).

While the movement away from the institutional church is well known and documented, there remains a persistent thirst for meaning, spiritual sustenance and personal connection through other agencies. “Australians may have rejected the Church’s authority over their personal lives, but they have not lost the dreaming, the need to reach out beyond themselves” (McGillion, 2003, p. 141). One of those other agencies sought out for spiritual connection is the Catholic school.

Contemporary Catholic schools now operate within a milieu of “radical challenges, system upheavals and new worldviews” (Beare, 2003, p. 6) emblematic of twenty-first century socio-political life. This observation echoes what is “almost universal agreement among social commentators that we are moving into a threshold time, leaving behind a so-called ‘modern’ worldview and sailing into uncharted waters of cultural identity” (Treston, 2000, p. 9). Fundamental changes and cultural upheavals will “shake our foundational assumptions...” and bring “far-reaching political and economic realignments” (Beare, 2003, p. 6). Given this scenario it would be “just

plain foolish” to continue on our current path. “Indeed it would be a scandal not to ready schools and their students for the new world order” (Beare, 2003, p. 6).

These experiences help fashion the way in which current parents and students see the world, what they value, and what they don’t, how they view their own place in the world and how they respond to opportunities as they arise. In similar ways the second Vatican Council (1962-1965) “proved to be a paradigmatic change in Catholic thinking, perspectives and orientation” (Murphy, 1997, p. 19).

This acknowledgement of the need for a rebirth signals “a new spirit of openness between the Church and the modern world” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 32). Catholic schools have a special role to play in this new spirit. There is an expectation that more effective ways be found to match the essential message underpinning the mission of the Church with the new worldviews of people, especially those who make-up the Catholic school communities. This is consistent with the views presented by the Oceania Bishops who assert that “Christ must be presented in a way well adapted to the younger generation and the rapidly changing culture in which they live” (Bishops of Oceania, 2003, p. 11). The Bishops, by extension, are including all members of the school community in this call. It is a recognition by the Bishops of a profoundly different culture, and therefore a call to present the story of Jesus in such a way as to make a meaningful connection with the life stories of the community. Given the importance the Bishops have given this objective, it seems a prerequisite for any meaningful connection to be aware of and understand the forces and issues which have shaped the worldviews, and the lives of the current school communities.

## **2.8    *The nature of generational change***

Australia is said to have had four simultaneous revolutions in the last 15 years which have fundamentally transformed our mindscapes (Mackay, 1993). The impact of these revolutions on the lives of children currently attending and who will attend our schools in the future is all-encompassing (Mackay, 1993). The child of today “is facing transformations to life on earth which are beyond our imagining, and she is already thinking and acting in ways quite different from her parents, with a time-



frame, with assumptions about the world, and with an awareness of planetary possibilities that in many respects are far beyond what adults now take for granted” (Beare, 2003, p. 7).

The four revolutions are the technology revolution, the gender revolution, the cultural revolution and the economic revolution. A fifth revolution of equal consequence is the spiritual revolution following from the Second Vatican Council, described as “a revolution against ecclesiastical institutionalism (in order) to return the Church to the dynamic virtues of Christ-centred love, justice and service to a changing world” (Arbuckle, 1993, p. 91). Each of these revolutions has fashioned a very different mindset and character that we can’t even imagine (Beare, 2004) clearly illustrated by the thought that children of this generation and the next will grow and live in the knowledge that “this may indeed be this humanity’s final century” (Beare, 2004, p. 7). “The generation of students now in schools may well be the most strategic group of people in the history of the human race. By the time they have finished their formal schooling and are entering upon their adult careers, the decisions will have been made (or not made) which will determine whether the human race and the planet itself have a future at all” (Beare, 2003, p. 7). Each generation is shaped by particular events and circumstances which determine the particular way that they view the world and their place in it. Understanding the basic characteristics of these generations provides an insight into motivations for particular worldviews and behaviours.

**Table 2.1      *Characteristics of the generations***

<b>Birth years</b>	<b>Generation name/s</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
Prior to 1926	GI, Builders	Influenced greatly the establishment of today’s society and church
1927-1945	Silent generation	Generous, conformist, parents affected by the Depression
1946-1964	Baby Boomers (4.1 million)	First divorce generation - view marriage as a contract for an exchange of goods and services; Now gaining control of the Church

1965-1976	Generation X, Post-boomers (4.5 million)	Predominantly single, Rapid rise in divorce rates; Women becoming a substantial portion of the workforce, The sexual revolution (contraceptive pill); Church attendance dropped and the Church and clergy portrayed negatively on TV; Illegal drugs freely available; HECS debt leading to the deferral of having children, greater reluctance to leave the family home and, decline in home ownership
1977-1994	Generation Y	Children of divorce; Integrated into the internet; Grew up with 50+ TV channels; Mostly unchurched generation; Amoral rather than immoral - raised without moral values; Education oriented; Fear of AIDS
1995 -	Millennials	To be determined

## 2.9 *Generation X*

Definition of this generation is important because most parents of students in Catholic schools are part of this generation. Generation X is often referred to as the “paradox generation” (Croucher, 2003) as it seems to be a mixture of often conflicting and contrasting positive and negative elements. Much of the understanding of this generation comes from an understanding of the preceding generation, the Baby Boomers. Baby Boomers are generally seen as more culturally confident, prosperous in the post-war period and rebellious against societal and parental norms (Rymarz, 2004). By way of contrast Generation Xers are:

- Very individualistic, and yet highly value relationships;
- Sceptical yet pragmatic;
- Slow to commit yet passionately dedicated;
- A challenge to manage but are excellent workers;
- Apathetic, and yet care deeply;
- Relativistic but are searching for meaning;
- Disillusioned, yet they are not giving up;
- Don’t respect authority, yet long to receive instruction;
- Have an extended adolescence, and yet they grew up too soon.

(Jeff Jantz quoted in Croucher, 2003, p. 45).

The above generalisations regarding the traits of generation Xers evoke an explicit image. There is a consensus view that “they struggle with three pervasive feelings - despair, confusion and narcissicism” (Croucher, 2003, p. 37).

Each of these feelings has implications for the way in which this generation relates to, and comes to grips with, their day-to-day encounters. The sense of despair generates from a lack of self-worth, a diminished sense of belonging in community, particularly the family and a perceived lack of opportunities to contribute to the common good through sacrifice and service. They are the “most ignored, misunderstood and disheartened generation we have seen in a long time” (George Barna in Croucher, 2003, p. 56), “a clinically depressed generation” (Richard Pearce in Croucher, 2003, p. 83). The sense of despair manifests in the generation who are “ten times as likely to suffer measurable depressions as their grandparents were” (Seligman in Croucher, 2003, p. 96). Contributing to the extreme sense of confusion is the fact that generation Xers are the first “post Christian/post modern” generation to grow up without absolute truths. If anything, the most influential belief is that the “highest virtue is tolerance of the views of others” (Croucher, 2003, p. 35). This generation lives with the very contradictory ideas that “everything is relative and everything could be truth” (Croucher, 2003, p. 38).

The narcissistic tendencies of this generation reflect the uniquely western understanding of self as independent, stable and autonomous. This contrasts with understandings of other cultures who view the self “as interdependent and connected with the social context” (Croucher, 2003, p. 42). This feature is consistent with the prominence of individualism as a guiding value in current society. Narcissistic tendencies also influence the debate favouring individual rights over the common good. These traits have major implications with how this generation engages with the Church.

## **2.10 *Generation X and the Church***

This generation may well become known in Church circles as Generation X-odus. Generation X presents particular challenges to the Church because “the world in which young Australians live is so alien from the world of Churchmen as to make formal religion irrelevant to them. That is not to say that the youth are not seeking a

spiritual dimension to their lives. They are just not finding the institutional churches as nurturers of a spirituality that seems relevant to their thinking” (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 11). This reality can be seen clearly when one considers the characteristics of Generation Xers described in the following ways:

- **The post-parish or “post-ecclesial” (Rolheiser, 2008) generation:**

The majority Generation X have never been involved in a church. This generation is interested in spirituality, but has little interest in formal religion, or ideology, and “places far more emphasis on the importance of human experience and is generally suspicious of institutional authority” (Rymarz, 2004). There is also a “loss of belief in the grand narrative or story” (Rymarz, 2004) and personal meaning is much more of an individual pursuit.

- **The post-TV generation:**

This is the first generation raised on television. Information for this generation communicates best as entertainment.

- **The post-divorce generation:**

Divorce has affected the whole generation. Opinions about family, marriage and trust have been shaped by experiences around divorce. The experience of divorce has had a negative psychological impact on Generation X.

- **The post-feminist generation:**

Equity and equality are very much assumed. This is an important fact for churches who do not support the ordination of women. Many Generation Xers will simply reject them and walk away.

- **The post-modern generation:**

This generation is deeply suspicious of grand claims and simple solutions. Churches that claim they have the last and final word on everything will find it very hard to attract this generation who cannot believe there is just one way for all. “Arrogance in the Church’s claimed infallibility no longer convinces

anyone, particularly the young” (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 11). Christianity will be one of the options in a group seeking personal meaning.

Generation X is fiercely independent in thought and resistant to claims and assertions which do not resonate with their life experience and worldview. For those who seek to influence the spiritual outlook of of Generation Xers by presenting the Christian faith, an important difference between this generation and previous generations is that “each person will make up his or her own mind about its value. Relationships and friendships are the mainstay of life and demonstrating commitment in relationships may be very significant in communicating what the Christian faith is all about” (Hughes,1999).

### ***2.11 Generation Y and the church***

Most of the students and a proportion of parents comprising Catholic schools are part of this generation. They are considered to be amoral rather than immoral having grown up without the influence of strong moral values. They are the products of the technology revolution, and represent a generation largely unaffiliated with the institutional Church, borne out by extensive research and statistical data on Mass attendance.

Examination of the religious practices of Year 12 students over the years 1972 to 1998 confirms that attendance at Sunday Mass declined significantly over this period, from 69% attendance at weekly Mass in 1972 to 23% in 1998 (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 311). This figure slips to 14% in the 20 - 29 year old bracket (Bellamy et al., 2002, p. 100). Further research confirms that “younger Catholics are much less likely to be frequent (Mass) attenders than older Catholics” (Bellamy et al., 2002, p. 100). This has implications for Catholic schools, as research highlights “how comprehensively people appear to lose Christian beliefs without the supportive structures associated with a frequent church involvement” (Bellamy et al., 2002, p. 104). The most significant catalyst leading to decreased Church attendance is simply the process of growing up and making independent decisions (Bellamy, 2002, p. 102). Given that for an increasing number of young people today “their only experience of Church is through their Catholic schools...” which “are often the principal places where

students practise their faith” (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 84), the experience of Church at school is in all likelihood the key element informing any decisions about the practise of the faith. This observation is given weight by research conducted into the perceptions of head teachers in selected English schools. The research concluded that “the Church is alive in the secondary schools through modern liturgies, but is dying in the parishes” (Grace quoted in Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 84).

## ***2.12 The challenge for Catholic Schools***

There appears little doubt that “a new worldview is in the process of dissolving the certainties of past decades, not least the certainties about the nature of schooling and the format for schools. A new mindset is emerging. The images young people accept as true about this world would have shocked their great grandparents if used 50 years ago (Beare, 2003). This view succinctly encapsulates the working environment of Catholic schools, highlighting the certainty of change, of new mindsets and worldviews, and is a cautionary signal to those charged with leading Catholic schools that the powerful forces competing for the hearts and minds of students are significantly different from those that have shaped past structures and culture.

Of particular interest to the Catholic education field is the resultant impact of the new world order on the way religion and spirituality are viewed by students. Research conducted in Australian Catholic schools shows a very clear image of the mindsets of students. The most influential work in this field has been the research by Marcellin Flynn which concludes that “the Catholic school appears to be having an effect on students’ personal faith development which does not depend on the prior religious socialisation of home. Through its Religious Education curriculum the school is having a strong independent effect on the personal faith of its students” (Flynn, 1985, pp. 312 - 313).

These findings highlight the contrast between the formal religious practice of students which shows clearly a disenchantment and lack of trust in the institutional church and the importance of a spiritual dimension in the students’ lives. Flynn’s results, measuring a strong independent effect on the personal faith of students, reflect the

“invisible pedagogy” or “informal curriculum” (Flynn, 2002, p. 217) which is so critical to the effectiveness of the Catholic school. The effects of this dimension of the Catholic school are difficult to measure objectively, but indicates a true expression of the student’s faith journey.

The Australian Catholic Bishops also recognise this dilemma facing schools and parishes, suggesting that:

We have an extraordinary treasure to offer in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately we may be offering this treasure to people in ways which make it difficult for them to recognize its value. One of the doorways may be the very real interest in or the quest for spirituality which seems obvious in many Australians. (Australian Catholic Bishops, 2003, p. 10).

There is much evidence to suggest that schools are more effective in this area than other church agencies (McLaughlin, 2003). Catholic schools are acknowledging and responding to the profound challenge presented to traditional Catholic culture.

Traditional Catholic culture is being openly challenged in three ways. The first is the unprecedented challenge to Catholic beliefs and teachings in the post-conciliar period. “The whole notion of a Catholic Weltanschauung (worldview) was challenged” (Rymarz, 2004, p. 2) as people simply refused to accept Church teaching without question, preferring to measure the relevance of the teaching against the touchstone of personal experience.

The second challenge concerns the emphasis on “the harmony and continuity between the culture of the Church and the wider culture” (Rymarz, 2004 p. 2), or, expressed another way, the “Church coming to grips with modernity” (Hornsby-Smith, 2000, p.371). This theme expresses the essential mission of the Church to assist in people’s search for meaning. The Church’s alternative, counter-cultural message must resonate in the context of people’s lives and be a “synthesis of Christian revelation and modernity, of the Christian witness and life with the forms of our age, a synthesis with power and authenticity, and thus one as authentically true to the Gospel as it is relevant to modernity” (Gilkey, 1975, p. 9).

A third challenge is the diminishing Catholic culture and identity which “provided earlier generations with a connection and an entrée into adult Catholic life” (Rymarz, p. 4). Generation Xers constructed an identity “that was far more responsive to the needs of the individual as opposed to a collective or communal meaning” (Rymarz, 2004, p. 4) but which often sacrificed the unique features of Catholic belief and practice. Many students not steeped in the traditions and culture of a Catholic upbringing do not have the very Catholic worldview as a launching pad into adulthood. It is clear that the new generation of parents and students is presenting a real challenge to traditional Catholic culture. The response to this challenge by Catholic schools is exacerbated further if there is no agreement between the school and parish as to the most appropriate response.

### **2.13 *Parish/school nexus***

Historically, the primary school and parish have been very closely linked in a number of ways, the most salient being the duplication of families who were active in the life of both parish and school. The current reality for Catholic schools is the almost complete absence of “traditional” Catholic families who have experienced the “traditional” Catholic upbringing in “a world bound by family, neighbourhood, school and parish, who experienced the values and cultural messages from each of those sources as consistent and mutually reinforcing” (Duggan, 1999). In this environment there was a concurrence of beliefs, values and allegiances serving to unite and strengthen both communities with a common purpose and goal.

The evolution of this relationship is now largely fraught with frustration, division and tension (Watkins, 1998; Quillinan, 1997). For a variety of reasons, including: the increasing access to Government funding; a demise in the numbers of religious in schools; the establishment of Diocesan Catholic Education Offices to administer schools; declining numbers of clergy; and the changing nature of families seeking enrolment, many contemporary Catholic schools now share a very different relationship with their parish community compared to previous years. Most schools are now more autonomous and independent in responding to the needs of families within their community. Principals of these schools are generally well-educated and lead communities which are considerably different in both worldview and aspiration to



those of previous years. A small percentage of families intersect between school and parish, with most families choosing to have contrived and limited contact with the parish through their children's sacramental programs (Tacey, 1998).

This limited intersection of families within schools and parishes highlights a dilemma confronting those responsible for the administration and governance of Catholic schools, and raises questions around what constitutes an authentic Catholic education for the current generation of students. Research conducted in a Catholic diocese of NSW concluded that "priests were motivated by a strong wish for an authentic Catholic education in Catholic schools and one which ultimately led students to practise their faith in the parish Church on Sunday" (Slattery, 1998, p. 173). This aspiration is indicative of considerable differences in understanding the current worldviews motivating the actions of families comprising school communities. Compounding the divide between parish and school is research which "increasingly indicates that Catholic laity approach the school with issues they once would have approached the presbytery" (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 15, Ranson, 2006) and in spite of the rhetoric concerning the "centrality of the parish as the locus of the Christian community" the reality suggests that this belief is "more aspirational than strategic" (Hornsby-Smith, 2000, p. 373).

These fundamental changes to the operational reality of the Catholic school have significantly and permanently altered its nature and purpose. The role of the school in the life of the local church community has evolved away from the traditional notion of the "parish school" into something which has been described by one scholar as the "parallel church" (McLaughlin, 2002) with both groups having few areas of common interest or mutual connection. The key behaviours of both principals and parish priests demonstrate the extent of this "no man's land". When asked "What do you perceive to be important key behaviours of the principal in the Catholic school?" there was agreement on only one of the key behaviours in the highest 15 responses from both groups. (Slattery, 1998, pp. 97,108). The highest key behaviour identified by priests: "co-operate with the parish priest and the parish community so that the school is identified within the local Church community" was not recognised within the first 15 responses by principals. "Clearly the priests indicated that the religious leadership of the Catholic school principal is more important than any other role"

(Slattery, 1998, p. 173). Indeed, “principals and their staff saw little reason for the involvement of parish priests in matters related to the school, thus reflecting the growing distance between parish priests and those working within Catholic schools” (Slattery, 1998, p. 169).

“There is a vast and complex question of just how schools and parishes relate when the school-going population is not, in the main, a church-going one” (Densley, 1990, p. 120). The current reality is that “the parish has a very limited outreach to Australia’s Catholic population” (McLaughlin, 2001 p. 8). “Many of the indicators which were taken to represent vitality in an earlier period have been in continuous decline since the 1960s, but on the other hand new forms of vitality - spiritual, ecumenical, socially concerned and committed – have emerged” (Hornsby-Smith, 2000, p. 373).

So complete is this decline that it has prompted at least one researcher to observe that “the continuing diminishing parish participation has meant that not a few parishes could not be viable without the presence of the school that bears their name” (Ranson, 2006, p. 3; McLaughlin, 2002). This observation, reflected in this sometimes tenuous relationship between the two groups, presents a perplexity for school leaders and inextricably shapes the role of the principal into something quite different from earlier understandings. The unique contextual link between parishes and schools, has, for all intents and purposes, ended. The intersection of families in both parish and school has declined to a point where serious questions are being posed about the mission of the Catholic school and the appropriate response to the needs and demands of this new community. Where once agreement and consensus may have prevailed, diversity and difference have emerged to obscure the once clear assumptions supporting the relationship between the parish and school.

## **2.14 *Divergent rhetoric and worldviews***

One of the central challenges to the contemporary Catholic school is the nature and diversity of its community. (English, 2007; Graham, 2006; O’Keefe & O’Keefe, 1996). This issue generates much debate between traditional and contemporary understandings of the culture of Catholic schools. Traditional understandings and

beliefs about Catholic faith and culture emerge from a substantially different context than that which now defines the milieu of modern school communities. This section examines some of the major forces shaping the values and beliefs of stakeholders in Catholic school communities.

The influence of Vatican II in the 1960s initiated a new spirit of questioning and openness and represented “a seismic shift in the self-understanding of Catholics” (Rymarz, 2004, p. 2). Long held views and practices, many of the sacred cows of the Catholic Church, were suddenly open to debate and new positions explored and adopted. Current Catholic school communities have no memory and little knowledge of the Council and certainly have no understanding of the contrasting environment since the Council. Generation X is the first post-conciliar generation. (Rymarz, 2004). There is little if any knowledge of the unique Catholic culture which existed prior to the Council, and therefore, it could be speculated, little or no “baggage” to compromise responses to contemporary questions. Likewise the historical perspective behind many of the issues is a necessary ingredient to temper appropriate responses. For some it is the ideal opportunity to review the mission and nature of Catholic schools in the face of significant contemporary challenges.

The result of this new spirit of openness and renewal was the exposing of serious differences between the rhetoric and the reality of Catholic schools (Treston, 1997). The role of the school in catechesis, the process of scaffolding religious teaching on a foundation of instruction and experiences provided by the family is greatly distorted by the nature of the modern Catholic school community. Even reference to the community as a “community of Catholics” denies the reality of modern school communities. Also evident is the paucity of fresh and appropriate outreach strategies, especially through parishes, of dealing with these realities. The extent of “connection” with the school community is, in many instances, limited to the Mass, where little or no compromise is afforded to tap into the particular faith journeys of the community (Graham, 2006).

Underpinning this problem is recent Australian research indicating that many clergy have a lack of confidence in the capacity of Catholic schools to help children mature in their personal faith journeys (Tinsey, 2002). “The schools were seen by 45% of the

priests as burdens on parish resources with little return for the local community. 'A low level of religious practice among students, parents and teachers' (56%) and the perception that 'the overall agenda of the schools has little to do with partnership with the local parish' were some of the reasons offered by members of the clergy for their negative attitudes towards Catholic secondary schools" (Tinsey, 1998, p. 67). While attitudes to primary schools were more positive, clergy in general "tended to have a 'value for money' attitude to the worth of the schools, with success being measured in terms of immediate and visible results, such as attendance at Mass on Sundays" (Tinsey, 1998, p. 68).

The seriousness of the situation is recognised by many researchers who assert that "the dissonance between the official rhetoric about Catholic schools and the world views of students and parents (and some staff) is a very serious issue confronting the movement to authentic Catholic schools" (Treston, 1997, p. 15). An important omission from this contention is the worldview of the principal as more data emerges to support the view that the principal's worldview is often at odds with the official rhetoric about the Catholic school (Grace, 2002, McLaughlin, 2002). Of further gravity is the lack of commitment and allegiance principals feel towards aspects of the Church's teaching and processes. It is a situation where principals feel they are being "forced into a position of justifying the ecclesial status quo, an outcome all too familiar in Roman Catholicism" (O'Murchu, 1995, p. 116). The sensitivity between religious faith and underlying changes in worldviews is closely related (Hughes, 1994). "It is often in religious expression and meaning that such changes become evident so quickly" (Hughes, 1994, p. 2). The particular worldview of the principal is a salient issue which is crucial to an understanding of the role of the principal.

### **2.15 *The principal's worldview***

Principals, like all other people, are the product of a particular environment and set of experiences which give rise to a particular worldview. This worldview is influential in determining beliefs, attitudes and understandings of events and importantly, reaction and responses to these events. The particular worldview will determine the principal's commitment and allegiance, or otherwise, to particular values and ideals, which will,

in turn, influence where the principal chooses to devote time and energy in his/her role.

The first public expression of the *raison d'être* of Catholic schools which provides some insight into the principal's worldview is encountered in the school mission statement. An analysis of the mission statements from some 66 schools revealed that while some "were very clear that a serious engagement with the religious culture of the Roman Catholic Church was the prime aim of the school" (Grace, 2002, p. 127), most were not so erudite and tended "to be expressed in more open and comprehensive terms" (Grace, 2002, p. 127). These schools presented their mission in terms of "Christian religious commitment and of adherence to Gospel values" (Grace, 2002, p. 127). Presentation of the school mission in this manner is an interesting decision and may be an attempt to capture more succinctly the reality of a more diverse and communal understanding of the Catholic school mission.

In almost all Catholic schools, the mission statement provides some indication of the values and ideals which influence the operation of the school; however, mission statements are not always an accurate reflection of the worldview and personal constructs of the principal's mission (Grace, 2002, p. 134). There exists the potential for dissonance between the espoused beliefs of the school mission statement and the personal beliefs of the principal. The essence of the personal dilemma felt by many principals is well illustrated by the following thoughtful admission by a Catholic principal:

I define myself as a professional Catholic, not in a derogatory sense but as a statement of fact. The Catholic Church employs me; my future career depends to a large extent on my relationship with the Parish Priest and my involvement with the local Parish – especially liturgically. I therefore regularly read to the assembled community and teach students Church teachings such as the Assumption – something I do not believe happened. It is my role to teach the children the accumulated knowledge and tradition of the Catholic Church, what Morwood calls the conventional stage of faith. Morwood describes this conventional stage as good and a necessary stage. This may be true. However, as educators would we knowingly teach a Mathematics concept which we know could not possibly be true? Yet, the school liturgy to celebrate the Assumption is prepared and will be a compulsory activity for all children and last week's newsletter contained a reflection based on the Assumption. Questions such as 'How true am I being to my own spirituality?' and 'Am I treating the Catholic Church justly by not being totally committed to an adhering to its teachings?'

began to nag me. True, with selected trusted friends and colleagues such questions as 'who is Jesus?' are discussed openly (usually at night), but should I continue to play this charade? Disturbing thoughts when you have a mortgage and children to educate (Quoted in McLaughlin, 2002, p. 13).

The personal constructs of the principal's mission are an important determinant "in sustaining and directing the leadership dynamic of individual head teachers" (Grace, 2002, p. 134). In other words, while publicly expressing allegiance to the values and ideals of the mission statement there exists a real conflict between official rhetoric and the personal views, values and aspirations of principals. In those cases where particular aspects of values and ideals most commonly expressed in mission statements were devoid of personal meaning for the principal, leadership energy and commitment to these particular areas was also diminished (Grace, 2002).

This assertion is borne out in results of research conducted in Britain. When asked to articulate their personal conception of the mission of the Catholic school "virtually all of the head teachers made some reference to their responsibilities for the renewal and development of the Catholic faith among the students in their schools" (Grace, 2002, p. 135). Further analysis concluded that just over half appeared to be committed to this personally, while the others offered only "nominal or ritual acknowledgement" (Grace, 2002, p. 135). The former group spoke of their role in terms of a personal mission or vocation, while the latter group expressed their personal mission in terms of "good works" emphasising the spirit of Vatican II of "faith in action in the wider world" (Grace, 2002, p. 136).

Examination of the backgrounds of each of the respondents revealed that, of the faith leaders who expressed a commitment in terms of a personal vocation, six were members of a religious order, 27 were lay principals. While the responses in terms of vocation and mission from the six religious principals were not surprising the backgrounds of the other principals revealed some interesting data. Grace contends that principals adopt many of the values and ideals of their own particular schooling. If the principals were products of particular religious schools themselves, they are likely to espouse the same characteristics of the particular charism of the order. That is, principals who attended Christian Brothers' schools were likely to behave in a way

reflective of the elements of the Edmund Rice charism. An absence of staff from religious orders in schools reduces the potential for students to be educated in the founding principles and charism of the order. The worldview of the principal is critical to the tone and ethos of the school.

This is a very real dilemma facing principals. Many principals view themselves as “authority dissenters” (Arbuckle, 1993) raising questions about the ecclesial structures, which exposes the principal to the real risk of being “criticised as disloyal” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 48). “Issues like this are real challenges for thoughtful and loyal Catholics, especially those who hold leadership roles in Catholic schools, since a case can be made that the current curia position on dissent from non-infallible teaching is both theologically tenuous and pastorally naïve” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 49). Australian Catholic school principals have “a practical, tolerant view of Catholicism that was more about establishing relationships through service and less on law” (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 134).

## **2.16 *Permeation of boundaries***

Many aspects of the changed nature of Catholic schooling have opened the school to scrutiny by a wider spectrum of stakeholders than ever before. “Catholic education institutions are now more weakly classified and insulated from external agencies than in previous historical periods” (Grace, 2002, p. 48). While this phenomenon can be optimistically viewed as “a progressive development of the mission of Catholic schools and a fruitful realisation of the openness principles of Vatican II reforms” (Grace, 2002, p. 48) it may, upon further reflection, “represent a loss of distinctive voice, character and integrity for the Catholic faith in the modern world” (Grace, 2002, p. 48). New accountability demands, particularly from those with a “financial stake” in the operation of the school, present to these stakeholders a window of influence over the life of the school which once would have never existed.

### **2.16.1 Fundamental utilitarianism**

The burgeoning expectation of parents to be involved in every aspect of school administration, “parentocracy” (Grace, 2002, p. 35), is problematic for principals. Parental involvement in the life of the school increases the potential for the rise and

acceptance of values contrary to the fundamental values of the school, a situation which would inevitably result in an internal control struggle (Grace, 2002). “Clearly the relation between the official faith-vision of the school and the unofficial faith agenda lived in the daily praxis of both school and society will seldom be a matter of ‘sweetness and light’... Christian ideals of the institution are subtly undermined by the pressures of competition (from examinations to sport) or from the alternative curriculum of liberal relativeness and self-fulfilment, that is so easily absorbed from the wider curriculum - including of course, the culture of the parents” (Gallagher, 1996, p. 27).

Traditional ecclesial identity, once a feature of the operation of Catholic school, no longer resonates with the majority of parents. The underlying assumption of the traditional structure that “the dominated accept as legitimate their own condition of domination” (Bourdieu quoted in Grace, 2002, p. 31), and, the “response by the Catholic laity to clerical leadership until the late 1980s” (Grace, 2002, p. 31), has been replaced by collaborative and consultative leadership models seeking and welcoming involvement of all stakeholders in the operation of the school. This change has far-reaching effects. In England, “the guardianship of the distinctive Catholic mission and ethos of a school has passed, in practice, from the Bishops to empowered school governors and parents” (Grace, 2002, p. 37). This same situation has taken effect in Australian Catholic schools to varying degrees and has radical implications for the role of the Catholic school principal and the dominant ethos of the school.

One example of the potential of parental influence on prevailing values is the Catholic school driven by a ‘results at any cost’ mentality which has at its heart something radically different from the common good. “With all the pressures towards a culture of ‘performativity’ and measurement in schooling, the attention given by Catholic leaders to the academic mission of the school has undoubtedly increased” (Grace, 2002, p. 141). Another strong influence on the ethos of the Catholic school is the market-place.

### **2.16.2 Influence of the market culture**



The “pedagogy of a faith-based curriculum” (Grace, 2002, p. 46) accepts the dignity of each individual regardless of achievement. This stance is being openly challenged by the “pedagogy of the market-place” which differentially values students according to output and achievement (Grace, 2002, p. 46).

Resistance to these values requires a vision that can “withstand the marketplace” (Fullan, 1998, p. 34), which connects with the school community and values practices and behaviour consistent with the mission of the school (Fullan, 1998). The failure of the curriculum driven by market-place values is that “it dislocates knowledge from a relation to the sacred or to the community and replaces it with a utilitarian, commodified and individualistic relation” (Grace, 2002, p. 50). “In bringing soul to our modern society we are fighting for human dignity and offering something that has to be better than the predatory greed and emptiness that encircles us” (Prendergast, 2003b, p. 17).

Catholic schools may appear effective and successful within this “invisible pedagogy” (Grace, 2002, p. 50); however, this apparent success does not always fit well with the stated goals of the mission statement. The “invisible pedagogy...” [of] “personal formation in faith shaped by the whole-school environment, its ethos, rituals, symbols and value climate” (Grace, 2002, p. 50) is less tangible and visible than behavioural benchmarks, and only made visible in the longer term. Traditional signs of success in the “invisible pedagogy” such as numbers of students involved in sacramental programs, numbers at Sunday Mass and vocations to the priesthood and religious life are now less tangible forcing Catholic schools “to look for new signs of their spiritual, moral and social achievement” (Grace, 2002, p. 51).

Research results conclude that “the attempted colonisation of schools, colleges and universities in the 1980s and 1990s by the values, practices and discourse of market ideologies has presented Catholic school leaders in some countries with challenges to the principles of a distinctive Catholic educational mission” (Grace, 2002, p. 180). There are those who believe that “some Catholic schools not only may have been seduced by the secular culture but also have succeeded within it” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 36). Furthermore, “the state in many places now heavily subsidises Catholic education. All talk about the ‘school community’ and ‘holistic education’ cannot hide

the fact that less admirable qualities of society's values have become absorbed by the schools in the process. If a transformative shift had occurred the difference between the state and the Catholic system would be strikingly apparent. They are not" (Murphy, 1997, p. 170).

### ***2.17 The spirit of renewal in Catholic schools***

By any measure the decline in faith by ordinary Catholics in the institutional Church has been momentous with seemingly limited desire by the disaffected majority to embrace a Church with little will or intention to change. The once substantial influence of the Church on the daily lives of Catholics has largely disappeared (Robinson, 2007). The Church's capacity to cogently express the eternal principles in ways which resonate with people's daily lives emanates from a spirit of renewal and openness to change with which the Church is yet to come to grips (Treston, 2000). Conversely, Catholic schools have embraced the spirit of renewal and openness to change and incorporate many practices associated with renewal into formal structures, thus making them a crucial agency to the transmission of faith and the face of the Church for many families (Grace, 2002).

Catholic schools are very much the face of the Church today and they facilitate much of the outreach into the community. Catholic schools "may not be perfect but they are the best forum that the Church has in its ministry with youth. Throw away our schools and what forum do we have to relate to young people in Australia today?" (Tinsey, 2002). Catholic schools provide an important faith environment in the lives of the faith community. Indeed "in a time of dramatic transformations in the institutional Church arising from Vatican II reforms and in a larger social context marked by increased secularisation, Catholic schools were crucial to the transmission of the faith in changed circumstances" (Grace, 2002, p. 84). Catholic schools have a vital role in the educational mission of the Church because they "have an impact independent of parental background" (Greeley, 1998, p. 183). Catholic schools are not only effective in circumstances where the students came from a strong family faith background but also in teaching the message of Jesus Christ and meeting the needs of a diverse and pluralist community irrespective of background (Greeley, 1998).

Educationally, Catholic schools appear to be successful. If taking the simple comparison of the numbers of students who complete Year 12 schooling, Catholic schools appear to do considerably better than other schools (Hughes, 2004) retaining some 77.4% of students in the year 2000 (Flynn & Mok, 2002). The total number of students in Catholic schools has risen to 19.7% of all Australian students, a rise from 17.6% in 1971 (Flynn & Mok, 2002). Longitudinal research measuring students' satisfaction with their school between 1982 and 1998 found that students "were similar in their degree of satisfaction with Catholic schools" (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 302).

This scenario provides further impetus to a call that "yesterday's directions need to be critiqued." (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 4) to avoid the situation where schools merely recycle worn and hackneyed stereotypes and rhetoric. This is a cautionary call by researchers to critique yesterday's directions which "may have answered yesterday's questions, albeit inadequately" (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 5) but are no longer meeting the needs of the contemporary school.

The apparent success of schools in overcoming the prejudices and injustices of the past may have occurred "not so much by addressing the injustices in our society, but by, in so many ways accepting the agenda of the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant establishment by becoming part of it, and indeed attaining leadership roles within it". "Consequently, we need to scan our environment and face reality" (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 5). This presents a challenging dilemma for the principal as any process of renewal is fraught with potential disagreement and debate about the most appropriate way forward.

### **2.17.1 Catholic school renewal processes**

All effective institutions, including the Church itself, must undergo radical, pervasive and regular changes to effectively carry out their mandate (Mackay, 1993). "At a time of profound change in society, it is necessary that educators continue to monitor the performance of Catholic schools as they endeavour to communicate the Gospel of Jesus to today's youth" (Flynn, 2002, p. 20). The message of renewal has found greater acceptance in Catholic education than in the wider Church community. "Renewal is not a new phenomenon within Catholic schools" (Spry, 2000, p. 121),

although its initial discourse and shape was “informal, haphazard and reactive” (Spry, 2000, p. 133) in nature particularly through the early phases of the establishment of Catholic schools. “It has been recognised that Catholic schools from their establishment have engaged in processes that are developmental in orientation” (Spry & Sultmann in Spry, 2000, p. 121).

A commitment to formal, deliberate and proactive renewal processes by the late 1970s provided a mechanism and mindset for those involved in Catholic school leadership to critique, through formative and summative processes, the organisational and educational dimensions as well as the nature and purpose of the Catholic school and, just as importantly, their role within the process. While there is evidence to suggest that Catholic school renewal “was framed as a natural process motivated by both the desires and capacity of the Catholic community for change and development” (Spry, 2000, p. 129) it is only relatively recently that “Catholic system authorities began to see a leadership role for themselves within the discourse of Catholic school renewal” (Spry, 2000, p. 130) and a structural framework was implemented for a process of renewal.

While the reform agenda pertaining to organisational and educational aspects of Catholic schools have been enacted through the school effectiveness and improvement movements (Spry, 2000), the application of renewal principles provided an opportunity for the Catholic school community to “continually re-evaluate its own structures and processes and also its relationships with parents, community and Catholic education at large so that there was a consonance between the Christian values it espouses and its actual practice” (McLay quoted in Spry, 2000, p. 134).

Renewal in this sense is an opportunity to “bring the everyday experiences of our lives, as well as the extraordinary ones, within a context of larger significance” (Whitehead & Whitehead quoted in Spry, 2000, p. 127).

The real problem facing the Catholic school is to identify and lay down the conditions necessary for it to fulfil its mission... Loyalty to the educational aims of the Catholic school demands constant self-criticism and return to basic principles, to the motives which inspire the Church's involvement in education. They do not provide a quick answer to contemporary problems, but they give a direction, which can begin to solve them (CCE, 1997, pars 64, 67).

The spirit of renewal is very much empowered by the level of commitment to “self-criticism” by Catholic school leaders.

### **2.17.2 Leadership of the renewal process**

Catholic education has embraced the principles of renewal more enthusiastically than other Church agencies (Spry, 2000). The value of this process to the success of the Catholic education system in general is indubitable. Empowering this process falls squarely within the role of the principal. In fact, in the midst of profound changes and upheavals Catholic schools encourage leaders who are:

discomforted by what is, driven by nagging discontent, and consumed by a compulsion to revise, remodel and improve things. They have the explosive combination of insatiable restlessness about what is orthodox, conventional, and acceptable, together with the ability to handle and invent ideas and to synthesise them in a new way which makes them coherent and persuasive for others (Beare 1998).

Leadership is at the heart of the renewal process. Attempts to encapsulate this sentiment of renewal at the core of the Catholic school’s authenticity and as the critical role of leadership (Spry & Sultmann, 1994: Treston, 1992) use language and descriptors which evoke a sense of rebirth and revitalisation. Descriptions of this spirit of renewal and restoration conceptualise the process in a way which invites reflection and critique through “re-imagining”, “discernment”, “reframing”, “sifting”, “renewal”, “conversion”, “transformation” (Prendergast, 2003a), “singing a ‘new song’” (Lawton, 2003) and “revisioning” (Angelico, 1997). This key dimension is presented as an intrinsic activity derived from the inner values and aspirations of the leader rather than the application of a set of generic processes from a document.

Leadership which is not content with the ordinary or the status quo is valued and encouraged. The fundamental choice for any leader is between “maintenance and greatness, between caution and courage, and between dependency and autonomy” (Block quoted in Fullan, 1998, p. 10). The underlying theme is one of risk and imagination.

When renewal processes are hard wired into daily practices, an openness to change and critique become accepted as vital to the effective and authentic operation of the organisation. Likewise it can be concluded that where these processes are missing or treated with suspicion the environment becomes insular, narrow-minded and sour. “While many questions remain unanswered, there continues to be a strong commitment to extending both the theory and the practice of Catholic school renewal in ways that are authentic to the nature and purpose of Catholic schooling” (Spry, 2000, p. 146). This critical facet of Catholic school leadership has the potential to significantly impact, either positively or negatively, on the worldviews of the leaders involved and could conceivably be the source of deep and irreconcilable differences on understandings of the mission of the Catholic school.

### ***2.18 The research problem defined***

The changing Catholic landscape is heralding a new dynamic in the nature of Catholic school communities. Unlike Catholic communities of the past, Australian Catholicism is now characterised by pluralism, a mistrust of institutional values and authority, and an emphasis on a more personal, less institutional form of Catholic life (Lennan, 2009). Indicative of this change is a growing “post-denominational” (Allen, 2008) generation where beliefs and values are not constrained within one particular denomination.

For Catholic schools, this situation invites a major rethink of current practice, and how best to connect meaningfully with the faith lives of families. Moreover, the rise in Catholic schools being the only contact Catholic families are choosing to have with the Catholic church has focused the urgency of the dilemma squarely in the school environment. Many of the issues and concerns which would have once been addressed by the presbytery are now being directed to school personnel, especially the principal. This situation is indicative of fundamental changes to the operation of Catholic schools and exposes deep divisions in how the mission of the Catholic school is understood by key stakeholders.

The paradoxical manner in which the mission of the Catholic school is viewed is not a new phenomenon. There is an ideological tension between outreach, liberation and renewal and, alternatively, retreat, domestication and withdrawal, with each reflecting

an understanding of mission emanating from a distinctly different worldview (Chittester, 2003, Grace, 2002, Haldane, 2000). The prevailing culture supporting retreat, domestication and withdrawal is a “theology of acceptance” (Haldane, 2000) in matters of Church teaching and doctrine and a return to past practices and structures. The alternative call is for an “inspirational pedagogy” (Grace, 2002) encouraging critical thought and dialogue to develop a personally meaningful spirituality through a knowledge and experience of the reign of God. There is little doubt of the challenge posed by conflicting understandings of the mission of the Catholic school. For the principal though, negotiating a pathway through these conflicting worldviews and understandings presents a further dilemma. This is the influence of key stakeholders on the way the principal’s role is enacted.

Two important stakeholders in the life of the principal are the clergy and the employing authorities. Clergy are significant because most primary schools, and to a lesser extent secondary colleges, maintain a historical connection to the parish. Clerical influence in the day-to-day operation of the school varies widely, however, the role of clergy in the life of schools is moving to one of patron rather than manager, although clergy continue to maintain influence over the appointment of senior staff.

The second group is the employing authorities, who are gradually accepting more responsibility for the secular and spiritual accountability requirements of Catholic schools. The relationship with employing authorities is generally more transparent, with agreed mechanisms and processes to address areas of difference and dispute. A different dilemma arises when the principal has different expectations of his/her role from those held by the clergy.

The role of the principal is very much concerned with the promotion of the reign of God in ways which connect meaningfully with the life stories of the community (Rymarz, 2004). There is a challenge in ensuring that Catholic schools are not only Catholic in name, but also in nature. The apparent success of Catholic schools measured in enrolment applications needs to be tempered against the stated mission and how closely the stated mission reflects the day-to-day operation of the school. In fact “the dissonance between the official rhetoric about Catholic schools and the

worldviews of staff, parents and students is a serious issue confronting the movement to authentic Catholic schools” (Treston, 1997, p. 15). The essential question emerging from these challenges “is not how to educate people in the Catholic faith but how to form people with a Catholic mind and heart” (Hanvey, 2005, p. 52).

The effects of ecclesial, social and educational revolutions have fashioned dramatically different worldviews which are threatening the demise of traditional Catholic culture and the Catholic worldview. This has brought about fundamental changes to the operation of Catholic schools and exposed deep divisions in how the mission of the Catholic school is understood by key stakeholders. All groups charged with the administration and governance of Catholic schools claim to act from an authentic understanding of the mission of the Catholic school; however, there is evidence of substantial disagreement as to how the Catholic school should best respond to its call and duty to evangelise. This presents a real problem for principals who are expected to operate in an environment of contested expectations and perceptions of their role. This position invites closer scrutiny as the lack of consensus around mission and role creates ambiguity amongst major stakeholders. The challenge is to clarify the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal.

Consequently the problem driving this research is the apparent lack of clarity and agreement by major stakeholders in the governance and administration of Catholic schools about, firstly, the mission of the Catholic school and its place in the educational mission of the Church and, secondly, the role of the principal and the expectations that surround the position.

## **2.19 Purpose of the research**

The purpose of this research is to explore understandings held by key stakeholders of the mission of the contemporary Catholic school and the role of the principal in the school’s operation. The key stakeholders selected for the purposes of this research are principals, employing authorities and clergy.



## **2.20    *The major research question***

The following major research question focuses the conduct of the research for this thesis:

*What are the understandings held by key stakeholders of the mission of the contemporary Catholic school and the role of the principal?*

## **CHAPTER 3 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: IDENTIFYING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

### **3.1 *Introduction***

The purpose of this research is to explore understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The research examines this topic from the perspectives of three key stakeholders in the life of Catholic schools, namely, principals, clergy and employing authorities. The previous chapter defined the research problem in the light of the contextual realities of Catholic schools and illuminated a transitional period for the Catholic school. This period is from a time of certainty in embracing an authentic Catholic mission and identity to the current uncertain reality resulting from significant changes in the Catholic landscape. Indeed, the diversity of understandings of the mission of the Catholic school has become problematic for all involved. All groups charged with the administration and governance of Catholic schools claim to act from an authentic understanding of the mission of the Catholic school, however, there is a lack of clarity as to how the Catholic school should best respond to its call and duty to educate and evangelise. This presents a real problem for principals who operate in this environment of contested expectations and perceptions.

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the research problem within the theoretical debate on the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal. The chapter investigates the issues surrounding understandings of mission and role inherent in the research problem. The chapter is divided into two main sections and explores contemporary literature on the concepts of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the Catholic school principal. The review serves to provide a conceptual framework for exploration of these two concepts within contemporary Catholic schools.

### **3.2 *Conceptual framework***

Issues emerging from the literature pertinent to this study emanate from the interrelationship between the concepts of “mission” and “role”. In Chapter Two the nature of the changing Catholic landscape was explored and identified as a major

influence on how the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal is understood by stakeholders and enacted by principals. The concepts of “mission” and “role” serve as the foundation of the conceptual framework.

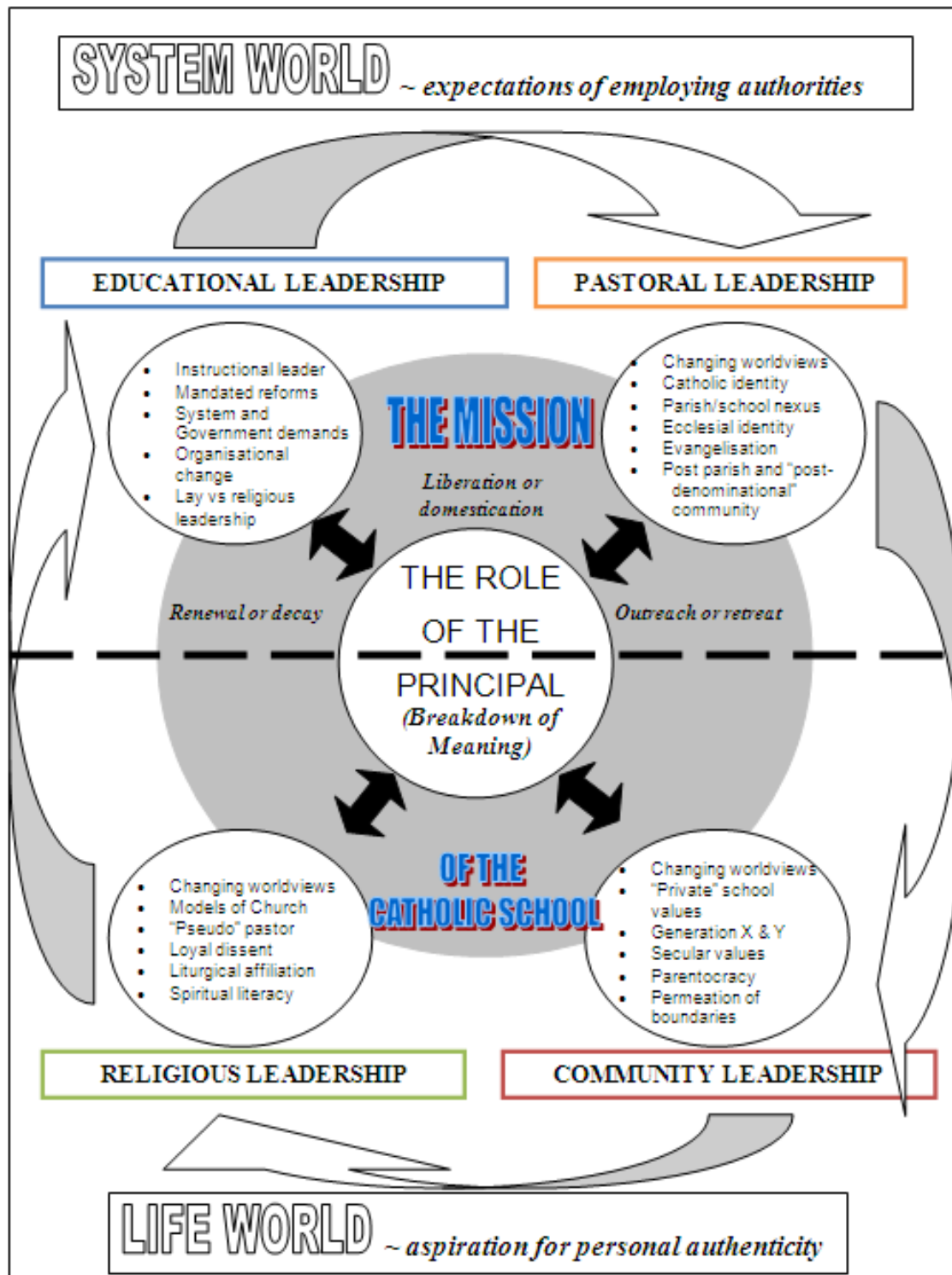
At the heart of the framework is the role of the principal. Ecclesial, social and educational revolutions have resulted in a breakdown of traditional assumptions and inherited meaning associated with this role. Values, practices and beliefs once taken for granted have become problematic for school leaders as the changing profile and nature of the school community presents new challenges. New assumptions and thinking are challenging the accepted wisdom underpinning the mission of the school and the consequent role of the principal.

Schools operate with the intersection of two broad spheres of influence – system world and lifeworld (Habermas, 1996). The lifeworld relates to the known body of cultural knowledge that the principal is able to access to make decisions and comprises the changing realities of the Catholic landscape and the principal’s own aspirations for personal authenticity. The system world, on the other hand, includes strategic, external and imposed influences such as legislative and system requirements. Considered together, the lifeworld of the principal and system world create tensions that impinge on the way that principals make decisions about their role and the role of the school in the educational mission of the Church (Habermas, 1996). Each represent contrasting perspectives on how Catholic schools should respond and proceed given the current Catholic landscape and significantly influence understandings and expectations of the leadership of schools. The framework situates the role of the principal in the core of the enterprise of Catholic education. This is the current reality for principals as they negotiate their way through conflicting understandings resulting from a changing Catholic landscape.

The principal is expected to provide leadership in all aspects of school life. For the purposes of this study these have been grouped under the following dimensions:

1. Educational leadership
2. Pastoral leadership
3. Community leadership
4. Spiritual leadership.

The literature identifies significant variance in understanding in each of these dimensions of leadership. Each presents a number of pertinent issues which challenge the work of principals. The four leadership dimensions are situated within and take shape from the broader understanding of the mission of the school.



**Figure 3.1** Conceptual framework of the literature review

### **3.3     *The mission of the Catholic school***

The mission of the Catholic is understood differently by stakeholders associated with Catholic education. In its simplest form the mission of the Catholic school imitates exactly the mission of Jesus, which is to initiate a new reign of God in our world (Spry, 2000). While such a statement would meet with broad general agreement the reality for Catholic schools is that their mission is understood and enacted in radically different ways.

Catholic schools function “somewhere between the poles of ‘fully Christian’ on one side and complete secularisation on the other” (Benne, 2001, p. 49). Most Catholic schools operate from time to time at different points on the continuum, however, each Catholic school would fit predominately into one of five broad categories indicated below. Each of the categories is indicative of varying understandings and assumptions about the mission of the Catholic school (Treston, 1997).

1.     *The Traditional Catholic school.* This school is characterised “by a strong and definitive stance on the explicit Catholic character of the school, its rituals, sacraments and teaching of Catholic doctrine. Catechesis is the mode of religious education” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 57). The prevailing ethos is one of “overt piety of the (Catholic) tradition” (Benne, 2001, p. 49).
2.     *The Evangelising Catholic school.* This school has a strong and vibrant Catholic ethos while embracing the reality of the pluralism of beliefs among members of the school community. This school seeks to act “as an agent of the Church’s mission to evangelise and to be the face of Christ to students and parents who have little affiliation with the institutional Church” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 57).
3.     *The Secular Catholic school.* The prevailing Catholic ethos of this school is “reclusive and unorganised” (Benne, 2001, p. 49) with “secular sources as the organising paradigm” (Benne, 2001, p. 49). This school outwardly espouses Catholic values and a Catholic belief system while its culture is “thoroughly secular” and where “the veneer of Catholic respectability cloaks the school as a business enterprise” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 57).

4. *The Ecumenical Catholic school.* In this school the Catholic tradition is the dominant ethos however the school is “intentionally pluralist” (Benne, 2001, p. 49) being inclusive of students of other faiths. The school values and practices outreach, acceptance and critical dialogue with the community.
5. *The Public Sector Catholic School.* This Catholic school is “fully integrated into the public system and the distinctive Catholic character of the school is permitted to be maintained by special Government arrangement” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 57).

Each of the categories offers insights into how the mission of the school is understood and enacted. There is, though, an important distinction between elements which make up the mission of the Catholic school (the primary purpose) and the guiding elements dictating how the mission is enacted within the school environment (the secondary purpose) (McLaughlin, 2000). This insight is similarly expressed as the “cardinal characteristics” and “substantial characteristics” of a Catholic school which clearly distinguish the mission and its enactment (Groome, 1998). This distinction is important as the literature confirms paradigmatic differences amongst researchers, clergy, practitioners and the wider Catholic community as to the primary and secondary purposes of the Catholic school.

### **3.3.1 The primary purpose of the Catholic school**

Following the second Vatican Council, the Church, and more specifically Catholic schools, entered uncharted waters (Collins, 2008). The once “traditional and largely unquestioned role of Catholic schools in Australia was increasingly coming under scrutiny” (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 8). The effect of this change profoundly traumatized and challenged many of the groups associated with Catholic schools and signalled a defining moment in the evolution of Catholic schools (Flynn & Mok, 2002).

The mission and identity of pre-conciliar schools was clearly understood and recognisable. Catholic schools provided “a means for the Church to assume a social profile out of a sectarian history” (Ranson, 1996, p. 57). They became “defensive citadels for minority communities anxious to preserve the transmission of the Faith and of its spiritual and moral codes and symbols” (Grace, 1997, p. 72), “in a hostile

external environment characterised by a dominant Protestant order, continuing anti-Catholic prejudice and the growing influence of secularisation” (Grace, 2002, p. 7). The context provided the rationale for both the genesis of a separate Catholic schooling system and the heroic mission to defend the Catholic faith and protect the Catholic faithful.

Contrasting with this context, the “aggiornamento” emerging from the second Vatican Council served to highlight deeply entrenched divisions on the primary mission of the Catholic school in the educational mission of the Church and how this mission should take shape into the future. The challenges and opportunities of the post-conciliar Catholic landscape require a new rationale for legitimacy. The challenge ‘to keep alive and to renew the culture of the sacred in a secular world’ (Grace, 2002, p. 5) through outreach, renewal, acceptance and critical dialogue (Chittester, 2003) necessitates a very different response. Such fundamental differences generate division between groups associated with Catholic schools. This situation needs further investigation as it is fundamental to any attempt to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by the changing Catholic landscape.

### **3.3.2 New challenges for Catholic schools**

Catholic schools operate within the intersection of community, staff, clergy, employing authorities and students and experience the consequent dynamics of competing expectations, aspirations and understandings held by these key stakeholders. This context reflects the impact of social, ecclesial and educational revolutions and a consequent breakdown in meaning. Three key dimensions of the context of Catholic schools emerged from the previous chapter and assist in providing deeper insights into new challenges posed by the changing Catholic landscape. A return to the dynamic virtues of love, justice and service are enacted in three key elements which are fundamental to a legitimate Catholic school. These are an authentic Catholic culture, a Catholic anthropology, based on the primacy of the person, and a commitment to the common good, embedded through an active and ethical community. These essential elements are vital to any discussion and understanding of the mission of the Catholic school (Sergiovanni, 2000). The following section explores the implications for Catholic schools.

### **3.3.3 Catholic school culture**

Culture is understood as the lived beliefs and values of an organisation (Cook, 2001). The importance of culture to the effectiveness of an organisation is undisputed with research confirming that a “strong corporate culture contributes to productivity and success” (Cook, 2001, p. 5). Strong and effective organizations invariably possess cultures that provide a more meaningful way of life for members (Schein, 1992). This data support the promotion and definition of a strong culture in schools (Flynn & Mok, 2002). However, “the increasing pluralism of beliefs and values reflected within Catholic school communities makes the task of forming an authentic school culture even more difficult” (Treston, 1992, p. 7), while the indicators and criteria for measuring effectiveness are no longer as tangible.

For Catholic schools the notion of measuring “success” and “effectiveness” is problematic. One such indicator of a successful Catholic school is the prevailing culture. In schools, culture is thought of as “the normative glue that holds a particular school together” (Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 1). In fact, “the most distinctive feature of highly effective schools continues to be their outstanding culture which gives them a special character or spirit” (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 160). Similar assertions link culture to the attainment of desired outcomes confirming that “the culture and ethos that a Catholic school has is important with regard to that school fulfilling its purpose and vision” (Canavan, 2003, p. 168).

Catholic school culture is an environment where “students and teachers find meaning and discover relationships that enrich their lives through the curriculum and daily life of the school” (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 160) with culture being the glue which “provides the continuity and stability which binds a people together” (Cook, 2001, p. 5). The success or failure of Catholic schools is closely tied to culture.

Catholic schools aspire to an authentic Catholic culture. Catholic school culture is challenged by “poisonous values” (McLaughlin, 2004, p. 17) through the absorption of “an ethos which is pragmatic, competitive, consumerist and materialist” (Collins, quoted in McLaughlin, 2002, p. 17). Toxic values include “materialism, acquisitiveness, impatience with the lack of success, selfishness bred from intolerance of failure and a lack of concern for the non-productive members of



school” (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 17). These values thrive in an environment which deliberately nurtures:

1. A win at all cost attitude.
2. The pursuit of material gain as a measure of success.
3. Entrenching stereotypes of gender and status.
4. Creating a culture of ‘group think’.
5. Pandering to influential, wealthy groups within the community while ignoring commitment to the common good.
6. Giving in to market place values.

The Catholic school operates within the nexus of competing values and worldviews. The creation of an authentic Catholic culture in this environment is a real challenge to the leadership of Catholic schools. The role of the principal in giving priority to Gospel values and taking a counter stance against prevailing and dominant secular values is critical to building an authentic culture. This involves:

nurturing spirituality in the young against external pressure for secularism, hedonism and materialism; renewing and revivifying Catholicity to meet the needs of contemporary adolescents; mediating between the moral teachings of the institutional Church and the mores of the youth culture; teaching the importance of personal and social justice and the dignity of the person; strengthening Catholic values of community, solidarity and the common good in the face of the imperialism of market values and competitive individualism in education; and holding to traditional Catholic concepts that academic success and empowerment are intended to be used in the service of others (Grace, 2002, p. 237).

Authentic Catholic school culture gives priority to Gospel values, such as respect, forgiveness and justice, and pursues a “pedagogy of a faith-based curriculum” (Grace, 2002, p. 46) which accepts the dignity of each individual regardless of achievement. The prominence of Gospel values is challenged by the “pedagogy of the market place” (Grace, 2002, p. 46) which differentially values students according to output and achievement . A curriculum driven by market place values “dislocates knowledge from a relation to the sacred or to the community and replaces it with a utilitarian, commodified and individualistic relation” (Grace, 2002, p. 50).

Catholic schools may appear effective and successful within this “visible pedagogy” (Grace, 2002, p. 50) however, this apparent success may not align with the stated

goals of the school's mission. "Invisible pedagogy" (Grace, 2002, p. 50) of the Catholic school, encompassing "personal formation in faith shaped by the whole-school environment, its ethos, rituals, symbols and value climate" (Grace, 2002, p. 50) is less tangible and quantifiable, and only made visible in the longer term.

Traditional signs of success in the "visible pedagogy" such as participation rates in Sacramental programs, numbers at Sunday Mass, vocations to the priesthood and religious life are now less visible and Catholic schools "have to look for new signs of their spiritual, moral and social achievement" (Grace, 2002, p. 51).

The 'new signs' may have more to do with the degree to which the Catholic school demonstrates an enthusiasm to embrace a counter stance against prevailing and dominant secular values. Such a stance underscores a substantive reconceptualisation of the purpose of the Catholic school in a contemporary context. At this very moment in history we are assisting the birth of a new Catholic school culture in this country. It is growing out of our stories and traditions but it also involves a deep re-conceptualising of the nature and purpose of Catholic schooling that must speak to the minds and hearts of contemporary boys and girls, men and women. This is an extraordinarily significant process because as our schools continue to be assimilated into the wider school culture, we have to know and commit ourselves to what it is that distinguishes Catholic schools from others (Dwyer, 1993, p. 17).

The changing Catholic landscape challenges the conventional notion of Catholic school culture. The unique and distinctive school culture gives expression to the espoused values and beliefs of the school community. The school leader's role is to animate the defining elements of Catholic school identity through an authentic culture, inclusive and open to question, which is both appropriate to the times and the spirit of the gospels "where students feel safe to discover one's unique personhood" (Cook, 2001 p. 12). This challenge is to educate the "conscience of a race" (Groome, 2003, p. 37). Such a perspective has its legitimacy firmly rooted in the spirit which characterised the second Vatican Council.

The call for a "substantive reconceptualisation of the purpose of the Catholic school in a contemporary context" (Dwyer, 1993, p. 17) invites a new understanding of community as it applies to the context of Catholic schools.

### **3.3.4 Community**

Over the last 30 years, the understanding of the local community as “a network of support and trust relations which exists between persons” (Grace, 2002, p. 91) has declined significantly in importance (Hughes, 1994). This is true also of Church community where “the weight of tradition, along with religious exclusivity, has all but eroded the communal base of the official churches, and consequently increasing numbers look elsewhere for that experience” (O’Murchu, 1997, pp. 87/88).

To some extent, institutional religion is a victim of a national psyche which is “anti-institutional and anti-authoritarian, believing what is ‘good’ in life supposedly arises from the heroic achievements of the battling individual, while the collective institution is felt to generate only oppression and limitation” (Tacey, 2000, p. 214). Changing work patterns, technological advances and societal values has ensured a very different understanding of the term “community” from previous generations. The call to do the work of the Gospel is a call for a “rediscovery of community and service” (O’Keefe, 2003, p. 93).

It is useful to distinguish between two types of community which illustrate different purposes and motivations of the members. “Gemeinschaft” (Tonnies, 1925) refers to an association in which individuals are committed to the goals and ideals of the larger association over their own self interest. “Individuals in Germeinschaft are regulated by common mores or beliefs about the appropriate behaviour and responsibility of members of the association, to each other and to the association at large” (Perdue, 1986). Examples of this type of community are the family and religious communities. “Gesellschaft” (Tonnies, 1925) refers to associations where the individual’s self interest takes precedence over the goals and ideals of the larger association. A good example of Gasellschaft is a modern business, where “workers, managers and owners may have very little in terms of shared orientations of beliefs, they may not care deeply for the product they are making, but it is in all their self interest to come to work and make money, and thus the business continues” (Perdue, 1986).

The expectation on schools to be and foster Gemeinschaft communities of care is clear. Community is central to the ministry of Catholic education. Church teaching recognises that “what makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate

a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love” (Paul VI, 1965, par 8). There is an expectation that a feature of Catholic schools should be an emphasis on the building of community (Prendergast, 2003b). Three sub-themes bring to light the fundamental elements of true community:

1. The spiritual foundation on which Catholic education is based and therefore the importance of the human person;
2. Primacy of relationships;
3. Radical re-engagement with students especially their religious imaginations. (Prendergast, 2003b).

There is a diversity of understandings of the concept of community. While descriptors such as “worshipping”, “sacramental”, and “faith” often precede the word “community” in documents and literature about Catholic schools there is little practical evidence to refute the assertion that these expressions are idealistic and naïve, and much evidence to suggest that Catholic school communities are anything but worshipping, sacramental or faith filled according to a traditional understanding of these terms (Rolheiser, 2008). More apt descriptors might include “spiritual”, “learning” and “Gospel” which would more closely reflect reality and engage more closely with the mission of Catholic schools to promote the reign of God. This mission is enacted in an environment of influential secular values.

Community as a central value to Catholic schools is being threatened by “the ethic of possessive individualism, from market forces and from a customer culture reinforced by quick recourse to legal procedures” (Grace, 1997, p. 76). In fact “social capital” is dissipating as “customs and patterns, traditions and norms for guiding collective life together have disappeared (Starratt, 2003, p. 77). In the balance between desire for personal fulfilment and happiness and to be in relationship with others the “balance now seems to be precariously weighted in favour of self” (Gaffney, 2003, p. 83). While principals espouse as their sociological ideal the ‘*gemeinschaft*’ model of community they describe the reality of school life as more closely aligned to a ‘*gesellschaft*’ model of community (Graham, 2006).

In an effort to “reconnect moral teaching with the reality of the issues and dilemmas that young people face in their day-to-day relationships” (Gaffney, 2003, p. 82)

schools are being challenged to do the work of the Gospel through the “rediscovery of community and service” (O’Keefe, 2003, p. 93). This “rediscovery of community” grows out of “the desire to be authentic” (Gaffney, 2003, p. 82) in forming fulfilled and productive relationships which grows out of the predominant ideology permeating the school.

Catholic schools are informed by “an inspirational ideology” (Bryk et al quoted in Grace, 1996, p. 71) which “celebrates the primacy of the spiritual and moral life; the dignity of the person; the importance of community and moral commitments to caring, social justice and the common good” (Grace, 1996, p. 71). This stance for Catholic schools is endorsed by the second Vatican Council which called for “a new conception of the Catholic school and of Catholic education in which enhanced importance has been given to respect for persons, active community and a strong social ethic of citizen responsibility in a national and an international sense” (Grace, 1997, p. 71). It is clear that Catholic schools “exist unashamedly like state schools for the public good, for the common good” (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 16).

Catholic schools are being “shaped by a vision of the common good, a vision that itself is open to challenge. Catholic schools promote the common good and provide a secure environment to assist the community search for spiritual meaning and fulfillment. They are places “so permeated with values that they become sources of deep meaning and significance” (Sergiovanni, 2000a, p. 3) in the lives of the community. This is achieved through inspiration, not coercion; through dialogue, not dogma” (Bryk et al, 1993, p. 320). Catholic schools provide “an experience of church which is primarily pastoral rather than doctrinal” (McLaughlin, 2001, p. 6).

The current realities of the institutional Church, including the decline of parish communities and the concurrent growth in Catholic school enrolments might suggest that in this new environment people are seeking and experiencing values and ideals consistent with the Gospel message and values. There is evidence to suggest though that the pursuit of radical individualism is seriously challenging the ability of Catholic schools to pursue an authentic mission based on the message and values of the Gospel. Catholic anthropology presents a counter stance to radical individualism.

### **3.3.5 Catholic Anthropology**

The fundamental worth and dignity of all persons, made in the image and likeness of God, is a central element guiding Catholic beliefs and values (McLaughlin, 2005). “The message of the Catholic school is one of amazing human worth and dignity.” (Prendergast, 2003a, p. 17). The enduring Catholic position is that people are made originally ‘in God’s own image and likeness’ (Genesis 1:27). This is the greatest affirmation of the human condition (Groome, 2003). This intimate relationship between God and humanity is expressed “in each individual human person created with Christ in mind as a suitable person for the person of God to be God other than in God” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 42).

“A positive anthropology” (Groome 2003, p. 43) “is a desire to resist social fatalism, to insist that they rise above negative influences” (Groome, 2003, p. 44). Such a stance against a prevailing culture of radical individualism has “important ramifications for the purpose and nature of Catholic schooling” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 39). The Church itself reinforces this imperative that “the Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of human persons” (CCE, 1998, par 9).

Such a commitment calls the whole curriculum of Catholic education to reflect and promote at every opportunity the value and dignity of each community member. This requires a purposeful approach comprising three basic commitments:

1. To affirm each student's basic goodness, to promote their dignity, to honor their fundamental rights, and to develop their gifts to the fullest ~ as God's reflections;
2. To educate people to live responsibly, with God's help, for the fullness of life that God wills for self and others ~ as responsible partners;
3. To convince and mold people to live as if their lives are worthwhile and have historical significance, that their every good effort advances the well-being of all ~ as history makers (Gaffney, 2003, p. 111).

The human person is at the heart of the authentic Catholic educative process (McLaughlin, 2002). “To be human is to be spiritual” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 43). This is evidenced in the “undivided and focused pursuit of the enhancement of human dignity” (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 18). In fact, “our human condition is a covenant with

God, with us being graced to become partners in the realisation of God's reign" (Groome, 2003 p. 43).

Four central beliefs underpin this particular theology:

1. humans somehow image God and this imaging is fundamental to understanding the human person.
2. since Christ is fully human, to aspire to become fully human is to become more Christ-like.
3. spirituality is a characteristic of all of humanity and therefore to become more human is to become more spiritual.
4. to be fully human presupposes relational and communitarian dynamics, which demand the honouring of social justice imperatives (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 18).

All of these assertions have implications for Catholic schools to deliver an authentic education which honors the pursuit of an integrated curriculum enlightened by a Catholic anthropology which values the human person, community and the common good. Aspirations to be truly authentic raise questions about the essential features of a unique identity which can truly be recognized as Catholic.

### **3.3.6 Catholic Identity**

As a result of profound social and ecclesial changes affecting Catholic schools defining the authentic Catholic identity for Catholic schools has become problematic. Catholic identity could once be defined with clarity and certainty. "Catholicism has a distinctive identity which springs from ideas such as the duality of the Holy Scripture and Holy Church, the special mediating functions of the priesthood, the Mass, transubstantiation, the extraordinary magisterium, the Papacy, the communion of saints, the Marian dogmas, prayers of intercession" (Haldane, 1996, p. 127). However, profound ecclesial and social revolutions ensure that Catholic identity remains a contested issue (Nuzzi, 2002).

Catholic identity is fundamental to the sustained survival of Catholic schools and yet clear differences exist in a consistent understanding of what it means to be Catholic in a post-modernist world. The Catholic identity of the contemporary school is more difficult to define and measure because of the modern contextual features impacting on the life of the school (Nuzzi, 2002). Ambiguities and tensions emerge when the

nature and purpose of the Catholic school, particularly in the parish context are considered (Parramatta Diocesan Catholic Schools Council, 2005).

The importance of a clear Catholic identity is given strong endorsement by official Church teaching. “It is from its Catholic identity, that the school derives its original characteristics and its “structure” as a genuine instrument of the Church, a place of real and specific pastoral ministry” (John-Paul II, 1998, par 11). “Clarifying Catholic identity today is thus a significant part of staff development and faculty formation for the Catholic school. Left unattended, the lack of clarity about identity can thwart the overall mission of the school” (Nuzzi, 2002, p. 13). This is a critical insight for Catholic school leaders and one which impacts greatly on their role.

The pluralistic nature of contemporary schools challenges traditional notions of identity. For the pre-conciliar church “preserving Catholic identity was less of an issue because religious sisters, brothers and priests staffed the schools almost exclusively” (Cook, 2001, p. 1). Attachment to and observation of agreed beliefs and practices is no longer a valid measurement of Catholic identity (Cook, 2001). The movement within the Church “from the experience of authority to the authority of experience” (Treston, 1997. p. 10) suggests that new insights and perspectives into the core elements of being Catholic are emerging from the laity and these insights are very much grounded in life experience. Being Catholic now has become more personal and less institutional. “Increasingly, the lived experience of the followers of Jesus is becoming the privileged place and source for the interpretation of God’s Word today” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 118).

The pre-conciliar Church boasted “an amazingly comprehensive, at least implicit, agreement among all Catholics, men and women, clergy and laity, Magisterium and believers, on what was Catholic” (Greinacher, 1994 quoted in Nuzzi, 2002, p. 10). The post-conciliar Church can boast of no such clarity. As such, being Catholic today, is less clear, but more liberating and enriching” (Greinacher, 1994 quoted in Hunt, Joseph & Nuzzi, 2002, p. 11). The issue of identity presents “major challenges to the survival of Catholic schooling” (Spry, 2000). This has implications for school leadership. New forms of leadership are required to operate confidently in the Australian context “no longer predominantly concerned with issues of identity in an



adversarial climate but committed to the invigoration of community discipleship and dedicated to a new impulse in evangelisation” (Ranson, 2006, p. 3).

The current diversity of understandings of a contemporary Catholic identity has its roots in understandings about the nature of the Church (Nuzzi, 2002). The model of Church guiding often extreme perspectives varies profoundly from orthodox to “revisionist” (Haldane, 1996, p. 130). “Serious differences of opinion” (O’Keefe, 2003, p. 96) as to the mission of Catholic schools, “reflect different visions of the Church itself” (O’Keefe, 2003, p. 96). “Criteria which once seemed so clear are now in crisis. Practical measures, such as the visible presence of clergy or religious, are becoming less reliable as laity take on a rightful and increasingly visible role in Church life” (Provost & Walf, 1994, quoted in Nuzzi, 2002, p. 10). The history of the Church in Australia “has delivered an over-riding pragmatic concern for identity, focused on questions of growth and diminishment” (Ranson, 2006, p. 2).

### **3.3.7 Models of church**

Divergent understandings and differing models of Church clearly point to “fundamental and unresolved polarities in the Catholic community” (Zipfel, 1996, p. 215). The visions move between an “autocratic structure primarily concerned with preserving Tridentine orthodoxy through authoritative teaching and priest-administered sacraments” (Haldane, 1996, p. 129) and an alternative vision where “the Church now knows itself to be a community of equals moving uncertainly as a pilgrim body towards a more just social order” (Haldane, 1996, p. 129).

The spirit of the second Vatican Council attempted to “return the church to the dynamic virtues of Christ-centred love, justice and service to a changing world” (Arbuckle, 1993, p. 91). This initiated a “new spirit of openness between the church and the modern world” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 32) and importantly strengthened the image of the Church as the “more egalitarian People of God” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 32).

Vatican II moved away from an emphasis on the institutional Church and offered “a new conceptualisation of the Church as the People of God” (Nuzzi, 2002, p. 10). The

new conceptualisation of the Church as the People of God has implications for the ecclesial identity of Catholic schools.

### **3.3.8 The ecclesial identity of Catholic schools**

The ecclesial identity of Catholic schools exposes deep divisions in understanding and expectations. There is general agreement that

the Catholic school has a fundamental duty to evangelise, to go towards men and women wherever they are, so that they may receive the gift of salvation. Evangelism is the mission of the Church, to tell the world the truth of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The Catholic school is part of the evangelising mission of the Church. It is for this reason that the Catholic school has an ecclesial identity of mandate from the Church (John Paul II, 2003, p. 7).

However, expectations that the Catholic school would have a strong ecclesial identity is problematic because most of those who choose to attend Catholic schools also reject any affiliation, liturgically or formative, with the institutional Church. Understandings of ecclesial identity vary. Some are based on a belief that the Catholic church alone possesses the definitive truth and “the primary function of Catholic schools is to transmit Catholic truths and Catholic values” (Haldane, 1997, p. 135). In the current environment, there is little hope of “establishing a relationship of trust with the institutional Church, in the context of which the individual will reaffirm, or make for the first time, a personal commitment to Christ” (Winter, 1985, p. 104). Any approach which relies on an uncritical acceptance of the authority of the Church magisterium neglects the reality of a changing Catholic landscape.

The traditional view is predicated on a willingness to “cultivate the habit of thinking that if the Church teaches it as a matter of faith and morals, then somewhere there is a good cause for it to be drawn from revelation, tradition or natural reason” (Haldane, 2000, p. 8). Proponents of this view assert that current faith education is “pantheistic psychobabble” (Haldane, 2000, p. 9) and occurs in an environment where Church teaching is open to close scrutiny and testing against the touchstone of personal experience. This traditional view advocates and endorses a “theology of acceptance” where one would “accept what comes each moment as part of gracious providence” (Haldane, 2000, p. 9). The very idea of gracious acceptance of doctrine and Church

teaching is very much at odds with a prevailing culture of suspicion and mistrust of institutional authority.

The general rejection or suspicion of institutional authority has been well documented. This can be clearly seen in matters such as abortion, sexual orientation and practice and euthanasia where statistics show that an increasing number of Catholics believe that in these matters decisions should be left up to the person or persons involved (McLaughlin, 2000). Such a stance “undermines the notion of an objective moral order” (Haldane, 2000, p. 9). The identity of Catholic schools must emanate from a reasoned presentation of the faith of the Church which resonates meaningfully with the life experiences of families in the community (Haldane, 1995, p. 30).

Generation X Catholics, the current generation of parents and teachers associated with Catholic schools, place “far more emphasis on the importance of the human experience and are generally suspicious of institutional authority” (Rymarz, 2004, p. 1). Indeed, most Catholics including Catholic school teachers and principals have “a growing disillusionment with the official church” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 59). Not surprisingly “principals privately hold views contrary to current Vatican teachings on priestly celibacy, married clergy, female priesthood and artificial birth control” (McLaughlin, 1996, p. 134). This situation adds a moral complexity to the role of the principal. The demands and challenges being placed on schools cannot be viewed in purely technical terms in isolation to structures and culture “as though the structures and culture themselves were not problematic” (Starratt, 2004, p. 1). Principals seek to create environments of authentic learning, which instil in staff and students a sense of “who they are and how to live a humanly fulfilling life or how they might respond to the challenges they are expected to face” (Starratt, 2004, p. 2). This is at the heart of Catholic school mission. In the current Catholic landscape Catholic schools are forging an identity based on Gospel values and the reign of God, with little reference or connection to institutional church. This has significant implications for the mission of the Catholic school.

### 3.3.9 Official understandings of Catholic school mission

Church documents provide an insight into the official understandings of the mission of the Catholic school. The document, *“The Catholic School”* (1997) expresses the specific mission of the Catholic school as “the critical, systematic transmission of culture in the light of faith...and the integration of culture with faith and of faith with living” (Article 49). A more recent treatise on the subject highlights the priority of human dignity and worth in the mission of the Catholic school.

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: that is why the promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school. This affirmation, stressing people’s vital relationship with Christ, reminds us that it is in His Person that the fullness of the truth concerning men and women is to be found. For this reason the Catholic school, in committing itself to the development of the whole person, does so in obedience to the solicitude of the Church, in the awareness that all human values find their fulfilment and unity in Christ (CCE, 1998, # 9.3).

Other Church documents provide similar direction, charging Catholic schools with the task of

scrutinising the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men [sic] ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other (CCE, 1977).

The priority of human dignity and worth is a dominant theme in Church documents seeking to illuminate the mission of the Catholic school. The documents seek to reinforce the primacy of relationship, both temporal and divine, in any organisation which acts authentically in the educational mission of the Church. The primacy of the person is expressed in different ways, summarised as follows:

the provision of an authentic educational environment, where the value of the human person is affirmed, where knowledge is integrated for the sake of ultimate truths and where the relationship of the human person with God is modelled, as well as taught (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 91).

The mission of the Catholic school therefore can be expressed as a challenge to create an

authentic educational environment, faithful to the Catholic tradition of offering a synthesis of faith and culture, which, while promoting integral human growth, provides a catalyst for students to take the opportunity to initiate or continue a

personal relationship with Christ, that witnesses its practical expression in an active, inclusive care for others, while confronting contemporary injustices in economic and social structures, all of which give meaning to, and enriches human existence, and contributes to a fuller life (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 111).

Three “cardinal characteristics” are considered fundamental to Catholic schools in their daily encounters with people, namely:

1. A commitment to individual personhood and the quality of person that each of us becomes;
2. A commitment to working for justice and the social values of God’s reign;
3. A commitment to catholicity ~ hospitality for all and openness to truth (Groome, 1996).

The mission of the Catholic school then is most comprehensively concerned with the growth and formation of the whole person (the soul) in this life and the afterlife (Groome, 2003). Education in a Catholic school “must engage the souls of both teachers and students” (Groome, 2003, p. 40). Also integral to an authentic mission is the desire to respond to and, if necessary, challenge injustices and seek to bring about change based on Gospel values and teachings (McLaughlin, 2005).

A consistent theme emerging from a study of the elements making up the primary purpose of the Catholic school is the tension generated between two broadly opposing ideologies on how the primary purpose is best enacted. Any attempt to define how the mission is best enacted exposes a deepening gulf between competing contemporary and emerging ideologies (Nuzzi, 2002). “Responses come from many divergent disciplines and in qualitatively different tones” (Nuzzi, 2002, p. 20). These emanate from particular paradigms and have been variously described by several authors as the choice between “retreat or outreach” (Grace, 2002, p. 7), “domestication or liberation” (Chittister, 2003) or the choice between “renewal or decay” (Spry, 2000). These fundamental tensions have “shaped and patterned Catholic schooling in particular ways” (Grace, 2002, p. 7) and continue to be the focus of discussion and debate amongst those charged with the leadership of Catholic schools.

### **3.3.10 Traditional understandings of mission**

Stated simply, the traditional understanding of the mission of Catholic schools was to “produce ‘good Catholics’ characterised by faith, deference for a Church-approved knowledge and understanding of the world and of the world to come” (Grace, 2002, p. 65). This understanding is indicative of a worldview dominated by the need for “protective walls” and “sacred fortresses”. Its context is a time when the Church acted ‘to protect children from the “wolves of the world” who were destroying countless numbers of the unguarded ones’, and “if the walls are not high enough, they must be raised; if they are not strong enough, they must be strengthened” (McLaughlin et al., 1996 quoted in Grace, 2002, p. 9).

This understanding of the mission of Catholic school may jar with teachers and school administrators who work in communities who have little fear of the “wolves of the world”, have no trust in the institutional Church and who have rejected any notion of allegiance to formal religion (McLaughlin, 2000). The reality is that “most Catholics today do not accept church teaching simply because church authorities tell them, but tend to test these teachings against the experience of their own lives” (Treston, 1997, p 10). In fact, the generation of students currently in schools are “post ecclesial” (Rolheiser, 2008) and “post denominational” (Allen, 2008) in their understanding of religion and spirituality. At a time when the Catholic education system is “the only substantial agent of Church in which an increasingly non-worshipping Catholic population has confidence” (McLaughlin, 2001, p. 9) it is increasingly obvious that Catholic schools are now the pre-eminent place of evangelization in the Church.

This is a major responsibility and reflects the urgency for schools to clarify their role in this process. Traditional understandings of mission emphasise criteria which are easily defined and measured. External behaviours such as mass attendance and sacrament reception numbers indicate that Catholic schools are failing if mission effectiveness is measured in these terms (Kelly, 2009). This rationale retains strong appeal to sections of the Catholic community who believe it equally applicable now as it was in the past (Collins, 2007). Others in the faith community, though, believe that we are at a new place today in terms of faith and an adaptation of what has worked in the past may not be enough (Rolheiser, 2008).

### **3.3.11 Emerging understandings**

Alternative perspectives to those expressed above are concerned with “integrating gospel values and Christian social principles” (Joseph, 2002, p. 4) into life experiences with an expectation that Catholic school students would have a capacity and confidence to “form and hold views based on Catholic beliefs and values” (Joseph, 2002, p. 4).

The emphasis is not on retreat or isolation from the world rather on presenting an alternative Catholic response to the challenges of modern life.

World-wide Catholic primary and secondary schools are responding to concerns expressed by the Vatican over the last two decades about the impact of secularization not only in the wider world, but even within Catholic communities. The view is that secularization has produced a world devoid of meaning and purpose, with disastrous consequences in particular for modern youth (O'Donoghue & Vidovich, 2004, p. 12).

This scenario captures the challenge facing Catholic schools. Many dispute the call for a return to traditional understandings of the mission of the Catholic school in favour of an approach characterised by renewal, openness and “inspirational pedagogy” (Grace, 2002).

Catholic schools are entrenched in the prevailing secular culture. A spirit of renewal, openness and “inspirational pedagogy” (Grace, 2002) are strategies of hope and transformation as a response to, rather than a retreat from, secularization. The promotion and modelling of Gospel values to counter the influence of individualism, consumerism and acquisitiveness using Jesus as the model of goodness is at the heart of the mission. “The mission of the Catholic school is identical with Christ’s mission-and that is the bringing about the new reign (kingdom) of God” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 45). This understanding of sharing in the mission of Jesus is expressed and understood in different ways.

The universal purpose of education complements Catholic school philosophy and is built on the same principles and values. The three goals which underpin the transforming nature of good education are:

1. developing a reliable, enabling belief system,

2. becoming a responsible citizen (which implies citizenship of the world and not merely of a single country)
3. growing a personal life-story which defines who you are and where your life is going (Beare, 2001, pp. 18/19).

Each of these goals connects precisely with three distinguishing elements of Catholic school mission emerging from a new paradigm. The distinguishing elements are Gospel (culture), relationship (community) and primacy of the person. These goals provide a new perspective on enacting the mission or primary purpose of the Catholic school expressing a preference for mission, liberation and renewal over retreat, domestication and decay (Chittister, 2003).

This emerging paradigm challenges existing thinking and embeds the mission of the school squarely within the contemporary culture. Lane (1991) identifies four theological functions which strongly reflect the changing commitment to and understanding of mission, liberation and renewal.

1. *Recognition of the ecclesial character of other Christian churches:* The implication of this conception is an expanded vision of the Catholic church, the “whole body of Christ” (McBrien, 1994, p. 684), as opposed to it being the one true Church, as expressed in early Church documents, “the Church of Christ is the Roman Catholic Church” (Pius XII, 1943, par 45). Rather than diluting the richness of the Catholic Church this philosophy enriches the mystery and identity of the Church and challenges Catholic schools to re-examine their purpose in the light of this expanded vision which has strong implications for recruitment and enrolment policies.
2. *Religious freedom:* The special function of the Catholic school “is to develop in the school community, an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel” (Paul VI, 1965, par 8). The distinction between the two opposing approaches centres on an expanded vision of the evangelisation role of the school. “The right and duty of the school to proclaim the Gospel is not the same as the imposition of faith which is a form of moral violence which is strictly forbidden both by the Gospel and by church law” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 34).



3. *The synthesis of faith and culture:* This implication acknowledges the inextricable bond between people's faith journeys and life experiences and the need for sensitivity in both areas. Without this recognition "religious anaemia is produced when the receiver encounters only the conventional or complacent externals of an institution, and when the communicators of faith fail to enter respectfully into the culture of the receiver" (Gallagher, 1996, p. 21).
4. *The communio of all the people of God:* This understanding recognises the school as a place of acceptance of the pluralistic nature of the community and consequently an openness to the sharing of thoughts, beliefs and feelings and a willingness to engage in critical dialogue with the school community. The community is more than people gathering together in the same place at the same time. There is a sense of shared purpose and commitment to Gospel values and beliefs (McLaughlin, 2008).

The enactment of the Catholic school mission is to experience the values and beliefs espoused by the school in the day to day operation of the school. Therefore the values of community, social justice and human worth are all fundamentally embedded within the school's practices, traditions and beliefs. Catholic schools aspire to provide:

- "An integral quality education.
- The nurturing of human community
- A liberation of forms of oppression" (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 18).

Groome (1996) contends that "the distinctiveness of Catholic education is prompted by the distinctive characteristics of Catholicism itself, and these characteristics should be reflected in the whole curriculum of Catholic schools" (Groome, 1996, p. 107). He proposes five distinguishing characteristics of Catholicism which should be evident in the missionary aspirations of Catholic schools:

1. *Positive anthropology:* This stance is inspired by the belief that all people are made in God's own image and likeness. The Catholic position is a mediating stance between Palagius which expresses a view based on total self-sufficiency and Calvin which promotes total depravity. This stance promotes serious reflection on what the Catholic school adds to students'

ability to form fulfilled and productive relationships. “The desire to be authentic” (Gaffney, 2003, p. 82) presents a challenge for schools to “reconnect moral teaching with the reality of the issues and dilemmas that young people face in their day-to-day relationships” (Gaffney, 2003, p. 82). In the balance between desire for personal happiness and to be in relationship with others the “balance now seems to be precariously weighted in favour of self” (Gaffney, 2003, p. 83).

2. *Sacramentality*: This characteristic promotes the view that we see God in all things and "reflects the central Catholic conviction that God mediates Godself to us and we encounter God's presence and grace coming to meet us in the ordinary of life" (Groome, 1996, p. 112).
3. *Community*: This principle promotes the belief that we are 'made for each other' (Groome, 1996, p. 114). "Catholicism has a strong influence on the 'communal' nature of human existence: that we find our identity and true selves in relationship with others" (Groome, 1996, p. 114). Four functions of word, witness, worship and welfare should "permeate its whole shared life and curriculum" (Groome, 1996, p. 114).
4. *To share 'Story and Vision'*: This characteristic encourages a deep relationship with Christ which extends further than simply knowledge about Christ to a point of shaping lifestyle and life experience. This encourages followers to move "beyond knowing about Jesus" to a point where “they become disciples of his 'way'” (Groome, 1996, p. 118). "Such catechesis, however, cannot be some form of indoctrination nor settle for uncritical socialization" (Groome, 1996, p. 118).
5. *Rationality*: This principle is embedded in the notion of an “inspirational theology”, rejecting an uncritical acceptance of important matters surrounding the faith to a point where allegiance emerges from questioning and critique. This is “faith seeking understanding” (Groome, 1996, p. 118) which is committed to education and renewal.

Other substantive characteristics of an education which is Catholic both in name and in nature include :

1. Participation, (that is through education providing all students with the skills and abilities to participate responsibly in society),

2. Preferential option for the poor,
3. Activists against racism,
4. Multiculturalism,
5. Ecumenism,
6. Non-violence,
7. Service. (O'Keefe, 2003).

A summary of the important elements of the mission of the Catholic school, expressed in terms of basic actions and daily practices reflects the basic characteristics outlined above. These actions and practices guide and inform the authentic nature of the Catholic school:

1. *The Dimension of Faith* ~ the integration of faith and life in the daily life of schools.
2. *Catholic Schools as genuine Educational Institutions* ~ Catholic schools provide a quality education program and opportunities to students.
3. *The Goals of Catholic Schools* "should be linked explicitly to Jesus Christ and the Gospel" (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 16).
4. *Catholic schools as Christian communities* should be grounded in Gospel values and include prayer, worship and the sacraments.
5. *The Culture of Catholic schools* should convey the Christian message to students in the daily life of the schools and be a milieu in which the integration of faith and life takes place in students' lives.
6. *The 'Catholic' character of the schools* which arises from their affiliation with the Catholic Church and its living traditions.
7. *The Education in Faith, or Catechesis* which makes explicit the integration of faith and life which takes place in the daily life of Catholic schools.
8. *The involvement of parents in the life of the schools* should be encouraged as they are the 'first educators' of their children (Flynn & Mok, 2002, p. 16).

Highlighting the essential characteristics of a distinctive and authentic mission for Catholic schools assists Catholic educators understand their own role in animating the mission. This process is useful in establishing reference points or touchstones to help determine the effectiveness of current practices and goals. The following section

describes a project undertaken in Queensland to discern the defining features of a Catholic school.

### **3.3.12 The defining features of a Catholic school in the Rockhampton Diocese**

In an attempt to give clear direction to the mission of the Catholic school the Queensland Bishops commissioned a research project into the defining features of Catholic schools. The Bishops of the time recognised the need to respond to the changing Catholic landscape stating unequivocally “What we’re looking for is a redefinition, and if it’s a radical redefinition we’ll deal with that ...what we don’t want to get at the end of this is a steady-as-she-goes, platitudinous, cliché-ish response” (Putney quoted in Browning, 2004, p. 5). The guiding question for the research study was: *What are to be the defining features of Catholic schools in the context of the Church’s evolving mission in the world?*

The aim of the report was to communicate clearly what “is at the heart of Catholic education and give direction and guidance to those whose daily interactions with others bring to life the vision of an authentic Catholic school as a living out of the Gospel message” (Jeffcoat quoted in Browning, 2004, p 2). Following extensive consultation with Catholic school communities throughout Queensland the Diocese of Rockhampton identified six defining features which exemplify Catholic schools in the Diocese. Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Rockhampton are called to:

1. Give witness to the message of Jesus and the mission of the Church;
2. Have a clear Catholic identity;
3. To be communities of care;
4. To offer a relevant and holistic curriculum of quality teaching and learning;
5. To be open and accessible to all who seek their values;
6. To be characterised by inclusive partnerships within a community of faith (Browning, 2004).

These features reflect the breadth and depth of the Catholic school mission and the significantly altered context in which Catholic schools operate. “They come as prophetic and challenging direction pointers inviting us to the possibilities of future life for Catholic Education” (Browning, 2004, p.23). They endorse three critical components of Catholic school mission:

1. the endorsement of Gospel values, given expression through the person of Jesus Christ, above all others;
2. the “sacrament of relationship” (McLaughlin, 2005) expressed through the vitality of a faith community;
3. the primacy of the human person in all things expressed through a spirituality encompassing the spiritual and secular dimensions of life.

### **3.3.13 Conclusion**

The emerging paradigm embraces a mission “of new openness to the modern world, entering into dialogue with the family of humanity, cooperating with all who are concerned to construct a more just and sustainable world order” (Lane, 1991, p. 8). The enactment of the mission is guided by context and culture. The peripatetic nature of contemporary society challenges Catholic schools “to review the vitality of the religious ethos of the school, both in relation to the quality of formal religious education programmes and the religious education provided by the whole culture and life of the school” (O’Donoghue & Vidovich, 2004, p. 12).

Differing understandings of the mission of the Catholic school held by key stakeholders require careful management by the principal. Some stakeholders yearn for a Church where allegiance to orthodox beliefs and practices is paramount and Catholic schools are reserved solely for Catholic families. Alternatively, others call for a greater recognition of and connection to the life world of students and families who make up the Catholic school community. This approach encourages evangelisation through an encounter with elements of the Catholic faith which are personally meaningful and credible. Within this pluralistic milieu of beliefs and experiences principals negotiate the integration of beliefs and practices which connect more meaningfully and credibly with the lives of the community.

## **3.4 *The role of the principal***

### **3.4.1 Contemporary challenges shaping the role**

Recruitment and retention of suitable leaders for schools is problematic for employing authorities. There is “a declining number of people aspiring to the role of principal because of fears that the job is too demanding, time consuming or stressful

(Neidhardt & Carlin, 2004). Current serving principals report “a disjunction between their actual work and what everyone perceives their work to be” (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2002, p 44). In terms of a clear understanding of their role the principal is “trapped in the dilemma between the nostalgia of the parents and the utopia of researchers and reformers” (Boris-Schacter et al., 2002, p. 44), and “what they believe they should be doing, versus what they actually do” (Cranston & Ehrich, 2002, p. 2).

The increasing demands and complexity of the principal’s role signals a timely warning to re-imagine the role in ways which recognise the altered landscape of the Catholic school principal. “Despite all the attention on the principal’s leadership role we appear to be losing ground, if we take as our measure of progress the declining presence of increasingly large numbers of highly effective, satisfied principals” (Fullan, 1996, p. 1). Additionally, demands and expectations emanating from a church experiencing diminishing allegiance and community fragmentation present new challenges to the role (Collins, 2008).

The current unique contextual circumstances confronting contemporary Catholic schools provide a “watershed moment” (Prendergast, 2003a, p. 11) as Catholic schools find themselves at the cross-roads between competing values emanating from vastly different paradigms. Decisions about future directions are determined by perception and understanding of the contemporary milieu which is the Catholic community. There is a sense that “there is much riding on how we negotiate our way through this time of seismic shifts and transitions” (Groome, 2003, p. 12). The social, ecclesial and educational forces at work “could prove terribly destructive or lend a new lease of life” (Groome, 2003, p. 35). This “passing of the baton” (Monahan, 2003) signals a period of transition fraught with both risk and opportunity. “There is a temptation to give up in despair or to see the present as something new, exciting and vibrant” (Prendergast, 2003, p. 12).

This time of transition challenges existing structures, practices and roles. The essence of the challenge for principals seeking to engage productively with the school community is that there is no magic formula or “silver bullet” (Fullan, 1998, p. 7) solution waiting to be uncovered. The fundamental challenge is a willingness to

engage personally with the competing values and worldviews present in the school and wider community while remaining true to the educational mission of the Church and the mission of Christ (Bryk et al., 1993). “Catholic educators must struggle to discern the valuable contributions of this larger, secular culture, while maintaining fidelity to the religious ideals that have vitalised Catholic schools since Vatican II. Such openness with roots inevitably creates organisational tensions and dilemmas” (Bryk et al., 1993, pp. 334-335). Understanding of the nature of the work of the principal and its evolution over time is fundamental to any close scrutiny of the principal’s role.

### **3.4.2 Traditional understandings of the role of the principal**

The most familiar conceptualisation of the role of principal is that of “instructional leader” (Macmillan, Meyer & Sherman, 2001). This concept was firmly in place in the early 1980’s, and reflected the predominant notion of the principal as the “best and most talented teacher or the principal teacher” (Wanzare & Costa, 2001, p. 270). The principal was often the most experienced teacher on staff and in many cases a model for less experienced teaching staff. Notwithstanding almost unanimous agreement on the importance of instructional leadership within a conceptual framework for the role of the principal “it remains a loosely constructed-paradigm lacking a clearly articulated theoretical framework” (Lashway, 2003).

Since the 1980’s “significant changes have occurred not only in our understanding of instruction, but also in the structures governing how this instruction happens” (Macmillan, Meyer & Sherman, 2001). Increasing complexity and demands have broadened the scope of the principal’s role from curriculum and instructional leader to a community leadership (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001). This changing emphasis away from instructional leader has precipitated a situation where “administrators have had additional responsibilities and expectations placed upon them, which have had the effect of increasing the managerial function and of removing administrators from an intimate, ongoing involvement with classrooms” (Macmillan et al, 2001). The “traditional conceptions of the principal as instructional leader increasingly conflicted with pressures to be a ‘production manager’” (Greenfield, 1982, p. 16). This signalled a noticeable shift in the responsibility and expectations of principals (Macmillan et al, 2001).

Despite the fact that instructional leadership tasks are spoken about in general and theoretical terms, much of the principal's attention is directed in other areas (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001). In fact principals "continue to lead in much the same way they have for the past 20 years" (Baker & Baker 2002, p. 51) spending more time than they believe they should on management responsibilities and less time than they believe they should on instructional leadership (Baker & Baker, 2002). The influence of centralised, systemic approaches to educational administration has crudely reduced instructional leadership to facilitating the implementation of Government initiatives rather than the creation of innovative new curricula (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001). The principal's role could be more aptly described as instructional facilitator rather than instructional leader (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001). In fact "the role of principals in implementing innovations is more often than not a case of being on the receiving end of externally initiated changes" (Fullan, 1998, p. 1).

It is timely for the focus to shift from competency based models of leadership to leadership based on capabilities (Baker & Baker, 2002).

Competency is about delivering the present based on past performance; capability is about imaging the future and bring it about. Competency is about control; capability is about learning and development. Competency is about fitness for (usually other people's) purpose; capability is about judging fitness of the purpose itself (Stephenson, 2000. p. 4).

The expanding nature of the role "has broadened the initial definition of instructional leadership to include leadership inside and outside of the communities it serves" (Macmillan et al, 2001). The role of the principal "is increasing in complexity and is shifting away from instructional leadership as direct involvement in classrooms to instructional leadership as the provision of a positive instructional environment" (Macmillan et al, 2001). "We need leaders who can create a fundamental transformation in the learning cultures of schools and of the teaching profession itself (Fullan, 2002, p. 16). The role of the principal as instructional leader is too narrow a concept to carry the weight of the kind of reforms that will create the schools for the future (Mulford, Silins & Leithwood, 2004).



Instructional leadership fails to recognise the exponential growth in managerial tasks and responsibilities. The principal is no longer the most important person impacting on classroom instruction (Macmillan et al., 2001, Rowe, 2004). Viewing the principalship from an instructional leadership perspective only neglects the complexity and diversity inherent in the role. Importantly, teachers also believe that principals should not be involved solely in instructional leadership (Murphy, 1990). In fact instructional leadership while an important aspect of the principal's central role is "a valuable first step in increasing student learning, but it does not go far enough" (Fullan, 2002, p. 16). When it comes to the classroom the general consensus is that principals have only indirect impact on student learning, however, the real impact principals have as instructional leaders is in working directly with teachers and by changing the instructional environment (Macmillan et al., 2001, Rowe, 2004, Cotton, 2003, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006).

Reconceptualising the leader's task from one of simply supervising or managing the status quo to the more complex role of "designing the learning processes" (Senge, 1990, p. 345) is a significant step forward in thinking about the role. "The critical factor influencing the improvement of student achievement is principals working through and with others to improve the internal processes of the school" (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, p. 26). The direct influence of the principal on learning outcomes in classrooms represents only 5% of the total inputs (Rowe, 2004). In fact, taking into account what the child brings to the classroom, by far the most positive influence on the child's learning achievement is the quality of the teaching within the classroom (Rowe, 2004). Other influences which often consume much of the principal's time and energy, such as school organisation, gender issues and parental input paled into insignificance (Rowe, 2004) against the influence of the teacher (Rowe, 2004). Appropriately, the shift in focus for in-school administrators was on becoming leaders of the whole school, and supporting the intellectual and emotional work of teachers (Hargraves, Earl, Moore & Manning, 2001) rather than having daily input into classrooms.

### **3.4.3 The changing role**

The transition from instructional leader to community leader significantly alters the role of the principal. This understanding of the principal's role "not only embraces the

administration of internal factors, but must also embrace leadership roles with regard to the external forces that impact on the school" (Tuohy & Coghlan, 1998, p. 168). This situation has unique implications for leaders of Catholic schools who are expected to engage with a Church rejected by the majority of the school community. "As society, education and institutional church undergo rapid and unprecedented change, the role of principal continues to expand" (Neidhart & Carlin, 2004, p. 5). Within the altered working environment principals experience "frustration at the demands and expectations placed on (them) by families and local churches, who no longer had the capacity, or even sometimes the motivation, to share the responsibility" (Neidhart & Carlin, 2004, p. 5).

These particular circumstances serve to reinforce the transformed pluralistic, socio-political world of the modern principal, and the consequent need to reframe and reconceptualise the fundamental elements of the role. These circumstances confirm that "whether by design or default the school leader's role has been transformed in practice, if not in definition" (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001). Key dynamics external to the role have considerably influenced this transformation.

An important consequence of the transition to community leadership is that "principals are increasingly caught in battles of power and control over decisions based on educational issues influenced by externally driven agendas" (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001). This is a concern as principals "do not have tenure and their survival is dependent on lay persons in the community, not professionals" (Meyer & Rowan, 1983, p. 87) which includes the influential role of clergy. Transparent and ethical appointment and appraisal processes are easily compromised when suitability and performance are measured against inappropriate and covert criteria (Sachen, 2006). Principals are called to be "missionaries of conscience" (Chittester, 2003, p. 25) which can ultimately leave the principal gazing into an open professional grave (Sachen, 1996). This call has to be weighed against future career implications and job satisfaction (Meyer & Rowan, 1983).

Additionally, the effect of a declining and aging Catholic clerical profile is a contributing factor to the changing nature of the role of principal. The increasing average age of Australian priests, 63 years old (Dixon, 1996), declining numbers,

approximately 3000 Australia wide, and events such as the current sexual abuse scandal have resulted in a situation where “it is the principal, the Assistant Principal (Religious Education) and other approachable teachers, who have been given the unofficial leadership of the local Catholic communities” (McLaughlin, 2002, p. 11). This additional expectation of the principal’s role adds to an already impossible list of responsibilities. Of particular concern is that these subtle changes are occurring without dialogue, suitable training or any negotiation between the groups involved. Clergy are one of many groups influencing the transformation of the principal’s role.

Principals are required to manage “ever changing, external influences promulgated by media, conservative-minded legislatures and an increasingly litigious population” (Meyer & Rowan, 2001, p. 24), and are expected to be “a combination of bureaucrat, educational leader, community pillar, role model, surrogate parent, and moral agent as they respond to all of the school’s constituents” (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001, P. 24). Burgeoning demands within the principal’s role has particular significance and import for Catholic school principals, who are increasingly in the position of being seen as *de facto* faith community leaders as people approach the school with matters which once would have gone to the parish (McLaughlin, 2002). The skewing of the role away from the core business of schools is exacerbated in the Catholic school context because of the disintegration of the two traditional faith communities ~ the parish and the family. Changes in these communities “have resulted in higher expectations and demands on Catholic schools, and in particular principals” (Neidhart & Carlin, 2004, p. 6).

### **3.4.4 Contemporary realities**

The duty statement for principals in the Rockhampton Diocese reads in part:

The appointee shall have control of and be responsible for the efficient running of the school, the maintenance of academic standards and the supervision and control of staff and students at the school..... The appointee shall be responsible for the maintenance of the standards of Religious Education in the school in accordance with Diocesan regulations and Parish policies. The appointee shall in the execution of the duties, liaise with the School’s Board, the Parents and Friends’ Association as well as the community at large.

This broad elucidation of the principal’s role provides little real guidance to principals and leaves decisions as to how the role is enacted within the school community for

the principal to negotiate with major stakeholders within the scope of Diocesan and Parish policies. The duty statement draws attention to major stakeholders who, due to their *ex officio* roles, are rightly involved in the decision-making processes establishing the vision and future direction of the school. Significant groups include parents through the Parents and Friends Association and School Board, the Parish Priest and the Diocesan Catholic Education Office. Each holds varying expectations of the principal which can lead to a fragmentation and division of whatever vision the principal may attempt to foster in the school (Wanzare & Da Costa, 2001).

The duty statement in many ways encapsulates, on the one hand, the relative freedom and discretion of the principal to act collaboratively with others to substantially shape the school vision and culture, while on the other, identifying potential sources of tension in determining the most appropriate way of achieving this. A paucity of documentation “fleshing out” the gaps exacerbates the effectiveness with which the principal can fulfil the role and exposes the opportunities for the intervention of other stakeholders, particularly the “systemworld” (Sergiovanni, 2000b). Such intervention could overwhelm principals and leave them “with little capacity to initiate their own solutions to problems, define their own internal character, or manage their relationships with external audiences” (Sergiovanni, 2000b, p. 30).

The role is now more multi-faceted and multi-dimensional than it used to be (Forrest, 2004). Ambiguity and complexity associated with the role is reflected in a lack of clear expectations, conflict about responsibilities and “no defensible criteria for evaluating the principal’s performance” (Wanzare & Da Costa, 2001, p. 277). In response to this there is growing importance on the development of leadership frameworks to articulate general areas of responsibility of the principal.

Conceptualising the role of the Catholic school principal in a leadership framework establishes a base for discussion, performance review and goal setting. Leadership frameworks vary from diocese to diocese, however, a synthesis of these reveals four common, recurring areas:

- *Religious Leadership*: ensuring the effectiveness of the school’s religious mission.

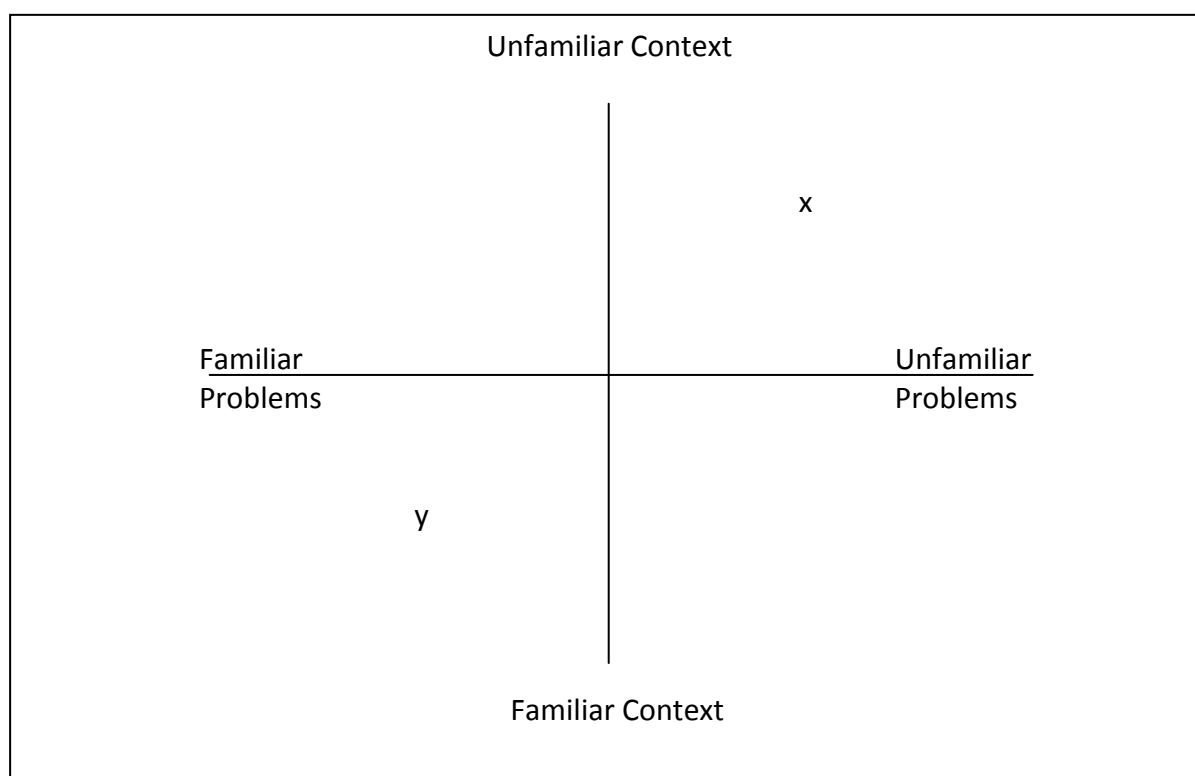
- *Educational Leadership*: leadership in areas of curriculum and instruction
- *Community Leadership*: building a sense of community and belonging to the school community
- *Pastoral leadership*: availability of the principal for guidance of parents, teachers and staff (Flynn and Mok, 2002).

It is evident that the principal's role has been reconceptualised to reflect a new understanding of the principal's world. The "leadership" aspect of the role is expected at a deeper level requiring more than experience and competence in a series of administrative skills. "Leadership is much more a matter of who the leader is than how the leader applies leadership principles or adopts leadership style. Real leaders are authentic" (Starratt, 2004, p. 65). Expertise and interior enterprise have usurped experience as essential credentials for the role of principal (Duignan, 1999). "The work of educational leadership should be work that is simultaneously intellectual and moral; an activity characterised by a blend of human, professional and civic concerns; a work of cultivating an environment for learning that is humanly fulfilling and socially responsible" (Starratt, 2004, p. 3). In the context of the Catholic school the reconceptualisation of the role as community leader has far reaching implications evoking a variety of divergent understandings and expectations of what this actually means and entails.

### **3.4.5 Context and culture of leadership**

Amid concerns that the principalship be confined to a set of generic rules and practices the importance of context and culture to leadership practices transcend any notion of "textbook", "generic" or "one size fits all" approaches to leadership (Forrest, 2004). In fact these sentiments reflect a wider attempt within the leadership community "to move away from accepting a behaviourist view of managerial and administrative work focused on clearly defined, positivistic sets of generic strategies" (Macmillan et al, 2001). This represents a movement from competency based leadership, where the prevailing culture is one of training, to capability based leadership where the culture is one of professional development (Stephenson, 2000). The difference between the two modes of is context. "Context plays a key role in

deciding whether certain approaches to leadership will be effective or not” (Sergiovanni, 2000b, p. 165, Hanvey, 2005, Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2007), and the scale of the current changes impacting on the role of principal is unprecedented (Fukuyama, 1999). This new context for leadership of Catholic schools is represented in the following diagram:



**Figure 3.2 Stephenson (2000): The changing nature of the principal’s work.**

The model explains why leaders need to adopt new modes of leadership as they are more regularly managing “unfamiliar problems” in “unfamiliar contexts”. In the past principals operated predominantly in position y, managing familiar problems in familiar contexts. Position y leadership emphasises reliable delivery, performance standards, error elimination, technical expertise and the mastery of established procedures. Position z is the current reality where most leaders have to be futures oriented (Stephenson, 2000). This mode of leadership requires strategic use of capabilities such as informal networks, creative problem solving, intuition, planned risk taking, courage, imagination, reliance on beliefs and values and highly developed self-awareness and self-knowledge (Stephenson, 2000).

This alternative conceptualisation of leadership moves from an understanding of the principal's role as "a set of objective rules that can simply be replicated irrespective of the particular circumstances" (Forrest, 2004, p. 54) to a view of leadership as "a purposeful activity ('leadership for what') whose purpose should influence both what you do and how you do it" (Forrest, 2004, p. 54). The distinction between what is done and how it is done represents a critical tipping point in leadership theory and rightly centres the nub of effective leadership within the capacity of the individual rather than on external influences or panaceas (Fullan, 1998). In fact, principals no longer view their roles as an objective reality or a "set of expectations – or a script – that tells the individual what to do" (Charon, 2004, p. 168). Rather the role is being reconceptualised as a "social role, framed as a set of rules governed by negotiation" (Graham, 2006, p. 191). This conceptualisation of the role supports the movement away from vertical structures to more collaborative approaches.

Discourse about school management in recent years has focused on hierarchical management styles and approaches (Beare, 1998). Capability based leadership redefines the principalship by "exploring intellectual and emotional leadership as a means to flatten hierarchies, to empower teachers and to build collaborative cultures, and thus creating effective learning organisations through school communities based on principles and values" (Macmillan et. al., 2001). This has given rise to more collaborative cultures of "covenantal communities" (Sergiovanni, 2000b) and "distributed leadership" (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2008). The role of principal is more about "living the values and the purposes of the school community every day and using these to guide judgements within the culture and context of the school (Forrest, 2004). This is a call for "visionary risk-takers with high energy levels and a willingness to break from tradition" (Terry, 1999, p. 28).

This reflects a new understanding of "leadership as a personal thing" (Sergiovanni, 2000a, p. 21). The principal is centred and inspired by a personal philosophy based on particular values (Beare, 1998). "The heart of leadership has to do with what a person values, dreams about and is committed to - that person's personal vision" (Sergiovanni, 2000a, p. 21). Principals "bring themselves, including their deepest convictions, beliefs and values to their work" (Starratt, 2004, p. 65). This person is able to negotiate the fine line between the various competing elements of the role.

This is the leader who balances “technical proficiency against artistry, logic against symbolism, efficiency against meaning, organisational tidiness against cultural creativity, and perhaps the mundane against transcendence” (Beare, 1998, p. 31). “The characteristics of successful leaders and their ability to be simultaneously people-centred while managing a number of tensions and dilemmas highlight the complexity of the kinds of values-led contingency leadership exercised” (Day, Harris & Hadfield, 2001, p. 36). This type of leadership seeks to build and sustain a culture consistent with Gospel values and the reign of God.

This section has highlighted the importance of context to the role of the principal. The changing Catholic landscape has altered the context for the work of the principal. Principals are expected to engage with and manage the competing demands and expectations of different groups seeking to influence the learning process. The capacity to do this effectively requires artistry in complex skills as well as an understanding of the role as multi-dimensional and malleable. The next section explores elements of leadership pertinent to the principal’s role.

### **3.4.6 Cultural Change Leaders**

Principals are at the forefront of cultural change (Cook, 2001). The capacity to bring about and sustain long-term cultural change is the crucial variable influencing the quality of the school environment and corresponding achievement (Newmann, King & Youngs, 2000). The reconceptualised nature of the principal’s role focuses on sophisticated conceptual thinking to lead cultural change through “the development of teachers’ knowledge and skills, professional community, program adherence and technical resources” (Fullan, 2002, p.16).

The influence of cultural change leaders goes beyond the maintenance of high standards (Fullan, 2002). Principals are challenged to establish the conditions for sustained change or “enduring greatness” (Fullan, 2002, p. 16). Sustainability is a key element to cultural change. Five essential components characterise and motivate the work of the principal as a cultural change agent:

1. Moral purpose
2. An understanding of the change process
3. Improved relationships



4. Knowledge creation and sharing
5. Coherence making (Fullan, 2002).

The key elements pertain to the personal integrity and professional will of the principal. Some of the personal values and qualities include extreme humility, emotional intelligence, a sophisticated, conceptual thinker, and “authority dissenter” (Arbuckle, 1993). Closely aligned with this dimension of leadership is the concept of entrepreneurial leadership (Fullan, 1998).

### **3.4.7 Entrepreneurial leadership**

The role of the principal cannot be limited to a set of tasks to be completed (Forrest, 2004). Of equal importance to knowing what the principal does is the capacity to bring life to a vision which aligns with the values and beliefs which guide both the principal’s life journey and underpin the organisation.

Entrepreneurial leadership “is typified by responsibility, public accountability, interactive professionalism and the recognition that playing positive politics is essential, possible, and the key to effectiveness” (Fullan, 1998, p. 10). Entrepreneurial leadership is the antithesis of the centralised, systemic, bureaucratic model where principals operate in a culture of dependency and helplessness. The ability and freedom to act independently and engage with the community in local decision making are at the heart of this leadership. At a time when other agencies are seeking to influence the work of schools for their own purposes principals are challenged to “confront the issue of autonomy (and) pursue autonomy in the midst of a dependency-creating culture” (Block, 1987, p. 6). The fundamental choice is “between maintenance and greatness, between caution and courage, and between dependency and autonomy” (Fullan, 1998, p. 10). Entrepreneurial leadership seeks to balance the beliefs and values inherent in the mission of the Catholic school against the imposition of values and practices which undermine the capacity of the community to determine and resolve local issues and aspirations.

### **3.4.8 Religious leadership**

Principals of Catholic schools recognise “an important religious dimension to leadership that is apt to be absent from the concerns of public school administrators”

(Grace, 1997, p. 72). Catholic school principals have always had and accepted an element of religious leadership within their role (ACPPA Research project, 2005). However, there are clear differences of understandings and expectations regarding the religious leadership dimension of the principal's role (Wallace, 1995).

These differences are evident in a number of key areas. The first is responsibility for the Religious Education program. Principals encounter the dilemma where "religious education is seen as a necessary part of the formation of the whole person" (Slattery, 1998, p. 21), however, many families seek enrolment at a Catholic school for other reasons. Families seek an education founded on Christian values because it provides a sense of connectedness to school and family and provides foundational skills and traits which help protect students against drug use, poor body image and suicide (Gleeson, 2003). If the role of religious education is to provide students with a knowledge and experience of Catholic life, the immediate challenge to principals is to re-imagine the place of religious education in the light of the changing Catholic landscape.

The second key area of difference stems from the transition from religious to lay leadership and the willingness of lay principals to accept religious leadership to the degree expected by some stakeholders (Hunt, Joseph & Nuzzi, 2002). Principals are mindful of family and other commitments which compete with expectations associated with religious leadership (Hansen, 2000). The enhanced role of the People of God in the post-Vatican II Church and the decline of the clergy in numbers and credibility is leading to calls for "Catholic education to be reconfigured as a ministry of the laity with new models of leadership" (O'Keefe, 1996, p.178). This has immediate implications for the role of the principal. Expectations on the principal as "a minister or agent of the Church's mission, called to provide a process of education for the growth to maturity of the human person within a value system based on the Catholic tradition and the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Dwyer, 1997) are unclear. One such expectation is the responsibility for the spiritual formation of staff.

This transition from religious to lay staff and the decline in clergy numbers has implications for the principal's role. Principals are expected to have "competencies needed to provide staff development and school experiences that reinforce the

primary Catholic mission of the school” (Wallace quoted in Joseph, 2002, p. 3). While there is little doubt or disagreement that “the faith formation role of the principal is particularly crucial given the increasingly lay teaching staff” (Wallace quoted in Joseph, 2002, p. 3) there remains conflicting expectations of the Catholic school leader in terms of religious leadership if the goal is simply “institutionalising Catholic traditions and doctrinal emphasis” (Heft, 1990 quoted in Joseph, 2002, p. 3) within the school community.

Principals feel unprepared and ill-equipped to meet expectations in this area. Some believe that the Catholic system is now in need of principals “who are responsible for the spiritual formation of the entire school community” (Gilroy, 1998) including: “prayer leadership, commitment to Catholic social teaching, knowledge of the Catholic faith, skills to provide effective staff development programs that promote the mission of the Catholic school”. (Gilroy, 1998). Principals do not share the same perspective when it comes to this expectation of their role. In terms of personal capacity to adequately carry out this role “70% rated their formal course work as inadequate in the area of faith leadership. In addition, more than half indicated they had taken no courses or seminars beyond their bachelor’s degrees related to the faith leadership role” (Wallace quoted in Joseph, 2002, p. 7). Principals feel they “are not adequately theologically educated for their leadership roles” (Graham, 2006). Given this lack of confidence and background to provide effective religious leadership to the school community, it is interesting to note that 69% of principals believe that “today’s Catholic schools are as successful as schools in the 1950s in establishing and maintaining Catholic identity even though those 1950s schools were predominantly staffed by vowed religious” (Wallace quoted in Joseph, 2002, p. 7).

There is a lack of clarity as to the scope and extent of religious leadership. Indeed, “the problem of spiritual leadership and the questions that underlie it have never been more urgent or more confused” (Chittister, 2003, p. 21). Religious leadership is more than handing on doctrine to a new generation, a kind of “passing the torch to the next generation” (Prendergast, 2003a, p. 13). It is the desire and capacity to develop a sense and experience of the Transcendent in the lives of students, an awareness of the presence of a “beneficent watchfulness” (Hicks, 2004, p. 2) in their lives. Indeed the essence of religious leadership is “the ability to give meaning to life,

the ability to re-imagine what is for new times” (Chittister, 2003, p. 21) and entails much more than a simple transference of doctrine from one generation to the next. Given the value-competitive environment, the role of the school leader might best be described in terms of being “an expert in the promotion of values” (Selznik 1957, quoted in Sergiovanni, 2000, p. 3).

The issues impacting on the religious dimension of the principal’s role are not confined to personal preparedness. There is a wide variance in understanding of the purpose or mission of the Catholic school since the transition to an almost complete lay workforce in schools. As well, there is little recognition of the significant contextual change in the operation of the schools. The lived experience of most principals is changing the way they understand their role in far deeper ways than simply taking on extra duties in the parish because of declining clergy numbers. Scrutiny of data on the worshipping habits of people is one obvious example of a significant contextual change requiring honest and thoughtful reflection on the role of the principal in engaging with the new realities (Dixon, 2006, Collins, 2007).

The expectation that principals provide religious as well as educational leadership to the school community has intensified as the Catholic school increasingly becomes the only form of contact many families choose to have with the Church (McLaughlin, 2000). It is clear that whether by choice or default “Catholic principals have the added role of religious leadership ~ what they often describe as ‘handing on the faith’. Their religious role is becoming greater and greater as priests age and as fewer people find the church to be a real part of their lives. People are now turning to principals to fulfil some of the roles that priests hold” (The Age, 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2003).

The declining stature of the church as the traditional centre of the faith community is further evidenced by decisions to replace churches as the centre of local communities (Independent Catholic News, Sept 8, 2004). “Churches used to be the centre of communities but they are not anymore” (ICN, 2004). This pattern of movement away from parishes towards schools will continue unabated despite the efforts of those advocating a return to traditional structures and organisation.

Expectations associated with religious leadership add to the already burgeoning role of the principal. It is clear that schools can no longer rely on traditional processes of formation in the Catholic faith, the product of an active partnership between families, schools and parish, but must take a purposeful role in designing an environment and implementing strategies aimed at religious formation which is life giving and personally meaningful.

### **3.4.9 Leadership dilemmas**

Effective leadership extends far beyond the ability to complete a series of clinical behaviours and tasks which, once mastered, can be equally applied in any context (Fullan, 2000). Experience alone is an insufficient determinant for suitability and “limits the scope and depth of the demands of the current role” (Fullan, 2002). Interior enterprise provides the motivation for the role through a personal commitment to certain ideals and values which energise and shape the role. “Leadership is not just a function of what leaders know and do” (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 23). It is no surprise then that the fundamental leadership dilemmas encountered by Catholic educators occur at a very personal level, the “‘black box’ of leadership practice” (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 23). In many ways these dilemmas extend far beyond the educational realm of the role into beliefs about the very nature and purpose of the Catholic school.

This intensely personal dilemma is understood as a choice between two fundamental approaches. These approaches have been variously expressed as a choice between retreat or mission (Grace, 2002), liberation or domestication (Chittister, 2003), renewal or decline (Spry, 2000). The choice is for the culture of traditional Catholicism, deliberately constructed to address ambiguity and paradox by the strong framing of its teaching or a post Vatican II Catholicism with greater ambiguity and paradox in moral codes. Principals are in “a continuing struggle with these ambiguities” (Grace, 1997, p. 77).

A further dilemma is presented by the modern context of contemporary Catholic schools.

The leaders of Catholic schools were caught up in this struggle between hierarchical counsel and parental assertion, and in the dilemmas arising from conflicts between a construct of special mission as community values and a

construct of special mission as providing the best educational resources for Catholic pupils (Grace, 1997, p. 82).

This is essentially a "struggle to balance market concerns (critical to survival) with Catholic values (critical to mission) (Grace, 1997, p. 87). While principals may look for "guidance or leadership to 'the Church' on these contested matters, in a post-modern age what 'the Church' was and what its voice on these issues might be lacked the definition and certainties of the past. There are no ex cathedra statements or absolute moral codes which could give instant guidance on these social, cultural and professional dilemmas" (Grace, 1997, p. 87).

Principals are expected to balance "moral purpose and institutional survival" (Grace, 1997, p. 73), a very real dilemma for schools wanting to maintain a strong Catholic identity and ethos while also maintaining facilities and resources to a standard which is appropriate and sustainable for students. The nexus between funding levels and enrolment numbers is a reality for schools which needs to be considered carefully. This may include a more inclusive approach to the enrolment of students of other faiths, or changing current practice recognising the needs of a largely liturgically unaffiliated community.

This dilemma challenges schools to effectively meet the curriculum demands of both the Church and the state (O'Donoghue & Vidovich, 2004) which, if not appropriately managed, has the "potential to fracture the accommodation of the demands of both major institutions which the school has established for itself" (O'Donoghue & Vidovich, 2004, p. 17). This has implications for what is taught and how it is taught but also systemic considerations surrounding the implementation of league tables for school performance and a values-based curriculum.

This balancing act is inherent in the role of the principal as many of the dilemmas facing school leaders present themselves as "contestations of values and/or ethical dilemmas or tensions" (D'Arbon, 2004, p. 5). Many of these could be categorised as follows:

1. *Common Good and Individual Rights*: which highlights a contestation between individuality and individualism. While individuality is welcomed and given safe harbour in Catholic schools, the growing influence of

individualism conflicts with the fundamental role of protecting the rights and dignity of those members in a disadvantaged position and allowing and encouraging each individual to reach full capacity. “The common good will result from the self-actualization of each part” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 88). This dilemma has implications for enrolment and employment policies of Catholic schools.

2. *Care and rules:* All schools have rules setting parameters for behaviour to ensure a safe and welcoming environment, however, there is always the awareness that there will be exceptions to the rule and that rules are applied according to what is in the best interests of the people/person involved. The emphasis is on the person rather than the rules.
3. *Loyalty and Honesty/Justice:* This dilemma often requires a choice between right and right as it deals with conflicting views of what is a fair and just outcome.
4. *Rhetoric and reality:* The ideal, often expressed through the rhetoric of written documents, is open to challenge based on the reality faced by schools. Written aspirations do not transfer easily or automatically into action. The dilemma is often accompanied by the question of when is it prudent to reframe the rhetoric to encompass the shifting realities for Catholic school communities and to “propose a critical education with the purpose of transforming society-this is an authentic and credible *raison d’etre* for Catholic education” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 78).
5. *Status Quo and development:* This dilemma is particularly relevant when traditions and current practices are reviewed. Do the current traditions and practices within the school build and strengthen an authentic Catholic culture or simply reinforce redundant and out-of-touch view of issues affecting families in the modern world?

6. *Long-term and short-term perspectives:* This dilemma often emerges in the context of the personal formation of staff and strategic planning for the future growth and development of the school (D'Arbon, 2004).

Each of these dilemmas adds complexity to the principal's role. Increasingly principals are called to operate in an environment which can offer little in the way of connection with their own beliefs and vision. This can lead to a tense and stressful working environment of superficial compliance to passé beliefs and values. There is a strong call to re-imagine the role for the new Catholic landscape.

### **3.4.10 Re-imagining the role**

It is clear that "the principal's role as experienced no longer matches the role advocated by early leadership theories" (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001) and has in fact undergone fundamental change (Fullan, 1998). The reality of the principal's day-to-day operation suggests that "the immediacy of other, time-dependent issues often take precedence over and over-shadow the more complex, yet less immediate, issues often associated with instructional leadership" (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001). There is an urgency to cease fitting more and more into a traditional understanding of the role. Indeed, "we need to move away from the notion of how the principal can become lead implementer of multiple policies and programs. What is needed is to reframe the question. What does a reasonable leader do, faced with impossible tasks?" (Fullan, 1998, p. 6).

The impossible tasks faced by principals stem from three critical changes which have initiated the gravitation of the principal's role away from traditional constructs.

1. Government and system funding arrangements requiring principals to be more financially accountable, entrepreneurial, and budget savvy; "principals are required to do more with much less to fulfil government mandated change" (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001)
2. The proliferation of third party stakeholders in the operation of the school including service agencies, community leaders and business partners; "principals are more involved in social-service-related issues than ever before" (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001)



3. Greater involvement with and accountability to the communities served eg School Boards. “The role is increasingly becoming one of community leader with responsibilities not just confined to the needs of the school but extending to the needs of its communities” (Macmillan et al, 2001)

These changes to the role are indicative of a new school environment where “principals are agents of accountability, are involved with social service agencies, are concerned with the safety and security of students; and have extended their day through participation on parent advisory councils and with other community groups” (Meyer & Macmillan, 2001), and confirm that what is needed is a new understanding which better matches and responds to the contemporary context.

One way of doing this is by the use of metaphor. Metaphors help provide clarity to the essence of the role and clearly indicate the shifting focus of the role. The traditional metaphor of the ‘super hero’, able to meet and defeat all challenges which arise, is one such image which is no longer applicable. This section explores some of the current metaphors describing the role of the principal.

The role is being expressed in terms of new and challenging metaphors. Contrary to the outdated metaphor of defender, champion, protector, upholder and custodian, the role is more that of an architect with connotations of creator, fashioner and author (Cook, 2001).

These images are expressed in different ways but convey a similar understanding that the role of the principal has undergone a fundamental change. Some of the images include:

- optimistic, ethical leadership (Burford, 2002, Starrett, 2004)
- enchanted leadership (Woods, 2003)
- leaders as reservoirs of hope (Flintham, 2002)
- evangelizing leaders (Gusdane, 1999)
- faith leaders (Wallace, 1998)
- authentic leaders (Duignan, 2007)
- religious leaders (McDermott, 1975)

- advocates for ethical, moral and transcendental values (Spry, 2001)
- stewardship, inspirational ideology (McLaughlin, 2001 pp.8&9)
- releasing human potential, seeking a more humanistic world (McDermott, 1975)
- Designer, steward and teacher (Senge, 1990).
- Bi-focal leader (Deal and Peterson, 1994).
- Faith leader, educational leader, community builder, team member (Dwyer, 1993)

The thinking behind each of these descriptions suggests that the role is much more than a clinical execution of duties within a particular context. The principalship cannot be sustained by competency based leadership. The new metaphor calls for the role to be re-imagined to incorporate capability based leadership (Stephenson, 2000). Leadership capabilities represent

an all round human quality, an integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding used appropriately and effectively – not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but in response to new and changing circumstances (Stephenson, 2000, p. 4).

The difference between the two approaches is clear.

Competency is about delivering the present based on past performance; capability is about imaging a future and bringing it about. Competency is about control; capability is about learning and development. Competency is about fitness for (usually other people's) purpose; capability is about judging fitness of the purpose itself (Stephenson, 2000, p. 4).

The foundation of capability based leadership is a decision to journey with others in all aspects of life. For Catholic educators this decision incorporates a faith dimension and highlights a responsibility to be and build church within the community. This call to ministry has implications for Catholic educators.

### **3.4.11 Ministry of Catholic educators**

A fundamental shift within the global church is the willingness of the Catholic laity to challenge and reject elements of Church teaching while at the same time continuing to remain active members of the Church (Mulligan, 1994). This has fundamentally changed the relationship between clergy and the laity, once characterised as a

parent/child dynamic, although the “bitter aftertaste” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 93) lingers on for some of the faithful. Principals bring two essential elements to ministry in a pluralistic context, resistance and hope. Resistance refers to the unwillingness to blindly accept the status quo. It is the inquiring spirit at work in the world. Hope is the belief that God is a part of all that happens and therefore the source of hope for the future. “Hope lies in the trust that oppressive structures can be reformed” (Mulligan, 1994 p. 116). These two elements are very much a part of the role of the principal.

The role of the clergy in the changing Catholic landscape is being settled almost by default as numbers dwindle. The nature of the current structure is said to be one which “dis-empowers and alienates. It is an obstacle to mutuality and communion. It has tended to promote and maintain mediocrity in proclamation, celebration and administration” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 115). The current overextension of Church personnel and resources has forced a “new collaboration in the Roman Catholic communion” (Mulligan, 1994, p.117). Declining clerical influence has led to a recovery of “the community dimension of all ministry: basic Christian communities, pastoral teams, life communities” (Mulligan, 1994, p. 117).

In response to this situation, there is an expectation that members of the laity assume a more active role in the local Church. This has been enacted in Catholic education to a greater extent than any other area (McLaughlin, 2005). The current reality of an almost complete lay staff in all areas of Catholic education, and declining numbers of clergy endorses the certainty that “in the twenty-first century, it clearly will be the task of lay women and men, who even now have almost complete responsibility for the conduct of Australian Catholic schools, ‘to substantially determine whether or not a school realises its aim and accomplishes its objectives’ (Paul VI, 1982, par 1). In fact, the role of the clergy in this formation process has all but disappeared and it is incumbent on “the laity alone, who have unique and challenging opportunities in promoting the kingdom in the school context” (McLaughlin, 2000, p.38). For the vast majority of students in Catholic schools “the school will be the only church the children know, and lay leaders will be their defacto pastors” (O’Keefe, 2003 p. 104).

Church documents are very clear about the vocation of the Catholic educator (Mulligan, 1994). Teachers have a special role in the educational mission of the Church. Reference to the role in terms of “ministry” (Mulligan 1994) represents a seismic shift in thinking about the role of the laity. “Given the enhanced role of the People of God in the post-Vatican II Church and the decline of the clergy in numbers and credibility, Catholic education should be reconfigured as a ministry of the laity” (O’Keefe, 1996, p.178). Catholic school principals remain open to this invitation, however, are hesitant to accept responsibility for a role which is based on and entrenches authority structures and practices associated with traditional models of Church. This stance by principals is reflective of the changed nature of schools and their role including the responsibility to engage with staff who choose to have little or no connection with the traditional Church. The challenge for principals is daunting as the difference between the rhetoric about the role of Catholic educators and the reality is enormous.

#### **3.4.12 The profile of Catholic educators**

The official view and expectations of the role of the Catholic educator are clearly and unequivocally expressed in the following passage.

The Catholic educator must be a source of spiritual inspiration... The Lay Catholic educator is a person who exercises a specific mission within the Church by living the faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school: with the best possible professional qualifications, with an apostolic intention inspired by faith, for the integral formation of the human person, in a communication of culture, in an exercise of that pedagogy which will give emphasis to direct and personal contact with students (CCE, 1982, p 14).

The expectations inherent in this statement could prove daunting for many principals let alone any prospective young teacher and, to many reflective, contemporary lay Catholics represent an idealistic view. Contained within the passage is the expectation that the Catholic educator engage with the “spirit of the world” while at the same time called to be against the “spirit of the world” (CCE, 1998, p.112). The implication for educators is that to fulfil their role according to these expectations they would need to be “Catholic teachers who are practising their faith but who are also willing to give an appropriate form of witness to it as part of their professionalism” (McLaughlin, T, 1996, p.150).

Staff of Catholic schools make an enormous contribution to the mission effectiveness of schools. This contribution needs to be tempered against rhetoric describing the role of educators in terms of vocation, ministry or phases like “Christ’s evangelisers” (McLaughlin, 2002, p.12). This appears sound advice when the reality is that “the vast majority of them (Catholic educators) have reservations about the contemporary Catholic Church and, like the general Catholic population, are not practising” (McLaughlin, 2002, p.12).

This confirms a different image of educators to that expressed officially. At the very least “the majority of Catholic teachers are members of a Church ..... which in many ways is very different from the Church they were born into” (McLaughlin, 1997, p.1). Catholic educators are no different to the broader community of Catholic laity in rejecting the long held belief “that the authority of the leaders of the church was God given” (McLaughlin, 1997, p.1) and consequently adopt a critical and experienced-based stance when considering church teaching (Treston, 1997, p.10). “If they agree with the Church on an issue, it is because the Church position makes sense to them and they actively decide to agree. If a Church teaching does not make sense to them, they will refuse to agree, no matter how often or how clearly or how authoritatively the church has spoken on it” (McLaughlin, 2002, p.12). Teachers show little confidence in all aspects of Church teaching, especially around the role of the Catholic educator in the mission of the Church (Tinsey, 1998).

This is a real dilemma for principals given the reality that “for many of our Catholic students, Catholic teachers are expected to be the primary role model and educator in the faith – duties in the past reserved to parents and parish” (Mulligan, 1994, p.17). Catholic Education Offices have a responsibility to ensure that all school staff, but especially beginning teachers have access to appropriate professional formation aimed at nurturing faith “in an educational, personal and pastoral environment designed for its promotion” (McLaughlin, 2000, p.73). This process has its genesis in training programs undertaken by student teachers. Teacher training through Catholic universities includes units of spiritual and theological formation. Students training through other universities are, in some dioceses, required to undertake specific units in Religious Education to gain accreditation to teach and/or to teach religion in a Catholic school. There is a growing sense of urgency and importance attached to this

commitment that unless the challenge of assisting staff with their own spirituality is addressed we will be left with institutions “that were not so much vacant as empty to the core” (Prendergast, 2003, p.13).

The recruitment and training of teachers for Catholic schools is an immense task given the responsibility expressed above. Spiritual and theological formation through university cannot compensate for a family background bereft of any faith atmosphere or practice (McLaughlin, 2000). On this basis it could be argued that Catholic schools “have been largely ineffectual in communicating the Catholic faith to their students” (Gilchrist, 2000, p.3).

The Australian Catholic University is “the largest single supplier of teachers for Catholic schools” (McLaughlin, 1997, p.3). Research into the beliefs and faith practices of students attending ACU confirm a group very much at odds with many aspects of Church teaching. The findings included the following revelations:

- One third of the student teachers believed in transubstantiation during Mass.
- 34% indicated that they attended Mass on a weekly basis. 50% indicated monthly attendance.
- On the matters of the Church’s teaching on divorce and contraception 2% accepted the teaching. 89% indicated that the decision was a personal matter for the couple involved.
- 14% accepted the Church’s teaching on abortion, while 10% accepted the Church’s teaching on premarital sex.
- 50% of student teachers understood (or said they understood) the concept of God as the Blessed Trinity.
- 62% indicated agreement that women should be accepted into the priesthood.
- Slightly less than half, 47%, agreed that Catholic schools should aim to bring students to a sound knowledge of the Catholic faith (McLaughlin, 2000).

The formation of teachers is given high priority by employing authorities. One strategy aimed at ensuring that teachers in Catholic schools undertake regular spiritual formation is through accreditation. This employment expectation, adopted by all Queensland Dioceses, requires all teachers to undertake a minimum number of

hours of professional and faith development every four years. The aim is that “all teachers in the school share a view of life and of the educational task of the school - a common purpose and commitment - so that ‘unity in teaching’ and the development of community and ethos can be achieved” (McLaughlin, 1997, p.150). The two types, accreditation to teach in a Catholic school and accreditation to teach Religious Education in a Catholic School, recognise the need for educators to grow and mature in their own faith to effectively witness and teach the Catholic faith. “The new ecclesial reality is that the Catholic school for many is the primary place where young people will encounter Jesus and his teaching, and it is Catholic teachers, the laity, who are the evangelisers” (Mulligan, 1994, p.76). The success or otherwise of this initiative is open to debate.

### **3.5     *The research questions***

The purpose of this research is to explore understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The major stakeholders selected for the purposes of this research are principals, employing authorities and clergy.

The literature review was organised around the two concepts of mission and role. The literature identified variant understandings of these concepts as schools respond to the challenges of profound social, ecclesial and educational revolutions. It is therefore appropriate to identify and justify the research questions which focus the research design.

#### **3.5.1   The mission of the Catholic school**

The changing Catholic landscape is heralding a new and different dynamic in the nature of Catholic school communities. Unlike Catholic communities of the past, Australian Catholicism is now characterized by pluralism, a mistrust of institutional values and authority and a preference for personally constructed spirituality rather than a packaged religion (Treston, 2000). This is evidenced by a growing “post-ecclesial” (Rolheiser, 2008) and “post-denominational” (Allen, 2008) generation where beliefs and values are not constrained to one particular denomination.

Unprecedented growth of Catholic school enrolments contrasts with the experience of parishes, which are struggling with declining numbers of clergy and an inability to connect meaningfully with the lives of the majority of Catholic families. Data confirm that in 2001 the percentage of the Catholic population at Mass on a typical weekend had fallen to 15.3 per cent. Anecdotal reports suggest that in recent years this drift has been noticeable even among people who were regular Mass attenders and active parishioners for many years of their adult lives (Dixon, 2007). A growing “post-parish” generation have no prior experience or any sense of parish. Affiliation to one religious denomination no longer defines identity as it once did. Eclectic and peripatetic spirituality has replaced denominational allegiance. In this context, Catholic schools are now the only experience of “Church” that most families choose to have (McLaughlin, 2005).

Contemporary Catholic schools serve the needs of a significantly different community to that of pre-councilar times. This situation requires a major rethink of current practice and how best to connect meaningfully with the faith lives of families. The changing status of Catholic schools as the only contact the majority of families are choosing to have with the Catholic church has focused the urgency of the dilemma squarely in the school environment. Many of the issues and concerns which would have once been addressed to the presbytery are now being directed to school personnel, especially the principal (McLaughlin, 2005).

The changing social dynamic of Catholic schools is not limited to families. The majority of current staff are part of a post-conciliar generation who themselves are the product of a Catholic Education system searching for an authentic identity and purpose. This search continues to be a crucial struggle for contemporary Catholic schools. The nature of the new generation of teachers is cause for further reflection on the mission of the contemporary Catholic school and challenges long held beliefs and practices.

The pervasive influence of secular values challenges school leaders to look differently at how schools can most effectively present a counter stance. This prevailing secular culture seriously undermines the long-established *raison d'être* for the existence of Catholic schools and calls on schools to clarify an authentic Catholic



mission appropriate to their contemporary communities. This literature review highlights the disparate understandings of the mission of the Catholic school. There is a fundamental ideological choice between mission, liberation and renewal or, alternatively, retreat, domestication and decay, each reflecting a particular understanding and emanating from a distinctly different worldview (Chittister, 2003, Grace, 2002, Haldane, 2000).

The lack of clarity and agreement by the major stakeholders in the governance and administration of Catholic schools about the mission of the Catholic school and its place in the educational mission of the Church is a significant area of concern and invites further scrutiny as it is fundamental to any attempt by Catholic schools to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by the changing Catholic landscape. Any investigation brings to life opportunities to create and define new understandings of the role of the Catholic school in fulfilling its mission. Therefore the first research question is:

***How do clergy, employing authorities and principals understand the mission of the Catholic school?***

**3.5.2 Role of the principal**

It is in this environment that the principal enacts a leadership role. A lack of consensus by key stakeholders about the principal's role has resulted in increasing levels of anxiety amongst principals (ACPPA, 2005). Data gathered through State and National professional principals' associations confirms the prevalent nature of this tension and the negative effect on leadership succession (ACPPA, 2005).

Principals perceive their role as the promotion of the reign of God in ways which connect meaningfully with the life stories and faith journeys of the community (Rymarz, 2004). Principals are mindful of the dilemma that Catholic schools are not only Catholic in name but also nature. The apparent success of Catholic schools in terms of enrolment applications needs to be tempered against their stated mission and how closely the stated mission is reflected in the day to day reality. There is clear recognition that "the dissonance between the official rhetoric about Catholic schools and the world views of students and parents (and some staff) is a very serious issue

confronting the movement to authentic Catholic schools” (Treston, 1997, p.15). The essential question emerging from these challenges “is not how to educate people in the Catholic faith but how to form people with a Catholic mind and heart” (Hanvey, 2005, p.52). Within these competing ideologies the principal has significant influence on the way schools enact their mission (Rymarz, 2004).

Religious leadership is a key dimension of the principal’s role. However, principals feel unprepared for the expectations of religious leadership. This is a consequence of a rapid laicisation of school leadership which provided lay principals with little of the formation and training received by members of religious orders. School leaders are also reluctant to accept a leadership role based on traditional models of Church, authority and practices. Expectations of some key stakeholders are based on a “quasi-monastic” (Hansen, 2000, p. 281) model which creates a real dilemma for contemporary principals. This highlights a need for critical reflection on the changing nature of the role and the challenges presented by a rapidly changing Catholic landscape.

Two significant stakeholders in the life of the principal are the clergy, most primary schools maintain a strong connection to the parish (at least in theory), and employing authorities, who are gradually accepting more responsibility for the secular and spiritual accountability requirements of Catholic schools. A dilemma arises when the principal holds a different understanding and expectations of his/her role to clergy and employing authorities. The literature review confirms a lack of clarity and agreement by the major stakeholders in the governance and administration of Catholic schools about the role of the principal and the expectations that surround it.

This position invites closer investigation as it appears to be the genesis of tension and strain between employing authorities, clergy and school leaders. Exploration of the perspectives and understandings of this issue held by key stakeholders is important to any understanding of the role of the principal. Consequently the second research question is:

***How do principals and employing authorities understand the role of the principal?***

## CHAPTER 4      DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

### ***4.1 Introduction***

The purpose of this research is to explore understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The research examines this topic from the perspectives of three key stakeholders in the life of Catholic schools, namely, principals, clergy and employing authorities.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the research design. The research design is “the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of the study” (Yin, 2003, p. 19). Given the purpose of the study an interpretative design was adopted to explore how principals, clergy and employing authorities understand the mission of the Catholic school and how each of these groups envisage the role of the principal in realizing this mission. The following research questions emerged from the review of literature and are used to focus the conduct of the research:

- How do principals, clergy and employing authorities perceive the mission of the Catholic school?
- How do principals, clergy and employing authorities perceive the current role of principal?

Each participant was asked to reflect personally on their constructions of Catholic school mission and the role of the principal. The research assists participants to reflect upon how they “make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world” (Creswell, 1994, p. 145).

An epistemological framework of constructionism was chosen because it was important for the researcher to gain insights into the relationship between perceptions of mission and how these shaped understandings of the principal’s role. Constructionism most closely reflects the dynamics of competing values and worldviews associated with the role of the principal and offers a voice to the experiences and stories of the participants of this study. This process of constructed meaning occurs through social interaction and therefore symbolic interactionism was

chosen as the theoretical perspective through which the data analysis was conducted. Symbolic interactionism invites the researcher to place primary importance on the social meanings people attach to the world around them, and to adopt the perspective of those being studied (Charon, 2004).

Case study was chosen as the research methodology because of the researcher's interest in gaining insight into new knowledge and understandings about how key stakeholders perceive the principal's role in the light of their beliefs and perceptions about the mission of the Catholic school. Case study allowed the researcher to explore the research questions with the participants in real world settings.

Table 4.1 provides a summary of the epistemological paradigm and theoretical framework, methodology and methods.

**Table 4.1    *Elements of the research design.***

<b>4.2 Research Paradigm</b>	Interpretivism
<b>4.2.1 Epistemology</b>	Constructionism
<b>4.2.2 Theoretical Perspective</b>	Symbolic interactionism
<b>4.3 Methodology</b>	Case study
<b>4.4 Participants</b>	Purposive selection
<b>4.5 Methods</b>	Questionnaire Semi-structured interviews Focus group interviews

## **4.2    *Research Paradigm: Interpretivism***

The research paradigm or theoretical perspective is a “philosophical stance lying behind a methodology” (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). It refers to “an attitude of mind towards science and the explanation of man [sic]” (Simpson, 1982, p. 69). The research questions for this study focus on different aspects influencing the principal's enactment of the role with a view to exposing the “layers of reality” (Charon, 2001, p.

10) contained within. Such a methodology favours the choice of a non-scientific approach.

Congruency between the theoretical perspective and the purpose of the research provides “a logical basis for the processes involved with the research; it structures the research design; it gives direction to the data to be collected; and it provides a basis on which analysis of the data findings can proceed” (Beattie, 2000, p. 74). The congruency between theoretical perspective and research purpose is essential as “different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). Moreover, the theoretical perspective presents the social researcher with a way to “observe, measure and understand social reality” (Neuman, 2000, p. 65) that “accurately describes what is ‘really’ happening in the world around us” (Charon, 2001, p. 9).

The nature of this study is inductive and interpretive affording participants an opportunity to critically reflect upon how they “make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world” (Creswell, 1994, p. 145) while seeking to uncover meanings of social phenomena as held by those “inside” the experience of those phenomena (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 36).

Three key elements converge to shape the role of the principal and influence the design of the research process. The first element is context. While the contemporary context of this study is one of “unparalleled change and restructuring” (Dimmock & O’Donoghue, 1997, p. 36) the influence of the historical context on the research outcomes cannot be overlooked. Context is influential in advocating a particular theoretical perspective. Human meaning is inextricably bound up with context and the environment in which it is lived (Smith & Hershuisius, 1986). An understanding of the influence of contextual features on the principal’s role is crucial to any study of the role itself. Therefore the philosophical stance guiding the research design must be sensitive to the unique contextual factors which have shaped current perceptions and expectations. A theoretical perspective which ignores or diminishes the influence of context on the understanding of the role cannot accurately capture the principal’s social reality.

The second element is the evolutionary and reactive nature of the principal's role. The principal responds to new and varied perceptions and expectations, constructed from a range of interpretations of reality, emanating from divergent world views. The role is in a constant state of evolution as it seeks to respond to the changing social, ecclesial and educational landscape. Principals are volitional in responding actively, rather than passively to the stimuli of dramatically changing contexts.

The third element providing a unique character to the study is the complex environment of human interaction in which the principal's role is enacted. The influence of expectations and perceptions shaping the role has strong social and personal dimensions. This suggests the existence of many, varied interpretations of reality which gives credibility to the research as an accurate account of reality rather than an attempt to fit the variety of interpretations under the umbrella of one objective truth.

A theoretical perspective which respects and complements these key elements is crucial to the research outcomes of understanding and interpreting the principal's role. The research orientation must incorporate and validate the elements of context and personal meanings on both the researcher and participants as both attempt to construct understandings of the role. For these reasons interpretivism is chosen as the theoretical perspective.

An interpretive approach supports an epistemology that:

reality is not 'out there' but in the minds of people; reality is internally experienced, is socially constructed through interaction and interpreted through the actors, and is based on the definition people attach to it (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 35).

The interpretive approach "is the foundation of social research techniques that are sensitive to context, that use various methods to get inside the various ways others see the world, and that are more concerned with achieving an empathetic understanding of feelings and world views than with testing laws of human behaviour" (Neuman, 2000, p. 75). An interpretative approach "emphasizes the production of meaning" (Stake, 1994, p. 242) where "data and interpretations depend

on context and process and must be steadily verified and when necessary, corrected” (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 49).

Interpretivism is defined as:

the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds. (Neuman, 2000).

The interpretivist approach “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). This paradigm is premised on the belief that all human action is meaningful and therefore “has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices” (Usher, 1996, p. 18). The motivation of the social researcher acting from this perspective is to “learn the personal reasons or motives that shape a person’s internal feelings and guide decisions to act in particular ways” (Neuman, 2000, p. 70). Interpretivism is inductive in nature observing and interpreting the interaction between the principal and his/her environment and identifying how meaning is constructed during this interactive process. The inductive nature of interpretivism allows for the development of new understandings and new meanings associated with the role of the principal and Catholic school mission. It is ideographic, seeking to provide a “‘thick’ description” (Neuman, 2000, p. 73) of a social interaction.

Given the purpose of this research to explore the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the Catholic school principal in a changing Catholic landscape, an interpretive approach was considered most appropriate based on the following underlying assumptions:

- Nothing is predefined or taken for granted;
- Human behaviour is shaped in context and events cannot be understood adequately if isolated from their contexts;
- Experience is to be taken and studied as a whole, or holistically;
- Methods of inquiry for carrying out these aims must be appropriate to the aims (Sherman & Webb, 1988, p. 3-4).

Interpretive social science encompasses several approaches. This research project is not a study of a phenomenon rather an analysis of the meaning which emerges through interaction. The particular focus of this research is an examination of

language and symbols and the meaning people attach to them. This process is referred to as symbolic interactionism, a theoretical framework within the interpretative paradigm. This framework was considered the most appropriate for this research.

#### **4.2.1 Epistemology: Constructionism**

The epistemology advances the assumptions which underpin the research (Creswell, 2002). Epistemology encompasses the nature of knowledge, in particular its foundations, scope and validity (Crotty, 1998). It is therefore essential to identify the epistemology supporting this research project. This section explains and justifies the selection of an epistemology and the consequent research design which addresses the stated purpose of the study.

Epistemology defines the relationship between the researcher and that which is being researched (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Its focus is “the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis” (Hamlyn, 1995, p. 242), and it is “an attempt to explain how we know what we know and to determine the status to be ascribed to the understandings we reach” (Crotty, 1998, p. 18).

This study is an exploration of understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the consequent expectations of the role of the principal. People view phenomenon differently thereby generating a number of different understandings. Given this premise, it is reasonable to assume that “different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). The principal’s role is contextualized, individual, value-laden and encompasses highly relational and communitarian practices (Graham, 2008). The actions of individuals and groups within these communities result in the role being constantly adjusted and modified according to changing understandings and perceptions.

The constructionist epistemology is premised upon the understanding that “meaning is not discovered, but constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). A constructionist paradigm is “social constructivism”, recognizing that multiple meanings may emerge from the same phenomenon, that there is “no true or valid interpretation” (Crotty, 1998, p. 47). Such an approach confirms the belief that our human consciousness is not



predetermined or predictable, rather, is determined by “the social” (Crotty, 1998, p. 22). This assumption reflects the dynamics of competing values and worldviews associated with the enactment of the principalship. There are no law-like generalizations which can be applied to the experience of the principal’s role.

A constructionist epistemology allows for disparity due to contextual, social and personal dynamics. Constructionism “requires that we do not remain straitjacketed by the conventional meanings we have been taught to associate with the object” (Crotty, 1998, p. 51). Schools, like other institutions are in fact “invented realities instead of objective realities” (Dimmock & O’Donoghue, 1997, p. 51). Such an approach invites a “radical spirit of openness” (Crotty, 1998, p. 51) which has the potential for new or more sophisticated meanings or understandings in time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This outcome is appropriate to this research project. The researcher’s task is “to understand the others’ world and then to translate the text of lived actions into a meaningful account” (Glesne, 1999, p. 156). The research then seeks to “grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998, p. 38).

Given that the purpose of the study concerns contested meaning making process inherent within the Catholic school community, a constructionist epistemology honouring the assumption that knowledge and meaning as constructed by the participants forms the basis for making judgments and decisions seemed most appropriate.

#### **4.2.2 Theoretical Perspective: Symbolic Interactionism**

A theoretical perspective underpinning this study is from the approach known as interpretivism and more specifically, symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is the interaction between an individual and the society within which that individual operates and constructs meaning. It involves “an examination of perspectives and reference groups” (Charon, 2001, p. 37) and “deals directly with issues such as language, communication, inter-relationships and community” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8). The emphasis is on basic social interactions, entering into “the perceptions, attitudes and values of a community” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8).

Symbolic interactionism is a perspective, that is, one way of understanding reality and is based on the premise that “meanings arise through social interaction” (Chalmers, 1998, p. 11). “Meaning is always open to negotiation” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 26). This approach “focuses on the human being and tries to understand human behaviour” (Charon, 2001, p. 12), since humans use assumptions, values and beliefs to organize perceptions and control behaviour (Charon, 2004). Symbolic interactionism was selected as the theoretical framework because it invites the researcher to place primary importance on the social meanings people attach to the world around them, and to adopt the perspective of those being studied (Charon, 2004). “Methodologically, symbolic interactionism directs the investigator to take, to the best of his [sic] ability, the standpoint of those studied” (Denzin, 1997, p. 99).

Symbolic interactionism includes the study of both phenomenon (open to scientific and rational investigation) and noumena (above scientific investigation and empirical observation) (Charon, 2001). Human beings are understood as “social, interactional and symbolic by their very nature” (Charon, 2001, p. 35). Any attempt to understand human beings in strictly rational and empirical terms neglects the very essence of the human being (Charon, 2001).

“The epistemology generally found embedded in symbolic interactionism is thoroughly constructionist in character” (Crotty, 1998, p. 4). This perspective attempts to capture “the essence of the human being as a social being, a creator, a product and a shaper of society” (Charon, 2001 p. 6).

Three salient assumptions underpin the social interactionist approach (Blumer, 1962, p. 2). Each assumption is reflected in the three key elements influencing the role of the principal. These are the influence of contextual, social and the evolutionary aspects on the nature of the role.

The first assumption that “human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2) argues that human behaviour is not determined by societal forces or a product of psychological drives, rather, from a pattern of complex social interaction whereby individuals attach their own meaning to phenomena (material objects, people or abstract concepts) and act

according to these meanings (Chalmers, 1998). “Meanings determine actions” (Dimmock & O’Donoghue, 1997b, p. 42), and meanings can be influenced by different perspectives (Bogdan & Bilkin, 1998). “Human beings do not simply respond to stimuli or act out cultural scripts” (Dimmock & O’Donoghue, 1997b, p. 42). Symbolic interactionism supports the stance that we do not simply respond to our environment (Charon, 2004). “We are not simply shaped, conditioned, controlled by that environment (including other humans), but we act toward it according to our ongoing definitions arising from perspectives that are themselves dynamic” (Charon, 2001, p. 40).

Within the context of the current study, this assumption implies that the meanings principals assign to phenomena within their role will influence their decisions when enacting the role. Principals act from a worldview of personal beliefs and understandings which may or may not concur with the official view of the mission of Catholic schools espoused by Church and employing authorities (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Principals manage and exploit “sacred, secret, and cover stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) to “navigate the complex professional landscapes that comprise schools” (Soltis, 1995, p. vii). The sacred story is the theory-driven view, the official view, usually espoused by Church authorities and usually represents a vision of what is right and appropriate for the school. The cover story is the story which allows the principal, whose stories may be marginalized by whatever the sacred story is, to continue to practice and sustain their own practice within the system. The secret story is the true lived story and for the most part is told only to other colleagues. This belief that principals act out of their constructed meanings, or “secret stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) leads to Blumer’s second assumption concerning how meaning is constructed.

Blumer’s second assumption states that “the meaning of such things is derived from, and arises out of, the social interaction one has with one’s fellows” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Blumer contends that meaning grows out of social interaction and implies that meaning will be constantly adjusted and modified according to the actions of others. In other words, “people receive and transmit symbolic communication when they socially interact” (Neuman, 2000, p. 60) which leads to the formation of perceptions of each other and social settings. Human beings exist in a world of social interaction.

It is through social interaction that social objects are “pointed out, isolated, catalogued, interpreted and given meaning” (Charon, 2004, p. 47).

An important aspect of social interaction theory is the construct of the “self” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). Like meaning, the “self” is also a constructed reality, “the result of persons perceiving themselves and then developing a definition through the process of interaction” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998, p. 27). People largely act on their perceptions and how people think about themselves and others is based on their interactions (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). The highly relational nature of the principal’s role and the nature of the school environment implies that the fundamental meanings underpinning the way the principal enacts the role will be constantly reviewed and adjusted according to the actions and perceptions of other people.

The third of Blumer’s assumptions clearly connects with the evolutionary nature of the principal’s role. When meanings are made they “are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he (sic) encounters” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). This assumption is human experience being mediated by interpretation (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). All human action is meaningful therefore “has to be interpreted and understood within the context of societal practices” (Usher, 1996, p. 18). The personal meaning the principal attaches to events and phenomena associated with the role is, through an interpretative process, aligned with the meaning structures of other individuals and groups leading to a shared understanding of the objects and phenomena comprising the principal’s role.

### **4.3     *Research Methodology***

Methodology is defined as “a model, which entails theoretical principles as well as a framework that provides guidelines about how research is done in the context of a particular paradigm” (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 6). Methodology provides a rationale to orchestrate the use of particular research methods. The choice of an apposite methodology complements the unique character and purpose of the study. There are a number of methodological approaches within the interpretivist perspective which the researcher can engage. The chosen methodology must equip the researcher to complete an in-depth investigation of the interactions between the various aspects

shaping perceptions of the mission of the Catholic school and the consequent expectations of the role of the principal as well as identification of patterns emerging from the data analysis. Case study was chosen as an appropriate methodology to meet these criteria.

#### **4.3.1 Case Study**

Case study is defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2003, p. 13).

Case study has as its foundation the belief that “human systems develop a characteristic wholeness or integrity and are not simply a loose collection of traits” (Sturman, 1997, p. 61). Common understandings contained in all definitions include that what is being studied occurs “in a bounded context” where what is being studied and importantly, what will not be studied is “intrinsically bounded” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27) and therefore is both “the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning” (Stake, 2000, p. 436). The case study is “a detailed examination of one setting, or one single subject, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event” (Wellington, p. 91). In this research project, case study was chosen because of the researcher’s interest in gaining insight into new knowledge and understandings about how key stakeholders perceive the principal’s role in the light of their beliefs and perceptions about the mission of the Catholic school. Case study methodology has the potential to:

1. explore significant features of the case;
2. create plausible interpretations of what is found;
3. test the trustworthiness of these interpretations;
4. construct a worthwhile argument or story;
5. relate the argument or story to any relevant research in the literature;
6. convey convincingly to an audience this argument or story;
7. provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments.

(Bassey, 1999, p. 65)

Case study literature identifies a number of strengths and limitations associated with its use in the social sciences (Gomm, Hammersley & Foster, 2000). Five key limitations of this research methodology are cited throughout the literature.

1. The findings of case study research are not generalizable (Gomm et. al. 2000) especially when compared with other more quantitative methodologies. In response to this criticism researchers have introduced the concept of “naturalistic generalization” (Stake, 1994). Others question the appropriateness of law-like generalizations in the social sciences and argue that case studies offer “working hypotheses” (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, p. 45) which offer transferability by closely examining the similarities between source and target cases (Lincoln & Guba, 1989).
2. Knowledge collected through the case study is context-dependent which is more valuable than context-independent knowledge (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 421). An opposing view to this criticism is that “human behaviour cannot be meaningfully understood as simply the rule-governed acts found at the lowest end of the learning process” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 422). The case study offers the researcher and reader a “nuanced view of reality” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 422).
3. The case study is only suitable in the early stages of research when hypotheses are being generated and refined (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 421). This view emanates from the belief that case studies are not generalisable which has been refuted by researchers in this area (Ragin, 1992), who advance the notion that “generalizability of case studies can be increased by the strategic selection of cases” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 425).
4. The case study is open to bias and tends only to confirm the preconceived ideas of the researcher (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 421). This limitation of case study research is refuted by researchers who believe that case study research has its own rigour (Campbell, 1975) and the advantage that it can “‘close-in’ on real life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice” (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 425). Objectivity as a goal is not possible if there is interaction between the subject and

object. The notions of dependability and confirmability emerge when the writer is able to demonstrate that the “interpretations are based in context and the participants’ reality and not the researcher’s imagination” (Mullholland, 2005, p. 67).

5. It is difficult to draw general conclusions and generalizations from the findings of specific case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 421). This understanding is true more due to the nature of the realities being studied than the methodology itself. While large representative studies provide a breadth to the results, case study applications provide a wealth of depth to the study ensuring that the topic under study is not divested of its “rich ambiguity” (Nietzsche, 1974, p. 335). This thick description “gives the context of an experience, states the intentions and meanings that organize the experience, and reveals the experience as a process” (Denzin, 1994, p. 505). The paradox of the case study methodology is that “by studying the uniqueness of the particular, we come to understand the universal” (Simons, 1996, p. 231).

The strengths of case study research provide a rationale for its selection for this project. The “capacity to interpret situations rapidly and at depth and to revise interpretations in the light of experience” (Wellington, p. 91) affords the researcher the opportunity to draw a comprehensive and meaningful account of the topic under study. Case study allows the researcher to study the chosen phenomena, celebrating the “particular and the unique” (Simons, 1996, p. 227) and engage in “interpretation in context” (Cronbach, 1975, p. 123) while focusing on “holistic description and explanation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29).

This research project will use the case study as an interpretive tool. The intent of the study is to give insight into the issue of the changing nature of the role of the principal in this particular case study, rather than an application of results to cases not studied. The goal is “not the production of general conclusions” (Gomm et.al., 2000). It is because of its “particularity and ordinariness” (Stake, 2000, p. 437) that it is of intrinsic interest to the researcher. Therefore this will be an intrinsic case study. This process begins with the collection and inductive analysis of rich, descriptive data,

interpreting the results and then theorizing about the patterns and themes which emerge. Through this case study the construction of understanding will be managed through the description of perceptions and judgements made by the participants.

#### **4.4 Participants**

The case study is bounded within an Australian Catholic diocese and by the categories of groups chosen for study. It involves the study of perceptions and actions of three groups of participants, principals, employing authorities and clergy. The first group comprises serving principals of the Catholic primary schools within the chosen Diocese. The Diocese is divided into four regions loosely clustered around four major regional centres. These regions comprise schools diverse in character, size and location. The inclusion of principals from a variety of schools in the Diocese ensures a rich diversity of perspectives and experiences emanating from vastly different communities. Within this diversity of principals resides the secret and cover stories grown from experience and context. A more detailed profile of this group is provided in Table 4.2.

The second group of participants comprises representatives of employing authorities. To ensure a proportionate spread of opinions and views a group comprising people in supervisory roles higher than the principal level were selected. While most of the selected personnel have previous experience in the role of principal many have been out of the position for an extended period of time. It is expected that responses from this groups will span the sacred story but also connect with the secret and cover stories as previous experience as a principal provides a unique perspective on the perception of the principal's role.

The third group comprises clergy. These participants were selected as representing the wider clergy community who continue to have significant input into the selection and appraisal processes as well as, in some cases, the day to day running of the school. The views of this group could place significant pressure on the principal to act in the role according to a very different worldview and perceptions as to the purpose of the Catholic school. By virtue of their position the clergy perspective must be included as a significant influence on the life of the principal.



These participants were selected on the basis that their views reflect “different, even contending, perspectives” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005 p. 64) enhancing the credibility of the findings. All interviewees are knowledgeable of the context and issues underlying the research problem. Some will provide “contradictory or overlapping perceptions and nuanced understandings” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005 p. 67). This ensures that the complexity of the reality being studied is accurately portrayed.

A list of the research participants is given below.

**Table 4.2     Research participants**

Categories of participants	Surveys	Interviews	Focus Groups	Total
<b>SCHOOL</b>				
Principals	5	4	1 x 7 = 7 1 x 9 = 9	21
<b>EMPLOYING AUTHORITY</b>				
Assistants to the Director – Schools	4	2	0	4
Assistant to the Director - Mission	1	0	0	1
Assistant to the Director - Administration	1	1	0	1
<b>CLERGY</b>				
Clergy	5	3	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>32</b>

#### **4.5     Data gathering strategies**

The case study approach “has no specific methods of data collection or of analysis which are unique to it as a method of enquiry” (Bassey, 1999, p. 69). Data gathering strategies have been chosen to support the purpose and unique character of the research project. It is important that each strategy provides the vehicle to encourage the personal reflective journey from personal values and meanings to action, volitional, authentic and valued by the community. Strategies are designed to penetrate the social construction of reality as understood by each principal.

The strategies chosen for this research project are:

1. open-ended questionnaire;

2. semi-structured interviews and
3. focus group interview

Interviews were not conducted with all participants involved in the initial surveys. This was caused by a number of circumstances including unavailability of participants due to ill health, changes in employment and relocation due to family commitments.

#### **4.5.1 Open-Ended Questionnaire (Appendix B)**

The questionnaire is a widely used data gathering technique (Neuman, 2004). “In most cases, questionnaires are employed as the only method of data collection” (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 157). Given the number and spread of participants across an extended geographical area it was considered appropriate that a questionnaire would be mailed to each participant which would then be self-administered. Like all data collection strategies, the questionnaire has both advantages and limitations. A synopsis of the research into the advantages and limitations of the questionnaire is presented below:

Advantages include:

1. Questionnaires can be distributed to participants relatively cheaply, a task which is easily achieved by a single researcher.
2. Questionnaires offer anonymity to each of the participants.
3. Questionnaires can deliver high response rates given the appropriate preparation and education.
4. Questionnaires eliminate much of the risk of bias which is a significant factor for other methods when the researcher is present as the data is being collected.
5. Questionnaires provide a consistency and uniformity which other methods cannot, since all respondents receive the same questions presented in the same way (Neuman, 2004).

This method has limitations which need to be considered by the researcher. These include:

1. The possibility of low response rate.
2. The inability of the researcher to control the conditions under which the questionnaire is completed.

3. The researcher is not present to clarify questions or to respond to questions which may emerge during the questionnaire being completed. This may lead to a range of different interpretations of questions and/or incomplete surveys.
  4. The circumstances under which the questionnaire was completed is unknown to the researcher.
  5. The mail questionnaire limits the type of questions which can be included.
- (Neuman, 2004, Sarantakos, 1998)

These limitations can be addressed given the circumstances of this questionnaire and also the nature of the respondents involved. This survey is the initial method to establish parameters and identify pertinent issues. All participants were contacted prior to receiving the questionnaire, either by phone or in person, and advised of the purpose of the questionnaire. Participants were encouraged to respond within the set time.

The nature of the participants, serving principals, clergy and DCEO personnel, assumes familiarity with this genre and an appropriate level of comprehension with regard to the intent and purpose of the questions themselves.

All participants received a copy of the open-ended questionnaire. An open-ended approach was chosen to allow scope for a wide range of contextual differences between respondents. The intent of the research is to gather data which reflects the broad spectrum of perspectives. An open ended approach allows for this contingency.

#### **4.5.2 Interviews (Appendix C & D)**

The choice of the interview as a data gathering strategy connects with the assumptions embedded in the constructionist paradigm and the interpretivist theoretical perspective that reality is “an ongoing, interpretative accomplishment” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p. 16). The choice of the interview emphasises the research intent of understanding how people construct meaning to produce order in their everyday life, rather than a record of what they do (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This assumption is consistent with the rationale that “the only person who understands the

social reality in which they live is the person themselves” (Burns, 1997, p. 331). In this research, questions about beliefs and perceptions cannot be answered simply or briefly because participants need the opportunity to explain answers, give examples and describe experiences. Interviews allow for these outcomes.

The choice of the interview as a data collection strategy poses certain challenges which have to be accounted for within the research. The nature of the interview process raises the issue of validity. The most recurrent criticism levelled against interviewing as a technique for the collection of data is that interviews are “persistently slippery, unstable and ambiguous from person to person, from situation to situation, from time to time (Scheurich, 1997, p. 62). This criticism highlights the possible limitations of this strategy which also include:

1. a lack of comparability of interview data;
  2. the inadvertent omission of salient points; (Patton, 1990)
  3. possible influence of the interviewer on the response of the respondent;
  4. less anonymity afforded by this method may influence the judgements made by the interviewer;
  5. less effective in the discussion of sensitive and/or controversial issues where respondents may feel hesitant to discuss their feelings or opinions.
- (Sarantakos, 1998)

Each of these limitations emanate from a central concern regarding the concept of validity. However, validity can be assured through the application of a consistent and focused approach, “procedural objectivity” (Kerlinger, 1979, p. 264). The interview process itself is neither neutral nor value free, sometimes described as “active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated, contextually-based results” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 646). The interviewer and interviewee “form a relationship during the interview that generates ethical obligations for the interviewer” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 30). The interview as a data collection method 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, 1998, p. 177).

Arguments citing the possible influence of the interviewer on the results neglect the importance of context and life story as key elements to making sense of data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Context is pivotal to gaining understanding. Gathered data cannot be viewed in isolation from context. In response to the criticism of researcher bias is the concept of “negotiated text” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 663) or “conversational partnerships” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 79) where the text is “contextually grounded and jointly constructed by interviewer and respondent” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 663). This process minimizes the impact of the researcher’s bias as text is regularly tested for accuracy and reliability by checking with the interviewee regarding conclusions and patterns emerging from the data.

There are advantages associated with the use of the interview as a research method. These include:

1. the rapport between the interviewee and interviewer. A feature of this method is “the development of trust, collegiality and friendship between interviewer and respondent” (Sarantakos, 1998, p. 188).
2. sensitivity to the perspective of the informant;
3. responses are given in a more natural environment therefore less contrived;
4. the interviewee feels more at ease and less threatened (Burns, 1997).

There are several types of interview which are more or less suited to particular contexts. For the purposes of this study the semi-structured interview was chosen.

#### **4.5.2.1 Semi-structured interview**

The formats of unstructured interview vary widely from the semi-structured environment, a mixture of focus questions with the flexibility to allow the exploration of other relevant issues should they arise, through to the completely unstructured requiring minimal input by the interviewer. The essence of this type of interview is the “establishment of a human-to-human relation with the respondent and the desire to understand rather than explain” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 654). The role of the interviewer is neutral, establishing a “balanced rapport” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 650) being careful not to evaluate or influence the responses. This environment leads

to a greater breadth and depth of data than can be collected from other interview types.

This type of interview was chosen to suit the nature of the unique character and purpose of the study. These include:

1. The success of this research requires participants to speak “from the heart”, the secret story and not the rhetoric. Individuals may hold views at odds with the views of others. The establishment of a trusting and open relationship with each respondent is best achieved through a semi-structured environment.
2. Each respondent will have a different approach to the questions according to particular contextual circumstances, issues or concerns will vary from each respondent. The semi-structured environment allows each respondent room to articulate the background and specific circumstances contributing to their personal responses.
3. The semi-structured environment allows for the interviewer to probe particular issues for greater depth and clarity.

The nature of semi-structured interviews requires the use of judgement on the part of the interviewer to direct or re-direct discussion by probing certain issues for further clarity. There are issues which need to be considered when making judgements or assigning importance to particular groups of information. These include:

1. The data collected is “indirect” information filtered through the particular bias and worldviews of the participants. Information gathered through observation of and/or interaction with participants in a natural field setting reduces the bias.
2. The presence of the researcher adds to the bias of responses and selection of questions and information.
3. Not all of the participants are equally articulate and/or perceptive about issues being discussed which may result in a skewed interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2002).

#### **4.5.2.2 Focus group interview**

In this research study focus group interviews with three clusters of principals was used to validate and explore further the initial data collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Focus group interviews are a significant qualitative research method which allow for the “multivocality of participants’ attitudes, experiences and beliefs” (Madriz, 2003, p. 364). This strategy uses group dynamics to further understand the research questions by exploring the different perspectives held by group members in a free flowing open-ended discussion (Gall et.al., 2006). The structure chosen for this research project was informal and semi-structured with the researcher acting in a moderately non-directive role as facilitator and interviewer. The focus group interviews enriched and condensed the data collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews by “uncovering the complexity of layers that shape...collective...and life experiences” Madriz, 2003, p. 383). In this environment principals were encouraged to articulate views and rationales which may not have been forthcoming through the other methods.

The use of focus groups for this research project was particularly apposite due to the geographical nature of the research area. Group interviews ensured only minimum disruption to the participants work as the focus group interviews were scheduled to coincide with scheduled principals’ meetings. The discussion was part of the meeting agenda and presented a powerful opportunity for professional development and sharing by all participants. Groups were between 7 and 12 members which allowed for an intimacy where all participants felt comfortable in contributing, even those who held counter views to those of the group (Litoselliti, 2003). This safe, confidential environment encouraged group synergy which added new depth and insight into the discussion (Anderson, 1990).

Focus groups have a number of disadvantages which need to be considered (Patton, 1994). The influence of the researcher on the direction and nature of discussion can lead to bias and manipulation of outcomes (Fontana & Frey, 2003). The researcher can control group dynamics especially in the case where the researcher is well known to participants (Cresswell, 1998; Litoselliti, 2003). In each of the three focus groups conducted for this research the researcher was well known to each of the participants and maintained a listening role during discussion, only intervening to

redirect discussion back to the research questions when required and to ask new questions once discussion on the previous question was exhausted.

A further disadvantage involves the recording, analysis and interpretation of data from focus groups (Sarantakos, 2005). All focus group discussions were audio taped to provide an accurate record and allow for the full attention of the researcher to the conversation. The tape was transcribed to facilitate data analysis. In each of the focus groups the researcher maintained the conversation on the research questions and the purpose of the study. The collected data were pertinent to the research project and accepted as spontaneous and personal accounts of leadership in Catholic schools relevant to the person at the time.

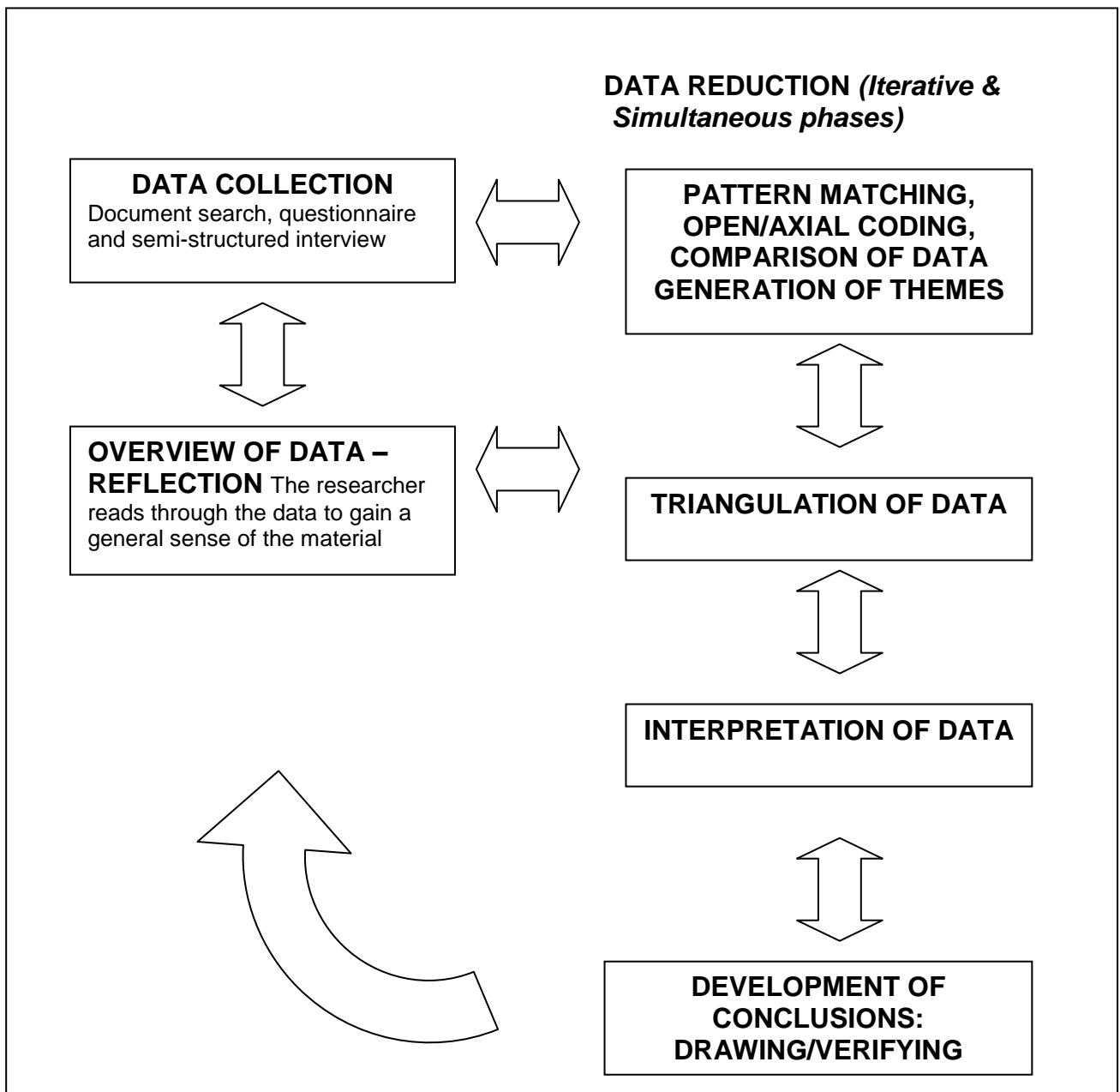
#### **4.6     *Analysis of data***

Interpretative data analysis is fundamentally the process of making meaning of people's words and actions (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) in an attempt to "describe and explain social phenomena" (Pope et. al., 2000, p. 114). It is "the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence-based interpretations that are the foundation for published reports" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 201). Data analysis can therefore be described as:

A complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive reasoning, between description and interpretation (Merriam, 1998, p. 178).

In this way data analysis may be understood as a process which includes "both simultaneous and iterative phases" (Creswell, 2002, p. 257). This process can be represented thus:





**Figure 4.1** *Process of data analysis*

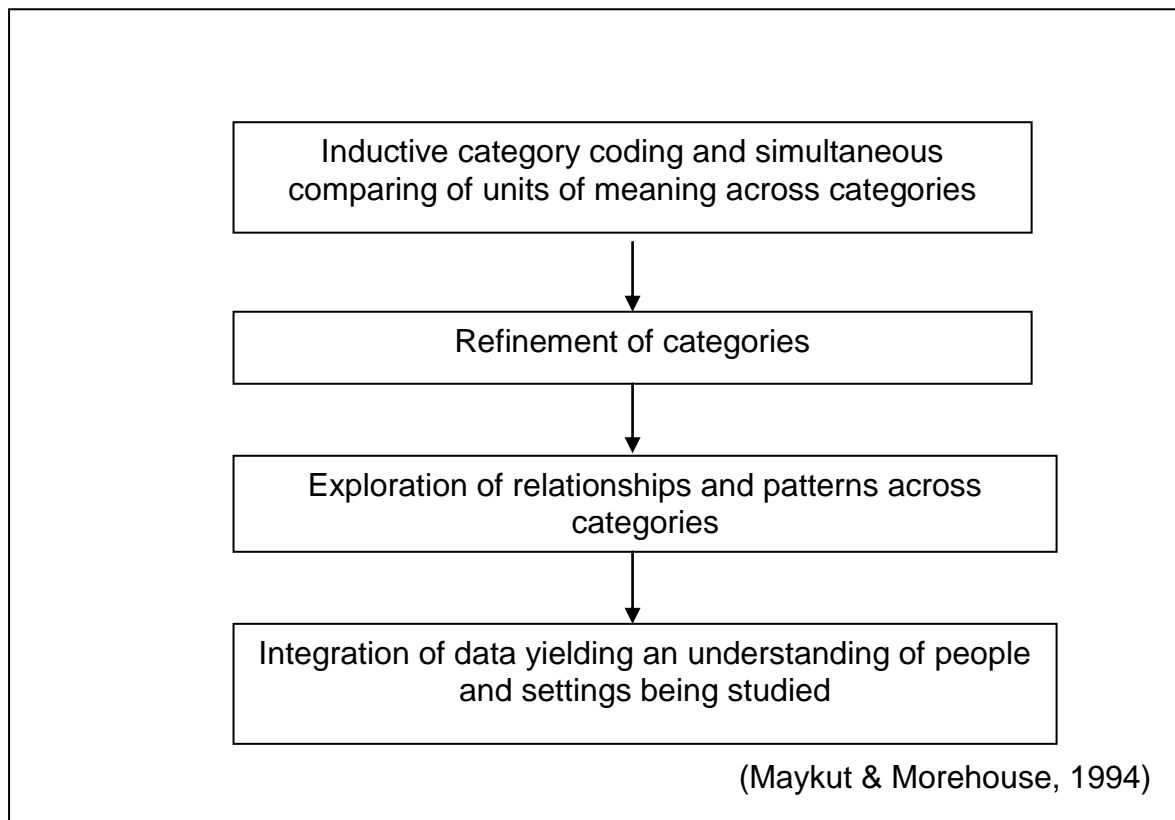
Interpretative data analysis is “eclectic” (Creswell, 1994, p. 153) and is therefore seen as problematic “because there is no recognized structure to interpretative data collection, when compared to the formal standardized instruments tested in the interpretative scientific world” (Beatty, 2000, p. 94). Regardless of the specific strategies selected, effective data analysis is supported by four key principles:

1. Analysis should show that it relied upon all the relevant evidence.
2. Analysis should take account of all major rival interpretations.

3. Analysis should address the most significant aspect(s) of the case study.
4. The investigator should be able to bring one's own prior expert knowledge to the case study (Yin, 2003).

Given the intent of the research to allow participants to respond to questions in ways which reveal their “sacred, secret and cover stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998) associated with the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal and the openness to researcher bias in this process the researcher maintained “procedural objectivity” to eliminate or minimize the impact of bias on the overall result. The absence of such a strategy to guide and direct the process is problematic for case study analysis (Yin, 1989). Data collection, analysis and interpretation are concurrent processes (Creswell, 2002) and are cyclical in nature involving the researcher moving freely between collecting data, making connections between relevant themes emerging from the data and classification of data according to certain criteria (Pope et. al., 2000). The ultimate goal is to make sense of the quantity of information gathered. Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with the researcher moving freely between data collection, data interpretation and narrative report writing (Creswell, 1994).

There are many approaches available to researchers for the analysis and interpretation of data. For the purposes of this project data was analysed by scanning and coding the data using the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which is represented in the following diagram.



**Figure 4.2** *Constant Comparative Method of data analysis and interpretation*

This strategy and modes of analysis establish validity and reliability of the analysis and interpretation of the case study data (Yin, 1989) by reducing or being aware of some of the researcher's prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This realization that "all observation is theory laden" (Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 877) and that "we are intimately a part of any understanding we have of what counts as knowledge or of any claim we make to knowledge" (Smith & Deemer, 2000, p. 877) questions how the researcher makes judgments about the data. This insight reinforces the constructionist paradigm emphasizing the notions of construction and meaning-making coming from "procedural objectivity" (Kerlinger, 1979, p. 264) rather than an objective researcher. Given that not all principals act from the same perceptions and understandings data analysis is best facilitated through an inductive process with themes and patterns of congruence derived gradually from the data. The data is not approached and analysed according to predetermined categories. The ultimate goal of data analysis is "to treat the evidence fairly, to produce compelling analytic

conclusions, and to rule out alternative interpretations” (Yin, 1989, p. 106). The process is nonmathematical, and, essentially involves the procedures of “examining, categorizing, tabulating or otherwise recombining the evidence, to address the initial propositions of a study” (Yin, 1989, p. 105).

The constant comparative method allows for the concurrent processes of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell, 2002). The analysis occurs simultaneously and iterative with data collection, data interpretation and report writing (Cresswell, 2002). This approach standardizes the analysis process allowing for comparative thinking between participant responses which enables the researcher “to do what is necessary to develop a theory more or less inductively, namely categorizing, coding, delineating categories and connecting them” (Boeije, 2002, p. 393). The process involves data reduction and interpretation, or decontextualisation and recontextualisation (Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Tesch, 1990).

The Constant Comparative Method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as it applies to this research project will be applied in three steps. Data generated through the initial questionnaire will inform the initial analysis process which will include the clustering and coding of data around significant emergent themes. Comparison of data within groups as well as between groups will occur. The themes derived from questionnaire data will provide the sifting mechanism for the large volumes of data generated from the interviews and focus groups.

In the initial step the responses of all questionnaires, interviews and focus groups are read to gain an overview of the data, a sense of the whole. Open Coding, that is coding as you go along (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), occurs with emergent phenomena, themes, issues to be emphasized and around which data can be examined and referenced selected. At this stage data about perceptions of the principal’s role and the Catholic School Mission are referenced and chunked to allow for subsequent retrieval and exploration.

An example of this process can be seen to responses to Question One. Responsibilities were listed and categorised according to a particular dimension of

leadership. The dominant dimension emerged which reinforce the dimensions identified in the literature review. These are:

E = Educational, C = Community, P = Pastoral, R = Religious. Responses from each of the three groups of respondents can be seen below.

**Table 4.3** *Stage One interpretation of responses to the role of the Catholic school principal*

ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL			
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	Data		
	PRINCIPALS	CLERGY	EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES
<b>Q1. MOST IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE?</b>	Symbolic leader (C) Cultural leader (C) Personal authenticity (P) Community builder (P) Pastoral role (P) Caring for all (P) Everything relational (P) Life-giving relationships (P) Formation of staff (P) Model of desired values (R&C) Keeper of the story (R&C) Setting direction (C) Sense of optimism (P) Witness (C) Maintain standards and credibility (C&P) Improve faith community (R) Faith role model (R) Authentic to Christian values (R) Educational leadership (E) Excellence in life-long and life-wide learning (E) Instructional and curriculum leader (E) Model and promote learning community (E) Behaviour management facilitator (E) Improve the learning and teaching of all people (E)	Visionary (C) Model (C) A living witness to Christ (R) An active member of the Catholic Church (R) A living example (R) Positive, active, faith-filled Christian (R) Lives Gospel values within school, parish and wider community (R&C) Witness to Catholic faith (R) Religious leader (R) General educational leadership (E) Leads and co-ordinates goals for Catholic education (E)	Develop relationships (P) Nurture community (P) Symbolic leader (C) Positive presence (C) Identify and articulate vision for the school (C) Articulate school's mission in action and words (P) Work with the community to develop a clear vision for the school (P) Symbolising and strengthening culture through actions and expectations (C) Promoting vision and mission of the school (C) Developing and promoting community (C) Effective relationships and communication (P) Building community based on Gospel values (C&R) Promote effective educational programs (E) Quality teaching and learning (E) Leading, supporting and promoting curriculum development (E) Ensuring relevant/holistic learning (E) Fair assessment practices (E) Improve learning for every student (E)
<b>Q2. HOW HAS THE ROLE CHANGED?</b>	Escalating administration and accountability Paperwork More administration and less instruction Accountability to diocesan	Religious to lay leadership Principal has unequal burden of faith witness Loss of witness from lay principals and staff Responsibility of religious	Greater demands on principal to be religious leader Principal must be seen a spiritual leader in school, parish and wider community

	<p>and gov't authorities Office bound Educator to administrator Role as educational leader is undervalued Changing community needs Dysfunctional families Lack of role definition Increased curriculum change Relationships are crucial Collaborative leadership is essential Changed relationship between school and parish Doing more parish work Tenuous links with parish Principal seen as official face of the Church School seen as new church Decline in clergy numbers No clergy presence in schools</p>	<p>leadership Expectation of lay principal in 'post religious' era Role of parish priest now performed by principals and DCEO</p>	<p>Increased involvement in parish life Increased levels of strategic planning Emphasis on practical aspects of role instead of bigger picture Increased expectations to act collaboratively Influence of many more outside groups Increasing complexity of role Involvement of more people Emphasis on right relationships</p>
<b>Q3. WHAT CURRENT CHALLENGES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED?</b>	<p>Administrative burden Increasing accountability, decreasing autonomy Maintain Catholic culture Paperwork Compliance with DCEO and Government Jumping through hoops Political agendas Budget constraints Inflated expectations of parish community "Professional" Catholic Catholic identity Official rhetoric Vs reality Church and school are different entities Disharmony of values Uncooperative staff</p>	<p>Maintenance of a distinct Catholic identity Keep our schools Catholic Changing family profiles Students not from traditional Catholic background Principal as the religious leader of the school Catholic staff-non-practising Percentage of non-catholic students Assist school community to be part of parish "Parallel" church Seduction of secular values Faith in Jesus Christ as a defining feature Catholic schools are not the Church Partnership between school and parish</p>	<p>Expanding management and accountability responsibilities Systemic and regulated approach Complexity of management Skill base required Effective curriculum leadership Accountability Maintaining and promoting a Catholic mission Secular model of schooling Staff development-understanding the importance of the Christian message Lack of clarity and agreement about the role</p>
<b>Q4. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE CHANGED ABOUT THE ROLE?</b>	<p>Less paperwork More time for administrative duties Employ a business manager Greater autonomy Employ a social welfare officer Clarify role</p>	<p>Principal's role is the faith development of staff More time to be the religious leader in parish and wider community Less time with administration Principals have a commitment to Church and regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist The place of the parish in family life Strong partnership with parish Priest be more highlighted</p>	<p>Additional staff to support non-educational areas eg. Finance Reduce administritivia More input to staffing processes More input in renewal/appraisal processes Principalship needs t be recognized as an official ministry of the Church and by principals.</p>

		Choice of future leaders – competence Vs faith commitment	
<b>Q5 WHAT ARE THE FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?</b>	Maintain authentic presence in lives of families Remain relevant in a pluralistic society Remain true to our ethos Gospel vs secular values Growing demands of government Government funding Changing needs of families Attracting quality teachers and leaders Educate kids in a fast changing world Schools seen as “one stop shop” Staff morale and professionalism Outside schools hours care Breakdown of family unit Welfare issues School/parish relationships Behaviour management/ parent education	Maintain strong Catholic identity School/parish relationship Recruitment of suitable staff and leaders Promotion should be via APRE [Assistant to the Principal – Religious Education] position To meet social demands and expectations To communicate message of the Church to unreceptive world Assimilate Catholic, non-Catholic and non-Christian students To accept that Catholic schools may be THE experience of Church To support parents as first teachers in the way of faith Role of principal is to work with pastor or parish team to build links with the parish Catholic schools becoming autonomous of parishes Leadership must be people of faith who practice their faith	Maintaining Catholic identity Working with non-Church affiliated families Resisting “private” and “elite” status Staying true to Christian message Recruitment of suitable staff Uncritically swallowing the agenda of others Unwittingly losing our “soul” Clarifying the purpose of Catholic schools Resist becoming “cheap private schools” Managing Gov’t accountability and system requirements Disintegration of parishes Loss of parish vision and enthusiasm Manage legal, industrial and bureaucratic demands destroying the human and relational aspects of community Managing legislative complexities

**Table 4.4 Stage One interpretation of responses to the mission of the Catholic school**

MISSION OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL			
RESEARCH QUESTIONS	Data		
	PRINCIPALS	CLERGY	EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES
<b>Q1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL?</b>	Creation of a learning community founded on Christian beliefs and values Academic excellence in a Catholic facility Maximise learning for all in a Christian environment A learning environment where learning is respected and valued Maximise potential Support and challenge students Provide inclusive, quality Catholic	Strong faith community Catholic teachings and practices are taught and modelled Teach and practise Catholic teachings Not just a school where students achieve well academically and in the sporting arena Provide and immerse students in Catholic education Witness Christian values and the Catholic story to the wider community Bring the Gospel to	Develop relationship with Jesus Pursue mission of Jesus Proclaim the Good News of God Give witness to the mission of Jesus Have a clear Catholic identity Holistic learning and teaching A caring community Provide a wholesome education Help staff, students and community develop their relationship with God

	<p>education</p> <p>Tell story of Jesus and bring about the Kingdom of God</p> <p>A holistic education</p> <p>A spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical journey</p> <p>A strong sense of community</p>	<p>students and families</p> <p>Witnessing, teaching, outreach</p> <p>Educate for faith and justice</p> <p>To share the core values of the Catholic church</p> <p>Support and nurture faith in “practical” Catholic families</p> <p>Active proselytising</p> <p>To spread the faith</p>	<p>Promote desirable qualities which inspire the actions and life decisions of students</p> <p>Help students make a positive contribution to wider society</p> <p>A balanced curriculum-striving for a socially just society</p> <p>Developing compassionate, empathetic, spiritually rich, clear thinking, courageous, knowledgeable contributors to society</p>
<p><b>Q2. POSSIBLE CONFLICTS TENSIONS – (a) STAFF</b></p>	<p>Lack of engagement with Church</p> <p>Reluctant witness to Catholic beliefs and values</p> <p>Shallow understanding of Church</p> <p>Many second generation non-churched teachers</p> <p>Little understanding of or respect for the mission and vision of the school</p> <p>Ambivalent, disinterested, even openly negative about institutional Church</p> <p>Work intensification has lessened involvement in Church oriented extra-curricular activities</p> <p>Industrial Vs pastoral understanding of role</p> <p>No commitment to community</p> <p>More unionized</p> <p>Individualism of younger generation of teachers</p> <p>Small view of the world</p>	<p>Lack of connection with wider Church community</p> <p>Anti-clerical</p> <p>No longer part of the worshipping community</p> <p>Lack of support for Catholic teachings</p> <p>Participation seen as duty rather than a willing response</p> <p>Professional Catholics</p> <p>Teachers and staff should be part of the mission of the Church</p> <p>Motivated by self interest</p> <p>Not interest in or supportive of the Catholic identity of the school</p> <p>Do not see the need to practice their faith</p>	<p>Reluctant to engage with the Church community</p> <p>Act out of an industrial model rather than a pastoral/shared wisdom model</p> <p>Decreasing knowledge of faith</p> <p>Don't see school as part of the Church</p> <p>Unwillingness to be spiritually challenged</p> <p>Lack of spiritual awareness and theological literacy</p> <p>Alienation from Church, school and diocesan leadership</p> <p>Inability to understand that the Church is a fallen, human institution</p>
<p><b>(b) PARENTS</b></p>	<p>Motivated by self-interest</p> <p>Respect values and ethos but RE is not considered important</p> <p>Alienation from Church</p> <p>Different expectations regarding ethos, curriculum, behaviour, Church</p> <p>Non-Catholic parents who don't support Catholic ethos</p> <p>Private school mentality</p>	<p>Lack of awareness of parish story</p> <p>See school apart from parish</p> <p>See enrolment in Catholic school as contact with Church</p> <p>No participation in Eucharist</p> <p>Private school mentality</p> <p>No support for liturgical celebrations</p> <p>Fail to see connection between school and parish</p>	<p>Low importance of faith life of school</p> <p>Informal. Voluntary and compliant to aggressive pursuit of personal goals</p> <p>Unrealistic expectations of schools</p> <p>Limited experience of Church and decreasing knowledge of Church</p> <p>Seeking a Christian perspective only</p> <p>The days of the “school is right” are over</p>



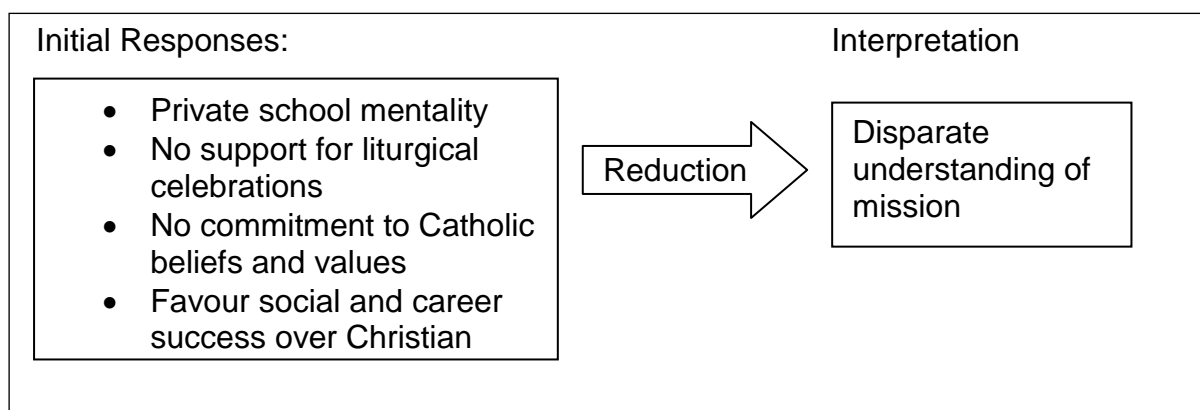
	Communication is improving	School is chosen on perception of safe and more caring environment No commitment to our beliefs and Traditions Favour social and career results over Christian education	Benevolent dictatorship of religious and clergy over parents is over
<b>(c) PRINCIPALS</b>		Good teacher/administrator vs faith filled person Emphasis on enrolment numbers Employment of teachers to fit subject needs rather than Christian values Little serious consideration given to faith life of school Motivated by self-interest, advancement Pay lip service to Catholic ethos Not interested in school/parish partnership	Difficulty in presenting Church views to an uninterested community Parish relationship depends on parish priest Unwillingness to be spiritually challenged by membership of the Catholic Church Unwillingness to see themselves as spiritual and religious leaders Alienation from Church and diocesan leadership Lack of spiritual awareness and theological literacy Inability to understand that Church is a fallen, human institution
<b>(d) CLERGY</b>	“Bums on seats at the weekend” mentality Effectiveness of schools judged on Mass attendance Unreasonable faith expectations on school and principal Little understanding of current educational issues Shared facilities Don’t understand schools Potentially the principals biggest adversary Little appreciation of the modern family Collegial interaction		Disappointed by small numbers of school families active in parish Funding issues Letting go of the concept of “parish school” Schools are a “parallel” church Fear and suspicion of lay leadership Doubting the effectiveness of Catholic schools Suspicion of liberal education Narrow, literalist approach to faith Different model of leadership
<b>(e) EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES</b>	Autonomy Ever present operational tension Systemic vs local priorities Constant curriculum/ accountability demands Supportive structures	Lack of confidence in appointment of staff Lack of sharing vital information Failure to consult on parish matters Misunderstanding of roles DCEO can unconsciously over-ride the parish Schools are “parish” in name only View education as an industry not ministry Imbalance of people and	

		physical resources	
<b>Q3. IDENTIFY CHURCH TEACHINGS WHICH ARE A CHALLENGE TO YOU</b>	Mass attendance Divinity of Christ Virgin birth Obsession with sex Divorce Homosexuality Priesthood The Risen Christ Birth control Senior Church leaders who behave badly Focus on teachings of Jesus not Church pontifications	Dogmatic teachings vs Church disciplines Dogmatic teachings – none Celibacy Lack of collegiality within College of Bishops A bigger concern – so many teachers do not know Scripture and Church teachings Exclusive teachings Divorce/remarriage Denial of communion Contraception Female priests Denial of 3 <sup>rd</sup> Rite of Reconciliation	Lifestyle and family related teachings Divorce Celibacy Female priests Church does not take needs/circumstances into account Mass attendance Virgin Mary Assumption Immaculate Conception Confusing messages by Church leaders re primacy of conscience Christology Ecclesiology
<b>Q4. WHAT ROLE DOES THE CHURCH PLAY IN THE LIVES OF FAMILIES?</b>	Few go to Church but support ideal of “live one another” Contact with Church in times of crisis Sacramental programs Impact is slight and normally negative Associate the school as the Church RE program School based liturgy and prayer Input by principal and APRE through Newsletter and other forums	Limited role. The Catholic School IS the Catholic Church Influence is highly contextual Some extra pastoral support in times of crisis and grief Sacramental programs Depends on school and parish leadership working together	No significant impact Schools assist families to grow in or return to faith Priest is the determinant to the level of involvement of families in the life of the Church Without Church there are no Catholic schools Impact of Church through schools is productive and enriching
<b>Q5. WHAT ARE YOUR INDICATORS OF A SUCCESSFUL CATHOLIC SCHOOL?</b>	Life-giving relationships Meeting welfare and aspirational needs of students Learning community Exceptional teaching staff Financial viability Catholic symbols and actions Support for families Ethos of Christian love Sense of joy, vitality and purpose Respect for the dignity of all Learning opportunities Internalised values Treatment of the most vulnerable	Sound knowledge of Jesus Christ and beliefs and teachings of the Catholic church Engagement with wider faith community Fidelity to Jesus and his Traditions Vitality of school students, staff and parents Role played within the parish and wider community Hospitality Outward expression of Christian values Appreciation for Catholic heritage and values Principals and teachers are witnesses and sponsors of faith Pride in school community Healthy relationship between staff, students,	Effective curriculum that meets needs of students Positive relationships Promotion of Gospel values Good communication Well articulated and owned vision Ethos is alive and evident Social conscience by staff and students Spiritual richness by staff and students Capacity to forgive Compassion for the poor and needy Excellent educational outcomes Collaborative, lasting, reflective, inclusive leadership High staff morale/school spirit Empowered teachers

		parents, parish personnel and parish council Principals and APRE are practical and excited in their faith School brings children to their faith	Teachers being leaders Shared sense of hope, optimism and values School contributes to the "common good" Expression of faith is open and genuine not bogus and formalized Embrace of learning Gifts of others recognized and affirmed Conflict is dealt with not hidden and ignored.
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The second stage involves seeking patterns of data to clarify and cluster germane issues. "Pattern theories" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are consistent with the inductive model of thinking (Creswell, 1994) and "represent a 'pattern' of interconnected thoughts" (Creswell, 1994). "Pattern theories are systems of ideas that inform" (Neuman, 2000, p. 38). This may involve establishing areas of agreement and disagreement, "coding categories" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 171) between principals, clergy and employing authorities regarding the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal and link these to the conceptual understandings emerging from the literature. These categories form the basis for axial coding of data to provide a clearer focus for the analysis of data. This process is described as "reduction and interpretation" (Marshall & Rossman, 1984, p.114) and "de-contextualisation" and "re-contextualisation" (Tesch, 1990, p.97).

An example of this process is clergy responses to possible conflicts with parents. Some of the initial responses were grouped as follows:



**Figure 4.5 Data reduction and interpretation process**

The third stage involves triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation. This stage involves a considerable amount of abstraction and synthesis as summaries of views and experiences are distilled and grouped. Second stage interpretations were further grouped according to specific areas of similarity. Six areas of similarity were chosen. These are:

L = Leadership, R = Role, I = Identity, M = Mission, CL = Christian life and C = Community.

These headings will be used to organize the discussion of the research findings in Chapter six.

**Table 4.5     Stage two and three interpretation of responses to the mission of the Catholic school**

<b>MISSION OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL</b>			
<b>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>	<b>Stage 2 &amp; 3 interpretation of data</b>		
	<b>PRINCIPALS</b>	<b>CLERGY</b>	<b>EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES</b>
<b>Q1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL?</b>	Learning community (M, C) Christian values (CL) Church of choice (M) Academic excellence (M) Inclusive (C) Jesus and the Kingdom (M, CL) Caring community (C) Journey (CL) Evangelisation (M,CL)	A faith community (M,C) Traditional Church teachings and practice (I) “Practical” families (C) Institutional Church Traditional Catholic education (M) Conversion/proselytizing (M)	The message of Jesus (M, CL) Open to all (C) Catholic Identity (I) Caring community (C) Holistic education (M) Relationship with God (M, CL) Faith and life connection (CL) Student focused (C,M)
<b>Q2. POSSIBLE CONFLICTS TENSIONS – STAFF</b>	“Post-ecclesial” generation (CL, M) New spirituality (CL, M) Careerism and vocation (M,I) Church alienation (CL,M) Industrial vs pastoral (M) Individualism (C) Reluctant witnesses (M,I)	Alienation from mainstream church (M,CL,I) Anti-clerical (C) Lip service to Church teachings (CL,M) Professional Catholics (CL,M,C) Self interest (C)	Alienation from church leadership (C,I) Industrial Vs pastoral model (M) “Post ecclesial” generation (CL,M) School as satellite church (I) Superficial faith background (CL,M,I)
<b>PARENTS</b>	Disparate understanding of mission (M,L) Self-interest (C) Non-institutional spirituality (M,CL) Christian values only (CL) “Parentocracy” (M,I,C)	Disparate understanding of mission (M,L) Parish estrangement (I,CL) School as satellite church (M,I) No commitment to Church teachings/practices (M,I,CL)	Disparate understanding of mission (M,L) Not seeking faith dimension (M,CL) Limited experience and knowledge of Church (M,I) Christian perspective vs Catholic education (M,I) “Parentocracy” (M,I,C)
<b>PRINCIPALS</b>		Lack authentic understanding of Mission (M,L,R)	Unwilling religious leaders (L,R) Alienation from Church

		The “professional” Catholic (L,R) Self interest (L,R,M) School is satellite church (M,I)	leadership (C,L,R) New Catholic community (C,M,CL) Superficial faith background and knowledge (R,L,M)
<b>CLERGY</b>	Disparate understanding of mission (M,L,R) No background in education (R,L) Out of touch with post-modern families (C,L) Traditional leadership style (L,C) Traditional model of Church (M,I,C)		Disparate understanding of mission (M,L,R) Suspicion of lay leadership and liberal education (L,R) Parish focused (C,L) “Parallel” church (C,M,I,CL) Lack confidence in Catholic schools (L,C) Traditional leadership style (L,C) Traditional model of Church (M,I,C)
<b>EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES</b>	Operational tension (L,R) Diocesan Vs local vision (L,M,C) Autonomy (L,R) Accountability demands (L,R)	Communication (L) Staffing (L,M) Shared facilities (C) Clarity of roles (R) Clarity of mission (M)	
<b>Q3. IDENTIFY CHURCH TEACHINGS WHICH ARE A CHALLENGE TO YOU</b>	Core and peripheral teachings (L,R,I,M) Family related teachings (I,C) Primacy of conscience (L,R)	Teachings vs disciplines (L,M) Celibacy (L) Divorce (C)	Core and peripheral teachings (L,R,I,M) Family related teachings (I,C) Primacy of conscience (L,R)
<b>Q4. WHAT ROLE DOES THE CHURCH PLAY IN THE LIVES OF FAMILIES?</b>	School is the new “church of choice” (M,L) Limited contact with Church (C) Principal is “pseudo” pastor (L,R)	School is the new “church of choice” (M,L) Ecclesial identity of Catholic schools (I,L)	School is the new “church of choice” (M,L) Determined by clergy (L,R) Schools evangelise (M,L,CL)
<b>Q5. WHAT ARE YOUR INDICATORS OF A SUCCESSFUL CATHOLIC SCHOOL?</b>	Relationships (C) Gospel values (M,I,CL) Teaching and learning (M)	Catechesis (M,I) Mass attendance (M,L) Engagement with parish (R,L)	Relationships (C) Gospel values (M,I,CL) Teaching and learning (M) Spiritual richness (CL,I)

**Table 4.6     Stage two and three interpretation of responses to the role of the principal**

<b>ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL</b>			
<b>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</b>	<b>Stage 2 &amp; 3 interpretation</b>		
	<b>PRINCIPALS</b>	<b>CLERGY</b>	<b>EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES</b>
<b>Q1. MOST IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE?</b>	Pastoral (L,R) Community (C,L,R) Educational leadership (L,R)	Spiritual (L,R) Educational leadership (L,R)	Pastoral (L,R) Community (C,L,R) Educational leadership (L,R)
<b>Q2. HOW HAS THE ROLE CHANGED?</b>	Educator to administrator (M,L,R) Expectations of spiritual leadership (L,R) Tenuous parish/school nexus (C,M,I)	Religious to lay leadership (L,R) Principal as "pseudo" pastor (L,R)	Expectations of spiritual leadership (L,R) Multiple stakeholders (C,L,M) Strategic leadership (L,R) Clarity of role (R)
<b>Q3. WHAT CURRENT CHALLENGES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED?</b>	Administration (M,R) Autonomy (M,R,C) Ecclesial identity of schools (I,M)	Catholic identity (I) "Parallel" church (M,L) Principal as religious leader (L,R)	Accountability (L,R) Catholic identity (I) Clarity of mission (M) Clarity of role (R)
<b>Q4. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE CHANGED ABOUT THE ROLE?</b>	Administrative vs educational role (R) Greater autonomy (M,R,C) Clarity of role (R)	Principal as religious leader (L,R) Greater involvement in parish (R) The "professional" Catholic (L,R)	Administrative vs educational role (R) Greater autonomy (M,R,C) Official recognition of role by Church (R)
<b>Q5 WHAT ARE THE FUTURE CHALLENGES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?</b>	Clarity of mission (M) Educational needs of students (R,M) Clarity of role (R)	Clarity of mission (M) Clarity of principal's role (R) Faith leadership (L,R)	Clarity of mission (M) Staffing (L) Ecclesial identity of schools (I) Community (C,M)

The fourth step involves selecting alternative interpretations and deviant cases to test against main interpretations. The researcher looked for alternative data which is not consistent with the identified themes and patterns, with a view to assessing its value and relevance to the findings. These alternative interpretations have been highlighted in the data.

The final step involves the development of assertions or generalizations. Identify implications, interpret and explain the findings for future practice and directions. This process is influenced by the original research problem and research questions as well as the themes which may have emerged from the data themselves. The assertions or generalizations are validated against the original transcripts and/or returning to the participants requesting feedback.

## **4.7 Legitimation**

The concept of “trustworthiness” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) confirms the focus of case study methodology as being a legitimate and justifiable research methodology. The criteria associated with “trustworthiness” are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Other researchers (Bassey, 1999), have expanded on these concepts and identified eight areas to ensure legitimation of the research process. The following processes are embedded within the research:

1. “Prolonged engagement” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985),
2. “Persistent observation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985),
3. Checking of raw data with sources which promotes validity for the reader. Other researchers name this concept as “consensual validation” (Eisner, 1991), “transferability” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), “plausibility” (Connolly and Clandinin, 1990), “believability” (Bloomfield-Jones, 1995) and “verisimilitude” (Denzin, 1994).
4. Triangulation. These are procedures which involve the use of “multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake, 2000, p. 443).
5. Systematically testing the emerging story against the analytical statements as “in naturalistic case study research, theorizing emerges” (Gillham, 2000, p. 35)
6. “Peer debriefing” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or “peer consultation” (Gillham, 2000),
7. Conveying a justification for findings which leads to the question of how the researcher knows things. The researcher questions whether findings are confirming tacit or explicit knowledge (neither is wrong) but an answer to this question challenges the researcher to constantly justify the conclusions being drawn from the collected data and
8. Maintaining an “audit trail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Other useful techniques include looking for “discrepant data” (Gillham, 2000). This involves being mindful of negative or contradictory evidence which “qualifies or complicates your emerging understanding” (Gillham, 2000, p. 29). This ensures an open-mind to all possibilities which “is basic to research integrity” (Gillham, 2000, p.

29) and reinforces the view that in all kinds of research “theory is not primary, evidence is primary” (Gillham, 2000, p. 34). The emphasis in case study is not the intent of proving anything but the hope of learning something (Flyvbjerg, 2004, p. 422).

Representativeness of data is also a process which adds to the legitimacy of the research process and therefore the research report. This concept differs to the concept of triangulation in that it seeks to ensure a proportionate spread of opinions and views and includes the concept of ‘accessibility’ (Gillham, 2000, p. 30). Representativeness in this study is achieved through the selection of all primary principals and a wide cross-section of employing authority representatives.

Case studies arise out of “a commitment to study in their own terms, rather than in terms of prior categorizations to documenting their uniqueness” (Gomm et.al., 2000). For many researchers this means that the concept of reliability is viewed more in terms of “a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations” (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998, p. 36).

#### **4.8    *Ethical issues***

Ethics in research establish the principles of right and wrong for all groups involved in the research project which ensure informed consent and the protection of participants from harm. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The main concern for educational research is that it be ethical in all of the different facets comprising the research project. “First and foremost, the researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of the informant(s) (Creswell, 1994). Research ethics can be discussed under various general headings as advanced by different authors. Three criteria which consistently emerge from the research are:

1.     respect for democracy;
2.     respect for truth; and
3.     respect for persons (Bassey, 1999).

In a democracy researchers can expect to have the freedom to conduct investigations without fear of reprisal or prejudice. Researchers are expected to



respect the truth in data collection, analysis and reporting of findings. All participants are entitled to dignity and privacy. Expectations in this regard fall under the following headings: permission to conduct the research, agreed arrangements for the transferring the ownership of the record of conversations and actions to the researcher, agreed arrangements for identifying or concealing details of participants and/or settings, and agreed arrangements for permission to publish the case report (Bassey, 1999). In specific terms the ethical concerns associated with interviewing revolve around the topics of:

1. Informed consent;
2. right to privacy; and
3. protection from harm. (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 662).

The following safeguards will be implemented to protect the rights of the informants:

1. The research objectives will be clearly articulated to the participants who will be fully aware of the topic and type of data to be collected as well as how the data will be used;
2. Protocols for either identifying or concealing individuals and settings will be clearly outlined and agreed;
3. Written permission will be required from each participant before beginning the data collection process;
4. Participants will be consulted in any decision regarding the publication of the data, results and conclusions;
5. Copies of all interview transcripts will be made available to all participants;
6. The final decision regarding anonymity rests with the informant. (Creswell, 1994).

#### **4.9 Overview of the research design**

The chosen research methodology is case study. This was chosen in order to gain and enhanced understanding of the research problem. Data relevant to the case study will be collected using the strategies of interview, questionnaire and focus group. This data will be analysed and interpreted leading to the research findings being recorded and presented. The research design is summarized in the table below.

**Table 4.7 Overview of the research design**

<b>PURPOSE: To explore understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape.</b>			
<b>Research Questions &amp; related issues</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Data Collection (2006-2007)</b>	<b>Data Analysis (2007-2009)</b>
<p>How do principals perceive the purpose of the Catholic school?</p> <p>How do principals perceive their role in achieving this purpose?</p>	<p><b>PRINCIPALS</b> Questionnaire to 5 serving primary principals Focus groups – 3 groups of current principals – primary and secondary.</p>	<p><b>Phase 1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Induction of participants</li> <li>• Begin study journal</li> </ul> <p><b>Phase 2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaire to all participants</li> </ul> <p><b>Phase 3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparation of interview guide from questionnaire data</li> <li>• Semi-structured interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of questionnaire data</li> <li>• Data referenced and chunked</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Coding of questionnaire data</li> <li>• Tentative interpretations</li> <li>• Early data analysis and clarification of emergent themes with participants.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overview of interview data</li> <li>• Data referenced and chunked</li> <li>• Tentative interpretations</li> <li>• Axial Coding of interview data</li> <li>• Early data analysis and clarification of emergent themes with participants.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validate responses with principals' focus groups</li> <li>• Validation of original transcripts</li> <li>• Axial coding of data</li> <li>• Close examination of alternative interpretations and deviant cases.</li> </ul> <p>Final validating steps with participants.</p> <p>Data analysis and synthesis</p>
<p>How do employing authorities perceive the purpose of the Catholic school?</p> <p>How do employing authorities perceive the role of the principal in achieving this purpose?</p>	<p><b>EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES</b> The four Assistants to the Director-Schools Assistant to the Director-Administration, Religious Education and Formation</p>	<p><b>Phase 4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principals' focus groups</li> </ul>	
<p>How do clergy perceive the mission of the Catholic school?</p> <p>How do clergy perceive the role of the principal in achieving this mission?</p>	<p><b>CLERGY</b> Five serving clergy within the Diocese.</p>		

## CHAPTER 5 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings generated from research exploring understandings of the purpose of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The research examines this topic from the perspectives of three key stakeholders in the life of Catholic schools, namely, principals, clergy and employing authorities. The data were collected using questionnaire responses, focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

### 5.2 The Participants – Pseudonyms

Each participant was assured anonymity. The following coding was used to protect the identity of respondents. The three groups were represented as P (principal), C (clergy) or E (employing authority). Each respondent was allocated a number within each of these groups P#1 = Principal number one. Finally each response was further coded to denote whether it came from the questionnaire response (Q), as part of an interview (I) or as part of a focus group (F). Therefore P#1/Q denotes a questionnaire response from principal number one.

**Table 5.1 Research Participants**

Categories of participants	Surveys	Interviews	Focus Groups	Total
<b>SCHOOL</b>				
Principals	5	4	1 x 7 = 7 1 x 9 = 9	21
<b>EMPLOYING AUTHORITY</b>				
Assistants to the Director – Schools	4	2	0	4
Assistant to the Director - Mission	1	0	0	1
Assistant to the Director - Administration	1	1	0	1
<b>CHURCH</b>				
Clergy	5	3	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>32</b>

### 5.3 *Structure of the presentation of the findings*

The structure employed to present the findings uses the design framework of the first data gathering strategy, the questionnaire (appendix 2). However, the presentation of findings integrates data generated from the questionnaire, focus groups, and informal interviews. Table. 5.2 illustrates the framework for presenting findings

**Table 5.2      *Overview of Presentation and Analysis of Findings of the Research***

5.1	Introduction
5.2	Participants
5.3	Structure of the presentation of Findings
5.4	Findings from Questionnaire: Q 1-4
	<b>The role of the Catholic school principal</b>
	5.4.1 Role of the Catholic school principals
	5.4.1.1 Community Leadership
	5.4.1.2 Pastoral Leadership
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	5.4.2.1 The parish-school nexus
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	5.4.3 Current challenges of the role of the Catholic principal
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5.5	Findings from Questionnaire: Q 5-7
	<b>The purpose of the Catholic school</b>
	5.5.1 Defining the purpose of the Catholic school
	5.5.1.1 Schools as learning communities
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  - The changing Catholic landscape**
  - 5.6.1 The challenge of Church teachings
    - 5.6.1.1 Church doctrine
    - 5.6.1.2 Moral and lifestyle teachings
  - 5.6.2 Impact of the Catholic church on families
    - 5.6.2.1 The importance of relationship
    - 5.6.2.2 The Catholic school as the new Church
  - 5.6.3 Influence of parents on school life
    - 5.6.3.1 From compliant volunteer to partner
    - 5.6.3.2 Parentocracy
  - 5.6.4 Future challenges to Catholic schools
    - 5.6.4.1 Clarity of mission and identity
    - 5.6.4.2 Staffing
    - 5.6.4.3 Leadership

## **5.4 Findings: Questions 1-4**

The first set of open-ended questions related to the perceived role of the principal, how the role has changed and the current challenges facing principals in their role. The questions were

- Q1. What responsibilities of the Catholic principal are most important?
- Q2. In what ways has your understanding of the roles or responsibilities of the Catholic school principal changed over the years?
- Q3. What are the current challenges which need to be addressed by the Catholic school principal?
- Q4. What would you like changed in the current role of the principal?

### **5.4.1 ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

Four consistent themes emerged from the data relating to the role of the principal. These were community, pastoral, religious and educational leadership.

#### **5.4.1.1 Community Leadership**

There was consensus on the importance of the principal as a leader of a community, a person of vision, a model of the desired qualities and values of the community and a model of personal authenticity. The principal is seen as “the keeper of the story and disseminator of it” (P#1/Q) and the architect and custodian of the school’s culture, the one who “must model and practice the school mission statement” (P#4/Q) and has “a major role in setting a direction and creating a general sense of optimism for students and staff alike” (P#11/F). The principal is seen as the person responsible for “keeping to the forefront the philosophical basis for the existence of the school” (E#3/Q) and a model of desired qualities and values by “symbolising and strengthening the culture and its values through actions and expectations” (E#4/Q). This ideal was similarly expressed as “building and maintaining the culture of the Catholic school” (E#2/Q) and “promoting the mission and vision of the school” (E#2/Q).

#### **5.4.1.2 Pastoral Leadership**

Pastoral leadership is broadly recognised as an important component of the principal’s role, however, contrasting understandings of pastoral leadership are evident. Principals expressed the pastoral aspect of their role in terms of developing and nurturing life-giving relationships and a cohesive community. The importance of “community builder” (P#3/Q) and “the pastoral role” (P#4/Q) were highlighted as being amongst their most important responsibilities. Pastoral leadership was understood by principals and employing authorities as “caring for all with compassion, respect, dignity” (P#1/Q). The role of principal encompasses “everything relational-parents/students/staff/Church” (P#1/Q) and has as one of its most important goals “to build strong, collaborative, nurturing and life-giving relationships among staff, students and parents” (P#5/Q).

Employing authorities endorsed this understanding of pastoral leadership as one of nurturing a cohesive community marked by life-giving relationships, and “developing and promoting community” (E#4/Q). Different aspects of pastoral leadership were cited as examples. These included the “establishment and maintenance of effective relationships and communication” (E#1/Q), “building positive relationships within the school and with the wider community” (E#5/Q) and “building a community based on

Gospel values” (E#2/Q) and “ensuring/developing right relationships throughout all layers of the school” (E#3/Q).

Reference to a faith dimension within this understanding of pastoral leadership is expressed in general terms as a “faith role model” (P#3/Q), with aspirations “to be authentic to Christian values” (P#2/Q) and “model discipleship” (P#2/Q). Faith leadership is understood almost entirely as the promotion of values, mostly referred to as the Gospel values, nurturing relationships and building community. These aspirations are seen as the measure of an authentic Catholic school.

The faith component must come into it as a Catholic school so improving the faith community. To improve the positive culture of the place so you walk into the place and you know it’s a vibrant, positive Catholic community. As soon as you come into a school and especially a Catholic school you should just see it by the relationships that are happening between staff members, children and adults, how we conduct ourselves towards parents and partnerships, we really must focus on that. I’m sure state schools do that but what would be the umbrella is the Gospel virtues, compassion, kindness but with a significant focus on learning and making sure that by the end of the year all people, not just the kids but parents as well as staff are better for it (P#6/F).

#### **5.4.1.3 Religious Leadership**

In contrast to this understanding clergy are explicit and measured in their understanding of pastoral leadership as faith witness and religious leadership. Clergy focussed on the ecclesial dimension of the principal’s role. The principal’s role is to be “a living witness to the person of Jesus Christ. As a consequence: to be a person whose membership of the Catholic Church is real and active. To be a living example to both staff members and the student body” (emphasis in text) (C#1/Q). Involvement in the wider church community is highlighted as an essential element of the principal’s role. The principal is expected to be “a positive, active, faith-filled Christian who lives the Gospel values within the school, parish and wider community” (C#2/Q) and similarly that the principal “.....be an effective witness to Catholic faith by lifestyle and as a person of prayer” (C#3/Q). The expectation was expressed unequivocally as “the school principal must be a religious leader in the community” (C#5/Q).

#### **5.4.1.4 Educational Leadership**

The principal is expected to provide strong educational leadership to the school community. Principals and employing authorities cite this responsibility as a key element of the role. Indicative of this understanding is the assertion that principals have a responsibility “to provide excellence in life-wide and life-long education for our students” (P#5/Q) while others were more specific in naming the role as the instructional and curriculum leader of the school. The principal’s prime responsibility in this area was seen as providing “instructional leadership focusing on what quality teaching is and model this and promote a learning community” (P#2/Q). Similarly, the principal is the “curriculum leader, (and) behaviour management facilitator” (P#3/Q). Also indicative of several responses was the assertion that:

number one, I think, it is to improve the learning and teaching of all people in the school. So you look at the teachers and make sure that impacts on the children’s learning (P#6/F).

The principal has an educational vision and leads the school community in interpreting and developing a curriculum which is responsive and open to the needs of the community. The principal’s responsibility is the “promotion of effective educational programs” (E#1/Q) and “leading, supporting and promoting curriculum development” (E#2/Q).

Educational leadership is not viewed as a key area of principal leadership by all. Clergy were less vociferous acknowledging educational leadership only in broad, general terms and the principal as one who “shows leadership in the areas of faith, guidance, compassion, human development and general education” (C#5/Q), who “leads and co-ordinates the vision and goals of Catholic Education” (C#2/Q) and “brings the school community together under common goals” (C#3/Q).

These data indicate that the role of principal is far from constant and in a dramatically changing ecclesiastical and educational landscape the role of principal must reinvent itself if the mission of a Catholic school is to be relevant.



## **5.4.2 THE CHANGING ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL**

The extent of change associated with the principal's role is evident in the diversity of themes emerging from the data. The themes confirm a lack of clarity and agreement around the principal's role. The themes mirror revolutionary shifts in fundamental understandings of learning, community, family and Catholicity impacting on the role.

### **5.4.2.1 The parish-school nexus**

The shifting relationship between parish and school is an emerging, yet largely undefined reality impacting on the principal's role. The "links with parish are far more tenuous" (P#5/Q) as "the principal rather than the parish priest is seen by many as the 'official' face of the church" (P#5/Q). Principals feel compelled "to do more parish work due to the Parish priest being shared between a number of parishes" (P#2/Q). Of particular concern for principals are the additional expectations when there is no resident parish priest or where the priest has responsibility for a number of parish communities.

Having no priest with us the parish council and the various ministries within the parish are often bouncing the question 'is that how it's supposed to be done?' where that would normally be a question to a priest and their comment is 'well you've done the study, you're the next closest' (P#15/F).

Parents and other adults associated with the school view the principal as the first port of call to resolve and manage matters which once would have been directed to parish personnel.

They don't know the clergy. In our case the clergy is itinerant and is often not there. They don't know him, they don't have a personal relationship with the priest, whereas they know the principal, they know who he is, they know his family, they know they can talk to him, they see him every afternoon and every morning and they feel comfortable talking to that person (P#14/F).

There is a "greater demand for the principal to be seen as the spiritual leader both in the school and parish as well as in the community" (E#1/Q), leading to expectations of "increased involvement (almost expected) in parish life" (E#2/Q). There is a sense that "if the principal doesn't give that (spiritual) leadership it just won't happen at all" (P#7/F).

Clergy nominate the areas of faith witness and religious leadership as significant changes to the principal's role. The transition from vowed religious or ordained leadership to lay leadership of schools has heightened these expectations. "In my experience a major change has been the move from religious Catholic school principals to lay principals" (C#5/Q). This change is linked to a perceived decline in the commitment and capacity of lay staff to competently act as witnesses to and agents of the mission of Jesus in Catholic schools.

We have lost a kind of witness that was important at a particular age in the Church. I guess we have to find that again with our lay teachers and I guess overall there's been a pretty solid basis or general commitment to the faith, but I wonder about the next generation coming through of our lay teachers. I think the present generation, the older ones, who largely were probably shaped by the religious themselves we're getting the commitment there but the generation that's following this present mature group, that's what's worrying me the most (C#2/I).

The challenge to lay leaders is significant. "In the days of "religious" teachers faith witness was shared. All too often now the principal (and a few others) may be voices crying in the wilderness, and they have to shoulder an unequal burden of witnessing to the faith" (C#1/Q), leading some clergy "to appreciate and understand the spiritual leadership component (of principals) more" (C#3/Q).

While this challenge is acknowledged uncertainty surrounding "the expectations of the 'lay principal' to continue the participation in the parish of the 'post religious' principal" (C#2/Q) remains. This is coupled with a general recognition of the reality that "many responsibilities of the former parish priests are now the roles and responsibilities of the principal and the DCEO office" (C#5/Q).

#### **5.4.2.2 Bureaucratic responsibilities**

Bureaucratic responsibilities are detracting from the ability of principals to fulfil their role as they would like. The pressure of escalating demands posed by burgeoning administrative and accountability obligations is of real concern to principals as it has the potential to undermine the essence of the principal's role. "With the added paperwork we are required to spend more time in the office and less time in classrooms. It has become a more administrative role and less instructional" (P#2/Q). Coupled with the administrative demands is a perception of increased "accountability

to diocesan and governmental authorities” (P#5/Q). There is a sense of frustration with an inability to adequately discharge their key role of providing educational leadership to the school community.

It's going to the extreme now when you hardly ever get out of your office. You have to make a conscious decision that you're going to get out and talk to kids or go see some classes or otherwise you've got x number of emails, projects, memos, the whole works that have to be attended to (P#12/F).

The focus of the role is shifting from educator to administrator as the increasing demands for accountability in almost every area of school life adds to the workload of the principal. This dilemma is one which principals now incorporate into their daily schedules.

On the days that I teach in a week, when I first started to do it last year I would come into the office at morning tea and lunch time and do all the stuff that was on my desk administratively and this year I've chosen not to do that so that on the days that I teach I do administration stuff before classroom hours and after classroom hours but I won't do it during the day because it just detracts from everything else. I think you can be an administrator and an educator at the same time. I think it's very difficult to be an educator and wear those two hats at the same time. When I was in the classroom and trying to handle administration at the same time I wasn't doing either job justice either so then I said to the secretary anything that comes through I'll deal with it after hours I'm not dealing with it during class time and I think that's been a really valuable decision to make. Very beneficial to me and to the kids I have to look after on that day (P#13/F).

As a result of these expectations the training and expertise of the principal as the key educational leader in the school community is under-utilised and under valued.

I feel that a lot of the administrative roles and tasks that we're doing, they're things that as a principal you don't have to be in the field of education to do. I think that's the loading that's coming in now, we don't have to have done all those years of study in education to do those same tasks (P#15/F).

#### **5.4.2.3 Community responsibilities**

The inherent tension in balancing the administrative and educative demands of the role is further exacerbated by the perception of the school as a panacea for all problems encountered by the school community. This exposes the imprecise boundaries of the principal's role which is often interpreted as being all things to all people.

What professional can you get to see on no notice? The only professional you can get to and see is the school principal. You don't need an appointment, you can just walk in and there's an expectation there that they will do something about your problem and you will end up with anything from a school based problem, a house based problem, a family based problem or a work based problem because they have no-one else to talk to (P#14/F).

Expectations on the principal to respond to and assume responsibility for the outcomes of dysfunctional family life and societal ills which once may have been addressed by other agencies or by the family itself is indicative of the problematic nature of defining the principal's role. "I think the needs of families, children and staff have changed substantially, as well as the demands of curriculum and DCEO. With this has come a need to revise some of the foci of the role of principal" (P#1/Q). Burgeoning welfare issues have added to the tight constraints on the principal's time and priorities.

All of these challenges together support the reality of a "lack of clarity and agreement about the role and the expectations that surround it" (E#4/Q). This is a real source of considerable tension and proposed as a challenge which needs to be addressed.

I think the lack of clarity exists at all levels, I don't think that any of the players would necessarily be able to give a reasonably full exposition of what the role is and particularly I don't think that different people, different roles would actually define it similarly. How has this happened? Well I think it's happened partly because in the past when we had religious principals twenty five years ago the Church was much more interested and much clearer. I think it's partly due to the fact that Church and employing authorities aren't clear enough about how schools are supposed to be part of the Church and therefore principals aren't understanding what their expectations are, so yea I think it's kind of becoming visible without people realising it. Perhaps so that one of the things that strikes me is that it seems to be quite logical if the Catholic school is part of the mission of the Church then it must be rooted in Church and the person in charge, the principal, must understand what that looks like and be able to express that and I think, well my view is, that isn't what you find today (E#4/I).

#### **5.4.2.4 Collaborative Leadership**

The practical involvement of the principal in every aspect of the life of the school community is no longer possible, if it ever was. Principals are expected to act strategically and encourage community involvement through collaborative leadership. The "increased levels of strategic planning required" (E#2/Q) adds to the complexity of the role. The paucity of adequate support structures and necessary formation in

leadership expertise, and corresponding community education and agreement on the principal's role, leads to a temptation that principals "emphasise the practical aspects of the role instead of considering the 'bigger picture' items" (E#5/Q).

Increasing expectations that principals act collaboratively, and the escalating number of groups seeking to influence the outcomes of schools have had considerable impact on the way the principal's role is enacted. "The increasing complexity of the role requires the involvement of more people and their expertise" (E#5/Q). The strong emphasis on the principal's responsibility to "ensure/develop right relationships throughout all layers of the school" (E#3/Q) coupled with "collaboratively supporting ... (the school community) through good governance and administration" (E#4/Q) requires an appreciable investment of time and energy. The goal of "collaborative decision making" (E#6/Q) and "the necessity to develop team" (E#6/Q) sit comfortably within a preferred leadership style based on espoused principles of partnership, co-responsibility and transparent decision making.

### **5.4.3 CURRENT CHALLENGES TO THE ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

Two salient themes emerge from an analysis of the data. The most consistent theme relates to the escalating administrative and accountability burden felt by principals coupled with diminishing autonomy to act locally. The second theme is the challenge to maintain a Catholic culture and identity against "forces driving schools to a secularist model of schooling" (E#4/Q).

#### **5.4.3.1 Accountability and lack of autonomy**

Challenges presented by administrative and accountability mirrored responses to the changed understanding of the role of principal. This is summarised succinctly in these emphatic remarks: "Paperwork! We are not the captain of our own ship. We are accountable for so many grants and this adds to the paperwork" (P#2/Q), and similarly "compliance with DCEO and Government makes for lots of paperwork" (P#4/Q). Furthermore the frustration of an environment where school efficacy is measured by test scores and league tables presents the challenge of "'jumping through hoops' to satisfy (short term) political agendas" (P#5/Q).

These changes encourage a centralised and uniform approach to education and the lack of autonomy at school level is keenly felt by principals. The aspiration of “being able to remain ‘local’ versus DCEO interference” (P#1/Q) and lamenting “budgeting constraints and the associated lack of autonomy at a school level” (P#3/Q) were indicative of significant current challenges.

This challenge presented by local versus systemic priorities is validated by employing authorities. Coping with expanding management and accountability responsibilities, and “forces driving a systemic and regulated approach to the organisation and accountabilities of schools” (E#4/Q) is a real challenge to principals, adding significantly to the “complexity of management and the skill base required” (E#1/Q). Principals feel less confident in coping “with the expanding ‘management’ responsibilities” (E#1/Q) while questioning “how do or can principals still be effective curriculum leaders?” (E#1/Q).

#### **5.4.3.2 Surrogate pastor**

The default expectation that the principal assume responsibilities left unattended by the pastor and inflated expectations of the parish community that the principal be involved in all aspects of parish life places strain on the relationship between principals and the wider parish community. The principal is commonly viewed as the surrogate pastor within the community. Additional responsibilities and expectations associated with this perception detract from what principals consider to be the core dimensions of their role and elevate responsibilities in which principals have little or no expertise or training. This leads to a sense of frustration.

The parish priest now has a limited role because basically they’ve probably got seven to eight schools now that they see so the role and the religious are becoming more and more scarce so someone else has to step-up to the plate and I’m seeing it more and more that the Catholic school is taking the place of the religious educator for the parish. So whether we like it or not, I believe that people are looking to the principal for spiritual leadership when I think as a Catholic school for a principal it’s one of service and sometimes I think we forget that we focus on learning and are so busy with all the changes that that is certainly a challenge for all principals that we can’t neglect the spiritual side (P#6/F).

There is a keen sense amongst principals of a closer scrutiny by parish personnel and an expectation that the principal’s role encompass strong involvement in parish

affairs. Some principals speak of a “professional” Catholic mindset where involvement is perfunctory and token rather than a willing and generous contribution.

There is a group in the parish Council who felt that the principal of the school must be seen to be very much part of the parish and I know that I am, probably not because I know that I have to be but because I want to be, that’s part of my faith. But I think that the expectation is clear, they tell me when I haven’t been to Mass, but I know they count, they know when you have been and when you haven’t been. And members of the staff feel the same. I know that when there’s a good number of staff at Mass some little old ladies who always sit up the front come along and say ‘nice to see all the staff at Mass tonight’ (P#13/F).

Moreover, the perception of a professional Catholic mindset is similarly reflected by clergy who indicate concerns about the motivation influencing the principal’s involvement in parish life. These conflicting perceptions confirm two very different mindsets and the consequent expectations generated by each.

Yea I suppose I’ve had the experience in one or two cases where people have been part of the parish and just seem to me to be somewhat perfunctory rather than it’s absorbed into their life lived and its obviously part of what families do or part of what people do so I think it can at times and I suppose I’ve had that experience in a couple of instances where it just felt like we’re going through hoops here which I thought I would never ever be saying about a principal of a Catholic school but I have said it in recent times (C#3/I).

#### **5.4.3.3 Catholic identity**

Maintaining authentic Catholic culture and identity in a community with diminishing allegiance to mainstream Church is perceived by all groups as a consistent challenge for principals. This is immediately evident in the perceived lacuna between “official” rhetoric and the reality of the contemporary school community. There is a sense that “no one espouses the rhetorical Catholic crap – staff or families” (P#1/Q), compounding the challenge of “maintaining life-giving links between Catholic school and institutional church (at both parish and hierarchical levels) as church and school are now seen as different entities by many” (P#5/Q). The disharmony of values within the school community itself presents a challenge of “trying to run an inclusive school when some parents do not value inclusion” (P#4/Q), and “running a Catholic school when so few staff or families are familiar with Catholic culture” (P#4/Q).

These challenges are indicative of “the growing dichotomy between trying to live gospel values and the values implicit/explicit in our global/technological/secular/

media-driven society" (P#5/Q). "Forces driving schools to a secularist model of schooling" (E#4/Q) challenge the principal's responsibility to "maintain and promote the Mission of the Catholic school which is part of the Mission of the Church" (E#2/Q). The threat of the Catholic school being seduced by secular values presents a real challenge for principals.

I have no doubt that Catholic schools compete more than favourably with other State and Systemic Schools: but what more can be done so that faith in the person of Jesus Christ will be a 'defining feature' of the Catholic Schools' staff and students!? (C#1/Q).

Maintaining a distinct Catholic culture and identity is nominated by clergy as the foremost challenge for principals. The changing Catholic landscape begs the question "how to keep our schools 'Catholic'? when changing parent or family profiles of the Catholic school means much of the student body is no longer from a traditional Catholic background" (C#3/Q) and highlights the real prospect that the principal, by default, be seen as the religious leader of the community. Typical of the challenges for principals is to maintain:

the Catholic nature of the school, the demands of families, the balancing of his or her use of family time and work, percentage of Catholic and non-Catholic students, Catholic staff who do not practise their faith, staff who are not Catholic and unable to live with Catholic ethos, how to include and welcome for students and families school community, how to assist and teach students and staff to promote justice, to assist the school community to be part of a wider parish community and not a parallel separate community, to be a religious leader. This leadership is one of peer membership with the parish priests, parish team and school leadership (C#5/Q).

The cautionary reference to the possibility of the school community being seen as "a parallel community" (C#5/Q) is an interesting observation. The reality that "Catholic schools for most families is their experience of God and Church " (C#4/Q) serves to reinforce the necessity for "partnership between school and parish" (C#4/Q) and the view by clergy that the school is a firmly entrenched agency of the parish rather than of the Church.

#### **5.4.3.4 Changing staff profile**

The changing nature of families making up the Catholic school community are closely mirrored in the staff profile. The contribution of staff to an effective and authentic response to the mission of the Catholic school is widely recognised, however the



responsibility for the formation and development of staff in matters of Catholic faith falls increasingly on the principal. “The main challenge is to develop in STAFF the understanding of the importance of the Christian message-that, to be true agents of the Catholic school, staff members must continually challenge themselves with the Christ-like example”(emphasis in text) (E#3/Q). Clergy see the principal as the religious leader within the school community, whereas principals are reluctant to accept this responsibility by default. For some clergy “the primary role of the principal is the faith development of the staff” (C#1/Q) with the expectation that the principal spend “less time with administration – more quality time for individual staff and students and more time to be a religious leader in parish and wider community” (C#5/Q).

#### **5.4.4 DESIRED CHANGES TO THE ROLE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

Responses closely reflect the challenges identified in the previous question. Changes put forward by principals were almost exclusively responses to excessive demands of management and accountability. The consequence of more time being devoted to managerial and administrative tasks requires a serious reallocation of resources enabling the principal to provide educational leadership to the school community.

##### **5.4.4.1 Undervaluing of educational leadership**

Principals are concerned that the educational leadership component of their role is being undermined by an overwhelming number of administrative tasks. More autonomy to act at the local school level is cited as an appropriate response to this challenge. Schools “should be more autonomous in local issues, should be recognised as experts by DCEO, should be equal-primary and secondary, should be equal-DCEO staff who are presumed to ‘know stuff’!!” (P#1/Q). Coupled with this are the burgeoning expectations on schools to respond appropriately to the myriad of social issues and needs of families.

Schools need a social welfare officer. This has been the biggest change in schools-welfare issues! Welfare issues take up a significant part of my time and it is ongoing. A small proportion of the school community takes a large proportion of my time. A welfare officer could take my place in this area (P#2/Q).

Similar concerns were expressed by employing authorities and clergy endorsing changes in management structures, including increased autonomy to relieve the administrative and system demands by employing “a business manager or well paid personal confidential secretary to take over some of the non-educational or routine tasks (P#5/Q). The goal of freeing-up the principal to fulfil other duties could be progressed in a number of ways. “My idea would be to allow principals (all would need a generic skill base) to use their skills and have a support team that would support areas of ‘weakness’ eg Bursar in financial matters” (E#1/Q) and “greater administrative expertise (non-teaching staff) would be required for most schools. The principal would still authorize/have responsibility for all matters, but would have less need to be the person burdened with such tasks. (eg Financial expertise, project management, Gov’t forms) (E#3/Q). Principals feel caught in a dichotomy of having all responsibility for outcomes with limited control or influence over the tools and resources which allow discretion and innovation in educational leadership. The aspiration that “greater autonomy be given to schools in relation to accessing Government grants/funding” (E#2/Q) and that “principals should have more say in staffing their schools and in the processes for renewals, appraisals etc.” (E#5/Q) are indicative of the desired changes in management structures.

#### **5.4.4.2 Principalship as ministry**

Shifting perceptions and expectations of the principal’s role expose the need for a clearer definition of the status of the principal’s role within the ministry of the Church. Data confirm a poorly defined role and a lack of collegial goodwill between principals and clergy as major impediments to consensus about a way forward for Catholic schools. The role “needs to be recognised by church as an official ministry and by principals themselves and by others as a spiritual role” (E#4/Q). Such status would add certainty and authority, and agreed recognition of the scope of the role. For some this is currently measured in terms of “a commitment to Church and regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist as part of their leadership role” including “the place of the parish in their family life ..... as well” (C#3/Q). Others interpret the spiritual dimension of the role differently emphasising the “mission of Jesus, that is, to proclaim in the world the good news of God for all” (E#4Q).

This fundamental divergence of opinion has implications for leadership succession and the selection and appointment criteria applying to leadership positions. This raises the dilemma of “selection committees in future being forced to choose between a good teacher/administrator with little faith commitment, and a person who is less competent professionally but has great faith?! Not much of a choice if Catholic schools are to survive” (C#1/Q).

#### 5.4.5 Theme A: Role of the Principal -Summary

Each group responded to questions pertinent to the role of the principal. Analysis of the resultant data revealed a number of themes which will be explored further in the next chapter. A summary of these emergent themes is presented in the following table.

**Table 5.3 Summary of emergent themes from responses to the role of the Catholic school principal**

<b>THEME A - ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL</b>			
<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>Themes</b>		
	<b>PRINCIPALS</b>	<b>CLERGY</b>	<b>EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES</b>
<b>Q1. MOST IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE?</b>	Pastoral, community and educational leadership	Faith role model Religious leadership	Pastoral, community and educational leadership
<b>Q2. HOW HAS THE ROLE CHANGED?</b>	Educator to administrator Nature of school communities	Religious to lay leadership	Spiritual leadership Multiple stakeholders Strategic dimension Clarity of role
<b>Q3. WHAT CURRENT CHALLENGES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED?</b>	Administration, Autonomy Identity	Identity	Accountability Identity
<b>Q4. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE CHANGED ABOUT THE ROLE?</b>	Administrative Vs Educational role Greater autonomy Clearer definition of role	Principal as religious leader Parish involvement The “professional” Catholic	Administrative Vs Educational role Greater autonomy Official recognition of role by Church

## 5.6 Findings: Questions 5-7

The second set of open-ended questions relate to the purpose of the Catholic school and the identification of the challenges presented by ecclesial, social and educational changes. The questions were:

- Q5. What are you trying to achieve in your Catholic school?
- Q6. As principal, what are the possible conflicts/tensions between your understanding of the purpose of the Catholic school and the following stakeholders: Parents, Clergy, Principals, Diocesan Catholic Education Office?
- Q7. What are your indicators of a successful Catholic school?

### **5.6.1 DEFINING THE PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

The data confirm the need to re-imagine the role of the principal in the light of revolutionary changes in social, educational and ecclesial landscapes. Of similar urgency is the need to re-examine the mission of Catholic schools and critique current practices which presents the message of Jesus in a way which connects cogently with the realities of modern families. The data confirm differences in understandings and expectations in defining the mission of the Catholic school.

#### **5.6.1.1 Schools as learning communities**

According to principals the creation of a “learning community” guided by and founded upon Christian values is the primary purpose of the Catholic school. Principals aspire to “create a wonderful learning community that has the teachings of Christ guiding it”. (P#2/Q) This position reinforces a preference for the educational nature of the role, not limited to the academic but rather embracing a holistic understanding of education as a journey towards self-actualisation.

This encompasses “a spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical journey for all” (P#3/Q), the pursuit of “academic excellence in a Catholic facility ....” (P#1/Q) and promoting “learning for all in a caring Christian environment”. (P#2/Q) Similar ambitions aim at providing “...a learning environment where everyone is respected and where learning is respected and valued” (P#4/Q) in “a challenging yet supportive environment which maximises the potential for excellence in teaching and learning embedded in a values laden education that will guide and enable our students to develop into people filled with faith, hope, love and joyfulness” (P#5/Q).

This view is endorsed by employing authorities who understand the purpose of the Catholic school in terms of creating a holistic learning environment where all members are encouraged to develop in all aspects of humanity. Catholic schools explicitly encourage a relationship with Jesus and the expression of the practical expression of that relationship through active witness and outreach. In broad terms “the Mission of Jesus is the mission of the Catholic school” (E#1/Q) which is “to proclaim in the world the good news of God for all” (E#4/Q).

#### **5.6.1.2 Embracing diversity**

A desire to embrace diversity and being open to all who seek the values of the Catholic school is a defining feature of the Catholic school. Schools provide “witness to the message of Jesus. A place for holistic teaching and learning and offering a caring community open to all seeking our values” (E#6/Q) with the desire to “...provide a wholesome education to all who seek its values based on the Gospel values” (E#2/Q). Relationship rather than conversion is the primary focus of the school, “to help its staff, students and community to develop their relationship with their God”. (E#5/Q) There is an aspiration for:

inclusive, quality, Catholic education. Inclusive to everyone, open to all who accept and who are willing to work within the school environment or community. Quality – trying to provide the very best opportunities we can so that children can reach their potential, whatever that potential means, so a very individualistic approach. Catholic – telling the story of Jesus Christ and trying to bring about the kingdom of God now for these kids so that they will have a faith commitment or a faith story that they will, be able to connect to (P#9/F).

The purpose of the school community is to model and promote desirable qualities which inspire the actions and life decisions of students and to encourage students to lead lives of active witness to the Gospel values. Stated simply, “a Catholic school exists to help its students to learn what they need to live meaningful lives that make a positive contribution to the wider society” (E#5/Q). The effectiveness of education provided by the school is seen in student outcomes rather than inputs. The “provision of a balanced curriculum (academic, social, physical, emotional, spiritual) enables students to be active participants striving for a socially just society” (E#1/Q). The school “play(s) a significant role in developing compassionate, empathetic, spiritually rich, clear thinking, articulate, courageous, knowledgeable contributors to society” (E#3/Q).

The communal nature of Catholic schools is acknowledged and highlighted as a central defining feature of the school's mission. Principals promote community as a distinctive feature of any authentic Catholic school.

I think I'd want to say I want to grow good Christian people, that's staff and students and that kids leave our schools with a strong sense of community and I think that's one of the key differences between us and independent schools where independent schools have a strong sense of personal achievement whereas if I can add to that the idea of community and involvement with other people, and that's certainly the indication you get when you talk to people, the Catholic school people form community much easier (P#10/F).

There is also recognition by principals and employing authorities that schools are diverse communities of contested meaning and ethos. The stance taken by the principal is often open to challenge and resistance. This contested understanding of the purpose of the Catholic schools in a pluralistic community is an ever-present dilemma for principals.

The purpose of the Catholic school is to educate people in the Gospel and the ways of faith. Now if you ask other people what is the purpose of the Catholic school some would say learning and around that so I think there are differences in what the Catholic church sees as the purpose of the purpose of the Catholic school and what the average Catholic school principal would see as the purpose (P#8/F).

#### **5.6.1.3 Faith community**

The creation of a faith community where Catholic teachings and practices are taught and modelled is seen by clergy as the primary purpose of the Catholic school. Academic, sporting, cultural achievements were seen as important only in so far as they occur within a strong faith community.

The Catholic school will endeavour to teach and practice (Catholic) teachings which we believe are Jesus' gifts to his disciples. A Catholic school should be a faith community; not just a school where the students achieve well academically and in sporting arenas and are seen to preserve acceptable ethical standards of behaviour (emphasis in text) (C#1/Q).

The school leadership has a duty "to provide and immerse students in Catholic education. To witness Christian values and the Catholic story to the wider community" (C#2/Q) and "to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lives of students and their families – by witnessing, teaching, outreach. To educate for faith and

justice. To bring values of Jesus Christ to general learning – maths, science, art etc. (C#5/Q).

The inclusive nature of Catholic school communities is challenged as presenting a threat to the school's primary role "to support and nurture the faith of our children in 'practical' Catholic families" (C#3/Q). Principals and employing authorities support any endeavour "to share the core values and beliefs of the Catholic Church" (C#3/I) with the community, however, both groups react strongly against any understanding of mission which promotes active proselytising. An opposing view is that "the Catholic religion is a proselytising religion (like Islam) to spread faith is also the purpose of Catholic schools" (C#5/Q).

## **5.6.2 POSSIBLE CONFLICTS/TENSIONS WITH STAFF**

Two key issues involving staff invite further exploration. The first is the perceived diminished affiliation with the wider Church community and ambivalence to Church teaching by the majority of staff and secondly, the way in which the role of teacher in a Catholic school is perceived by staff.

### **5.6.2.1 Diminished engagement with Church**

Principals were unanimous in their belief that staff must witness the beliefs and values of the Catholic faith. Concerns centre around a perceived lack of staff commitment to "some of the more traditional priorities – regular prayer, liturgy and Mass. Understanding of Church - many second generation non-churched teachers and completely uneducated support staff. Visible actions-Mass attendance, attendance at special events" (P#1Q). Clergy were very clear in their expectation that staff should be active members of the parish worshipping community. This is a source of tension for clergy to the point where one clergy member believes staff to be "anti-clerical" (C#4/Q). The most immediate concern is for the integrity of the Religious Education program and the crucial role of staff members in providing the practical expression of Catholic beliefs and values in an active faith community.

Lack of engagement with the local parish community was seen as indicative of an overall decline in allegiances and commitment to Church teachings.

The fact that so many school staff no longer see any reason to be part of the worshipping community is a real concern. Celebration of Eucharist is (should be) a priority for Catholic Christians – “the Eucharist is Summit and Source”!!! One wonders sometimes other ‘Catholic’ teachings - dogmatic and moral - some staff members could not and would not support (C#1/Q).

Principals perceive inconsistency between their expectations and the practice of a significant proportion of staff. Staff have “little understanding of or respect for the Mission and Vision Statement in the School context” (P#3/Q) and furthermore “staff are ambivalent/disinterested/even openly negative about institutional church” (P#5/Q). The additional workload experienced by teaching staff results in a reluctance or inability of staff to be involved in extra-curricular activities which provide active witness to the schools beliefs and values. In particular “work intensification has lessened the involvement of staff in extra-curricular activities many of which were Church orientated” (P#4/Q).

While the diminished connection to and engagement with the wider church community was most evident at parish level, general awareness of and familiarity with matters of faith is of concern. There is an “expectation that staff are active members of the parish/Church” (E#2/Q), and coupled with that is a “decreasing knowledge in younger staff of the Catholic faith” (E#2/Q) and a failure to see “that the school is an important aspect of the Church community” (E#2/Q). Staff “are unwilling to be spiritually challenged by their membership of a Catholic school community. Staff in general lack spiritual awareness and theological literacy (and are) alienated from church, and from school and diocesan leadership” (E#4/Q) and have an “inability to understand and appreciate how the church is a fallen, human institution” (E#4/Q).

#### **5.6.2.2 Understanding of teaching role**

All groups perceived that staff members have a minimalist understanding of their role and do not view their role as a vocation and calling. Teachers “see teaching in a Catholic school as just a paid job, with no commitment to the community” (P#5/Q) leading to an industrial mindset where “...staff have become more unionized” (P#1/Q). There is a clear distinction between the “industrial Vs pastoral/shared wisdom” (E#1/Q) view of teaching. The “industrial mentality that sees their role as just a job and not an apostolate” (E#4/Q) is a source of tension for all groups.



According to clergy staff view their participation as a duty, a requirement of the role, rather than as willing participants in the mission of the church indicative of a “professional Catholic” mentality where “the willingness (as opposed to duty) of the staff to see themselves as participants of the parish” (C#2/Q) is challenged.

Clergy tend to see the teachers and staff of the Catholic school as being part of the mission of the Church. In contrast, many staff see their roles as a “job” or employment or a career, and the faith dimension may not be very important (C#3/Q).

This raises questions about the definition of a person’s Catholicism. Catholicity is measured on the basis of externals. Staff are seen as motivated by “self-interest” and are “only there for the pay and conditions” and “not interested or supportive of the Catholic identity of the school” (C#4/Q). This leads to tension “.....when staff fail to see the purpose of the parish and even the parish school – when the majority do not see the need to practise their faith” (C#5/Q).

Frustration with this pervasive mindset is clearly evident, albeit reflective of the wider societal lack of commitment to community values.

I think our society is that selfish, that it’s about me that comes through society much more freely these days, particularly our younger teachers coming through and making sure you know what can I get out of this? I want to make sure I get all my entitlements and all the rest of it (P#18/F).

This is much more than generational differences. It signals the emergence of a new paradigm challenging current beliefs, values and practices. Leadership is the critical ingredient in ensuring a cohesive and engaged community where staff play a crucial role. Principals do not underestimate the gravity of this challenge.

One of our challenges as leaders is always to remind staff of the bigger picture, it’s not just about science, it’s not just about Maths, PE or sport and it’s part of the telling the story of what the school is and what Catholic Education is, so you have a frustration but I think it’s just part of our role that we actually have to tell the story of life and bring it to the big picture (P#10/F).

### **5.6.3 POSSIBLE CONFLICT/TENSION WITH PARENTS**

Parents' role within the life of the school has changed dramatically. The role has changed from compliant volunteer to critical and informed partner in the Catholic Education enterprise. However, disparate expectations and understandings of the mission of the Catholic school held by some parents challenges the school to be very clear about its ethos and values. This challenge is present across a number of different areas including the parish/school relationship.

#### **5.6.3.1 Disparate expectations and understandings of mission**

For many parents, the religious or spiritual dimension of the life and identity of the school is often a secondary consideration against the more immediate and expedient outcomes of competitive individual pursuits. "I think they have a viewpoint that education in Catholic schools is a business and they're paying so they have an increased say in the running of the school" (P#16/F). This is symptomatic of a "societal self-centredness" reflected in "a growing number of parents who will do something for the school only if they see their own child being obviously advantaged and who are not interested in the welfare of the entire school if their child isn't part of the group being obviously advantaged by their help" (P#7/F).

It is thought that "parents may send their children to Catholic Schools for a variety of reasons but there are not a large number who put a high importance on their relationship with God" (E#5/Q). Parents' limited experience of Church leads to a situation where "many are seeking a Christian perspective while others are seeking 'private' schooling" (E#1/Q) paying lip service to "the fundamental aim of a Catholic School in developing people whose prime objective is to contribute to society rather than take what they can from it (emphasis in text) (E#3/Q). There is an active "consumer mentality that sees the school as a service provider to meet their personal needs and demands, rather than as a community with mutual needs and obligations" (E#4/Q). The problem is that "many parents have a private school mentality and I suppose it's up to our role to educate them that this is a Catholic school, not a private school" (P#10/F).

The profile of current school community is considerably different to any other time. “The principal has the challenge of presenting Church teachings and views to a variety of audiences which have a growing scepticism of traditional Church teachings and hierarchy” (E#1/Q).

The ecclesial identity of the Catholic school is clearly rejected by parents. There is widespread “alienation from institutional religion” (E#4/Q). Principals are challenged to articulate the mission of the Catholic school in ways which maintain an engagement with the community without alienating further the vast majority of families. Parents have “difficulty in seeing that what attracted them to the school is a manifestation of the Gospel message” (E#4/Q). The principal is challenged to articulate a vision which assists the community recognise “the connection between the identity and purpose to which the school aspires and the Gospel message” (E#4/Q). The challenge is to maintain:

the catholicity/Christianity of the school community when an increasing number of parents, while respecting the values and ethos of the school, put religious education way down on the list of priorities, are unchurched and their children are often uninitiated into a religious community (P#5/Q).

#### **5.6.3.2 Parish – school connection**

All groups believe that parents perceive the Catholic school as a distinct identity to the parish. Parental perceptions of the role of the school within the parish and “the lack of awareness of the parish school story” (C#2/Q) comprise the reality of school life. “Many parents now see the enrolment of their children in a Catholic school as their part in the Church and don’t see the need for being part of the wider parish or Church, especially through participating in the Sunday Eucharist” (C#3/Q). Parents “see the school as a “private” school, may not be interested in the Catholic ethos of the school (and) not prepared to support liturgical celebrations”. (C#4/Q). The reality is that

many parents fail to see the connection between parish and school or the Catholic faith and school. The school is about good education for their children and good discipline, a perceived safer, more caring environment – all of these latter values are good and parents need to seek them out. However, the purpose of the Catholic School provides these and much more. The more is often not seen or desired (C#5/Q).

There is a sense that Catholic schools are “let down” by those who do not practice their faith in traditional ways. “We share our schools with a growing number of ‘good’ people who have no commitment (thru no fault of their own) to our beliefs and Traditions” (C#1/Q).

In contrast, there is support from parents for the school in many other ways. “Some of our parents probably mourn the passing of a time when the school was smaller, the families were practicing Catholics and they all belonged to the same friendship group” (P#3/Q) but they do generally “know what we are on about and support us” (P#3/Q). The increased opportunity for input by parents was welcome. “I think they’re positive, they’re affirming and they’re constructive in the way they say ‘I’ve got issues with that’ which I think is fantastic. You find out things you don’t know otherwise” (P#17/F).

#### **5.6.4 POSSIBLE CONFLICT/TENSION WITH PRINCIPALS**

There is a clear contradiction in understandings of the purpose of the Catholic school between principals and members of the clergy, however, there is general recognition of and support for principals who work within the complex environments of contemporary Catholic schools.

##### **5.6.4.1 Relationship with clergy**

The relationship between principal and clergy varies between admiration to suspicion and mistrust. Principals are sometimes viewed as dedicated and faith-filled and model the desired qualities and practices of an authentic leader in a Catholic school.

Happily I have not come across a principal yet whose commitment to faith in the person of Jesus Christ, or their professional competence was questionable. For the sake of the Catholic School system I hope this is experience (sic) of all Priest/Pastors. The tension would be; ‘How long can this situation be maintained before we start choosing good teacher/administrators rather than a faith filled person who is a good teacher/administrator (C#1/Q).

An alternative view questions the motives behind the actions and decisions of the principal. For some principals the main motivation is “numbers, numbers, numbers! The need for numbers of students → teachers (\$?). Employment of teachers to fit subject requirements rather than Christian values. Expectation for parish to provide

land, facilities” (C#2/Q). This reinforces fundamental differences in understandings of the mission of the Catholic school. “Principals are keen to build up the school-to develop it, to increase enrolments and often little serious consideration is given to the impact all of this approach has on the faith life of the school community” (C#3/Q). Principals are motivated out of “self-interest. Use their role only for advancement. Pay lip service to Catholic ethos. Not interested in advancing school-parish partnership” (C#4/Q). This highlights an “alienation from church and from diocesan leadership” (E#4/Q) and exposes a lack of confidence in the capacity of the principal to lead an effective Catholic school.

The importance of partnership between parish and school is regularly articulated but often stalls around the issues of role and mission. A productive partnership is the responsibility of all. While often stated there was little evidence of bilateral cooperation in this area.

A possible tension could arise when the principal fails to appreciate the parish/school connection or when the parish priest does not see the connection and fails to connect with the principal or take any interest in the school. A social connection between principal and parish priest is of great value in helping to create a sound working relationship (C#5/Q).

### **5.6.5 Possible conflicts/tensions with clergy**

Disparate worldviews and consequent expectations and understandings around role and mission create the most tension in the relationship between principal and clergy. This tension not only exists at a philosophical level but in a real sense in the day to day life and operation of the school.

#### **5.6.5.1 Liturgical affiliation**

Liturgical affiliation is viewed differently by key stakeholders. For clergy, this is a key criteria for judging the success and effectiveness of Catholic schools. Clergy have a “bums on seats at the weekend” (P#4/F) mentality whereas “contemporary principals see no correlation between attending a Catholic school and attending Mass. Something territorial (and financial) I think” (P#1/Q). Hallmarks of the “Catholicity” of a school require further discussion and clarification. “The clergy want to see people “in church” and so they are disappointed by the small numbers of families in Catholic schools who are active members of their parish” (E#5/Q). Judging the effectiveness

of the Catholic school on the basis of externals is an obvious area of difference. "Some clergy feel that the Catholic school is failing in its mission because church congregations continue to decline and when young children cannot explain complex issues of theology and doctrine" (P#4/Q). Principals believe their own effectiveness is sometimes judged by clergy using the parameter of Mass attendance.

I sometimes think that principals are rated on whether they're successful in the spiritual side by the amount of bums on seats they have with their kids attending Mass. I get personally frustrated that that's out of my control whether parents send their kids there or not but sometimes we're judged on our performance by what happens on a Saturday night or Sunday morning (P#6/F).

There is a fundamental difference in understanding of the school's role in the formative process of faith development. "Clergy don't always seem to think that faith is not knowledge. Again the idea that if I don't go to Mass on Sunday it's the school's fault because the school has passed on neither the knowledge nor the faith and some clergy feel the school can do both" (P#7/F).

#### **5.6.5.2 Clergy and school management**

Principals have little confidence in clergy involvement in the day to day operational issues of the school. "Clergy have little understanding over current educational issues. If they are your employer they have a huge influence as they can decide over policies, staff, goals and budget (P#2/Q). Tension is most noticeable around practical areas of "shared facilities at school/parish level" (P#5/Q). The clergy role is very welcome in the areas of faith leadership and governance however discouraged in operational areas. "I don't think there are many clergy who really understand schools, they act around the edges of schools but I don't know that they really understand schools. I think they are more like the general population who all understand schools because they went there" (P#10/F).

The scope of the possible tension is clear. "Potentially they can be a principal's biggest adversary. They can have little appreciation for modern family and juggling a career. They can step in and lessen the effectiveness of the principal by publicly questioning the principal or over-riding decisions principals have made" (P#2/Q). Perceived interference by clergy "can cause a huge amount of stress. If they disagree with the direction in which the school is heading and a lot don't have a lot of

educational background in the pressures that principals face and they just add to it sometimes” (P#6/F).

In contrast to these responses, one principal noted a very different relationship and interaction with clergy highlighting in particular the role of the Bishop in providing a desirable model for collegial interaction between parish and school stating that “the clergy I deal with share my understanding of a Catholic school so I’m very lucky and they understand the realities of life today. I believe this understanding is transmitted from the Bishop” (P#3/Q).

For many principals the clergy/principal relationship is negotiated on a case by case basis and to make a general statement covering all clergy would be neglectful of the diversity which exists between the many different contexts.

I think it depends a little bit on the clergy themselves, who they are. I think sometimes the difference just comes into that alone. There are times when both the principal of the Catholic school and the clergy are aligned in what they believe is the difference between being spiritual and religious and others where they are opposing. So it’s difficult to answer that in a global way because it’s very much on an individual basis and also background and spirituality of the pastor themselves and the history that’s there (P#9/F).

#### **5.6.5.3 Models of Church**

The demise of the traditional model of “the Parish school” is exacerbated by the absence of a clear replacement. “‘Letting go’ of the ‘Parish’ school model is difficult for some priests (E#2/Q). The current ecclesial void raises questions about the indicators of mission effectiveness of Catholic schools. Perceived models of Church are crucial indicators as to how this effectiveness is judged. The traditional model of Church is the preferred model for clergy who “come from a very traditional view of Church and do not seem to understand the changes in the role of the school” (E#1/Q). Indicators used to measure success from the traditional model vary considerably with those emanating from an emerging model of Church.

Furthermore, a mindset of fear and suspicion of lay leadership in schools is evidence of a “crisis within church and within the priesthood” (E#4/Q). A “clerical culture” and a “fear and suspicion of lay leadership” coupled with a “suspicion of liberal education” (E#4/Q) is not conducive to a willingness “to be spiritually challenged by their

membership of a Catholic school community” (E#4/Q). Clergy tend to see the role of the school as “recruiting people to attend Sacraments” (E#3/Q) and have “a narrow and literalist approach to faith” (emphasis in text) (E#4/Q).

An agreed definition of mission effectiveness of Catholic schools is a clear need for the future. Leaders of Catholic schools express dissatisfaction with indicators emanating from a traditional paradigm of Church, however, struggle to articulate appropriate replacement indicators which reflect the changing Catholic landscape.

One of the reasons why we’re not very clear about what Catholic schools are for and what they’re supposed to do at every level comes about as a result of or reflects the fact that the Church itself in our country doesn’t really know what it’s on about or what it’s for. There’s a great lack of clear voices about what it should be so it’s quite OK to imagine that one of the reasons why there isn’t a clear identity or in some sense a rejection of something in the past or a response to an unsatisfactory situation people see at the moment but I wouldn’t put it any stronger than that. If the leaders of our Catholic schools were searching for a new model of Church you’d see them doing something more about it than just talking about it they’d actually be forming new models of Church, they’d actually be out there so dissatisfaction, maybe, lack of direction, maybe, but I don’t see it any stronger than that (E#4/I).

### **5.6.6 Possible conflict/tension with the employing authority**

Autonomy and workload are nominated as the key sources of tension between principals, clergy and the Catholic Education Office.

#### **5.6.6.1 Operational tension**

There is an operational tension deriving from differences in expectations and demands of the Diocesan vision and the expectations and demands of the local vision. “On a day to day basis I don’t care what DCEO thinks, however tensions arise around the reality that principals know their communities and local conditions but are very often hog-tied by DCEO” (P#1/Q). The trend towards a centralised system of schools raises questions around roles and relationships within local communities.

At times I feel the “Birth to Death” education motto taken on by DCEO brings about misunderstanding of roles and has DCEO venture into areas that are best handled by parish staff and parish council. DCEO offer a service, but by nature it is diocesan and so can easily and unconsciously over-ride the “parish”, “local”



nature of school. In fact many primary schools are “parish” in name only, and “diocesan” in fact (C#5/Q).

The balance between systemic and local priorities is difficult to manage as Catholic schools are seen as self-managing but not self-governing .

You are not your own captain! Decisions are made with little or no consultation. Professional development days that are mandated are placed in the last week of term when most people would realize that this is when principals are trying to get reports out. The office is meant to ensure schools are running effectively, however, the amount of surveys and paperwork is frustrating. Things are sent out to us from the office that we are required to fill in even though the information is already stored. Stuff comes out with no real purpose but to justify their existence. Staff in the office can be there because they could not effectively work in a school and are hidden in the office. Now they impact on more than one school. Some have been out of schools and have lost reality. Their usefulness for schools is lessened due to their incompetencies. Head office can also rarely handle criticism well. They take it personally, even though there is a genuine concern. I sometimes think they want me to ‘shut-up’ and pretend all is well. The most frustrating is when you have a child or parent that needs to be removed from school and we don’t get head office support. The principal is constantly battling for his/her school to get their fair share of the piece of the pie! Without financial support for their school a principal’s effectiveness can be questioned as the plans and goals and adequate staffing cannot be fulfilled. The office can/do place staff in schools that either do not fit that school’s culture or the staff member should have been sacked but instead are ‘hidden’ in another school. At the end of the day I see the head office’s role is to support school. Most of the time they do this. Those occasions when they don’t, then the principalship is the loneliest job in the world (P#2/Q).

There is also acknowledgement of the many agencies impacting on the administrative life of schools and that demands made by employing authorities are to meet their own accountabilities.

Tension is created when yet another document comes across the principal’s desk which is time consuming to complete, and the time commitment and often angst caused by constant curriculum/accountability changes and demands. However, I feel most of this is the result of QCEC [Queensland Catholic Education Commission], State and Commonwealth government accountability demands (P#5/Q).

The efforts by the employing authority to actively uphold principles and values consistent with the Diocesan vision are acknowledged and appreciated. “I find the DCEO [Diocesan Catholic Education Office] supportive and understanding. I believe our local church is not hierarchical and neither is DCEO. I see them as models of Servant Leadership” (P#3/Q). Principals are generally supportive of the level of

service provided through a systemic structure acknowledging the difficulty in balancing the benefits of the flexibility of a smaller system with the security of comprehensive systemic support available in a larger system.

When you go to conferences and you compare us with other Dioceses I think we're pretty well off actually. My sense is that coming from a different diocese I find that DCEO is small enough to be flexible, but when I compare us to smaller dioceses we're big enough to be professional. That's my sense and I have a quite positive view of it. There are some frustrations at the school end when things go out of your hands and you lose control. That's hard, but I like the fact that DCEO is there. I'm not on my own (P#10/F).

#### **5.6.6.2 Communication and consultative processes**

Lack of communication and consultative processes between the Parish and the Diocesan Catholic Education Office is an area of clergy concern. This includes a variety of issues including "lack of sharing of vital information eg. establishment of new school in the parish-often the parish has no input into such a decision. Expectation that parishes can still help schools financially, especially with regard to provision of land" (C#3/Q) and also making the point that "tension does arise when the DCEO fails to consult or inform the parish leader of matters that concern the parish school and the parish" (C#2/F).

The role of employing authorities in the selection and appointment of staff is questioned. There is a lack of confidence in the faith background of graduates and inconsistent criteria for selection of new staff. "Sometimes I wonder what criteria are used for the appointment of graduate teachers; or even what faith development is required of them before they are considered for positions in Catholic Schools!?? Or teaching scholarships in Training Colleges?!" (C#1/Q). Priorities for the selection and appointment of staff are indicative that employing authorities view "education as an industry rather than ministry" (C#2/Q).

#### **5.6.7 INDICATORS OF A SUCCESSFUL CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

A range of indicators of a successful Catholic school were nominated. Prominent amongst these are a caring culture, Gospel values, faith life and an effective curriculum.

### 5.6.7.1 Caring culture

Life-giving relationships and a caring culture, with an emphasis on meeting the welfare needs and aspirations of students is a very powerful indicator of a successful Catholic school. Leaders strive to build communities which have a

shared sense of hope, optimism and value (where) all members of the school community share a desire to choose the right. The school clearly contributes to the “common good” and strives for partnership and inclusivity. Students contribute positively to the school community and to the wider community both in the present time and in their future lives (E#4/Q).

All groups consider that caring relationships are foundational to all that happens in the Catholic school. “Right relationships at all levels. Children are cared for from the basics to the academic” (P#1/Q). The successful Catholic school is a place where “students feel cared for, loved and wanted (C#4/Q), “where there is an atmosphere of welcome. When children are obviously proud to be part of the school community. When there is a healthy relationship between staff, students, parents, parish personnel and parish council” (C#5/Q).

This culture is further enhanced when:

the community and visitors are aware of:

- an ethos of Christian love and care permeating the school-a ‘Jesus’ place
- a sense of joy, vitality and purpose in the daily life of the school
- respect for the dignity of all members of the school community
- a breadth and depth of learning opportunities provided and achieved (P#5/Q).

Caring relationships are expressed in a variety of ways. Principals, in particular, see a very important link between this ideal and the approach to discipline and conflict resolution in the school. Productive relationships with parents are also considered an important part of a successful Catholic school.

school culture-are kids, staff, parents positive and happy? Learning - is there a willingness to learn by staff-professional development? Discipline - links strongly with culture. Are kids taught strategies that will allow them to handle conflict? I believe my current school is successful because I rarely need to see children who have done the wrong thing. Staff are effective with classroom management. Caring community-part of school culture, people willingly volunteer for things. Facilities are improving, tidy place, pride in school. Principal can take new parents through school at any time of day and be proud

of what is happening. Enrolments are going up because of word of mouth (P#2/Q).

#### **5.6.7.2 An effective curriculum**

There is general recognition by all groups that an effective curriculum is a fundamental pre-requisite to a successful Catholic school. The “quality of the educational and community life” (C#3/Q) is important especially as it is through the curriculum that many of the fundamental values and beliefs are learned and sustained.

A curriculum (formal and informal) which meets the needs of students and community. A staff that puts students first. Has a clear well articulated and owned vision. Lives Gospel values (E#1/Q).

There is recognition of the informal or hidden aspects of the curriculum which contribute to and reinforce the distinct culture of Catholic schools. The importance of a quality staff to the school endeavours is also valued.

Exceptional teaching staff. Financial viability linked to wise financial spending. Recognised as Catholic by symbols and actions. Provision of as much support for families as possible-OSHC, C&K, Prep (P#1/Q).

The value of effective partnerships with the key groups in the school is recognised and affirmed. Partnership with parents is key to the formulation of a curriculum which focuses on meeting the learning needs of students.

“Effective curriculum programs that meet the needs of the learners. Effective partnerships with parents and groups within the wider community. Passionate staff. Effective leader. The Gospel values and evident in all that “happens” at the school” (E#2/Q).

#### **5.6.7.3 Engagement with Catholic life**

Engagement with Catholic life is measured and judged differently by key stakeholders. This is a key criterion to understanding the effectiveness of Catholic school as it is closely linked with understandings of mission. Clergy nominated knowledge about the Catholic faith and engagement with the wider faith community as indicators of a successful catholic school.

At the end of 12 (or 13) years, students would have a sound knowledge of Jesus Christ, and of the Catholic Church's understanding of his teachings, Traditions and practices. Hopefully that would lead the student to an active and living faith in Jesus. One might dare to hope that fidelity to Jesus and his Traditions is as important as fidelity to "the old school tie" and its traditions (C#1Q).

The focus of this engagement is on the external, ritual expression of faith measured in terms of "students being practical in their faith" (C#5/Q) and measures success against the question of "has the school been able to bring children or their families to "faith"? (C#3/Q).

A different perspective on the expression of Catholic faith is articulated by principals and employing authorities citing an emphasis on transforming faith into action and the active promotion of Gospel values.

When students leave the school with internalised values, integrity and a real sense of the power of Jesus in their lives. When both staff and students can regularly be seen smiling and heard laughing (P#5/Q).

This perspective seeks to connect with the faith lives of students in meaningful ways and is not primarily concerned with students being practical in their faith. There is a strong sense of

social conscience by staff and students. Spiritual richness of staff and students. High level of skill and knowledge development of students. A great capacity to forgive by staff (and hopefully graduating students). A desire by staff to live out right relationships as characterized by Christ (E#3Q).

Indicators of success espoused by Catholic schools must move beyond the school and parish boundaries to include engagement with the wider community. The Catholic school operates squarely within the life of many other communities and seeks to find relevance and meaning through interaction with these groups. Catholic schools seek to

play an active part in a community of schools – Catholic, non-government and government – where mutual respect, support and collaboration are evident. There is no antagonism or indifference towards the local parish – partnerships exist with Catholic and other faith communities. All the above is articulated within a theological framework that incorporates all that is best in Catholic teaching and tradition (E#4/Q).

This particular way of engaging with Catholic life was sustained through:

numerous expressions of the faith life of the community – not just in prayer and ritual, but also in service, respectful relationships, compassion for the poor and needy etc. (E#5/Q).

These responses are synthesised further in the following submission which nominates the achievement of a successful Catholic school when:

The expression of faith is genuine and open, not bogus and formalized. All members of the community embrace learning, and excellence is recognized and acclaimed. The gifts of others are recognised and affirmed. Conflict is recognized and dealt with, not hidden or ignored. There are positive and clearly articulated expectations upon all. Right behaviour and attitudes are promoted. Compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation are alive (E#4/Q).

### **5.7 Theme B: The Purpose of the Catholic school - Summary**

Each group responded to questions pertinent to the purpose of the Catholic school. Analysis of the resultant data revealed a number of subtexts which invite further scrutiny and exploration. A summary of these emergent sub-texts is presented in the table below.

**Table 5.4 Summary of emergent themes from responses to the purpose of the Catholic school**

<b>THEME B - PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL</b>			
<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>Sub-texts</b>		
	<b>PRINCIPALS</b>	<b>CLERGY</b>	<b>EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES</b>
<b>Q1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL?</b>	Learning community where Christian values are modelled.	A faith community serving “practical” families	Witness to the message of Jesus Open to all
<b>Q2. POSSIBLE CONFLICTS TENSIONS – STAFF</b>	“Post-ecclesial” generation New spirituality Careerism and vocation	Alienation from mainstream church Anti-clerical	Alienation from mainstream church Industrial Vs pastoral model
<b>PARENTS</b>	Disparate perceptions of purpose	Disparate perceptions of purpose Parish estrangement	Disparate perceptions of purpose
<b>PRINCIPALS</b>		Emphasis on numbers and subjects over values. The “professional” Catholic	Unwilling religious leaders. Alienation from Church leadership

<b>CLERGY</b>	Disparate purpose. No background in education. Out of touch with post-modern families.		Disparate purpose Suspicion of lay leadership and liberal education.
<b>EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES</b>	Operational tension Diocesan Vs local vision	Communication Staffing Shared facilities	
<b>Q3. WHAT ARE YOUR INDICATORS OF A SUCCESSFUL CATHOLIC SCHOOL?</b>	Relationships Expression of Catholic faith Effective curriculum	Faith life Engagement with parish	Relationships Gospel values Effective curriculum

## 5.8 Findings: Questions 8-11

The third set of open-ended questions relate to the perspectives on the changing Catholic landscape. The questions were:

- Q8. Identify particular Church teachings which are a challenge to you.
- Q9. In what ways does the Catholic church impact on the families in your school?
- Q10. Has the role, profile, visibility and influence of parents in the life of the school changed over the life of your professional life as a principal?
- Q11. What are some challenges for the future of Catholic schools?

### 5.8.1 THE CHALLENGE OF CHURCH TEACHINGS

It was generally agreed that all Church teachings present a challenge to anyone who is a genuine seeker of the truth. This question highlighted considerable differences in the way in which the different groups viewed Church teachings.

#### 5.8.1.1 Church doctrine

Some of the most basic tenets of the Church's beliefs and teachings are problematic and present a personal challenge to principals and employing authorities. These beliefs and teachings represent a substantial quantum of essential doctrines underpinning Church membership. "Most of them. Divinity of Christ, Virgin birth, obsession with sex, divorce, homosexuality, Mass attendance, priesthood, the Risen Christ" (P#1/Q). On a similar note, the extent of the reality can be gauged by the

number of Church's core doctrines and teachings nominated by some employing authorities as problematic and challenging.

Mass attendance. Gender of priests and the need for priestly celibacy. Virgin Mary. Mary's assumption into heaven. The Immaculate Conception of Mary (Can I stop?). The confusing messages given by senior Church clergymen disputing the primacy of properly formed and informed conscience (E#3/Q).

These responses are in clear contrast to clergy responses who nominate some challenge with aspects of current Church teachings, while querying the term "teachings", preferring to talk about "disciplines". Clergy are concerned with the lack of Scriptural and doctrinal knowledge of so many teachers in Catholic schools. Indicative of responses of some clergy to the question of Church teachings.

None! Two thousand years of teaching – and presumably the guidance of the Holy Spirit and study of Scripture – has refined our dogmatic teachings. If the question includes Church 'disciplines' maybe there are some I'd query eg. A celibate only priesthood, lack of collegiality within the College of Bishops. A much bigger concern for me would be what so many teachers in our Catholic Schools DON'T KNOW about Scripture and the Church's teachings (emphasis in text) (C#1/Q).

Other concerns are around "teachings which are exclusive rather than inclusive eg. Who can/cannot be enrolled in a Catholic school. Who can/cannot come to the Eucharist table. Who can/cannot be married in a Catholic church. Who can/cannot be installed into ministry" (C#2/Q), and again "Communion denied to divorced and remarried Catholics" (C#3/Q), and similarly "divorce. Contraception. Women priests" (C#4/Q).

#### **5.8.1.2 Moral and lifestyle teachings**

Most respondents cite significant aspects of Church moral teaching as challenging and confronting. Some identify with contemporary issues including those of lifestyle, family related issues and teachings which are seen to exclude people from full engagement with the Church. There is general concern that the Church fails to be sufficiently cognisant of the changing nature of family life and society in general. This was confirmed in responses such as "without going into specifics I believe there are a number of Church teachings, particularly in family related issues, that are not responsive to contemporary family needs and fail to recognize societal change" (E#1/I). Some of the Church's teaching was viewed as exclusive and marginalised large numbers of people.



The Church needs to find a better way to address the problems of those who separate from their spouses, or obtain a civil divorce” (E#5/Q). “Divorce, etc, excludes rather than includes people into the Eucharistic community (emphasis in text) (E#3/Q).

Other concerns focus on teachings surrounding more topical issues such as celibacy, divorce, homosexuality and birth control. A sample of these responses include:

religious people who behave badly and are not Christ-like with their dealings with others ie. Senior leaders of the Church. It is wrong that priests can’t marry. Religious being celibate. Women being oppressed by male clergy who refuse to give any power/decision making to women. Birth control (P#2/Q).

Responses to questions of support for and allegiance to Church teachings are indicative of substantial paradigm difference between the groups. Many principals and employing authorities lend public support to these teachings but have personal misgivings about many of them. Principals enact this clash between publicly and privately held views in different ways. One way is to focus on the values and practices which align with a view of the Kingdom. “I find many Church teachings a challenge (eg on homosexuality, birth control). I choose to focus instead on the teachings of Jesus and on the pastoral activities of the Church rather than the pontifications” (P#4/Q).

## **5.8.2 IMPACT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THE LIVES OF FAMILIES**

Perceptions of the impact of the Catholic Church on families attending Catholic schools varied from minor to significant. The variation accentuated contrasting views on the ecclesial identity of the Catholic school and the ability of the school to contribute to and uphold a traditional ecclesial identity.

### **5.8.2.1 The importance of relationship**

Principals believe that the Church has some significant impact on families attending the school, although that impact was not through direct or regular attendance at the Sacraments or other regular Church events. This paradoxical relationship signals an embrace of two aspects of Catholic school life namely community and Gospel values with a consequent rejection of the worshipping and liturgical aspects of Church affiliation. The quality of impact of the Church on family life though is:

Hopefully positive! The religious people in our parish are fantastic. They make a wonderful difference to our school and are constantly assisting with the daily life of the school without trying to control it. The Church's teachings, values are being lived and I believe we have a great school because people try and believe in a way that supports Catholic ethos. Few go to Church, but generally they support the ideals of 'love one another' (P#2/Q).

Crucial to the level of influence of the Church is the quality of the relationship. The approach by schools is "a gentle invitational, welcoming way and supportive in times of crisis" (P#4/Q) which is not the general experience in contact with the parish "Sacramental Programs and Liturgy/Mass celebrations" (P#3/Q). The foundation of genuine and influential contact with families is relational and invitational. In building relationships and being willing to connect with families on their faith journeys schools are having a real influence on families. Connectedness is an important indicator of the quality of relationship.

The influence of the Parish priest is a strong determinant to the level of involvement of families in the life of the Church. The influence on families:

Is very much dependent on the Parish Priest. A very "staid" Parish Priest creates huge problems for families because he does not cater or recognize their needs in relation to Church. An active and progressive priest has a very positive influence on families. Many of our families do not follow the teaching/laws of the Church and when they hear or see something that contradicts their beliefs, I believe this alienates them more from the 'Church'" (E#2/Q).

The indispensable role of the school on the faith life of families is widely acknowledged.

In reality I don't believe the Catholic Church has a significant impact on many of our families. But the school that lives and actively promotes a Catholic approach does make a positive impact. In many cases, it is the school that assists families to grow in or return to the faith" (E#1/Q).

The belief that the school community is the focal point of spiritual contact and engagement with families is widespread amongst principals and employing authorities. Without the school the impact of the Church through the parish is:

Very little, except, if they associate the good things that the school does with/as Church. They are marginalized because of divorce, financial status or lack of attendance at Mass, have been sexually or physically abused by its members or

may have been helped by SVDP[St Vincent De Paul Society] -although in my experience people generally view this as negative-as in “I’ve been identified” category (P#1/Q).

#### **5.8.2.2 The Catholic school as the new Church**

The reality that schools are viewed as a new Church by a significant number families attending Catholic schools creates a dilemma for Catholic school leaders in clarifying expectations of the ecclesial identity of Catholic schools. Any impact had by the Church on families is almost solely through the agency of the Catholic school and “varies in accordance to the willingness of the school community and subject to the participation of the school families within parish liturgies and activities. However, there is declining influence and perceived importance” (C#2/Q). For schools the reality is that

The majority of students coming in now are not churched before you get them. Parents will say that we leave it up to you to do now. There’s no reinforcement from home, the kids are coming to school with nothing, there’s no prior preparation for when they come, so you’re virtually talking a totally new language to them to try and start this faith community going and that’s where we come back to ‘the school is the front door of the church’ (P#14/F).

Principals and employing authorities acknowledge the reality of the new expectations being placed on Catholic schools and the corresponding decline of the influence of other agencies on the lives of the vast majority of families attending Catholic schools.

For the majority the only impact comes via the Catholic school: through the witness of staff and fellow parents; through formal and informal Religious Education programs; through parish/family based sacramental programs also supported by the school; through school based liturgies and prayer celebrations which many parents attend and actively participate in; through regular input by Principal, APRE and staff in school newsletters and other forums (P#5/Q).

This view of Catholic schools as the new face of the Church creates additional ambiguity around its mission and how it should be interpreted in the light of traditional structures and paradigms. The dilemma of uncertainty around the ecclesial identity of Catholic school is clearly evident in responses and presents a major challenge for Church authorities.

The ‘Catholic Church’ IS the ‘Catholic School’!! OR the Catholic School IS the Catholic Church!! Does the question imply that the ‘Catholic

Church' is something apart from the 'Catholic School'. All who profess their faith in Jesus Christ, and profess to be 'Catholic' are the Catholic Church. In virtue of our Baptism, "we are the Church". Maybe the question should be, "How do Catholics in Catholic Schools bear witness to Christ among themselves and to those who don't share our faith? Does the question highlight that we prepare all staff members to be ready to carry on the MISSION OF JESUS as faith leaders in our Catholic Schools?! If the question was asking, "How do Catholics outside the immediate school community impact on the school community? This would have to be stated on a case by case basis (C#1/Q).

There is strong evidence of conflicting understanding of where the Catholic school sits within the educational mission of the Church. The reality for Catholic schools is that "most parents now are not regular participants in the life of the parish, and especially the Sunday Eucharist, with a much higher non-Catholic enrolment" (C#3/Q). The perceived separation between the parish and school by families is evident in a failure of clergy to recognise the changing nature of Church in the lives of families.

The Catholic Church impacts significantly upon the families in Catholic schools because the Catholic school is an integral expression of that church (if only the "Church" recognised this). The main aspects of this influence I believe relate to:

- A validation of the validity and positive influence of a faith position and the expression of faith in prayer
- A strong sense of the right in terms of human values and social behaviour
- A commitment to the common good and a sense of generosity towards those in need
- Reinforcement of the values of service, community and equity
- The power of positive expectations
- The importance of compassion (E#4/Q).

The dominant theme throughout though indicates a diminished place of the Church in the daily life of most families.

School liturgies and Masses seem to have an impact, although somewhat limited. In times of grief, difficulty or emergency, often pastors/parish provide extra pastoral support (C#3/Q).

### **5.8.3 INFLUENCE OF PARENTS ON SCHOOL LIFE**

Two salient themes are evident regarding the influence of parents on school life. The first of these is the changed nature of the involvement of parents in school groups

and activities. The second is the increasing influence of parents seeking to challenge the cultural values and norms which underpin the school's existence.

#### **5.8.3.1 From compliant volunteer to partner**

There is a consistent theme that the influence of parents had moved from that of compliant volunteer to a more prominent role of contributor to policies and strategic plans for the future direction of the school.

There have been many changes in this area. Parental involvement and influence – on School Boards, school committees eg. curriculum, school Renewal as well as on the bigger stage – eg QSA. Their involvement is no longer just in the tuckshop, fundraising etc. (E#1/Q).

While acknowledging that fewer parents now act in a voluntary capacity, the relationship with parents is viewed more as a partnership with parents more forthright in their expectations and demands on schools. This is not always a productive partnership which on occasions leads to additional tension and workload for the principal.

Parents are having much more of a say in policies and direction of school and where money is being spent. Sometimes it seems it is the uneducated telling the educated how to do things. How successful this is depends on the relationship and trust the parents body has for the principal, the principal's people skills and the quality of people who are leading the parents groups. At the moment I am receiving wonderful support as the parents who are leading work closely with me and respect my role. This however has not always been the case. We are seeing less and less parents assisting with tuckshop, learning assistance programs and reading due to most partners working. It seems that for many parents the balance between work and family is not right. Kids are being dropped-off even before teachers get there and picked up at 6.00 o'clock. Schools are now being seen by media, politicians and parents themselves as organizations that can replace parents in their role. Obesity, females have babies too late or not having enough, drink-driving and countless other society issues are being dumped on schools. I now budget to feed kids and clothe kids because some parents don't. Due to the dysfunctional family unit schools are now having to step in to give children basic needs that once was found at home ie. Food, clothing, comfort, love (P#2/Q).

There is a significant change in the way parents view their role in the educative process. Parents advocate for the individual rights of their child with little consideration of the common good. The expertise to manage the parent group within

the context of the school is an additional layer of complexity which principals see as part of their role.

Parents are generally more understanding of the complexity and pressures placed on teachers, but are also generally more educated, more willing to speak up, not prepared to 'just leave it to the teachers' to educate their children. A minority are critical-eg. If their child is in a large class, or if a child with disability or behavioural problems takes away from what they see as their child's 'rights', or they feel their child should be given more individual learning support than is happening. Some parents are very fearful about their children's future job prospects and more inclined to put pressure on both teachers and their own children to maximise academic performance (P#5/Q).

Employing authorities endorse a similar perspective. "Yes. Parents, due to work commitments, do not become as involved as they used to. The day of the "volunteer" is almost gone" (E#2/Q). Respondents were unanimous in their recognition of the transition of the role of parents from informal, voluntary and compliant involvement in schools to the more formal involvement through established official groups and forums.

While parents are genuinely interested in the educational welfare of their children the busier lifestyles frequently result in less time to attend the school as often as they would like.

Increased work commitments have meant that parents have less time available for voluntary work at school or for meetings and fund-raising events. I believe they are still very interested in the education of their children and try to be involved in their schools. With fewer Catholics in Catholic schools and fewer Catholics involved in the local Parish, they probably are not a significant presence in parishes (E#5Q).

#### **5.8.3.2 Parentocracy**

The concept of "parentocracy" (Grace, 2000), that is, the escalating influence of parental demands and the consequent pressure on school leaders to compromise fundamental values and beliefs to satisfy personal agendas, is raised as a growing concern by some respondents. All groups report that "parents question decisions/directions of schools a lot more. The day of "the school is right" is over. This can both be a positive and or negative experience" (E#2/Q). The environment is that "parental demands for a school that meets their personal expectations have risen and parents can be far more aggressive in pursuing their personal goals" (E#3/Q). The genesis of

this situation may be attributed firstly to the transition from religious to lay leadership in schools and secondly to the role of the principal in establishing the apposite conditions for the involvement of parents.

In general, the main difference is that the benevolent (or not as the case may be) dictatorship of religious and clergy over parents has ceased to be apparent. The role, profile, visibility and influence of parents is still very much a product and reflection of the culture of the school. As parents have generally become better educated, less “churched”, and more aware of their rights, the importance of the leadership of the Principal in setting the appropriate tone and expectations has become more significant. In my experience, principals are still as capable of exercising effective restrictions and controls on parents and parent bodies as they ever were (and I do not necessarily approve of how they may do this). A failure to set an appropriate set of expectations, or to create positive, respectful and constructive relationships, certainly can create significant difficulties. The requirement to use “due process” in dealing with parent concerns or complaints may be onerous but it is hardly unreasonable (E#4Q).

#### **5.8.4 FUTURE CHALLENGES TO CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

The challenges varied across a range of areas. The dominant theme is the continuing plight of the Catholic school in maintaining an authentic presence in the lives of families amidst a plethora of other competing values and worldviews.

##### **5.8.4.1 Clarity of Catholic mission and identity**

There is consensus about the challenge for schools to clarify their mission and maintain an authentic Catholic identity, however, there is little agreement or common understanding of the essential elements of mission and authentic Catholic identity. The challenge is “to remain relevant as Church schools in a pluralistic society. This will involve taking risks and standing up to DCEO and official Church” (P#1/Q). There is a concern that Catholic schools lose their sense of purpose and identity becoming beholden to community and Government demands. “One big challenge is to remain true to the Catholic Ethos – not to become seduced by public image. Maintaining Catholic Ethos while taking money from the Government money that comes at a price” (P#4/Q).

There is an immediate challenge to clarify the mission of the school in the light of these current changes. Enrolment figures are a misleading measure of success and effectiveness. It is incumbent upon those charged with the responsibility of leadership

to “clarify the purpose of the school and stay true to their mission. Increasing enrolments are not the best indication of this. Leaders are charged with the responsibility of managing schools effectively in the face of rapid change, increased expectations, government accountability and system requirements (E#5/Q). Adding to these challenges are “changes in the Catholic Church – disintegration of parishes, lack of funding for parish personnel, loss of vision and enthusiasm” (E#5/Q).

There is an obvious conflict of values, gospel and secular which needs careful management as a “growing dichotomy between trying to live gospel values and the values implicit/explicit in our global/technological/secular/media-driven society” (P#5/Q) becomes more evident. Clergy also recognise the challenge “to remain Catholic in an ever increasing secular environment. To offer an alternative system when the finances and those that provide them are major players. To meet the social demands and expectations in an ever increasing complex environment”. (C#2/Q). There is recognition of a changed Catholic landscape. For the vast majority of Catholic families being “Catholic” is no longer measured against traditional criteria. This is a challenge requiring new insights into “how to remain “Catholic” and keep the Catholic ethos in light of a changing parent body and to communicate the message of the Church in a world that is no longer receptive to it (C#3/Q).

There is concern amongst all groups about the dilution of values supporting marginalised and disadvantaged groups in favour of values proposed by those who see Catholic schools as private schools.

Loss of faith – loss of Catholic identity - uncritically swallowing the agendas of others – in curriculum, in industrial relations, in beliefs about humanity – and unwittingly losing our “soul”. Becoming more and more middle class schools or ‘cheap private schools’ (E#4/Q).

This aspiration is more challenging in an environment of declining allegiance to and understanding of Church in the wider community. “Catholic Schools may be the experience of “Church” for some families” (C#4/Q). Catholic school leaders are expected to provide leadership to a community with little background in and allegiance to the values which underpin the operation of the school. The changing nature of the Catholic school community is a critical variable in the way that Catholic school leaders respond to this challenge.



Ensuring that parents accept and model the Gospel values that we are trying to instil in the children. Keeping the “Catholic” alive. More and more the school is “Church” for a lot of our families. Schools need to clearly articulate what this means. Ensuring that schools do not become ‘private’ and ‘elite’ (E#2/Q).

The influence of the Government agenda poses a real threat to the right of the Catholic school leaders to exercise control over curriculum, enrolments and staffing. Acceptance of funding from Government and other bodies presents an inherent challenge to the authentic expression of Catholic values and identity. “Funding: governments are making schools far more accountable for how money is spent and depending on the whim of the government of the day determines what hoops schools will need to jump through” (P#2/Q). This threat is manifest in different ways including “the growing demands of governments intent on tying funding and accreditation to outcomes that are strictly measurable, comparable, competitive, narrowly focussed, poorly researched and often short-sighted” (P#5/Q).

This environment of competing values and understandings as to the purpose of the Catholic school presents a real challenge for school leaders. An additional complexity for leaders is the increasing necessity to educate staff in the beliefs, teachings and values which underpin the existence of Catholic schools in addition to the accepted professional development associated with teaching and learning.

#### **5.8.4.2 Staffing**

The expectation that schools respond appropriately to the changing needs of families and the society in which they live and operate presents a huge challenge for the future of Catholic schools. There is a “growing trend for the society to see schools as a ‘one stop shop’ responsible for solving all manner of society’s ills. Teacher morale and professionalism will also present challenges” (P#5/Q). Schools are required “to keep up with the needs of families-child-care through to OSHC [Outside Schools Hours Care] – maybe a move to a centre with health care workers etc” (P#1/Q). This expectation on schools is further exacerbated by “the breakdown of the family unit. I have seen far more things that were once kept in the home impacting on schools. Welfare issues and kids’ wellbeing is a great concern” (P#1/Q).

This environment places enormous pressure on schools to revision their purpose and identity in this altered context. The commitment and support of staff to this endeavour is critical. “It is difficult to find staff with the personal qualities and philosophy that suit our schools” (E#3/Q). Principals identify the recruitment and training of suitable staff as a key area of their leadership.

Attracting quality people to teaching and leadership positions to replace aging staff. Any organization is only as good as the people in it. How can we improve this? As principal, attracting quality people is a high priority. Teaching children who are so more computer literate than staff and how can we educate kids in such a fast changing world? (P#2/Q).

Likewise, clergy identify the related challenge of recruiting suitable staff to ensure an authentic mission and identity. Typical of the responses is the aspiration:

To stay ‘Catholic’ in name and fact. To find suitable staff for Catholic Schools. Even more difficult!! To find suitable leaders - Principals and APRE’s – to lead Catholic School Communities. An observation that comes from some teachers!! The ‘line’ of promotion should be by way of APRE, to ensure that Principals have shown that commitment to sharing faith with staff and students (emphasis in text) (C#1/Q).

#### **5.8.4.3 Leadership**

The critical role of the principal as the key leader of the school community is recognised. Principals are expected to respond appropriately to the needs of a very different school community. There are clear differences in how this is done. Clergy believe that:

the role of the Principal of a Catholic School is to work with the Pastor and/or the Parish Team to build links between the Schools and wider Catholic community. There is a real danger, now that Catholic Schools are virtually autonomous, that they can take on a life of their own completely divorced from the “Parish” community and the wider Church” (C#1/Q).

Principals express frustration with an expectation which is far removed from the reality of the Catholic school community. Principals willingly accept involvement in parish life as part of their role and meet the expectations of clergy “to be seen as an essential part of the Catholic Parish life, where principals and staff are religious leaders, witnessing to life. The leadership, at least, must be people of faith and who

practise their faith” (C#5/Q), “who actually live their faith rather than just pay it ‘lip service’” (C#3/Q). Principals view schools as agencies of the Church rather than of the parish.

These expectations further expose the cultural and spiritual rift between those charged with the administration and governance of Catholic schools. The essence of this rift is the lack of clarity surrounding the purpose of the Catholic school and the role of the principal.

### **5.9 Theme C: The Changing Catholic Landscape - Summary**

Each group responded to questions pertinent to an understanding of the changing Catholic landscape. Analysis of the resultant data revealed a number of subtexts which invite further scrutiny and exploration. A summary of these emergent sub-texts is presented in the diagram below.

**Table 5.5 Summary of emergent themes from responses to the changing Catholic landscape**

<b>THEME C – THE CHANGING CATHOLIC LANDSCAPE</b>			
<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>Themes</b>		
	<b>PRINCIPALS</b>	<b>CLERGY</b>	<b>EMPLOYING AUTHORITIES</b>
<b>Q1. IDENTIFY CHURCH TEACHINGS WHICH ARE A CHALLENGE TO YOU.</b>	Challenged by core and peripheral teachings Primacy of conscience	Celibacy, divorcees	Core and peripheral teachings, family related teachings Primacy of conscience
<b>Q2. IMPACT OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON FAMILIES</b>	School is the new “church of choice”	School is the new “church of choice”	School is the new “church of choice”
<b>Q3. HOW HAS THE ROLE, INFLUENCE OF PARENTS CHANGED?</b>	More accountable Too much influence Strategic role	No involvement in parish by “disaffected” Catholics and “other than Catholic” families.	Compliant volunteer to discerning consumer Strategic role
<b>Q4. WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS?</b>	Nature of families Identity Staffing	Identity Suitable leadership “Autonomous” school – dependence Vs sovereignty	Nature of families Identity Losing our “soul”

## **5.10 Conclusion**

The presentation and analysis of findings highlight a number of key themes which invite further interrogation. The data confirm new and radical understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in an era of fundamental social, political, generational and spiritual change. This study recognises six major themes which are key elements to further discussion of this topic. They are:

1. Leadership
2. Role
3. Identity
4. Mission
5. Christian Life
6. Community.

### **5.10.1 Leadership**

The data confirm leadership as a key capacity for the growth and sustainment of Catholic schools in the future. Challenges to fundamental values, beliefs and culture require strategic, informed and visionary leaders who are able to articulate a future which connects with the life journeys of the community and promotes an environment for individuals to form and sustain a spiritual identity. The data confirm substantial differences in understanding of the type of leadership required and who will exercise that leadership amongst a number of agencies and individuals providing leadership in this endeavour. Principals cite the need for urgent dialogue and education around the changing focus of leadership brought about by a changing Catholic landscape. The data confirm a lack of clarity around the expectations of leadership and how the principal's role is enacted in contemporary Catholic school communities.

### **5.10.2 Role**

The role of the principal is experiencing renewed scrutiny and challenge against a background of changing educational and Church contexts. Bureaucratic responsibilities, lack of autonomy, Catholic identity and mission, and characteristics of the modern Catholic school community are cited as tipping points generating debate and reflection around attempts to redefine the principal's role. Principals view educational leadership as the key dimension of their role and are cautious about

increasing expectations of religious leadership without clear direction and appropriate formation. The inability of diminishing numbers of clergy to provide religious leadership and formation to school communities raises the real prospect of principals being seen as the religious leaders of the community.

### **5.10.3 Identity**

Defining and sustaining Catholic identity is problematic for school leaders for a number of reasons. Catholic schools have grown from an era of a very clear, precise and easily recognisable identity emanating from a distinct community, authority structure and worldview. The data confirm that, for modern Catholic schools, each of these elements has changed considerably leading to contested understandings of how schools define themselves as being authentically Catholic.

Previously Catholic school identity was inextricably linked to and derived from the ecclesial identity of the parish. Currently, the link with parishes is tenuous at best and therefore holds little meaning or influence for the vast majority of families making up the Catholic school community. Catholic school leaders are faced with the challenge of defining a Catholic identity which connects with the current community. Principals labour to promote a Catholic identity which is truly contemporary and yet authentically ecclesial against a background of perceived resistance and parochial self-interest by some members of the clergy.

### **5.10.4 Mission**

The data confirm significant areas of variance in understanding the mission of the Catholic school. There is clear evidence that Catholic schools have become the church of choice for the vast majority of families making up the community. This scenario as well as the almost complete rejection of ecclesial religion in favour of personal spirituality have served to establish schools as what could be metaphorically described as “satellite” churches. While clergy understand Catholic schools as an agency of the parish, principals and employing authorities understand the Catholic school as an agency of the Church. This reality has real implications for the way in which schools view their role in promoting and modelling essential elements of Christian life.

#### **5.10.5 Christian life**

Principals and employing authorities articulate a reality where deinstitutionalised religion is embraced as desirable and worthwhile and that pluralism is the fabric of the contemporary spiritual context. The data identify and confirm a new ecclesial reality of schools being the primary place where young people encounter Jesus and his teaching. Principals express frustration when operating between attempts to respond appropriately to the implications of such a profound shift in thought and practice while still expected to work within and support values and practices deemed unimportant by the majority of families and staff of Catholic school communities.

The data endorse a view of Christian life that in an increasingly complex world there is no longer any clear Catholic answer which is uncontested and accepted without question and dialogue. There are profound differences in thinking around the most fundamental elements of Church belief and teaching and sufficient evidence from the research to conclude that most families making up the Catholic school community have a great deal of difficulty with the Church's assertion of monopoly on definitive truth.

#### **5.10.6 Community**

A clear aspiration of the role of the principal is to establish and nurture community. Community is valued and seen as a feature of successful Catholic schools, a view rationalised in terms of the fragmentation and breakdown of community at almost every level including family and church.

Principals articulate a vision of community incorporating welcome, openness to diversity, an invitation to discover, nourish and experience Christian life. The experience of Christian life through community is rationalised as a response to the changing mission of the Church as first espoused by Vatican II. The experience of community makes it possible to take up the challenge to create dialogue among staff, parents and students to assist in the formation and encouragement of a personal spiritual identity.

Commitment of staff to support these ideals is questioned as staff themselves are from a “post ecclesial” generation who have little allegiance to Church and generally act out of an industrial rather than pastoral model of employment.

## CHAPTER 6      DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

### **6.1      *Introduction***

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings generated from the research exploring understandings of the role of the principal and the purpose of the Catholic school in a changing Catholic landscape. The research examines this topic from the perspectives of three key stakeholders in the life of Catholic schools, namely, principals, clergy and employing authorities. The data were collected using questionnaire responses, semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

### **6.2      *Overview of discussion of the research findings***

- 6.1                    Introduction
- 6.2                    Overview of discussion of research findings
- 6.3                    Emergent themes
- 6.4                    Leadership
  - 6.4.1      Theological and philosophical foundations
  - 6.4.2      Regnocentric thinking
  - 6.4.3      Liturgical affiliation
  - 6.4.4      Faith and meaning
  - 6.4.5      Spiritual identity
  - 6.4.6      Spiritual literacy and formation
  - 6.4.7      Conclusion
- 6.5                    Role
  - 6.5.1      Educative Leadership
  - 6.5.2      Personal authenticity
  - 6.5.3      Open accessibility
  - 6.5.4      Parish involvement
  - 6.5.5      School as agency of the Church
  - 6.5.6      Religious leadership
  - 6.5.7      Accountability and compliance
  - 6.5.8      Leadership framework
- 6.6                    Identity
  - 6.6.1      Traditional notions of Catholic identity
  - 6.6.2      Marginalisation of religion
  - 6.6.3      Spiritual engagement
  - 6.6.4      Conclusion
- 6.7                    Mission
  - 6.7.1      Who does the Catholic school serve?
  - 6.7.2      Pre-evangelisation
  - 6.7.3      Evangelisation and conversion
  - 6.7.4      Theological elements of identity
  - 6.7.5      Dialogue with the community
  - 6.7.6      Conclusion
- 6.8                    Christian Life
  - 6.8.1      Traditional ecclesial affiliation
  - 6.8.2      New ecclesial reality for Catholic schools
  - 6.8.3      Pluralism
  - 6.8.4      Defining a Catholic worldview



	6.8.5	Mass attendance
6.9		Community
	6.9.1	Belief and belonging
	6.9.2	Authentic Christian community
	6.9.3	Staff witness
	6.9.4	Declining parish influence
	6.9.5	Principal-clergy relationships
6.10		Conclusion

### **6.3    *Emergent themes***

Analysis of the findings indicates a depth of disparity in the way the Catholic tradition and Catholic life are viewed and understood. This reality challenges traditional notions of the role of the Catholic school principal and intensifies the ambiguity surrounding the purpose of the Catholic school. Reasons for these fundamental differences are inextricably linked to the changing Catholic landscape encompassing shifting social, economic and familial contexts of the Catholic school (Belmonte & Cranston, 2007). The findings echo other empirical research confirming that basic beliefs and understandings about Catholic tradition and life, once held as immutable, are now open to challenge and debate (Borg, 2004).

The scale of difference in fundamental beliefs suggests that this is far broader than disagreement over a number of discrete issues or specific concerns. This has led to a transitional period where long established customs, practices and beliefs are being challenged and critiqued as never before by a community seeking new ways to express “a relationship with the sacredness of life” (Tacey, 2003, p. 33). Beliefs and practices associated with Catholic tradition and life are being reshaped and re-imagined into a vision which accords more closely with the lived experience and needs of those seeking a Transcendent presence in the world (Morwood, 2007). It is a search for a new form of Catholicism which resonates more fully with people’s lives (Kelly, 2009).

This transitional period is a time of deep divide and major conflict in the Church involving two very different visions of Christianity (Borg, 2004, O’Murchu, 2002, Morwood, 2007) giving rise to the description “paradigm change” [a term] “central to understanding what is happening in the Church today” (Borg, 2004, p. 4). The

paradigm change encompasses the fundamental “interpretive framework that shapes how everything is seen” (Borg, 2004, p. 4).

The research findings confirm the existence of distinct visions and worldviews across a range of areas fundamental to Catholic tradition and life. It is therefore appropriate that the findings of the research be discussed and organised around the two contrasting paradigms, the first of which is variously referred to as the contemporary or earlier paradigm, emphasising continuity and the second understood as the emerging paradigm, emphasising change and renewal (Collins, 2007).

From the analysis of the findings six salient themes emerged and now form the framework to present the discussion of the findings. The findings will be discussed under the themes of: leadership, role, identity, mission, Christian life and community.

## **6.4 Leadership**

Pastoral leadership of the school community is identified as one of the most important facets of the principal’s role. However, variance exists in the understanding of pastoral leadership resulting from two contrasting points of view. While the views are not unanimous within any of the groups, there is sufficient difference to indicate a general conclusion of disparate understandings of pastoral leadership emanating from key theological and philosophical differences.

### **6.4.1 Theological and philosophical foundations**

Principals and employing authorities understand pastoral leadership of school communities in terms of an invitation to engage with the Catholic way of life through integration of education and experience. This endeavour is supported by two key theological and philosophical foundations: (1) a Catholic anthropology, and (2) the primacy of relationships in a community underpinned by Gospel values. The pursuit of authentic relationships and Gospel values is clearly documented by principals and employing authorities as providing life and meaning to the principal’s work. This stance is supported by the work of McLaughlin (2000a), among others.

These foundations are further clarified around three points cited by principals and employing authorities as touchstones for determining action and setting direction. The first point is the primacy of the message of Jesus. Principals and employing authorities indicate clearly that this point is fundamental to their approach. The message of Jesus, rather than the person of Jesus, forms the basis of education programs and experiences in the Catholic way of life. Such an approach encourages followers to move "beyond knowing about Jesus" [to a point where] "they become disciples of his 'way'" (Groome, 1996, p. 118). This approach recognises changes in Catholic behaviour from high participation in long standing practices understood as central to "acting Catholic" to an approach emphasising inner transformation over external behaviour (Kelly, 2009). This signals a key difference between the two paradigms.

The second point is the priority of community which gives life experience, witness and sustenance to the message of Jesus. There are clear differences of thought between the two paradigms around how this occurs and who should be included in such a community. Religiously homogeneous Catholic school communities have largely disappeared. The Catholic school community is now a religiously heterogeneous group reflecting a wider community profile (Kelly, 2009). The contemporary paradigm emphasises liturgical affiliation and parish allegiance as the mark of community, while the emerging paradigm expresses the mark of community as an invitation to discover, nourish and experience Christian life.

The third point is the personal response to the message of Jesus through service and outreach, emphasising values such as peace and social justice in daily life (Flynn & Mok, 2002). The emerging paradigm seeks to build a community searching for a genuine engagement with a complicated world through "a fuller understanding of faith and ways to live that faith authentically to improve communities and the world" (Kelly, 2009). The contemporary paradigm emphasises external behaviour through participation in long standing practices. Outcomes of this research indicate profound differences between the two paradigms on the nature and shape of service and outreach.

#### **6.4.2 Regnocentric thinking**

The key endeavours of the emerging paradigm focus on nurturing relationships, welcoming diversity of views and beliefs, and connecting with daily life experiences by engaging pastorally with the world. This paradigm seeks and centres on the reign of God and extends an invitation to respond to the challenge of the kingdom by engaging meaningfully with the message of Jesus. This difference exemplifies well the contrasting nature of the contemporary and emerging paradigms.

The aspirations expressed through these endeavours align closely with contemporary Catholic thinking tracing four dominant stages of Catholic engagement with the world (Ratzinger, 2007). Prior to the Second Vatican Council “ecclesiocentrism”, the Church being at the centre of everything, dominated Catholic thinking and practice. This was followed by a shift to “Christocentrism” with the person of Jesus at the centre of all. A recognition that Christ was at the centre of the Christian religions only prompted a shift towards “theocentrism” which allowed a greater engagement and dialogue with other world religions. We are now moving toward a period dominated by “regnocentrism” which places the Kingdom, the core of Jesus’ message, at the centre of Catholic thinking and practice (Ratzinger, 2007) and within the human heart based on the values of justice and love (Robinson, 2007). These stages in Catholic thinking provide a useful perspective to explain and interpret the findings. The perspective of “regnocentrism” resonates more comfortably with the emerging paradigm while “ecclesiocentrism” is more prominent within a contemporary paradigm.

#### **6.4.3 Liturgical affiliation**

Principals are committed to participation in the life of the Church through their local parishes and are active in extending an open invitation to the school community to engage with the local Church community. The response by the majority of families though is not encouraging. Practices such as Mass attendance and parish involvement are not mentioned in responses from principals and employing authorities when talking about pastoral leadership. This emerging paradigm creates a dilemma for principals, who share little confidence in a Mass recruitment approach given the nature of most school communities where the vast majority of parents and students show scant interest in the formal religious education program offered by the

school (Belmonte & Cranston, 2007). What is abundantly clear is that, for most of the community, compliance with beliefs, laws and tradition is important only to the extent that it contributes to and promotes the message of Jesus, the experience of community and the response through outreach and service.

The findings confirm that principals and employing authorities themselves struggle trying to separate “an authentic search for a liveable theology from the strictures of official Church policy” (Kelly, 2009). There is a clear difference between the two paradigms in the place and importance of liturgical affiliation in the lives of the vast majority of Catholic families.

This dilemma is further endorsed in the outcomes of research into the key behaviours of the principal which found almost no correlation between key behaviours identified by principals and the expectations held by members of the clergy for principals’ behaviour (Slattery, 1998). The research concluded that “principals and their staff saw little reason for the involvement of parish priests in matters related to the school, thus reflecting the growing distance between parish priests and those working within Catholic schools” (Slattery, 1998, p. 169).

#### **6.4.4 Faith and meaning**

Principals understand pastoral leadership as more than handing on the doctrine of the Church to a new generation (Prendergast, 2003). The role encompasses a desire and capacity to develop a sense and experience of the Transcendent in the lives of students (Hicks, 2004), and “the ability to give meaning to life, the ability to re-imagine what is for new times (Chittester, 2003, p. 21). This point of view is a choice for critical dialogue over direction and the experience of a pastoral rather than juridical Church (Robinson, 2007). There is a strong sense of schools as “places of evangelisation, social justice, a sacramental approach to life and a way of introducing children to a Catholic way of being” (Flynn in Collins, 2007, p. 142).

Immersion in a community which gives high regard to these endeavours is seen by both principals and employing authorities as sound preparation for a meaningful integration and appropriation of faith into daily life. One principal articulated this aspiration of pastoral leadership:

As soon as you come into a school and especially a Catholic school you should see it in the relationships that are happening between staff members, children and adults, how we conduct ourselves towards parents and partnerships, we really must focus on that (P#6/F).

Principals emphasise the development of relationships as the key element of pastoral leadership and understand the fundamental link between faith and life experience and provide experiences and knowledge of the Catholic faith which resonate with the faith lives of the community. The Catholic school community provides an opportunity for people to “bring their religious sensibility more fully into the public sphere and to let that engagement inform their theology” (Kelly, 2009).

#### **6.4.5 Spiritual identity**

Principals and employing authorities express the pastoral understanding of the principal’s role as living and sharing the Catholic faith with the intention of influencing and enriching the lives of students, staff and other members of the school community. The focus of this mission is on education and formation, a stage of pre-evangelisation (Collins, 2007) or “new evangelisation” (Bishops of NSW and ACT), rather than recruitment and compliance. This “invitational paradigm” (Prendergast, 2003, p. 16) supports a view that any allegiance to the faith is invitational rather than impositional. The essence of this paradigm is that staff, parents and clergy assist students in developing a personal spiritual, cultural and moral identity. Put simply, students are architects of their own growth. This sentiment is summarised in the following reflection by one principal:

I think that religious leadership is intimately linked with the pastoral role of the principal. Principals are called upon to help all within the community, students, staff, families and it is through this active pastoral role that we are called upon to treat others in the image of Jesus. Our daily relationships with people in a multitude of situations provide us with the opportunity to respond to them in the way conducive to the model of Christ (P#19/Q).

In contrast, the contemporary paradigm endorses the primacy of doctrinal/behavioural outcomes, encouraging a type of “compliant paralysis” (Collins, 2008, p. 93). This paradigm sets behavioural requisites characterised by Mass attendance and adherence to laws and doctrine. These practices are considered prerequisites to Church membership. This approach values and honours “traditional Catholic families” (C#3/Q) “traditional teachings and practices” (C#1/Q) and laments

the loss of these standards and practices in the lives of the large majority of the school community. “Ecclesiocentric” thinking dominates this paradigm.

Contemporary paradigm thinking is ambivalent to the current reality of school communities and generally holds expectations that pastoral leadership should be focused more towards conscripting the community to active parish involvement and faithfulness to Church teachings and doctrine. Mass attendance and parish involvement are key aspirations expressed consistently by clergy as a prerequisite for spiritual engagement with members of the community.

This view, though, is not held by all clergy, with one member citing a deeper understanding of the community demands and contextual constraints on the spiritual leadership of principals stating that “all too often now the principal (and a few others) may be voices crying in the wilderness, and they have to shoulder an unequal burden of witnessing to the faith” (C#1/Q).

#### **6.4.6 Spiritual literacy and formation**

Similar conflicting understandings of pastoral leadership are advanced by principals who feel unprepared and inadequate as pastoral leaders (Joseph, 2002). In fact, principals and employing authorities understand that pastoral leadership incorporates more than the simple transference of doctrine from one generation to the next and adherence to certain beliefs and practices. Principals and employing authorities understand their roles in far different terms than clergy (Flynn & Mok, 2002, Chittester, 2003, Hicks, 2004). This difference in understanding of pastoral leadership suggests that “the conflict between kerygma and dialogue, proclamation and discussion are at the heart of the tension” (Mellor, 2005, p. 45). Principals’ leadership aspires for growth rather than simple obedience and they are more comfortable with the chaos of struggle, challenge, free-decision and responsibility of such a stance (Robinson, 2007).

#### **6.4.7 Conclusion**

Pastoral leadership by the principal is considered to be a fundamental aspect of the role by all groups. Further exploration of the application and purpose of pastoral leadership exposes profound differences between groups associated with the

effective operation of Catholic schools. The disparate understandings suggest that groups are acting out of two very different paradigms.

## **6.5 Role**

The findings confirm clear differences in understanding by the various stakeholders around the educative, administrative and religious dimensions of the principal's role. In light of the many competing demands for the principal's time and attention, a clearer definition and agreed understanding of the principal's role was seen as a priority by all groups. This is manifest in concerns about responding to unreal expectations held by stakeholders. Principals note that expectations have not kept pace with the historical evolution of the role, which in many respects was shaped "in a different era, by a different educational and Church context for a different student and parent clientele" (Hansen, 2000, p. 142).

### **6.5.1 Educative leadership**

Principals and employing authorities unanimously endorse the principal's prime responsibility as educative leadership. Indicative of responses "...number one, I think, is to improve the learning and teaching of all people in the school" (P#6/F), "leading, supporting and promoting curriculum development" (E#2/Q), "...ensuring relevant/holistic learning, fair assessment practices" (E#3/Q) and "focussing on clear goals to improve learning for every student" (E#5/Q).

Prominence is given to educative leadership: however, there is a sense that, in the contemporary operational context, educative leadership is more rhetoric than substance as the role increasingly involves a burgeoning list of duties and expectations which seem unrelated to the goals of educative leadership. The skewing of the principal's role from educative leadership to administrative management presents a significant challenge to the educational leadership of the principal (Fullan, 2002).

The findings confirm general acknowledgment of the exponential growth of the role of the principal into areas beyond core teaching and learning, and that "the role of principal as instructional leader is too narrow a concept than we need for the future"



(Fullan, 2004, p. 16). Indeed the growing complexity of the role dictates that “the work of educational leadership should be work that is simultaneously intellectual and moral; an activity characterised by a blend of human, professional and civic concerns; a work of cultivating an environment for learning that is humanly fulfilling and socially responsible” (Starratt, 2004, p. 3). The findings confirm a strong desire towards authentic leadership.

### **6.5.2 Personal authenticity**

Principals and employing authorities cite tension emanating from a working environment where personally held beliefs, values and aspirations are often at odds with the beliefs, teachings and aspirations of the official Church and its officials. “No one espouses the rhetorical Catholic crap – staff or families” (P#1/Q). Most principals cite authenticity as one of the strongest values guiding their work. The concept of authentic leadership has far-reaching implications for leaders of Catholic schools.

Successful and effective leadership requires much more than experience and competence, and is “much more a matter of who the leader is than how the leader applies leadership principles or adopts leadership style” (Starratt, 2004). The “skills of doing” can only be applied if leaders have the “skills of being” (Duigman, 2007). Truly authentic leadership creates a tension for principals who feel caught between two very different paradigms (Duignan, 2007). Authenticity is critical to the emerging Catholicism. While principals and employing authorities acknowledge disagreement on some Church teaching and beliefs, they welcome the honest search for genuine understanding and answers. There is a general sense that the Church’s stance on many issues is not a genuine search for understanding and identity rather “a mere flexing of institutional power” (Kelly, 2009).

### **6.5.3 Open accessibility**

Principals cite their open accessibility to all, coupled with the expectation that they will at least be the first point of contact, if not take full responsibility for the solution of problems which are beyond their training and expertise, as a mounting source of discontent. This reality is indicative of the paucity of specialists available to families, while also reflecting areas normally within the responsibilities of clergy. It also endorses wide-ranging research concluding that parents are more inclined to

approach the school with concerns which would have once been referred to the parish priest (McLaughlin, 2002). One example of this is the sacramental instruction and preparation of students.

Indeed, the skewing of the role away from the core business of schools is exacerbated in the Catholic school context because of the disintegration of the two traditional faith communities – the family and the parish. Significant changes to these communities “have resulted in higher expectations and demands on Catholic schools, and in particular principals” (Neidhart & Carlin, 2004, p. 6).

#### **6.5.4 Parish involvement**

Inflated expectations that the principal be involved in all aspects of parish life add to the complexity of the principal's role. There is general affirmation by clergy of the religious commitment and witness of principals measured almost exclusively on Mass attendance and involvement in other parish matters. However, close scrutiny by the community, especially felt by principals in smaller, isolated centres, is seen as leading to a “professional” Catholic mindset. One member of clergy questioned the sense of allegiance of some principals to their parishes naming their involvement as “perfunctory” and “going through hoops” (C#3/I).

Concomitant with this is a working environment of unclear expectations of system authorities and clergy regarding the role of the principal. Such an environment:

- Contributed to the complexity of principalship in the Catholic primary school;
- Raised issues regarding the different experiences of school/parish relationships;
- Resulted in a clash of leadership paradigms as principals employ collaborative approaches to school leadership and reject traditional understandings.

(ACCPA Research Project, 2005)

Similar research from a parish perspective confirms a situation of declining numbers of clergy and the consequent additional expectations on the principal. Indeed, “in many parishes, especially those located in rural areas, Pastoral Council members admitted that expectations of the Catholic school principal in terms of lay parish

leadership would increase despite their acknowledgement of the injustice and impracticality of such an expectation” (QCEC Research Project, 2007, p. 16).

#### **6.5.5 School as agency of the Church**

Clergy consider the school as a subordinate constituent of the parish and hold expectations that school leadership would be exercised in supporting the life of the parish. Typical of this expectation is the comment “[I expect principals] to communicate to the school community various aspects of the parish, encouraging staff/families to participate more in broader parish life and not simply the ‘school church’” (QCEC Research Project, 2007, p. 7). In contrast, principals consider the school as an agency of the Church, not the parish. This dilemma is indicative of the principal’s working environment, where the parish community shares little influence in the lives of almost all families seeking enrolment in a Catholic school (Collins, 2007) and yet has expectations which reflect little understanding or recognition of the changing Catholic landscape.

#### **6.5.6 Religious leadership**

Clergy consider religious leadership as the key dimension of the principal’s role and expect that “the school principal must be a religious leader of the community” (C#5/Q). There is an implied view that the touchstone against which expectations of the role are measured derives from a corporate memory of active involvement by members of religious orders in schools. Comments such as “...we have lost a kind of witness that was important at a particular age in the Church. I guess we have to find that again with our lay teachers” (C#2/I) support this view. There is a sense that clergy lament the demise of religious congregations in schools and, by comparison, hold a view that lay leadership does not measure up to or fill the void left by their demise.

This research confirms a clear rejection of the stereotypical understanding of religious leadership by principals. Religious leadership, styled upon a model once provided by members of the religious orders, was seen as no longer appropriate or acceptable to lay principals. There was also a sense of being held responsible for the decline in active Church participants.

Expectations of religious leadership are exacerbated by limited participation by principals in formation opportunities. There is concern that principals lack the sophisticated spiritual awareness and theological literacy to adequately fulfil the role of religious leadership. This highlights the significantly different backgrounds of contemporary lay principals who struggle to combine a commitment to family life with a commitment to the demands of professional and personal formation.

#### **6.5.7 Accountability and compliance**

Principals, clergy and employing authorities express caution against the burgeoning demands of accountability and compliance from government, system authorities and Church. Of particular concern to principals is that the role may become beholden to the weight of bureaucratic demands and “excessive managerialism” (Duignan, 2007) to the detriment of the preferred educative and pastoral leadership. Principals believe their most important work is with people at the “grassroots” level in touch with the life stories of their communities. Principals identified system and government accountability and compliance demands as adding significantly to the pressures of their role.

Teaching principals experience difficulty maintaining the integrity of their teaching role when they are expected to complete the same administrative demands of larger schools. In many cases, they also manage expectations as the default leaders of the local Catholic community. Principals articulate a concern that system demands fail to recognise the unique context of individual schools with the resultant loss of flexibility and discretion to act according to local needs and priorities.

#### **6.5.8 Leadership framework**

There is little direction or clarity provided by employing or Church authorities around how schools should fulfil their mission to be part of Church. Principals feel exposed in attempting to be all things to all people, and clearly see their key role as the educative leader of the school community. There is scope for debate on whether the issue at the heart of this variation in views is an issue of clarity or, more precisely, an issue of agreement.

In response to this challenge, the development of a leadership framework to provide more explicit guidance and direction to the principal's role is required. Principals and employing authorities express concern that the influence of clergy in the life of the school often derived from scant background and experience in either contemporary education or family life. This adds to the complexity of forming and sustaining a productive partnership founded on common aspirations. Principals noted that several dioceses have initiated the development of a leadership framework which seeks to clarify and define the various dimensions of the role.

## **6.6 *Identity***

Differing perspectives on the essential constituents of Catholic identity are problematic for all connected with the Catholic school. Understandings of Catholic identity vary between two extremes, "Catholicism lite", a form of faith sold out to secularism, and "Taliban Catholicism", an "angry expression of Catholicism that knows how to excoriate and condemn" (Allen, 2009). The task of the principal is to navigate a middle course "embracing a robust sense of Catholic identity without carrying a chip on their shoulder" (Allen, 2009).

### **6.6.1 Traditional notions of Catholic identity**

The pluralistic nature of contemporary Catholic school communities challenges traditional notions of Catholic identity (Robinson, 2007). Concomitant with this, the rejection of Church affiliation by families challenges the traditional understandings of ecclesial identity of Catholic schools. This critical insight impacts significantly on the principal's role. Disparate understandings of identity are clear evidence of different paradigms at work in the debate about Catholic identity.

The traditional paradigm creates expectations viewed by principals as hidebound and beyond their capacity to deliver either in terms of appropriate training, available time or willingness to do so. The challenge of maintaining a "traditional" Catholic culture and identity in a community with diminishing allegiance to mainstream Church, largely seen as "duty-driven and sterile" (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 7) is vigorously articulated by principals.

### **6.6.2 Marginalisation of religion**

Catholic schools function in an environment where religion has ceased to be the basis of identity for the current generations of parents and students (McLaughlin, 2008). Families are more discerning and eclectic in their approach and allegiance to traditional faith institutions. Tenets of faith considered foundational to Catholic identity hold little weight or meaning for the majority of parents, staff, principals and employing authorities, and may be indicative of a cultural shift towards unbelief, which runs deeper than mere rejection of practices associated with faith and belief (Taylor, 2007). The cultural transition “is one which takes us from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to one in which faith, even for the staunchest believer, is one human possibility among others. Belief in God is no longer axiomatic” (Taylor, 2007, p. 3).

The principal’s role is enacted in an environment of “religious indifference” where “God becomes a ‘hobby’ and this marginalised religion is thus robbed of social seriousness” (Gallagher, 1995, p. 4). The growing Australian secular culture “is tending to marginalise the religious dimension of Catholic schools for which the schools were originally founded” (Flynn in Collins, 2007, p. 141). The emerging paradigm is characterised by a “hermeneutic of suspicion” (D’orsa, 2008) rendering once closed and accepted beliefs and teachings open to dialogue and debate.

### **6.6.3 Spiritual engagement**

A majority of parents name Christian values as the most appealing feature of Catholic schools. The pursuit of Christian values figures prominently in principals’ articulation of Catholic identity. Principals believe that spiritual engagement with the community without pre-requisite expectations enriches the faith life of all and strengthens the Catholic identity of the school.

Spiritual engagement is expressed in terms of experiences of prayer and liturgy emphasising the message of Jesus, and knowledge and experience of Catholic life. This view is indicative of the emerging paradigm where the school is seen as the “new Church” comprising a largely “post-ecclesial” (Rolheiser, 2007) community. The “post-ecclesial” status of most families indicates an absence of any personal experience, emotional attachment through extended family involvement or memory of

parish life. Principals express an openness to journey in faith with all members of the community whatever their status in this regard. This position, while in step with the spirit of evangelisation, indicates a profound disparity in understanding of Catholic identity. Bishop Michael Putney's claim that "only when we name who we are before this 'other' will we be able to claim our identity fully ourselves" (Putney, 2008b, p. 36) invites further scrutiny around the question of "who we are".

The outcomes of this research confirm a contrasting paradigm to the emerging paradigm outlined above. The contemporary paradigm disputes whether spiritual engagement with the community on the level outlined above would constitute an authentic and complete Catholic education. Furthermore, the contemporary paradigm asserts that authentic Catholic identity is given full expression only through active participation in the liturgical life of the Church. In contrast, the belief that "identity is shaped not only by one's own tradition but also by engagement with 'the other' which in this case is a multi-faceted other, including other Christians and other believers but above all the secular post-modern culture of Australia today" (Putney, 2007) gives some credence to the approach preferred by principals. The findings of this research confirm that principals and employing authorities act out of a paradigm of strong commitment to engagement with "the other". "In doing so we become aware not only of our differences, but [also] the richness of our own traditions" (Putney, 2007). In contrast, those acting out of the contemporary paradigm embrace "the other" conditionally, most often on some expectation of active Church participation.

#### **6.6.4 Conclusion**

This fundamental difference between the two paradigms bears further investigation and reflection. Principals, employing authorities and clergy agree that the pervasive cultural marginalisation of religion in the wider community presents a real and growing threat to "traditional" Catholic identity. Principals labour to promote a Catholic identity which is truly contemporary and yet authentically ecclesial against a background of perceived resistance and parochial self-interest. This perception ranges from "creative noncontemporaneity" at best and "aggressive backwardness" (Metz, 1998, p.39) at worst. There is a concern about a perceived lack of commitment to the ecclesial aspect of authentic Catholic identity by principals.

## **6.7 Mission**

Responses from principals, employing authorities and clergy identify a range of understandings of the mission of the Catholic school.

### **6.7.1 Who does the Catholic school serve?**

The historical primary rationale for the existence of Catholic schools, namely, the defence and protection of the Catholic faith in an environment of secular-Catholic antipathy, still motivates some of the current thinking around the mission of the Catholic school. For some, Catholic school mission relates almost exclusively to ecclesial outcomes. Such a position presents a strong argument that the Catholic school is primarily at the service of the parish (Tinsey, 1998) and that the primary mission of the Catholic school is “the creation of successive generations of Catholic mass-goers” (Hansen, 2000). Some clergy hold aspirations of having Catholic schools for liturgically affiliated Catholic families only and question the value of including families who had chosen not to affiliate liturgically with Church.

### **6.7.2 Pre-evangelisation**

Fundamental differences between the traditional and emerging paradigms focus on the questions of whom the Catholic school serves and how they are best engaged. Emerging paradigm thinking is unequivocal in asserting that Catholic schools are open to all, welcoming students of other faiths and nominally Catholic students, allowing each to maintain their own religious integrity. Indeed, such a position is recognised in official documents which indicate clearly that students in Catholic schools might come from very different ideological backgrounds (CCE, 1998). This appears to include even non-Christian students and provides a basis to assume that non-Catholics are not necessarily present in Catholic schools only to be proselytised.

The emerging paradigm expresses commitment to pre-evangelisation as part of the mission of the Catholic school. Catholic schools aspire to provide an education about and experience of Christian life in the Catholic tradition. The Catholic school nurtures a secure and supportive environment for people to engage in and explore their faith within a Catholic framework. This emerging paradigm is consistent with post-Vatican II theology of mission (Quillinan, 2007).



### **6.7.3 Evangelisation and conversion**

The approach inferred by Cardinal Pell (2006) when he asks “what strategies might be adopted to strengthen the Christian faith and perhaps make converts among the 23% of non-Catholic students in our schools?” is indicative of the contemporary paradigm and at odds with the intentions espoused by principals and employing authorities. When speaking of their role, principals identified the pastoral aspects as being most important in their response to their call, meeting and supporting families without an imperative to proselytise or convert. According to the emerging paradigm, the role is best described as one of “evangelizers rather than sacramentalisers” (QCEC Research Report, 2007).

### **6.7.4 Theological elements of identity**

In the quest for authentic Catholic identity the emergent paradigm differs from the contemporary paradigm in the “modes of emphasis and degrees of importance” (Phan, 2002) placed on the four theological elements of Church, proclamation, mission and reign of God. These are similarly described as word, witness, worship and welfare which should “permeate the whole shared life and curriculum of Catholic schools” (Groome, 1996, p. 114). Advocates of the emerging paradigm prioritise these elements in the exact opposite order to that of the contemporary paradigm, namely, the reign of God, mission, proclamation and Church. This research confirms this difference, placing the reign of God at the forefront of understandings about mission. The emerging paradigm understands the commitment of Christians to bring about the reign of God in the world and proclaim the good news by example. The alternative ecclesiocentric paradigm links evangelisation to an ecclesial outcome, “evangelisation leads ultimately to Eucharist” (Putney, 2008), and highlights the difference between the paradigms as one of emphasis and weight. The essential difference in the paradigms is one of “saving souls and church extension” (Phan, 2002) to “transformation of the economic, social and political structures, dialogue with other religions and engagement with local cultures” (Phan, 2002).

Responses from principals and employing authorities confirm that “saving souls and church extension” (Phan, 2002) does not figure highly among reasons for enrolling students of other faiths in Catholic schools. This perspective is given official authority

by Bishop Michael Putney who posits that “this at least opens the door to considering a school that sets out intentionally not only to enrol those of other faiths but [also] to consciously work to strengthen and grow these students in their own faith and to provide instruction and pastoral care that is linked to this” (Putney, 2007).

Principals, in recognising the increasing enrolment of students of other faiths and a pervasive cultural opposition to religion in the wider community, advocate that Catholic schools continue to make a “Catholic” contribution to education (Fisher, 2006). This contribution should include the education of a sizeable proportion of children from other faith groups and that the Catholic school should be re-visioned as “a principle organ for evangelisation” (Fisher, 2006).

#### **6.7.5 Dialogue with the community**

The “regnocentric” view of mission clearly identifies that “Catholic schools are called to proclaim the good news by creating a community experience, an experience of the reign of God” (Quillinan, 2007, p. 6). Principals and employing authorities articulate a preference for, and openness to, dialogue with the community. This commitment to dialogue is a significant difference between the two paradigms. In fact the only effective way for the Church to carry out its mission of evangelisation is through dialogue (Phan, 2007).

All groups agreed that the mission of the school was under pressure from a number of significant and influential external variables. These included pressure for academic success, an inclusive enrolment pattern and the influence of media-driven values contrary to the values espoused by the school.

#### **6.7.6 Conclusion**

There is clear evidence emerging from the data and other research suggesting that Catholic schools have become the church of choice for the vast majority of families making up the community (Treston, 2007). This research also found that there are significant areas of variance in understanding the purpose of the Catholic school. This scenario as well as the embrace of spirituality and rejection of ecclesiology has served to establish schools as what could be metaphorically described as “satellite” Churches, orbiting within the gravitational influence of the Church however remaining

distant from the “official” Church and moving sometimes closer, sometimes further apart depending on the strength of attraction. This reality has real implications for the way in which schools view their role in promoting and modelling essential elements of Christian life.

## **6.8 *Christian life***

Principals and employing authorities were mindful of the paradoxical nature of school communities where liturgical affiliation is experiencing radical decline while the interest in and commitment to non-institutional spirituality is proportionately increasing. The data confirm a reality where spirituality is embraced as desirable and worthwhile, and that pluralism and ambiguity are part of the contemporary spiritual context. There is evidence of a separation of spirituality and ecclesiology, a key reality of contemporary Christian life (Rolheiser, 1999).

### **6.8.1 Traditional ecclesiology**

Clergy are indifferent to Christian life bereft of traditional ecclesial affiliation, expressing a robust aspiration to bring people back to liturgical affiliation within the Church. Crucial to the success of this aspiration was a belief that “appropriate” leadership by school personnel was the crucial ingredient in facilitating a turnaround in current thinking and practice. There is an expectation that “lay persons (educators and parents) belonging to the educational community must take a meaningful part, even outside the walls of the Catholic school, in the life of the local Church” (CCE, 2007, p. 20).

The contemporary paradigm expects that the school’s priorities should be skewed towards “traditional” practicing families rather than families who may have abandoned any formal allegiance to Church. This position contrasts significantly to that taken by principals and employing authorities who view the quest for spirituality as fertile ground for evangelisation. There is little acknowledgement by clergy of the profound impact of enormous shifts in the nature of the contemporary religiously heterogeneous Catholic school community. Principals and employing authorities recognise the paradox of a community disaffected toward the institutional Church yet harbouring a desire to “engage with the world informed by Catholic tradition and

theology” (Kelly, 2009). There is a real sense that clergy “do not yet understand how to accommodate a highly educated, confident and increasingly independent laity who want to play important roles in their parishes and organisations” (Kelly, 2009).

### **6.8.2 New ecclesial reality for Catholic schools**

Principals express frustration attempting to respond appropriately to the implications of profound shifts in thought and practice while still expected to work within and support structures and practices deemed unimportant by the majority of families and staff of Catholic school communities. Principals identify and embrace a new ecclesial reality of schools being the primary place where young people encounter Jesus and his teaching. The emerging paradigm promotes a different response to a community searching for “faith but not the church, the questions but not the answers, the religious but not the ecclesial, and the truth but not obedience” (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 5). “As a Church, we have a long history of providing authoritative answers to a plethora of issues” (Lennan, 2004, p. 4). This reality is consistent with current research confirming that “many people express a yearning for clearer articulation of non-material values without resort to institutional religion” (McKay, 2007, p. 14).

The emergence of deinstitutionalised religion is well documented in empirical research, which notes that about half of the participants expressed a desire to develop a spiritual life that was not dependent on the Church or on Mass attendance (“Catholics who have stopped going to Mass” Report, 2006, “The US Religious Survey” 2007). The reality is also indicative of a general rejection of the institutional Church by young people (Rymarz, 2004) and the declining involvement of families in all aspects of parish life. The majority of families comprising Catholic school communities can “no longer sufficiently locate themselves within the Church’s world-view to be regular participants in the Church’s core communal action, the Mass” (Collins, 2007, p. 102).

### **6.8.3 Pluralism**

The absence of an ecclesial dimension to contemporary spirituality is indicative of a shift towards a comfortable embrace of pluralism of beliefs and values in Australian Catholic schools (Belmonte & Cranston, 2007). This has resulted in an increased enrolment of students of other faiths during the same time period, and a general

illiteracy and disinterest in the Catholic Church and its teaching by many who choose a Catholic school (Treston, 2007). Principals' expectations of the community in this regard are inclusive and tolerant.

For principals, faith background and practice of families is important to the extent that families are willing to support the Catholic ethos of the school. Principals and employing authorities seemed more at ease than clergy with the peripatetic nature of the faith beliefs and practices of families. Family faith backgrounds, best described as spiritually eclectic and self-constructed, are seen by principals and employing authorities as enriching the spiritual fabric of the school and presenting an ideal opportunity to engage with families on a spiritual level. "Modernity has deconstructed the traditional systems of believing, but has not forsaken belief" (Kelty, 2007). Principals articulate a further complexity in working to provide a rich spiritual environment when fewer and fewer people have a spiritual vision which rises above "what is accidental to what is essential" (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 3). The challenge to provide the essentials of a spiritual vision consistent with Catholic beliefs and teachings is not lost on principals.

#### **6.8.4 Defining a Catholic worldview**

Principals endorse a view of Christian life where there is no longer any clear Catholic answer which is uncontested and accepted without question and dialogue. This is in an environment where the certitude inherent in traditional religious education is now deferring to experience as the prime determinant of beliefs and practice (Hughes, 2007) therefore creating a tension for principals trying to shape and maintain a Catholic worldview amid influential and prominent alternative worldviews. In fact, principals and employing authorities identified schools as a forum where even something as valued and entrenched as the Catholic ethos is open to challenge and contest by the community.

Furthermore, profound and enduring differences emerged in areas of personal commitment and adherence to Church teaching and core tenets between principals, employing authorities and clergy. These differences are indicative of polemic worldviews confirming the tense co-existence of the contemporary and emerging paradigms. The contemporary paradigm embraces a comfortable adherence to

fundamental beliefs and teachings on the basis that they are the product of 2000 years of thought and tradition. Concerns with Church teaching expressed by clergy centred on issues of family life and social compliance such as divorce and homosexuality.

Contrary to this view, the emerging paradigm embraces a critical stance to Church beliefs and teachings characterised by conscientious objection. This is indicative of a preference for the primacy of conscience in determining core beliefs. Principals and employing authorities are comfortable with the ambiguity inherent in this paradigm, and reluctant to accept aspects of Church beliefs and teaching simply on the basis of the teaching authority of the Church. Principals spoke incidentally about the influence of higher education on their thinking and are more likely to question the credibility of Church teaching against current thinking and understandings.

The emerging paradigm reinforces profound differences in thinking around the most fundamental elements of Church belief and teaching. There is sufficient evidence from the research to conclude that proponents acting out of the emerging paradigm have a great deal of difficulty with the Church's assertion of monopoly on definitive truth. High profile Church figures such as Bishop Geoffrey Robinson struggle to rationalise this assertion against the reality of the changing Catholic landscape (Robinson, 2007).

#### **6.8.5 Mass attendance**

Principals and employing authorities acknowledge the importance of formation and education in engaging the community in Christian life. Catholic schools challenge the contemporary culture and articulate an alternative vision of life. When speaking of their role, principals expressed no particular aspiration for increasing the attendance of families at Sunday Mass.

Contrary to this scenario, clergy convey a parochial desire for a more active association of families with the parish community, particularly attendance at Sunday Mass. Clergy clearly link the successful attainment of this aspiration to the role of the principal, both in terms of expectations of the principal's own worship practices and, for some clergy, the belief that Mass attendance should be a prerequisite for

attendance at a Catholic school. While principals consider attendance at Sunday Mass as important, they did not see it as a priority for their role, with one principal citing that “contemporary principals see no correlation between attending a Catholic school and attending Mass” (P#1/Q). Principals cited no evidence of “an enriching exchange in a more extensive communion with the parish” (CCE, 2007, p. 20) from families associated with the school.

Principals acknowledge and share the brokenness of people’s lives, expressing a vision of Church as the wounded body of Christ, and understand their role as an opportunity to walk with families on their faith journey, building confidence to converse about faith and enhancing the important connection between faith and life experience. Principals reject an ecclesiocentric approach expressing a preference for promoting the message of Jesus and modelling the values flowing from that message. This stance is consistent with the outcomes of research conducted by the Australian Catholic Primary Principals’ Association in 2005. The following quote is indicative of comments from principals expressing their aspirations in this area:

Happy children, staff and parents. A culture where people feel respected and appreciated and in turn provide this for others. A place where individual student needs are met and individual achievements celebrated and encouraged (P#19/Q).

The criticism inherent in some responses by clergy that such an approach represents a “Catholicism-lite” (Allen, 2009) approach, a diluted version of the Catholic faith, is also strongly rejected by principals. There was a sense by some clergy that principals were not as loyal or committed to parish life as they would like them to be. This view presents an obvious obstacle to fostering a genuine partnership between the two groups.

## **6.9 Community**

A clear aspiration of the role of the principal is to establish and nurture community. Community is valued and seen as a feature of successful Catholic schools, a view rationalised in terms of the fragmentation and breakdown of community at almost every level, including family and church. Principals express a clear preference for, and commitment to, relationship and community.

I would liken our Catholic school communities to the early church. Not all are Catholic (in fact none were) and all come from many different backgrounds but they share together the sense that something great is being offered and are drawn to this. My hope is that in time the experiences they have within our school communities will enliven them to the message of Jesus as it did with those in the early church. The sense of community that was present in the early church, the sense of purpose and community, is very evident in our schools and is a terrific building platform for us to begin the revisioning of Catholic communities (P#19/Q).

Principals articulate an understanding of community characterised by invitation and empathy. This community is continually created, preserved, and is committed to partnership, Christian values and the common good. Principals also widely recognise that, for many families, the experience of the school community is the closest and most influential encounter with the Catholic faith and Christian life they will have (McLaughlin, 2002). Principals articulated a vision of community incorporating welcome, openness to diversity, and an invitation to discover, nourish and experience Christian life. This vision is indicative of an emerging paradigm.

#### **6.9.1 Belief and belonging**

The emerging paradigm embraces the richness and ambiguity of the faith journey without parameters or, at times, definitive answers to many of life's big questions. "In this worldview, each person's faith must not only be chosen by them, it must 'speak' to them - it must make sense of their spiritual journey as they see it" (Wilson, 2008, p. 9). This view, while not universally supported, is endorsed by some who recognise the distinction between belief and Church affiliation.

Belief is a complex matter. Because of its nature it is difficult to quantify. People will answer questions about belief in different ways. Belief is not identical with Church affiliation. There are non-practising Catholics who are genuine believers and there are also many who practise but who may not really believe. Faith is about a relationship and relationships can be of differing quality. Measuring the level of faith in society is not just a question of numbers but above all of the quality of the faith relationship" (Martin, 2007).

Principals and employing authorities unambiguously strive to build the faith relationship by education about, and experience of, the Catholic faith and way of life.

In contrast to this worldview, the contemporary paradigm rationalises community differently. This paradigm is consistent with understandings expressed in official



Church publications such as “Educating Together in Catholic Schools” (2007) among others, and goes beyond the desire to belong to a group with shared values, and a comfortable acceptance of difference, doubt and uncertainty. This view offers spiritual engagement which is both duty-driven and “ecclesiocentric”. This is characterised by the external imposition of a set of beliefs bereft of relationship and commitment.

Recognition of, or aspiration for, the Catholic school as “an environment for an authentically ecclesial experience” (CCE, 2007, p. 6) was not evident in responses by principals. Principals defined their intent to provide an encounter with Jesus Christ through community, which “gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (Ratzinger, 2006, p. 1)

### **6.9.2 Authentic Christian community**

The aspirations of principals and employing authorities to provide an experience of Christian life through community is rationalised as a response to the changing mission of the Church as first espoused by Vatican II. The experience of community facilitates the challenge to create dialogue among staff, parents and students so far as this dialogue is age appropriate (Phan, 2007). The emerging paradigm accepts that the first task of the Catholic school is to create an authentic Christian community. Foundational to this task is the belief that “actual allegiance to and conversion to church membership is not the first but in fact the final task of mission” (Phan, 2007, p. 13). This has implications for schools and hence for school leadership.

In support of these sentiments, Archbishop Phillip Wilson (2007) argues that the conversion of large groups of people, in terms of a movement to formal Church allegiance is no longer possible or even desirable. Each individual makes their own choice with regards to formal allegiance to Church (Wilson, 2007). With regard to questions such as the meaning of life, the source of goodness and human values, “nobody has the standard answer that can convince everybody else and everybody who is asking these questions” (Taylor, 2007, p. 18). This thinking is indicative of a very different paradigm, that, in a plethora of faith practices and journeys, there are multiple answers which need to be explored further. In fact, “leading people to faith

can only take place with conversion of individual hearts and minds” (Wilson, 2007, p. 9).

### **6.9.3 Staff witness**

There was general accord by all groups that the extent to which the Christian message is transmitted as a result of the educational endeavours of the school is greatly influenced by the work and example of staff. There is a state of religious ennui among staff. Principals and employing authorities believe that in general, staff commitment to the religious character of the school could not be relied upon as may have been the case in previous years. All groups identify a general concern that staff were either unprepared, unwilling or unable to embrace the fullness of the Church and Catholic tradition.

One of the most confronting challenges is the selection, retention and ongoing formation of staff. Increasingly, staff act out of an industrial mindset in determining the priorities for involvement and participation in the life of the school community. Principals, in particular, alluded to the tension between vocational and industrial aspirations. Generally, staff do not view their role as “a personal vocation in the Church [but] simply the exercise of a profession” (CCE, 2007, p. 4). This expectation belies the reality that most members of staff are themselves “post-ecclesial” (Rolheiser, 2007) in their outlook and practices and hold little in common with the official Church beliefs and teachings (McLaughlin, 2000).

Of particular concern was the perceived lack of commitment by staff to their own faith formation and to any sense of ecclesial communion. The Catholic school by its very nature “requires the presence and involvement of educators that are not only culturally and spiritually formed, but also intentionally directed at developing their community educational commitment in an authentic spirit of ecclesial communion” (CCE, 2007, p. 13). Catholic school staff seem little different from the “post-Christian” (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 3) culture where religion has been marginalised within ordinary life and the dominant consciousness among many connected with the Church is agnostic (Rolheiser, 1999, p. 3).

#### **6.9.4 Declining parish influence**

Principals and employing authorities acknowledge a declining, limited contribution by parishes in the mission to engage families in meaningful dialogue about their faith. While this reality is exacerbated by declining numbers of available clergy and largely unaffiliated families, there is strong evidence to suggest the presence of deep differences between Catholic school leadership and clergy. These differences stem from an understanding of the status of the school in the life of the Church. Principals view schools as an agency of Church, while clergy maintain a belief of the school as an agency of the parish. Principals and employing authorities acknowledge this increasing division between school and parish as though separate entities with geographical proximity providing the only tenuous link. On a philosophical or theological basis there are few areas of agreement.

Principals identify a real challenge presented by a lack of clarity of the nature of the school-parish relationship is a real challenge according to principals and employing authorities. Parish involvement impacts greatly on the personal and family life of principals (ACPPA Research Project, 2005). There exists a paradox in the principal's involvement in parish life. While principals are very accepting of the role they hold within the community as a faith witness, a leader in the Church community and as a role model, the impact this has on principals and their families was seen as the single greatest life diminishing aspect of the role (ACPPA Project, 2005).

#### **6.9.5 Principal - clergy relationships**

Relationships between clergy and the principal and staff are seen to be problematic in a number of areas. There is minimal meaningful contact between parish and school, almost always initiated by the school, with almost no engagement for the purpose of formation and faith sharing. Principals cite a disproportionate responsibility to improve relationships and felt very much the minor partner in any relationship which existed.

Principals felt it was expected both by clergy and employing authorities that in disagreement it was the principal and/or staff who would compromise and change to accommodate the wishes of the parish priest. This observation is confirmed in recent research which found that "there was an expectation that principals would be people

with the interpersonal skills and dispositions necessary to build positive relationships [with clergy]" (QCEC Research Project, 2007).

The influence of the parish priest on possible future career aspirations was noted by principals. The success or otherwise of any relationship was seen to be largely contingent upon personality, which was problematic for principals. In the development of new models of church, principals see they have a valid and valuable contribution to make through their role as the leader in the Catholic school. This contribution needs to be recognised and supported rather than increased to fill the void left by decreasing number of priests (ACPPA Research Project, 2005).

### **6.10 Conclusion:**

It is clear from an analysis of the findings that, when it comes to leading Catholic schools, there exists two very different and, at times, competing paradigms. These competing paradigms contribute to a tension and suspicion between groups involved in the operation of Catholic schools. Principals feel wedged between the reality of their school community, their own personally held views and the views and aspirations of clergy who exert varying influence over the life and direction of the school.

There is consistent agreement on many of the desired outcomes of Catholic education. Where deep disparity of views exists, it is invariably around processes and practices. In general terms, the research indicates significant disagreement between principals and clergy when assessing appropriate strategies for engaging meaningfully with a multi-faith, secular and critical school community. Declining numbers of clergy only serves to exacerbate this adversarial climate.

The emergence of a new, challenging paradigm is consistent with the concept of the "upper limit hypothesis" (Branson, 2007). This hypothesis proposes that every organisation reaches a point where its effectiveness in attaining its goals and meeting the needs of its members enters a period of stagnation and decline. No amount of restructure or reform which fails to recognise the changing context and landscape will result in further sustainable growth. This period is characterised by

uncertainty and chaos as old ways are abandoned and the search for new ways of thinking begins.

The research findings contend that the contemporary paradigm guiding the beliefs, understandings and practices of being Catholic has reached the upper limit of its effectiveness and that a new paradigm is emerging which is guiding the thinking and actions of the vast majority of Catholics. The greatest challenge presented by a failure to take note of the emerging paradigm is not inefficiency but irrelevancy (Branson, 2007).

The emerging paradigm is a catalyst for fundamental changes to the way people view their faith and engage with the world. School leaders are challenged to respond to this changing landscape in ways which require a new understanding of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal. The new paradigm challenges contemporary understandings of Catholic ethos and Catholic identity and the way Catholic schools can most effectively and meaningfully engage with their community.

The research findings confirm two distinct paradigms interacting within the realm of the Catholic school. The findings support the view that any vision for the future based on contemporary paradigm thinking alone is not sustainable and will inevitably fail. Catholic schools present the most fertile opportunity to envision a future for Catholic education which resonates with a community searching for a new dynamic spirituality. This has profound implications for school leaders who wish to negotiate a workable vision for the future which encompasses the best of both paradigms.

The aim of this research project was to explore the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The following table contains the emergent themes which add complexity to the principal's role. Both paradigms are alive and active within each school community.

**Table 6.1      *Characteristics of contemporary and emerging paradigms***

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Contemporary paradigm</b>	<b>Emerging paradigm</b>
<b>The role of the principal</b>	<p>Leadership provided by clergy and religious orders entrenches a traditional culture and model of Church.</p> <p>The role of principal is clearly defined and understood in terms of competency based leadership.</p>	<p>Leadership by lay principals is interpretive and promotes relationships and Christian values through critical dialogue.</p> <p>The role of the principal is continually evolving with principals expected to engage with an ever-expanding community and understood in terms of capability based leadership.</p>
<b>The purpose of the Catholic school</b>	<p>The school has a clear Catholic ecclesial identity embedded in parish life.</p> <p>The school is exclusive, serving the catechetical needs of liturgically affiliated families.</p>	<p>The school is seen as the face of the “new Church” comprising a largely “post-ecclesial” and “post-denominational” community.</p> <p>The school is inclusive, involved in pre-evangelisation of diverse and pluralistic communities.</p>
<b>The changing Catholic landscape</b>	<p>Christian life is presented and understood in terms of rewards and punishment.</p> <p>The community accepts the values, doctrines and beliefs of the Church and supports the school's role in handing these onto the students.</p>	<p>Christian life is viewed as relational and transformational within a Christian tradition</p> <p>The community is critical and suspicious of the institutional church and supports the school's role in upholding Christian values.</p>

## **CHAPTER 7      CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conclusions and recommendations of this study.

### **7.1      *Introduction***

This chapter reflects on the study's purpose and research design. A summary of the research findings will be presented organised around the research questions. This is followed by the research conclusions and recommendations for further research and study.

### **7.2      *The purpose of the study***

The purpose of this research was to explore perceptions held by key stakeholders of the mission of the contemporary Catholic school and the role of the principal. The stakeholders selected for this research were principals, employing authorities and clergy. This study also sought to understand the rationale behind the perceptions held by the key stakeholders and the implications for principals and their role.

A review of the literature highlighted a background of diverse and evolving understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal. The research data confirmed this finding and that the contrasting views are a potential source of tension between members of these groups. The research proposes the presence of two major paradigms influencing the understandings and expectations major stakeholders have of schools and principals. The research identified inconsistencies between the official espoused views on mission and role and the perceptions and experience of principals, clergy and employing authorities.

The problem generating this research was the lack of clarity and agreement around the concepts of mission and role. In order to address this problem, participants were asked to reflect on aspects of the life of the Catholic school which they believe are essential for the school to act with integrity in its educational mission while sustaining an authentic Catholic identity. Participants were asked to identify features which define and typify an effective Catholic school, and the essential criteria which guide

their thinking when judging the success or otherwise of a Catholic school in giving authentic expression to this mission. Participants were also asked to reflect on some of the challenges posed to the future of Catholic education by the changing Catholic landscape.

Participants were also invited to reflect on the role of the principal in managing the competing forces attempting to shape the ethos and identity of the Catholic school. Participants were asked to identify key behaviours and aspects of the principal's role necessary to animate the mission of the school, and the key areas where principals were expected to exercise considerable leadership and expertise.

The study sought to gain a clearer understanding of the points of difference and the depth of disparity generated by contrasting perceptions and experience of members of these cohorts.

### **7.3     *Research design***

This study was primarily an exploration of the mission of the Catholic school and role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The study was interested in the perceptions and experience of principals, clergy and employing authorities and the rationale informing their positions. The conceptual framework grouped the literature into two focus areas, namely the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal. The research design was focused by the following questions:

1. How do principals/employing authorities/clergy perceive the mission of the Catholic school?
2. How do principals/employing authorities/clergy perceive the role of the Catholic school principal?

Given that the purpose of this study was to explore the issues from the perspectives of principals, clergy and employing authorities, an interpretative approach was considered appropriate. A constructionist epistemology was adopted as it is based on the assumption that different people construct meaning in different ways and that people use this meaning to make sense of their world (Crotty, 1998).



This research project was not a study of a phenomenon, rather an analysis of the meaning which emerges through interaction. Perceptions influence choices and behaviour through a process of social engagement and interaction with peers and others. This research examines the perceptions of the various cohorts involved in the administration and governance of schools and their proclivity to act on the basis of personal meanings. For this reason, the theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction was employed as the research method.

Given the intensity of social interaction associated with leading an authentic Catholic school, and the influence of deeply held personal views and perceptions on how the mission of the school is enacted, a case study approach was considered appropriate. The intent of the study was to gain insight into the issue of disparate perceptions and experiences of the mission of the Catholic school and role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The goal was “not the production of general conclusions” (Gomm et.al., 2000). It is the “particularity and ordinariness” (Stake, 2000, p. 437) of this study that was of intrinsic interest to the researcher. Therefore this was an intrinsic case study. Through the methodology of case study the construction of understanding was managed by description and documentation of perceptions and judgements made by participants.

The case study was bounded within an Australian Catholic diocese. Each cohort of participants was naturally bounded by their work areas and professions. Participants were invited by the researcher to be part of the study. The first group comprised 5 serving principals of Catholic primary schools within the chosen diocese.

The second group of participants comprises representatives of the Catholic employing authority. To ensure a proportionate spread of opinions and views, a group of 6 participants in supervisory roles higher than that of principal were selected.

The third group comprised 5 members of the clergy within the diocese. These participants were selected as representative of the wider clergy community who continue to have significant input into the professional life of the principal.

Data gathering strategies were chosen to support the purpose and unique character of the research project. Each of the chosen strategies encouraged a personal reflective journey from personal values and meanings to action. Strategies were designed to gain a closer understanding of reality as understood by each participant.

The strategies chosen for this research project were:

1. open-ended questionnaire;
2. semi-structured interviews;
3. focus group.

Following the results of the open-ended questionnaire, four principals, three clergy and three employing authority representatives were selected by the researcher for follow-up semi-structured interviews. These were audio-taped and transcribed to form part of the data presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Two focus groups were conducted with principals following the questionnaire. This strategy was adopted to validate the data received through the questionnaire and to contribute to the trustworthiness of the collected data.

The participant selection and the data collection process conformed with Ethical Clearance granted by the ACU Research Ethics Committee (Appendix 1).

#### **7.4 *Limitations of the research***

The research was concerned with the mission of the Catholic school and role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The research context is the Rockhampton Diocese. To ensure a spread and diversity of views, representatives were chosen from across the diocese, which required the researcher to travel extensively to conduct interviews and focus groups. The logistical challenges in collecting data from the participants given the isolation of schools throughout the diocese was a limitation of the research.

A second limitation was the personal and professional relationship of the researcher to many of the participants. All were known to the researcher, while some are close colleagues. The researcher is conscious of the possible bias and influence this may

have on the research findings. The choice of multiple data collection techniques minimises the researcher's bias in the collection and analysis stages.

## **7.5    *Research questions addressed***

This section presents a summary of the findings of the two research questions.

### **7.5.1    Research Question One**

The literature identified a range of understandings and expectations regarding the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal. This suggested that similar diversity would be apparent in the responses from the participants in this study. The first question sought to understand the perceptions of the mission of the Catholic school held by the participants. The question asked:

**How do principals/employing authorities/clergy perceive the mission of the Catholic school?**

The research confirmed a diversity of understandings of the mission of the Catholic school. This diversity clustered around two dominant paradigms. These paradigms reflected contrasting worldviews which resonated with a contemporary understanding of the mission of the Catholic school, and an emerging understanding, more cognisant of the needs and characteristics of the current community served by Catholic schools.

Advocates of the contemporary paradigm sought to reinforce the place and importance of traditional beliefs and practices as the most appropriate response to the changed environment of Catholic schools and indeed the changing Catholic landscape. Proponents acting out of the emerging paradigm understood the changing needs and nature of the Catholic school community as an essential determinant informing their understanding of the mission of the Catholic school, and sought to integrate more meaningfully the beliefs and practices of Catholic life with the lived experiences of the community. This was a crucial difference distinguishing the two paradigms.

Contemporary paradigm thinking values liturgical affiliation, affording little recognition or acknowledgement of a profoundly different context for contemporary Catholic schools and school leaders. Diversity between the paradigms is further entrenched by research suggesting that the current Catholic school community is both “post-ecclesial” (Rolheiser, 2008) and “post-denominational” (Allen, 2008) in its outlook and choices around religion and spirituality.

Emerging paradigm thinking is very much focussed on engaging people on their faith journey and recognising that to be human is to be inadequate (Rolheiser, 2008). This worldview embraces a tolerant and inclusive environment where people engage confidently in critical dialogue about important matters of faith and spirituality. The key question posed by this paradigm “is not how to educate people in the Catholic faith but how to form people with a Catholic mind and heart” (Hanvey, 2005, p. 52). This is clearly a choice of spirit, or function over structure.

This paradigmatic duality is evident in the way the mission of the school is viewed and understood. The difference is best expressed in terms of the order and emphasis given to four theological principles, namely, Church, proclamation, mission and reign of God (Phan, 2007). Understandings and expectations of Catholic school mission deriving from a contemporary paradigm were “ecclesiocentric” in nature with Church affiliation understood as the starting point of any engagement. The findings suggest little intention or strategy to continue the journey through to an encounter with the reign of God, confirming Church affiliation as the sole, exclusive purpose of any engagement.

As a result of this emphasis, contemporary paradigm proponents articulated a preference of Catholic schools for liturgically affiliated Catholic families only, questioning the value of enrolling families who had chosen not to affiliate liturgically with Church. In contrast, liturgical affiliation was not a key factor in the responses of those acting from the emergent paradigm.

Responses aligned with the emergent paradigm were “regnocentric” and engaged with the four principles in the reverse order to the contemporary paradigm. In fact, the practical aspects of Gospel values and the message of Jesus formed the basis of

any engagement with the community. Responses from principals suggested that community engagement at this level was very important, with little evidence that principals saw their role as moving beyond this level of engagement. Principals viewed the nature of the engagement with the community as confined to this pre-evangelisation stage.

A second point of divergence centres on the evangelising mission of the Catholic school. Emergent paradigm thinking supports an environment and mission of pre-evangelisation, focussed on education about and experience of Catholic life. This approach may lead to Church involvement, however, it is not the primary focus nor an exclusive effectiveness indicator. This divergence is indicative of a lack of clarity around understandings of pastoral leadership, which extends into crucial areas of identity, community and Christian life.

The contemporary paradigm, focussed on the process of evangelisation, supports an environment and mission of preparing people for reception into the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church. Principals and employing authorities posited that the school community has unequivocally rejected this ideology and has little confidence in the motivation underpinning this mission.

The implications for school leadership in negotiating a pathway through two very different paradigms were not missed by principals or employing authorities. Connection with traditional models of Church is proving problematic both practically and symbolically, leaving principals caught between the realities of the community and the rhetoric and expectations of Church authorities.

The findings indicated that previous understandings of “parish schools” have been replaced by a relationship where the school is analogous to a satellite orbiting the parish, experiencing short periods of proximity and alignment with parish ideals and priorities, while usually being separate and driven by substantially different priorities.

### **7.5.2 Research Question Two**

The second research question investigated perceptions and understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and its implications for the key leadership role of the

principal. The question sought to clarify the expectations and understandings of the role of the principal held by participants. The question asked:

**How do principals/employing authorities/clergy perceive the role of the principal of a Catholic school?**

Principals and employing authorities were lucid about the primary role of the principal as the educational leader of the school community. These responses echoed findings from the literature review, confirming educational leadership as the key dimension in the principal's role. Principals and employing authorities named burgeoning accountability demands from both government and system authorities, as well as many forces driving schools to a secularist model of schooling as the key challenge to their ability to effectively provide educational leadership.

Clergy recognised the importance of educational leadership in the principal's role and clearly articulated expectations that the principal accept responsibility for religious leadership of the community. Clarity around this dimension of the role was even more urgent given little intersection of parish and school communities, and declining numbers of clergy to provide religious leadership. Principals reported nominal formative involvement of clergy with staff or the school community. Principals' understandings of religious leadership emanated from a different paradigm of Church and Kingdom.

There were clear differences in understandings of pastoral leadership, which reflected the duality of paradigms at work. The heart of the emerging paradigm is the primacy of relationship, the Gospel message and outreach through community. Principals understood their role in terms of facilitating an environment where these aspirations were given structure and priority.

The contemporary paradigm approach is ambivalent to the current reality of school communities, and generally holds expectations that pastoral leadership by the principal should be focussed on conscripting the community to active parish involvement and faithfulness to Church teachings and doctrine. Mass attendance and

parish involvement were key aspirations expressed consistently by clergy as a prerequisite for spiritual engagement with members of the community.

## **7.6 *Conclusions of the study***

The following conclusions represent an attempt to better understand the issues faced by participants around the mission of the Catholic school and role of the principal.

The findings confirmed significant difference in the thinking and aspirations of those responsible for the governance and administration of Catholic schools. The major finding of the research was the existence of two dominant paradigms influencing the thinking of the key stakeholders. This was evident in the different ways the purpose of the Catholic school was understood which has major implications for how the principal would enact a role consistent with this perception.

### **7.6.1 Inadequately appreciated contextual fabric underpinning a Catholic school**

This study found that Catholic schools function within a contemporary context which presents serious challenges to long held beliefs and understandings of the nature and purpose of the Catholic school. The reality for school leaders is a community largely unaffiliated with mainstream Church, critical of the authority of the Church when it provides guidance and teaching and not constrained within one particular denomination when making decisions about personal values and life patterns. Practices and decisions by the large majority of families comprising the school community accentuate the need for a vastly different approach by school leadership. Communities are now more secular in nature, however, the distinction is made between objective secularism, a rejection of religious institutions, and subjective secularism, a rejection of personal spirituality. Catholic school communities reflect the general pattern of objective secularism of society.

The findings indicated that principals and employing authorities acknowledged the reality of objective secularism and responded to the special needs and characteristics of the community in ways which resonated closely with their life and faith journeys. The study found that principals and employing authorities were

sensitive to the life stories of the families making up the school community and the generational characteristics which influence the appropriate type and level of engagement. This included expectations around involvement in the liturgical life of the Church. For principals and employing authorities, Church affiliation was not a prerequisite for initial or sustained acceptance into the community.

Alternatively, most clergy focussed on Mass attendance as a single determinant of Catholic school efficacy. There was little recognition or understanding of the contextual milieu of the Catholic school, and little knowledge or expertise to engage with the community in a way which was open and receptive to the pluralistic nature of the community.

The question of how best to engage with the community is a source of real tension and challenge for principals. The findings concluded that principals and employing authorities nominate Gospel values and the message of Jesus as the key points of engagement with the community. This may reflect limited theological and spiritual literacy among principals and employing authorities, and a reluctance by principals to accept additional responsibilities which do not complement the demands of family and professional life.

#### **7.6.2 Lack of clarity around the pastoral leadership role of the principal and the expectations that surround it**

This study found little agreement or guidance around the principal's role, particularly in the area of pastoral leadership. Principals cited difficulty meeting expectations of clergy which bear little resemblance to the reality of professional and family life. Principals held concerns that expectations of personal and school involvement in the parish emanated from an outdated "quasi religious" (Hansen, 1999, p. 281) model of school leadership.

There was a broad range of understandings of pastoral leadership across the cohorts emanating from contrasting paradigms. There was little evidence of a way forward to establish some agreement and clarity around these expectations.



Catholic schools principals felt caught between these historical aspects of the role while being expected to manage and challenge the competing demands and influences in an era of change. Principals are now required to be more engaging with the community, open to change, flexible and versatile than ever before.

### **7.6.3 Reticence by principals to embrace religious leadership**

Principals were reluctant to see themselves as religious leaders in the mould being espoused by clergy. Principals felt constrained by the lack of clarity and opportunities for informed dialogue in this area. Many principals felt confident expressing the “sacred story” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) originating from Church documents and teachings about this aspect of the role, but all had constructed substantially different lived or “secret stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) when addressing the perceived needs of the students and community. Principals were uncertain about how to process their lived or “secret stories”, working in an environment where religious leadership expectations on principals were opaque and largely unchallenged. Principals felt the paradox of holding personal views inconsistent with the “sacred story” and the reality of having to construct “cover stories” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) when interacting with clergy, employing authorities and in public forums.

Though many principals have units of theology and masters level qualifications, this study found that a deficit of formal theological and spiritual literacy among Catholic school leaders contributed significantly to a reluctance to accept religious leadership roles. Principals and employing authorities clearly identified educational leadership as the primary focus of the principal’s role. Principals viewed the challenge of educational leadership as demanding both in time and commitment and therefore were suspicious of any expectations to integrate religious leadership.

### **7.6.4 Lack of agreement about the place of the Catholic school in the evangelising mission of the Church**

This study concluded that there is a lack of substantial agreement about the role of the Catholic school in the evangelising mission of the Church. Identification of the Gospel message with the Catholic Church and a narrow and literalist approach to faith is proving problematic for principals and employing authorities, and exacerbates attempts to respond meaningfully to the needs of staff, students and community.

Importantly, principals and employing authorities viewed the school as an ecclesial entity in its own right, not an agency of the parish. This view rationalises a new role and approach to evangelisation by the Catholic school.

The study concluded that most schools are engaged in a process of pre-evangelisation, providing the community with knowledge and experience of Catholic life. The study suggests that schools are now in a “holding” period of knowing how best to respond to the needs of the current community. Church leaders are able to provide little in the way of leadership in this area.

With ever increasing intensity, the Church in Australia and New Zealand and the other countries of Oceania are turning their attention to the need to engage in a new evangelisation of our part of the world, especially in the secular culture of Australia and New Zealand. However, at the present time no one method or even a shared understanding of what is required in practical terms, has emerged (Putney, 2008).

Principals felt caught working between the expectations of two very different paradigms.

#### **7.6.5 Dissonance between the official rhetoric about the mission of Catholic schools and the views expressed by principals**

This study concluded that there was substantial difference between the official rhetoric on the mission of the Catholic school and that expressed by principals and employing authorities. Principals and employing authorities cited educational excellence as a key element of the mission of the Catholic school, followed by an experience of a Christian community where Gospel values and the message of Jesus are given life and expression across the curriculum. In contrast, views expressed through official documents and supported by clergy present the mission of the Catholic school in terms of liturgical affiliation and acceptance of the beliefs and teachings of the Catholic Church.

There was little commitment or opportunity for parties to engage in open and informed discussion of indicators of mission effectiveness for Catholic schools at the local level. This situation invites an atmosphere of suspicion and uncertainty between groups involved in the leadership of schools.

#### **7.6.6 Post-parish communities and the perception of the school as the new church**

The study concluded that there is a real need to acknowledge and reflect upon the decline of the parish as the place where Christian community is formed and experienced for the vast majority of families comprising the Catholic school community. The Catholic school is seen by the majority of families as the new Church and the only point of contact families want to have with the Catholic church.

There was general acknowledgement of a “post-ecclesial” (Rolheiser, 2008) generation seeking a new model and medium of spiritual engagement and formation. The “regnocentric” (Ratzinger, 2008) response by schools to this reality is at odds with the perceived “ecclesiocentric” (Ratzinger, 2008) model which has characterised the response by many parishes. The response by schools is informed by research identifying the characteristics of current generations of parents and students and the most spiritually life-giving and durable experiences as identified by parents and students.

#### **7.6.7 Primacy of personal authenticity as motivation for the principal’s work**

The study concluded that the lack of clarity around understandings of the mission of the Catholic school and the principal’s role presents serious challenges to aspirations for personal authenticity. The study found significant differences between personal beliefs held by key school leaders and the official rhetoric of the Church. This led to a situation where many leaders were torn between the rhetoric of official teachings and doctrine and the reality of their own experience. Principals and employing authorities were comfortable with the primacy of conscience and rationalised this against the personal opposition to official Church teaching and doctrine especially on moral, ecclesiological and gender-related issues. Despite these serious personal differences principals and employing authorities articulated a commitment to Church and a determination to work within the system and look for meaningful and productive ways to engage with the community.

The notion of the “professional” Catholic was cited by some as a reality. Principals in small communities experienced the pressure of community expectations to ensure

that students and staff attended Mass each week. This expectation was experienced to differing degrees in larger centres.

## **7.7 Summary**

This study has identified the presence of two dominant, contrasting paradigms within the enterprise of Catholic education. These paradigms influence the perceptions and expectations of Catholic schools and their principals held by key stakeholders. This study contributes to the available literature on this topic and complements similar research conducted in other contexts. This study is important in raising matters where uncertainty and disagreement exists between the stakeholders. The recommendations identify possible courses of action to bring clarity and closer agreement to understandings of mission and role.

## **7.8 Recommendations**

The conclusions of the research clearly identify a number of issues emanating from diversity of views on the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal in a changing Catholic landscape. The following recommendations present a way forward for all groups involved in the leadership of Catholic schools. Each recommendation is an attempt to address the issues involved and facilitate dialogue and communication between stakeholders. The recommendations are the outcomes of extensive interaction with participants and reflections of the researcher.

The recommendations are:

1. That employing authorities facilitate the development of a leadership framework for senior leaders to provide direction and clarity to the principal's role, which is assuming responsibility for wider pastoral and community leadership. Such a framework would result from open and honest discussion and consultation between all groups involved in the governance and administration of Catholic schools.
2. That employing authorities review the process, expectations and criteria for selection and appointment of principals in the light of substantial differences in key stakeholders' understanding of the mission of the school

and the role of the principal. Current processes do not necessarily articulate unwritten expectations of the principal held by all stakeholders. These expectations can be especially important when thinking beyond the immediate responsibilities of school leadership.

3. That the key stakeholders in the governance and administration of Catholic schools clarify and agree on expectations surrounding the mission of the Catholic school and strategies for school leadership to engage with their communities. The mounting influence and nature of generational diversity, especially between school staff, principals, employing authorities and church authorities is limiting any progress in this regard.
4. That church authorities give greater recognition of school communities as the pre-eminent place for evangelisation. The current focus on the parish as the centre of the Church community denies the reality of the changing Catholic landscape and restricts the potential of school and parish to work co-operatively in addressing the needs of the community.
5. That key stakeholders engage and dialogue further around the question of who the Catholic school serves. Currently there exists substantial differences in understanding between key stakeholders on this question. As a consequence, criteria for enrolment into Catholic schools need to be further clarified and agreed upon by all groups charged with the governance and administration of Catholic schools.
6. That clergy and employing authorities provide greater practical acknowledgement of the changing role of the principal in providing leadership to the broader Catholic community associated with Catholic schools. Such acknowledgement would recognise the transition from the parish to the Catholic school as the pre-eminent place of evangelisation and authorise principals to act confidently in responding to the needs and aspirations of their communities.

7. A final recommendation is that regular opportunities for open dialogue and formation involving all key stakeholders involved in the leadership of Catholic schools be facilitated and given priority by diocesan authorities as a way to define and promote an agreed, cohesive vision of the mission of the Catholic school and the role of the principal.

This research has identified several profound challenges to the role of the Catholic school in the educational and evangelising mission of the Church and to the leadership of Catholic schools in general. The need for an urgent review and revitalisation of current thinking and practices against the reality of a rapidly changing Catholic landscape has been clearly established. This review is necessary if schools are to effectively engage with new generations of families seeking spiritual leadership through Catholic schools. This research confirms the results of similar research in this area and poses additional questions which may be the catalyst of further research into this topic.

## CHAPTER 8 APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Ethics approval letter

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



#### Human Research Ethics Committee

##### Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** Associate Professor Denis McLaughlin Brisbane Campus

**Co-Investigators:** Brisbane Campus

**Student Researcher:** Mr Patrick Coughlan Brisbane Campus

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**

The role of the Catholic school principal in a changing Catholic landscape

**for the period:** 16 March 2006 to 1 February 2007

**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** Q200506 15

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than minimum risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of minimum risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Pashley".

Signed: ..

Date: 16 March 2006  
(Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)

## Appendix B: Open-ended questionnaire



### Questionnaire One: Clergy

#### CLERGY - PERSONAL DATA

**Name: (pseudonym):**

**Highest Academic Qualification:**

**Professional Life:**

Number of years as priest:

Brief summary of your contact with Catholic Schools:

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Thank-you for your co-operation in completing this questionnaire. Please return the completed questionnaire to:

Pat Coughlan  
St Anthony's School  
390B Feez Street  
NORTH ROCKHAMPTON  
QLD. 4701



This questionnaire is divided into three sections:

1. Role of the principal
2. Purpose of the Catholic school
3. The changing Catholic landscape

## ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Q1. For you, what roles or responsibilities of the Catholic principal do you believe are most important?

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Q2. In what ways has your understanding of the roles or responsibilities of the Catholic school principal changed over the years?

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Q3. For you, what are the current challenges or problems which need to be addressed by the Catholic school principal?

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Q4. What would you like changed in the current role of the Catholic principal?

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**PURPOSE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

Q5. What do you believe is the purpose of the Catholic school?

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Q6. As a member of the clergy, explain possible conflicts/tensions between your understanding of the purpose of the Catholic school and the following stakeholders?

a) School staff

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b) Parents

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c) Principals

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d) The Catholic Education Office

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Q8. What are your indicators of a “successful” Catholic school?

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### **CHANGING CATHOLIC LANDSCAPE**

Q9. Identify particular Church teachings that are a challenge to you.

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Q10. In what ways does the Catholic Church impact on the families in Catholic schools?

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Q11. Has the role, profile, visibility and influence of parents in the life of the Catholic school changed over the period of your association with Catholic schools?

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Q12. What are some challenges for the future of Catholic schools?

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## **Appendix C: Interview questions for clergy**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CLERGY**

- Q1. You identify the core role of the principal as educational- community- spiritual leadership. In your experience do principals meet the demands and expectations of each of these responsibilities?
- Q2. You also identify the core role of the principal as being a living witness, someone whose membership of the church is real and active. Do you believe spiritual leadership to be the most important aspect of the principal's role?
- Q3. The transition from religious to lay leadership of schools is effectively complete. In your view has this been a successful transition? Do you believe clergy are "suspicious" of lay leadership?
- Q4. Given the change above and the substantial changes to Catholic school communities has the Catholic school effectively lost, or in danger of losing its identity and ethos?
- Q5. You have identified commitment to Church, regular attendance at Sunday Eucharist, and a reconsideration of the place of the parish in their family life as aspects you would like changed in the current role of the principal. Are you expressing a dissatisfaction with the current situation in this regard and do you believe principals do not attach the same importance to these areas? Is this an example of a "professional Catholic"?
- Q6. Do you believe the current Catholic school is achieving its purpose?
- Q7. You have some real concerns about the faith practice of members of staff. Is there any action which could be taken to address this concern?
- Q8. When talking about principals you have suggested that they are interested only in increasing enrolments with little real regard for the impact of this on the faith life of the community. Is this an example of a trend towards mainstreaming in Catholic schools?
- Q9. In your response to indicators of a successful Catholic school you state that the school should have brought the children or their families to "faith". What do you mean by "faith"?
- Q10. I take your point about the distinction between Church "teachings" and Church "disciplines". Some clergy express a concern about school staff not supporting Church teachings – dogmatic or moral. Do you share this concern? How seriously do you take this concern and what effect does this have on the faith life of students?

- Q11. How importantly do parents who send their children to Catholic schools generally see their commitment to the Catholic Church, especially through involvement in the life of the Parish?
- Q12. You touch on, though don't name it as such, the Catholic school as becoming or being seen as a "parallel Church". How valid is this description and how much substance should be given to this concern?
- Q13. Would you like to comment on the level of "religious intelligence" of principals and staff in Catholic schools?
- Q14. Where do you see as the fate of Catholic schools in the future?

## **Appendix D: Interview questions for principals**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS:**

#### **Role of the principal**

1. What are the most important responsibilities in the role of the principal?
2. Is religious/spiritual leadership a significant part of the role?
3. What do understand by religious/spiritual leadership?
4. What are the biggest challenges in the role of the principal which need to be addressed?

#### **Purpose of the Catholic school**

1. What are the key aspirations you are trying to achieve in your school?
2. What are the issues presented by the following groups which create possible tension/conflict/obstacles to you in achieving these aspirations?
  - a. Staff
  - b. Parents
  - c. Clergy
  - d. DCEO
3. What are your indicators of a successful Catholic school?

#### **Changing Catholic landscape**

1. Is the school becoming the “new” Church for families?
2. What implications does this have for principals?

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