

# **AN EXPLORATION OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY AS APPLIED TO CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

**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 acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

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All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the Ethics Committee

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## ABSTRACT

This research study explores the issue of school community leadership in Catholic primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore. In so doing it seeks to understand and reconstruct the school community leadership role of the principal. This topic is worthy of study as an analysis of public education in Australia has highlighted an enduring controversy regarding the 'community' dimension of schooling. Further, the Catholic Church teaches that community is central to the nature of its schools.

A comprehensive analysis of key literature in education, sociology, theology and leadership theory, revealed a number of key insights that informed the study. Here it is found that community is a contested, dense and widely appropriated sociological concept, of which the application to schools is problematic. Three major models of community could be applied to schools. Hence, there is a call for a careful and rigorous debate concerning the application of community to schools. Leadership and community exist in a binary relationship for Catholic school principals. Yet, the model of leadership required for community remains elusive. Finally, the principalship is in transition and suggestions toward a new model are being proposed.

Based on these insights, the researcher identified two research questions.

1. How do primary principals conceptualise the Catholic school as community?
2. How do principals describe their leadership role in building Catholic primary school as community?

This research study is informed within the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. As both a perspective and a method symbolic interactionism is situated within a pragmatic constructivist paradigm of research. Case study was considered the appropriate orchestrating perspective with the boundaries defined in terms of the primary schools served by the Catholic Diocese of Lismore. This case study employed qualitative research methods, including an open-ended questionnaire with fifteen principals, two individual interviews and a focus group interview, each with six principals.

The findings of this research study suggest that principals have a limited conceptualisation of community, with little common agreement or symbolic language around community. Principals appeared unable to extricate themselves from the competing understandings of community that shape their views. The data also suggest that these principals struggle with acknowledging the problematic nature of community. Further, they appear more comfortable with sociological than theological understandings of community. The results of this study suggest that the community leadership role of the principal is in transition between competing leadership models and that building school community is burdensome. Yet, the data also appears to indicate a range of positive ways to take forward a new model of community leadership. Hence, principals would appear to benefit from peer support, coaching and theological education.

From an instrumental perspective, these findings raised the following propositions regarding the professional development of principals as community leaders:

- The Catholic Education Office, Lismore, needs to develop policy, guidelines with regard to the Catholic primary school as community
- Role making processes are required to clarify and document the role of the Catholic primary school principal as community leader.
- The professional development of principals should include regular, confidential opportunities for social interaction and learning.
- The professional development of principals should educate and challenge them to develop more adequately theorised understandings of school community leadership in Catholic schools.

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# **CHAPTER 1      LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL AS COMMUNITY: POSITIONING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

## **1.1      Introduction**

This research study is an exploration of Catholic primary school principals' perspectives on the concept of community and how this concept is applied to the building of community. In recent years, there has been an increasing recognition that multiple understandings of 'community' and 'leadership' abound and this recognition has resulted in competing discourses which significantly impact on endeavours in education. Consequently, it is suggested that without rigorous and careful debate, any hope for community in schools may completely fall apart (Croninger & Malen, 2002; Westheimer, 1999). At the same time, the gravity of this situation is starkly revealed by the fact that community is seen to be central to the nature of a Catholic school and its leadership can only be understood within a community context (Hanks, 1997). Hence, the recognition of these issues focussed the researcher's attention on the research problem of school community leadership.

## **1.2      Background**

In discussing the background to this study, it is important to make visible the relationship of the researcher to the phenomena under investigation. This claim addresses Merriam's (1998) concern that any background information on the researcher that might influence the research and its findings should be made explicit. Such positioning of the researcher within the research process requires that the 'third person' language adopted for the research narrative be momentarily suspended whilst the relationship is explored.

My interest in school community leadership started, in the mid 1980s, while I was lecturing in postgraduate courses at the (then) Catholic College of Education, Sydney. At this time, I was increasingly drawn to the inherent potential of the concept of school as community as I began to witness what I believed would be a quite significant shift in the nature, culture and practices of Catholic schools leading into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This abiding interest in school as community is evidenced in

the following excerpt from a keynote address I presented at the National Catholic Education Conference in 1988 (Graham, 1989):

The success of Catholic education in its first 100 years lay in the strong community context within which the schools existed. Catholic families were at one, generally, with the pastoral and educational goals of Church life. The parishes, families and schools mutually nourished each other in the religious socialisation and academic achievement that would give Australian Catholics the faith, the power and social status to live securely in Australian society. Today, that community cannot be assumed, the old community has gone and a new Catholic community has to be created (p.109).

The challenges embedded in such a statement took a more immediate and pragmatic turn with my appointment in 1990 as a consultant in the Catholic Education Office, Lismore. In this new role, I was responsible for the family, school and community services provided by the Catholic Education Office to Catholic schools within the Diocese of Lismore. In the early 1990s, I was to work with principals, teachers, parents and parishes in developing and implementing a model of school community development. As part of this overall direction, I deployed a range of initiatives that aimed to build the capacities of all stakeholders for creating school as community. By the mid 1990s, I was aware that despite our mutual best efforts we were losing ground in our determination to build schools as communities. This was compounded by difficulties in locating measures and developing indicators to gauge our progress. Moreover, at the 1998 and 1999 Annual Priest and Principal Conferences which I facilitated for the Diocese of Lismore, along with other professional inservices that I led, principals identified many questions and concerns regarding their role in leading and building the Catholic school as a community.

At the same time, I became increasingly aware that the key to whether schools developed as communities heavily relied on the leadership capabilities of the principals. Yet, it was obvious that in their attempt to build community most principals appeared to be operating from intuitive and pragmatic approaches, rather than from well-developed theoretical principles or frameworks. Moreover, there were more questions than answers and typically the principals asked:

“Why is school community now so important?”

“How can you have community when so many people don’t practise their faith and family life is being increasingly disrupted?”

“How can we bring parents into partnership with the school, especially when you have so many difficult ones and parental involvement is too time consuming on our limited resources?”

“What are practical ways to build school community?”

In asking these questions, there was a growing appreciation that the role was becoming more demanding and complex in a changing socio-cultural and religious context. Community leadership was proving to be just too difficult due to the increasing expectations of parents, clergy and policy makers within a context of educational, social, cultural and religious change.

The problematic nature of building the Catholic school as community had already been identified in Tinsey’s (1998) research on secondary schools in the Diocese of Lismore. This research found that while teachers and priests had similar aims for Catholic schools, there were conflicts at the level of priorities and relationships. Describing ‘community’ as an example of this conflict, Tinsey stated that while teachers and clergy stressed the importance of the secondary school as community they had divergent understandings of the phenomenon. Thus he concluded:

This study has indicated that differing shades of meaning that are attached to many of the terms [including community], used to describe the religious dimension of the mission of Catholic schools, can be ambivalent and confusing for some people. Investigation into whether differing understandings of religious concepts contribute to different perspectives and views on the mission of Catholic schools would be helpful (p. 93).

Consequently, this research study was undertaken to address the need for further research. Like Tinsey’s study, this research study was situated within the Diocese of Lismore. However, where Tinsey had investigated secondary schooling, this time the focus was on the Catholic primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore.

### 1.3 The Research Site

This research study was situated in a Catholic education system within the Diocese of Lismore, Australia. This diocese extends from Tweed Heads in the north, to Laurieton in the south, and west to the foothills of the Great Dividing Range. The coastline of the Pacific Ocean runs the length of the eastern boundary of the diocese. The Catholic education system includes 34 primary schools with over 9000 students; and 9 secondary schools with over 7000 students (Catholic Education Commission, New South Wales, 2005). In total there are over 16000 students and 1200 teachers in Catholic schools, as of August, 2005.

Consistent with the early history of Catholic education in Australia (Ryan & Sungaila, 1995), priests and religious communities in the Diocese of Lismore accepted responsibility for schools in each parish. In this period, Catholic parents bore the total cost of their children's education. During the 1950s and 1960s, Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lismore, as throughout Australia, were under pressure from an escalation in the "costs of operating schools", "large numbers of immigrant children", "the post-war baby boom", a marked decline in "membership of religious orders" and little government assistance (p.158). Confronted by these challenges, Catholic communities began "a campaign of political action" (p.159) and, during the period 1964-1973, government policy was to shift to provide funding for non-government schools, including Catholic schools.

The impact of Government policy and funding initiatives necessitated the development of a centralised system of Catholic schools in Australia. However, in order to implement these initiatives, governments refused to negotiate with separate schools and looked to the various diocesan authorities, including the Diocese of Lismore, to coordinate the distribution and accountability for its allocated funds as well as to implement their programs. Consequently, the onset of this funding hastened "the development of centralised bureaucracies" which in many dioceses changed Catholic schools from a "relatively autonomous, self-supporting loose network under the control of parish priests and religious congregations, into a system of schools with a professional educational outlook" (Ryan & Sungaila, 1995, p. 160).

Counter to this development of centralised bureaucracies in other dioceses, Catholic education in the Diocese of Lismore remained a somewhat decentralised system of schools. In 1984, following an examination of diocesan needs in education, the Bishop established a Diocesan Education Board, with an executive arm, the Catholic Education Office, to carry out the decisions of the Board. As government funding increased, the Catholic Education Office was able to expand its central services to meet both the requirements of the government as well as the needs of the diocesan church. In order to fulfil these responsibilities the Catholic Education Office was mandated to do so in an essentially 'service' manner. Individual parishes through the parish priest, principal and parent bodies were given a significant degree of autonomy and local responsibility.

Thus the Catholic school system in the Diocese of Lismore was to be characterised by a decentralised management style and an administrative arrangement said to be in accord with the theological principle of "subsidiarity and the decentralisation of decision making" (*Catholic Commission for Employment Relations, 2006, p. 1*). The principal, with the consent of the parish priest and after consultation with the Catholic Education Office, offers employment to teaching staff on behalf of the Bishop and his trustees. Enrolment policy, with the exception of the starting age at kindergarten and matters covered by state legislation, is determined at parish school level. Capital programs for school building projects are initiated and managed at parish school level with support from the Catholic Education Office. Within this decentralised system of schools, the Catholic primary school principal has a leadership role with wide-ranging community accountability. Recognizing this accountability the researcher was further encouraged to investigate the issue of school community leadership.

#### **1.4 Research Problem and Purpose**

Thus, this research study began with a vague feeling that school community leadership was not what it could be or should be. Following the recommendation of systems analyst Patching (1990), the researcher sought to clarify the research problem by developing a rich picture of the 'context' of the Catholic primary school principal as community leader. Here, it is assumed that human activity, such as Catholic education, occurs within a number of interconnected "contexts"

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Consequently, the Catholic primary school principal was situated within the immediate environment of the Catholic primary school in the Diocese of Lismore, the external institutional context of Catholic education and public education in Australia, and, finally, the wider social and cultural forces that create new challenges for the role of the principal as a community leader.

This contextual analysis confirmed that the leadership role of the principal was significantly more complex and challenging than in previous eras. Yet, despite this increasing complexity and change, the principals' leadership role as community builder in the Diocese of Lismore is undertaken without any detailed policy guidance. Such lack of guidance would appear to be a problem, given that the Catholic Education Office (Catholic Education Office, Lismore, 2002; 2003; 2005a, 2005b), as well as Catholic Church documents (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, #31) and government policy (Karmel, 1973, 1985; Dawkins, 1988; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, MCEETYA, 1999), clearly suggest that community is central to school life. Yet, Catholic Church documents offer only fragmented insights into the school as community with no clear theoretical explication of its nature. Nor does government policy provide a theoretical understanding of community; instead it appears to appropriate the discourse of 'community' as part of an ideologically driven imperative. Finally, the radically changing socio-cultural context of education, including Catholic schooling, seemed to be compounding the difficulties reported by principals in applying the policy rhetoric of community within the day-to-day reality of the schools.

Thus, the researcher came to understand that school as community is an evolving and contested concept which significantly impacts upon school community leadership. In addition, it was concluded that while the policy context of Catholic education and public education may direct the principal to build the school as community, this direction remains problematic. The evolving and contested nature of community in contemporary society means that there is no obvious way forward in respect to school community leadership. Thus, this research study was narrowed to focus on the role of the principal as school community leader. The purpose of this research study was identified in terms of developing a more informed and



sophisticated understanding of the school community leadership role of the principal. It was expected that such an understanding would not only point to new directions for policy and practice in the Diocese of Lismore but also contribute to theoretical development in the field.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

This research study was guided by research questions that emerged following a comprehensive review of the literature. This review of the literature revealed several important insights regarding principals, leadership and community. In the first instance, the literature (Starratt, 2003) identified that the concepts of community, leadership and principalship are inextricably linked. However, a review of prior research revealed that there has been only limited research available to the principal seeking to take up the leadership role of building the Catholic primary school as community. In addition, this review of the literature found that the concept of community is evolving and contested. Further, despite theoretical development, leadership within post industrial organisations remains elusive. Moreover, there is the recognition that the principalship, itself, is in transition as emergent theories of post-industrial leadership are advanced. This finding is confirmed by the assertion in the literature that school community leadership is undertheorised and in need of further research (Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

Given this conceptual confusion, the researcher concluded that the problematic nature of school community leadership was unavoidable and that problematic nature of school community leadership represented a problem of finding meaning in the context of change. The principals' questions regarding school community leadership, that provided the impetus for this research study, seemed to suggest that the principals did not have a clear understanding of *what* should change in respect to the expectation of school community leadership and, as well, they were unsure *how* to go about it. Influenced by the seminal work on educational change by Fullan (1991), the researcher identified two research questions:

**RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How do primary principals conceptualise the Catholic school as community?**

This research question investigates the proposition in the literature that community is a rich, widely used and contested concept (Dempsey, 2002; Merz & Furman, 1997). It is asserted that community is essential to achieve good schooling (Sergiovanni, 1994) and because “human beings are communal by nature” (Fielding, 2000, p. 5) schools provide a context whereby this can be achieved. Yet, despite these claims the literature acknowledges the problematic nature of community as applied to schools. Consequently, there are significant calls in the literature to carefully and rigorously debate the nature of community and to make a more realistic assessment of its possibilities in schools (Westheimer, 1999). This first research question, therefore, sought to understand the principals’ perspectives on the Catholic school as community as a first step in assessing its possibilities. In particular, the researcher was interested in whether the principals aligned with one or other of the three models of community identified in the literature, or whether they conceptualised community in other ways.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2: How do principals describe their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?**

This research question builds on the previous one, as it appears there is a binary relationship between school community and the leadership role of the principal. Principals now lead in an era of social, cultural, educational and religious change, which has affected school community and expanded their roles (Scott, 2003). Principals are regularly positioned in the leadership role of having to choose between three models of community and their competing discourses (Beck, 1999) in regard to schools. Any choice will inevitably have a degree of difficulty attached to it as principals consciously or unconsciously engage with each in seeking to understand the ‘how to’ of integrating leadership and community. Thus, the researcher is interested in the principals’ choices regarding the leadership model/s that underpin their work. This second research question therefore seeks to understand the principals’ perspectives on their leadership role in building Catholic primary schools as communities. In particular, the researcher was interested in the possible influence of classical theories of industrial leadership or emergent theories such as post industrial leadership upon the principalship.

## **1.6 Theoretical Framework**

Given the emphasis in this research on accessing the *perspectives* of school principals it was decided that symbolic interactionism offered an appropriate theoretical framework. As a perspective, symbolic interactionism asserts that how the world is experienced by persons is of vital importance. Extending this assertion, it highlights the symbolic nature of reality and frames human beings as purposive agents and symbolic actors. In this study, symbolic interactionism as perspective enabled the researcher to interpret how the participants conceptualised community in their schools, consistent with the interests of Research Question One. It also enabled the researcher to gain insight into how the principals described their leadership role in building community, as expressed in Research Question Two.

Conceptualised as method as well as a perspective, symbolic interactionism encourages researchers “to take the role of the other” in order to “become familiar with [the other’s] world” (Blumer, 1997, p. 51). The challenge for this particular project was to mine the potential of a symbolic interactionist approach in collecting qualitative data that would allow for rich descriptive accounts of the principals’ experience. Whilst symbolic interactionism cannot explain everything, it is nonetheless “an exciting and useful perspective for understanding human life” (Charon, 2004, p. 190). As symbolic interactionism focuses more directly on the process of meaning making it provides a constructivist persuasion within social research. The choice of a constructivist tradition for this research study was deemed appropriate because “it assumes a relativist ontology (that acknowledges multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 35). Constructivism relies on a “hermeneutic/dialectical methodology” aimed at understanding and reconstructing previously held problematic constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 111-112).

## **1.7 Design of the Study**

Case study was considered the appropriate orchestrating framework within this research endeavour seeking to advance knowledge of principals’ perspectives on community as applied to Catholic schools. Case study seeks and facilitates in-

depth understanding of the interpretations and meanings being explored, which are mindful of symbolic interactionism (Merriam, 1998). It examines “how”, “why” and “what” questions (R. Burns, 1995) and, in so doing, derives data from the ground, taking into account both the researcher and participants’ perspectives (Anderson, 1990; Gall, Gall & Borg, 1999). Notwithstanding this choice of case study, the researcher was aware of some lingering confusion within educational research regarding its use, which is partly addressed by defining the case study within a “bounded context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25).

This research study represents a regional case study of Catholic primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore, serviced by the Catholic Education Office. The design of this research study met the distinguishing characteristics of a case study in that it was (i) “particularistic”, because it studied whole units in their totality, and not aspects or variables of these units (Stake, 2005); (ii) “descriptive”, since the outcome from the study was a rich, sophisticated description of the phenomenon under study and uses several research methods to ensure completeness and avoid errors (Sarantakos, 1998); and (iii) “heuristic”, as it illuminated the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon under study and can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the researcher’s experience, or confirm what is already known (Merriam, 1998). This project was deemed to be an “instrumental case study” (Stake, 1995), as the purpose of this research was to address the current gap with respect to research in the area of principals’ understanding and reconstruction of their community leadership role as applied to Catholic schools.

In line with symbolic interactionism as method, this research study employed multiple research methods in the two stages of “exploration” and “inspection” (Charon, 2001, p. 208). In the exploration stage, 15 principals completed an open-ended questionnaire. This exploration stage raised a number of issues with respect to principals’ conceptualisation of community in a Catholic school and how it is built. These issues were further investigated in the inspection stage of the research study. Here, six principals participated in two individual interviews and a focus group. Incorporated into this research methodology was a three-step iterative process of data analysis proposed by Neuman (2006, p. 160). The first step interpretation was taken up with learning about the research problem from the meaning ascribed by

the participants. The second step included looking for internal meaning and coherence, expressed through categorisation, codification and the identification of themes. The third step interpretation involved the researcher reflecting on theoretical significance of the research findings.

## **1.8 Significance of the Study**

This research study is significant because it was designed to develop an understanding of the role of the principals in school community leadership within Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Lismore. Prior research by Tinsey (1998) in Catholic secondary schools in this Diocese had identified the problematic nature of the Catholic school as community and had called for further research around this issue. Anecdotal evidence collected by the researcher in his role, within the Catholic Education Office, had also confirmed the problematic nature of school community leadership. At the same time, the researcher had identified the growing expectations on the principal in respect to school community leadership, as well as the gap in the policy context with respect to policy and practice to support these growing expectations. Consequently, the purpose of this research study was identified in terms of developing a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the Catholic school as community and the role of the principal in school community leadership. This understanding would then support the development of policy and practice, leading to the reconstruction of school community leadership in Catholic primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore.

This research study is also significant as it investigated the issue of school community leadership in Catholic schools beyond the Diocese of Lismore. Historically, Catholic schools have been established to act as agents of the Catholic Church and its evangelising mission in the world. In short, the Catholic school has a theological purpose and it is expected that school leadership will be motivated by this purpose. Consequently, theological understandings of the Catholic Church as community and community leadership in this context will impact upon the Catholic school as community and the role of the principal as school community leader. However, church documents reveal that the understanding of community and community leadership have evolved over time and continue to remain to be contested in church circles. This research study offers an opportunity to further the

understanding of community and community leadership as these concepts are 'played out' in the daily life of the Catholic school.

Finally, this research study is significant as it contributes to theoretical development in respect to school community leadership. This research study addresses the assertion in the literature that school community leadership is under-theorised and in need of further research (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Despite the growing expectations for school community leadership within the policy context of public education in Australia, a search of prior research reveals the lack of any substantial examination of how principals experience, interpret and manage the problems related to school community leadership (Wildy & Wallace, 1997). Moreover, the literature calls for a considered and rigorous debate regarding community, which will be taken forward in the current study (Westheimer, 1999). This research study provides an opportunity to further the theory on school community leadership by offering an in-depth case study account of it for the broader educational community.

## **1.9 Limitations of the Study**

Notwithstanding the potential significance of this research study, as previously noted, it is acknowledged that the study is limited in scope, focusing only on principals within parish schools within the Diocese of Lismore. Whilst during the exploration stage of the research study, 34 principals were invited to complete an open-ended questionnaire, only 15 principals took up this opportunity. Moreover, the research study has concentrated its attention on six of these principals in its search for a richer, informed and comprehensive understanding of the nexus between community and leadership within the principalship. The findings of this study are specific to the schools described herein and cannot claim to represent the whole population of schools or principals. The external validity of this research is dependent upon its "reader user generalisability" (Merriam, 1998, p. 211) through "case to case transfer" (Firestone, 1993, p.16).

Further, this research acknowledges the inherent limitations of both the constructivist research paradigm and the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The study aims to understand principals' perspectives on community and how to build it in Catholic primary schools so that a

more informed and better-theorised reconstruction of this phenomenon can be formed. This study is clearly not in the positivist tradition as there are no claims to objective knowledge, verified hypotheses and established facts. Nor are the positivist canons of validity and reliability invoked. Finally, there is no critical stance taken, nor judgments made, as the focus of the research study was the principals' perspectives.

Yet again, the research endeavour was very much reliant on the rich accounts of the participants being interviewed. Whilst this account is sought and highly valued, it is not presented in this research text as *the* 'reality' or the 'truth', that is, it simply reports 'reality' as it is interpreted and reported by the participants. Moreover, parents, clergy and diocesan Catholic Education Office staff could well offer other perspectives on the principals' understanding, management and leadership of community. Their accounts were not sought nor do they form part of this particular research narrative. Such reliance on one source of information required strong vigilance to ensure that the study obtained, defined and communicated trustworthy data.

As previously mentioned, the focus for this research emerged from the researcher's professional interest in, and responsibility for, supporting principals with the community leadership dimension of their work. As such, a further limitation may be the personal or self-interest of the researcher. The choice of topic and methodology undoubtedly reflects, to some extent, the researcher's biases, experiences, perspectives and professional responsibilities. However, in acknowledging the research does have limitations, it will nonetheless make an important contribution to the existing knowledge base given its emphasis on the participating principals' perspectives on their community leadership roles.

## **1.10 Structure of the Thesis**

While this chapter provides a succinct overview of the key elements of this particular research study, the following chapters are more detailed and comprehensive.

**Chapter Two: A Contextual Analysis: Clarifying the Research Problem** explores the key contextual and policy issues that impact on the principal. It

highlights that principals may not be provided with sufficient policy and practical advice to lead their school communities and that utilitarian individualism, along with the exaltation of the self, are a serious challenge to the building of community. This chapter also uncovers the complex interplay of systems that impact on school communities and so gives shape to the research study.

### **Chapter Three: A Review of the Literature: Identifying the Research Questions**

reviews literature regarding community, leadership, the principalship and Catholic education, so as to develop a comprehensive understanding of the community leadership role of Catholic primary school principals. In-depth analysis of each of these areas provides a rich tapestry of the contestations, transitions and challenges facing principals in their quest to be effective school community leaders. This review provides a basis for understanding the research problem. It also provides a helpful framework for the discussion of the findings.

**Chapter Four: The Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Interactionism** examines the epistemological stance of the study and the chosen theoretical framework. In this chapter, a case is made for situating this research study within the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, informed by a pragmatic constructivist research paradigm.

**Chapter Five: Design of the Study** outlines how the case study approach and its purpose and value are appropriate for this project. It presents the multiple research methods chosen and justifies how and why these are deemed most appropriate in seeking to understand and reconstruct principals' perspectives on their community leadership role. Further, it outlines why two research stages - exploration and inspection - are appropriate for research informed by the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Finally, it details the analysis procedures for the research, as well as issues relating to ethics and the trustworthiness of the data.

**Chapter Six: Display of the Data** reports the data gathered by the multiple research methods used in this study. The format follows the integration of the exploration and inspection stages under the headings of the two research questions. Within these two questions the data are displayed in thematic ways.



**Chapter Seven: Discussion of Findings** uses the two research questions to further analyse and discuss the data with reference to the wider literature and existing evidence base. This analysis leads the researcher to make a number of key assertions about how the principals conceptualize the Catholic school as community and see their school community leadership role. The application of the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism then enables a deeper appreciation of this interpretation. This chapter provides a better understanding of how community and leadership are inextricably linked to the principalship.

**Chapter Eight: Review and Conclusions** provides a review of the research study. It discusses the knowledge gained from this exploration of the two research questions. It also details the limitations of the study. Finally, it recommends areas for further research and draws out the propositions made by the researcher.

## **CHAPTER 2      A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS: CLARIFYING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

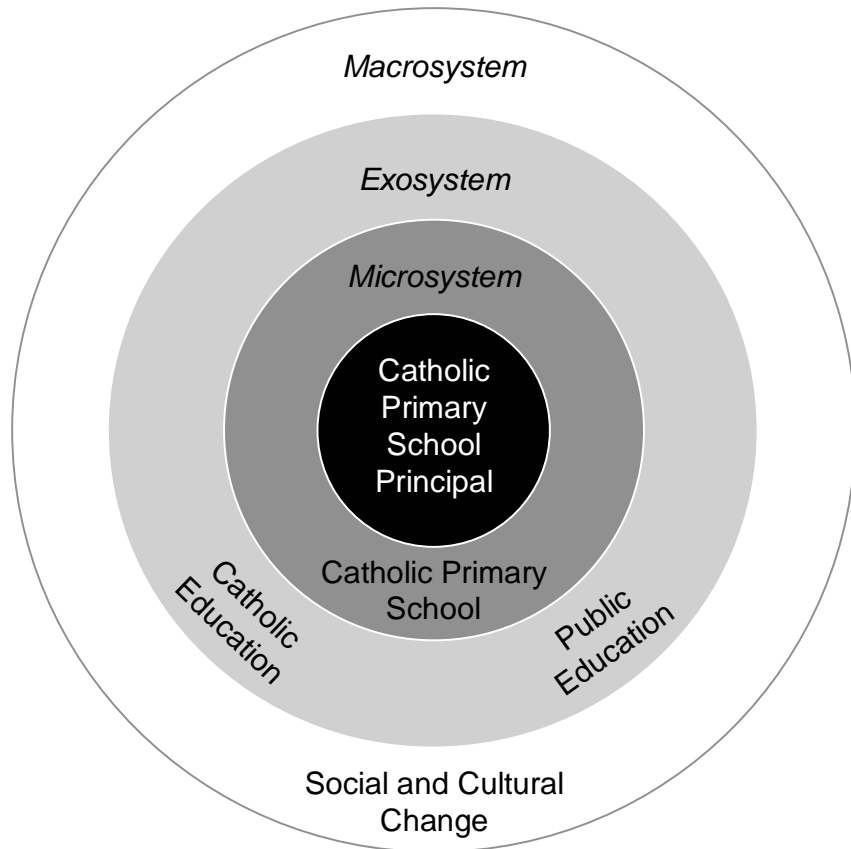
### **2.1      Introduction**

This research study initially focused on the issue of the Catholic school as community. However, this proved to be a broad focus with a number of interrelated problems that were difficult to isolate or clearly identify. Therefore, following the recommendation of systems analyst Patching (1990), this chapter seeks to clarify the research problem by developing a rich picture of the 'context' of the Catholic primary school principal as community leader. Here, it is assumed that human activity, such as Catholic education, occurs within a number of interconnected contexts. Bronfenbrenner's "Social Ecological Model" (1979) identifies three, such interrelated contexts. These contexts include the "microsystem" or the immediate environment in which the person is situated; the "exosystem" or the institutional environment that supports and curtails a specific human activity; and the "macrosystem" or the wider social and cultural contexts. When applied to the specific activity of the primary principalship in the Diocese of Lismore, this Social Ecological Model situates the principal within the microsystem of the Catholic school, the exosystem of Catholic education and public education<sup>1</sup> and the macrosystem of social and cultural change (Figure 2.1).

Consequently, this chapter is comprised of four sections. The first section explores Catholic schooling within the Diocese of Lismore. The second and third sections situate Catholic schooling within the exosystem of Catholic education and public education in Australia. Finally, the fourth section locates Catholic primary schools within the wider social and cultural forces that create new challenges for the role of the principal as a community leader.

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic education in Australia has always been accountable to Government. However, since the reintroduction of state aid in 1972, the level of compliance with public education policy and practice has increased substantially. This has led to a recurring discussion around maintaining autonomy and Catholic identity, while becoming increasingly dependent on government funding and directed by its outcomes for schooling (Griffiths & McLaughlin, 2000).



*Figure 2.1* Conceptualisation of context of the Catholic primary school principal as community leader.

## 2.2 The Catholic Primary School Principal

‘Leadership’ and ‘community’ are fundamental responsibilities found within the three key Catholic Education Office documents that frame principalship within the Diocese of Lismore. The three documents are:

*Primary Principal Appraisal Process for the Diocese of Lismore* (Catholic Education Office, Lismore, 2002);

*Role Description - The Catholic School Principal* (Catholic Education Office, Lismore, 2005a);

*The Foundational Beliefs and Practices of Catholic Education In the Diocese of Lismore, The Essential Framework* (Catholic Education Office, Lismore, 2005b).

The first of these documents, namely, the *Primary Principal Appraisal Process for the Diocese of Lismore* (2002) identifies wide ranging community leadership accountability when it states that:

The Principal is appointed to the leadership position in the school and is accountable to the Trustees of the Diocese, the Parish Priest, the Catholic community and the parents and students of the school. Within the school community the Principal has the responsibility to exercise a leadership which derives from the mission of the Church (p. 2).

The second document, *Role Description - The Catholic School Principal* (2005a) contains seven beliefs that underpin the role description, of which the following two relate directly to this research study:

- The Principal is the designated leader of a faith community which is the school.
- The Catholic School Principal is a reflective leader constantly evaluating the effectiveness of leadership and its impact on the people of the school community. (p. 1)

The accountability requirement to build the Catholic primary school as community was further strengthened by the publication of the *Foundational Beliefs and Practices of Catholic Education in the Diocese of Lismore, The Essential Framework* (Catholic Education Office, 2005b). This document offers a new essential framework for Catholic schooling in the Diocese of Lismore and outlines five practical areas of mission for these schools, including “community”, “teaching/learning”, “witness”, “service” and “worship”. In short, this statement frames the Catholic school as a Christian community and links this community with both educational and theological concerns. Here:

Community is central to the life of the Christian community. Christian community is primarily constituted by the Word of God and bound together by the Holy Spirit... In this community one person’s problem is everyone’s problem and one person’s victory is everyone’s victory. It is fostered especially by the Eucharist which is both a sign of community and cause of its growth. (p. 4)

Therefore, community building is deemed to be a major aspect of the leadership role of all primary principals. However, despite this emphasis on community building, this dimension of principalship has yet to be fully detailed in terms of policy and practice.

## 2.3 The Microsystem –The Catholic Primary School

Within this research study, the Catholic primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore represent the microsystem or the immediate environment in which the principal exercises responsibility for community leadership. Within the Diocese of Lismore there are 34 primary schools with an enrolment of 9238 students. These primary schools range from an enrolment of 51 to 649. There are also variations in terms of geographical location with examples of schools servicing small rural and coastal communities, as well as large regional centres.

These primary schools come under the direction of the parishes and are subject to parish canonical governance<sup>2</sup>. This canonical governance is extended to parish priests by the Diocesan Bishop who, “On his Ordinary authority, [has] jurisdiction [that] extends to the supervision of all aspects of school curriculum, including policy writing, administration, staffing and maintenance” (*Catholic Education Office, Lismore*, 2003, p. 15). Consequently, the parish priest as the Bishop’s delegate has a significant role in school administration especially in the areas of employment of staff, financial structures, enrolment policy, religious education and school direction. This close connection between parish and school in the Diocese of Lismore was a critical contextual factor in this research study. This connection between school and parish, along with the role of the parish priest in school administration, are markedly different from that which exists in other dioceses in New South Wales. The Diocesan Teachers Award states that “the Lismore Diocesan school system is unique in New South Wales and probably throughout Australia in its emphasis on the principle of subsidiarity and the decentralisation of decision making” (*Catholic Commission for Employment Relations*, 2006, p. 1).

Beyond this local jurisdiction, these schools comprise the Catholic education system and are supported by the Catholic Education Office, located in the regional centre of Lismore. While the parishes exercise canonical governance over each Catholic primary and secondary school within its boundaries, the Catholic Education Office

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<sup>2</sup> Canon Law describes a Catholic school in these terms: “A Catholic school is understood as one in which a competent theological authority or a public ecclesiastical juridic person directs or which ecclesiastical authority recognises as such through a written document” (#803) and furthermore “The local ordinary is to be concerned that those who are designated teachers of religious instruction in schools....are outstanding in correct doctrine, the witness of a Christian life and teaching skill.” (#804) (The Canon Law Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2001, pp. 146-147)

has an administrative and service function in respect to staffing allocation, performance review, consultancy and advisory services, in-service, industrial negotiations and management of government funded programs (*Catholic Education Office, Lismore*, 2003, pp. 16-17). This organisational model represents a decentralised rather than centralised framework of governance, leadership and administration.

Apart from these organisational issues, Catholic schools within the Diocese of Lismore have experienced significant staffing changes over the past 20 years. Catholic schools within this diocese were initially founded by religious orders of sisters, brothers and priests. However, the decades since the 1970s, have seen the virtual disappearance of religious orders from Catholic schools in the Diocese to 4% of the teaching body in 2005 (Catholic Education Commission, NSW, 2005, p. 73). The impact of the religious orders departing from Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lismore has been significant. Consequently, earlier research (Tinsey, 1998) has identified perceptions throughout the Diocese of Lismore that schools and their teachers have lost the spirit of vocation and dedication in their mission. Tinsey (1998) posits that:

It is debatable whether a person can effectively take on the role of cultural leader in a Christian community with little or no specific formation for the task. Traditionally the Catholic community has hoped that this formation would happen through an osmosis effect....This is becoming an increasingly difficult task, as support from other sectors of the Catholic community is not always forthcoming and with the decline in numbers of members of religious congregations in schools, the charism of religious orders is having less influence in the articulation of a school identity and culture. Most principals feel reasonably comfortable in the role of expert educator, while a significant number would feel less comfortable in the role of leader of a Christian community. (p. 50)

In the transition from religious to lay-led schools within the Diocese of Lismore, there seems to be the potential to lose the “animating spiritual capital of Catholic schooling” (Grace, 2002, p. 236), which the religious once provided. This spiritual capital involves the “resources of faith and values derived from a commitment to the religious tradition”. Therefore, to fully appreciate the current challenge of community leadership in Catholic primary schools it is useful to situate local Catholic schools

within the wider context of the exosystem of Catholic education and public education in Australia.

## **2.4 The Exosystem: Catholic Education And Public Education**

Catholic schooling, within the Diocese of Lismore, is situated within the wider exosystem of Catholic education and public education in Australia. Consistent with the early history (1870-1960) of Catholic education in Australia (Ryan & Sungaila, 1995), priests and religious communities within the Diocese of Lismore accepted administrative responsibility for schools within their parishes with Catholic parents bearing the total cost of their children's education. However, by the 1950s and 1960s, Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lismore, as throughout Australia, were under pressure from an escalation in the "costs of operating schools", "large numbers of immigrant children", "the post-war baby boom", a marked decline in "membership of religious orders" and little government assistance (Ryan & Sungaila, 1995, p. 158).

Confronting these challenges, Catholic communities began "a campaign of political action" (Ryan & Sungaila, 1995, p. 159) and, consequently, during the period 1964-1973, government policy was to shift to provide funding for non-government schools, including Catholic schools. With the introduction of public funding, in 1972, the level of compliance with public education policy and practice has increased substantially. Consequently, principalship and Catholic schooling within the Diocese of Lismore is situated within the wider exosystem of Catholic education, as well as public education in Australia.

### **2.4.1 Catholic Education**

A discussion of Catholic education in Australia must first acknowledge that this educational system acts as an agent of the Catholic Church and its evangelising mission in the world. In short, the Catholic school has a theological purpose and it is expected that school leadership will be motivated by this purpose. Thus, the conceptualisation of community and community leadership articulated in Church policy and practice will impact upon the Catholic school as community and the role of the principal as school community leader.

Within the literature there seems to be apparent agreement that the concept of community or 'communio' is fundamental to the Church's self understanding (Coriden, 2000). This agreement has been traditionally expressed as "koinonia" in Greek (Ratzinger, 2005, p. 65) and "communion" in Latin (Coriden, 2000, p. 41) where both terms have taken up notions of prayer, scripture, Eucharist and apostolic teaching which are expressed relationally in partnership and fellowship. This relational aspect of Christian community is further defined by "mutual acceptance, giving and receiving on both sides, and readiness to share one's goods" (Ratzinger, 2005, p. 79). Here, Catholic Church teaching that 'community' is primarily a theological rather than a sociological concept is better understood (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988).

However, significant aspects of the nature of the Catholic Church's understanding of community are now contested and leaders need to mediate among "the various stances and approaches" (Doyle, 2000, p. 171). These various stances and approaches reflect differing schools of theology. One school of theology views the Church as a "symbol of the unity of all mankind" [which] "is presented most fundamentally as the reality of solidarity among all human beings" (p. 112). Another school posits that "It is the Church that makes the transcendent present to a secular world" (p. 113). While another "stress[es] the dynamic character of the Church as people of God and the priority of charism over structure and institution" (p. 119). Yet again, a gender and cultural approach places emphasis on the local and particular elements of the Church as community (pp. 137-150). Consequently, further exploration of the contested nature of community is required for the Church and its agencies to know how they should live as communities of faith (Kaslyn, 2000) and to "provide some sense of a shared Catholic identity" (Doyle, 2000, p. 171).

Here the contested nature of community is hardly surprising given the evolving understanding of these concepts found in church documents. The Catholic theological discourse on community underwent fundamental renewal at the Second Vatican Council<sup>3</sup> between 1964 and 1965 (Fuellenbach, 2002; Komonchak, 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council: This Council of all Catholic bishops and other religious leaders from around the world was called by Pope John XXIII. In his opening address to the members of the Council, Pope John gave the following reasons for its convocation (Abbott, 1966): "Illuminated by the



During this period a transition took place, which is now understood to be a “paradigm shift” in Catholic thinking, from a hierarchical and institutional to a collaborative and community based Church (Shimabukuro, 1998, p. 2). Prior to the Second Vatican Council, textbook theology described the Catholic Church as simultaneously a “hierarchical Church” and a “monarchical church” (McBrien, 1994, p. 658). Moreover, an early draft of the Second Vatican Council document, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (Abbott, 1966), supported this traditional understanding. However, McBrien, (1994) clarified:

The successive drafts (there were four in all) disclose the extraordinary development which occurred in the Council’s self-understanding. Whereas at the beginning the emphasis was on institutional, hierarchical and judicial aspects of the Church, with special importance assigned to the papal office, the final and approved constitution speaks of the Church as the People of God and its authority as collegial in nature and exercise. (p. 669)

Therefore, the concept of *communio* attempts to capture “the hierarchical nature as well as its egalitarian, community nature” (McLaughlin, 2000, p. 38). A subsequent document, from the Council, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Abbott, 1966), reiterated this communitarian dimension by stating:

From the beginning of the history of salvation, God chose certain people as members of a given community, not as individuals, and revealed his plan to them, calling them ‘his people’... This communitarian character is perfected and fulfilled in the work of Jesus Christ. (p. 230, n. 32)

Here salvation is deemed to be communal because the Church was founded as a result of God’s initiative in Christ and not as the result of the actions of a group of individuals. Baptism forms people “in the likeness of Christ...In this way all of us are made members of His body” (Abbott, 1966, p. 20, n. 7). It is baptism into Christ that determines the way people live together as Church and not a social agreement among individuals. Each person is respected for his or her individuality, but cannot be understood in any self-contained or isolated way. Thus, there is no place for

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light of this Council, the Church – we confidently trust – will become greater in spiritual riches and, gaining the strength of new energies therefrom, she will look to the future without fear. In fact by bringing herself up to date where required...the Church will make men, families and peoples really turn their mind to heavenly things” (Komonchak, 2003, p. 712).

excessive individualism, or over-emphasis on individual rights, in a Christian community (Kaslyn, 2000, pp. 254-256).

Extending this thought, the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (Abbott, 1966) details how baptism is intimately connected with the gifts of each person and with special attention being given to those lay people<sup>4</sup> who work in the Church. Each baptised person is endowed with gifts by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the Church. The *Dogmatic Constitution* (Abbott, 1964) then states that the Holy Spirit:

Allotting His gifts 'to everyone according as He will' (1 Cor 12:11), He distributes special graces according as he will. By these gifts, He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks or offices advantageous for the renewal and upbuilding up of the church. (p. 30, n. 12)

Through common sharing and effort, these gifts of the Holy Spirit bring the baptised into a new form of collaborative community. As the *Dogmatic Constitution*, (Abbott, 1966) states:

...each individual part of the Church contributes through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church. Thus through the common sharing of gifts and through the common effort to attain fullness in unity, the whole and each of the parts receive increase. (p. 31, n. 13)

Clergy and laity are interrelated as "each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ" (Abbott, 1966, p. 27, n.10) and together they collaboratively serve the building up of the Church and the promotion of the reign of God's Kingdom in the world, as an "interlocking reality" (Abbott,, 1966, p. 22, n. 8). This collaborative apostolate of laity and clergy can lead to the laity being called:

In various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy...to more immediate cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy...Consequently, let every opportunity be given them so that according to their abilities and the needs of the times, they may zealously participate in the saving work of the Church. (p. 60, n. 33)

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<sup>4</sup> Lay person or the 'laity' refers to all the baptised in Christ and constitute the People of God, except those in Holy Orders and those in a religious state approved by the Church (Abbott, 1966 p. 57, n. 31)

Thus, in line with this emphasis on a communal way of life within the Church, the Catholic discourse on leadership was transformed. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Abbott, 1966) took up the notion of leadership as service within the mission of Christ and the Church:

...the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ Himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served. (p. 201, n. 3)

This life of service is to be expressed through an active involvement in the Church and the world. The *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (Abbott, 1966) stated:

...the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places where only through them can she become the salt of the earth. (p. 59, n. 33)

This understanding of the relationship between community and leadership within the Church was further refined in *The Code of Canon Law* (Canon Law Society of Great Britain & Ireland, 1983). Canon 208 states that each baptised person has to contribute to the “building up of the Body of Christ”<sup>5</sup>. Canon 209 extends the previous Canon by obliging all Christian faithful to “preserve their communion with the Church”, which is expressed through nurturing their own communion relationship with God and actively supporting the Church’s communal way of life (Kaslyn, 2000, pp. 256-261). Several of the key canonical requirements for living out this communal way of life are exercising “the mission which God entrusted to the Church to fulfil in the world” (Canon 204), “leading a holy life” (Canon 210), promoting “social justice, [helping] the poor from their own resources” (Canon 222) and giving “witness to Christ” (Canon 225).

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<sup>5</sup> Body of Christ refers to the fact that through baptism in Christ the Holy Spirit present in each person welds them into the mystical body of Christ (Abbott, 1964, p. 20, n. 7)

This evolving understanding of the Church's communal way of life is also reflected in official documents on Catholic education.<sup>6</sup> In 1988, the Congregation for Catholic Education challenged Catholic schools to “transition from the [Catholic] school as an institution to the [Catholic] school as community” (n. 31), to be “concerned with the creation of a community climate” (n. 38), and to be witnesses to a “community living out of its faith” (n. 68). At the essence of this community is “frequent encounters with Christ” who is the “cornerstone of the school community” (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, n. 61). Centred on Christ and the gospel, a community climate should be experienced which is distinguished by a commitment and witness to incorporate Catholic social teaching, particularly the principles of collegiality, co-responsibility and the common good (n. 73). Decision making is to be shared collaboratively between the various groups that make up the Catholic school, respecting the levels of competency among the partners, and using the principles of participation and co-responsibility (n. 70).

Twenty years on this thought was repeated in the document, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997). In describing the Catholic school as an “educating community”, this document noted that:

While respecting individual roles, the community dimension should be fostered, since it is one of the most enriching developments for the contemporary school. It is also helpful to bear in mind, in harmony with the Second Vatican Council, that this community dimension in the Catholic school is not a merely sociological category; it has a theological foundation as well. The educating community, taken as a whole, is thus called to further the objective of a school as a place of complete formation through interpersonal relations. (n. 18)

Finally, in order to implement these principles, all must overcome individualism and work collaboratively to discover their human and faith responsibilities to live in community (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, n. 60; 1988, n. 39). This theological and canonical responsibility to build community is also found in writing on the principalship. Community has been named as a spiritual dimension of leadership, “manifest in the language of community which principals use to describe

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<sup>6</sup> *The Catholic School* (Sacred Congregation, 1977), *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Sacred Congregation, 1988), and *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Sacred Congregation, 1997).

their schools and in their actions as they work to achieve the goal of community” (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993, p. 156). Fitzgerald (1990) states that the first question asked of anyone who wishes to be a principal of a Catholic school should be their capacity to lead a community.

However, there are points of tension in respect to making this community vision for Catholic schooling a reality. For most of the history of Catholic education in Australia, there has been a close correlation between enrolment at the local Catholic school and a family commitment to the local parish community. The local Catholic school and the local parish formed a seamless ‘community’ within a broader, local community. The seminal research of Coleman and Hoffer (1987) identified community as a major factor in the academic success of Catholic school students. On the basis of their research, they concluded that the “proximate” reason for academic success of Catholic schools was “in large part from the greater control that the school, based on a functional community, is able to exercise” (p. 48). This functional community was fundamentally due to the schools being centred on parishes, the shared values between stakeholders and the network of other social ties which resulted in social capital for the child.

More recently, several Australian studies have found that this functional community may be deteriorating (Quillinan, 1997; Watkins, 1997). Bentley and Hughes (2005) in their review of Australian church related research since 1975 noted that “One of the major changes from the 1950s to the 1970s was the loss of local community life...As local communities became less relevant to many people, so did the local community churches” (p. 20). Research has found that the Catholic Church is experiencing a significant decline in mass attendance and parish affiliation (Dixon, 2003). Quillinan (1997) reported that:

...the families of children attending Catholic schools in the Rockhampton Diocese are not as closely associated with parish structures as they were in years gone by...fewer families would claim to be aligned to a particular parish...The only experience of church for many families is the experience they have as a consequence of their involvement with the school (p. 51).

Consequently, the Catholic school is now acknowledged as the only contact that the majority of its parents and students have with the Church (Pell, 2006; Tinsey, 1998).

It is argued (Watkins, 1997) that the Catholic school has in reality become “the normative faith community” (p. 79) as the local parish community lost its relevance for eighty percent of parents.

Recognising this development, various reports (Queensland Catholic Education Commission, 2001) and policy documents (National Catholic Education Commission, NCEC, 1996; 2002) have framed the Catholic school community as “a theological entity in respect to implementing the Church’s mission of evangelisation and service to the “Common Good” (Hutton, 2002, p. 48). Here evangelisation<sup>7</sup> is more than just its older understanding of proclamation of the Christian message, which was expressed in bringing “people into the Church, to get conversions to the faith” (Tinsey, 2002, p. 1) or “to restore Christendom” (p. 5). Rather evangelisation entails “a profound dialogue with culture” (Bevans, 2005, p. 6) which is embedded “in the ongoing dialogue between God and man” (Tinsey, 2000, p. 1).

This new understanding of evangelisation has been taken up in a call for Catholic education to broaden its mission by “engaging with Australian society and culture” (D’Orsa, 2002, p. 17), and for school leaders to “facilitate, challenge, direct and support the work of those women and men [who] bring [this broad] vision of Catholic schools to life” (Benjamin, 2002, p. 85). Moreover, this new understanding of evangelisation highlights the importance of dialogue within Catholic school communities. Further, within Catholic schooling “The commitment to dialogue is a celebration of the interconnectedness of people in the school, and builds a sense of shared leadership and teamwork” (Touhy, 1999, p. 182).

While such a recommendation in support of ‘dialogue’ supports Church teaching<sup>8</sup>, commentators on Catholic schooling identify a “paucity of dialogue” (Watkins, 1997, p. 76) or a “limited degree of broadly based, sustained dialogue” (Battams, 2002, p. 363) within Catholic school communities. For Grace (1996, 2002), this lack of progress with dialogue in Catholic schools is due to two sets of factors. Firstly, there is a threat from the “...more assertive use of legal procedures, the ethic of

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<sup>7</sup> Evangelisation means that “Through baptism, each person...participates in the mission of the Church; each person is obliged and possesses the right to proclaim the gospel message” (McManus, 2000, p. 22). “Evangelising means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new” (Pope Paul VI, 1975, n. 18).

<sup>8</sup> Church can give no greater proof of its solidarity with the human family, than to engage with it in “conversation” about its problems (Abbott, p. 201, n. 3).

possessive individualism, from market forces and from a customer culture reinforced by a quick recourse to legal procedures” (Grace, 1996, p. 76; McLaughlin, 1998). As well, there is the “sheer durability of a long historical tradition of hierarchical leadership and [the]... revisionist reaction against some of the more liberal principles commended by the [Second Vatican] Council” (Grace, 2002, p. 147). It is asserted that the return to a pre-Second Vatican Council hierarchical and institutional model of the Catholic Church has been occurring since the late 1960s (McLaughlin, 2000). These factors will need to be addressed if sustained dialogue in support of evangelisation within the Catholic school community is to be broadly established.

In summary, this review of Catholic education in Australia reminds us that this educational system was established to act as an agent of the Catholic Church and its evangelising mission in the world. In short, the Catholic school has a theological purpose and it is expected that school leadership will be motivated by this purpose. Consequently, theological understandings of the Catholic Church as community and community leadership in this context will impact upon the Catholic school as community and the role of the principal as school community leader. However, Church documents reveal that the understanding of community has evolved over time and continues to remain a contested concept within Catholic Church. This further explains the challenge facing principals as they seek to build school community leadership.

#### **2.4.2 Public Education**

Beyond this institutional association with the Catholic Church, Catholic schools are also situated within the exosystem of public education. An analysis of public education in Australia highlights an enduring controversy regarding the community dimension of schooling. The place of community in Australian schools is a controversial issue not yet capable of “closure” because it is a matter of “public dispute” and there is obvious “merit in both the contending positions” (Haynes, 2002, p. 210). This analysis locates this controversy within a number of Australian government educational policy documents from 1973 to the present<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> *Schools in Australia: Report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission* (Karmel, 1973), *Quality of Education in Australia: Report of the Quality Of Education of Education*

The Australian controversy regarding school as community began with ideas of devolution and community involvement in schooling proposed by Karmel (1973):

The Committee favours less rather than more centralised control over the operation of schools. Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of the pupils whom they teach and, at senior levels with the students themselves... opportunities will need to be open to parents and to the community at large to increase their competence to participate in the control of schools. (pp. 10-11)

Prior to 1973, Government policy supported decision making by state educational bureaucracies to the exclusion of the ideas of devolution and community involvement<sup>10</sup>. The Karmel Report (1973) changed this understanding by arguing for a moral purpose that was to support collaborative school based decision making, with local community involvement, responding directly to parents and school communities. This devolution to whole school community decision-making related to the moral purpose of promoting “equality” and “equity” “through a process of participation and self determination” (Marginson, 1997, p. 58).

While the notions of “equality” and “equity” survived into the later government reports (Dawkins, 1988; MCEETYA, 1999) the ideology of economic rationalism gradually replaced the Karmel (1973) understandings of this moral purpose (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997, p. 11). This ideology assumed, among other things, that “Individuals are only concerned with and act on their self-interest... Society is a number of self-interested individuals” (Haynes, 2002, pp. 122-123).

Economic rationalism formally informed educational policy with the publication of the *Quality of Education in Australia* Report (Karmel, 1985):

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Review Committee (Karmel, 1985), *Strengthening Australia's Schools: A Consideration of the Focus and Content of Schooling* (Dawkins, 1988), *The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, (MCEETYA, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> “The system of public education was highly centralised until the early 1970s. Few decisions could be made at the school level” (Caldwell, 1998, p. 447).



After 30 years of economic growth the nation has, in the last decade, experienced sharp economic downturn, slow growth, inflation and high rates of unemployment... Restructuring requires changes in attitudes and the development of skills and ingenuity. The education system will need to enhance the capacity of individuals to bring it about and to maintain and develop new directions. (p. 52)

The *Strengthening Australia's Schools* Report (Dawkins, 1988) further strengthened the economic rationalist control of educational policy in the section called "Maximising Our Investment in Education" (p. 6). In order to achieve this maximising effect, the Report stated that ways had to be found "to develop stronger links between schools, the community, the labour market and other educational agencies". This view on schools and community in relationship to the labour market was justified on economic rather than on moral grounds. Issues of parental partnership and devolution of decision making were put aside in favour of stronger links with the business sector and accountability in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

*The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (MCEETYA, 1999) took up the Dawkins (1988) notion of "stronger links", but then extended it by including the notion of "learning communities". One of the four major purposes of education according to the Declaration (MCEETYA, 1999) is "further strengthening schools as learning communities where teachers, students and their families work in partnership with business, industry and the wider community" (p. 1). The issues of parental partnership and devolution of decision making were put aside in the declaration in favour of "stronger links" with business, industry and the wider community for the purpose of "securing...outcomes for students [and] each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life" (p. 1). The Declaration contains no understanding of the inherent goodness of community founded on Karmel's (1973) moral purpose of "equality" and "equity" (Marginson, 1997). Instead, education took on "the corporate form of devolution" which involved removing "deliberative or consultative processes involving staff, and users of education" (Marginson, 1997, pp. 167-168).

This combined policy direction from Karmel (1985) through to the Adelaide Declaration (MCEETYA, 1999) spawned the educational restructuring and reform movements that swept through education in the post Karmel and post Dawkins eras (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997; Leithwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999). Beyond these educational policy directions, the restructuring of schools was also part of a "wider agenda for restructuring workplaces throughout the Australian economy" (Haynes, 2002, p. 165). Community involvement was promoted as a way to make schools more accountable, to monitor teacher performance and to introduce changes to teaching and learning, according to the economic rationalist agenda. Even the legislation to have parents involved in school councils was seen as a way to "push schools in...[the] direction of market consciousness and client responsiveness" (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 7). However, while this approach involved the need "to transform school and community relationships" (Boyd, 1996, p. 1), it was found to be better at "creating committees than at building communities" (Hargreaves, 1997, p. 15). Hence, Boyd (1996) concludes that how school and community relations are to work effectively "remains a subject of great debate" (p. 1)

Critics point to the enduring influence of economic rationalism on Australian schooling through the ascendancy of "New Right" proponents (Haynes, 2002, pp. 118-123) and "market liberals" (Marginson, 1997, p. 103). Both groups created "the social conditions in which their particular brand of individualism could be universalised" (p. 103). Individualism is expressed in "atomism", "competition" (p.140) and a "withdrawal from threatening, unpleasant or unrewarding working relationships" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 182) within the school community. Consequently, in such an environment the devolution, consultation and participation named by Karmel (1973) as central to the moral purpose for the Australian school system became increasingly difficult for principals to achieve. However, despite these difficulties, the policy direction first enunciated by Karmel (1973) continues to be taken up by advocates challenging principals to build community. Theorists identify community building as a fundamental pillar in school restructuring and reform (Sergiovanni, 1994) restoring "a focus on the importance of collective educative relationships" in learning (Smyth, 2003, pp. 31-32).

As a result of this exploration of the exosystem of Catholic education and public education, it can be seen that the school as community is an evolving and contested concept and school community leadership represents a significant challenge. It seems that the discourse surrounding the school as community and school community leadership is both internally ambiguous and contradictory. However, in order to further explore this challenge it is helpful to situate this discourse within the wider context of social and cultural change.

## **2.5 The Macrosystem: Social and Cultural Change**

The exosystem of Catholic education and public education is situated within a macrosystem of social and cultural change. This cultural change began somewhere between the 1400s and 1600s and is now known as 'modernity'. Modernity, according to Gallagher (1997, p. 77) "is best viewed as a complex phenomenon, a product of converging forces through various centuries" and it "wrought a fundamental change in the Western character" (Tarnas, 1991, p. 223). Modernity replaced God, community and the Church with the "rational human being committed to discovering truth, free of the strictures imposed by any group or structure" (Lennan, 2004, p. 20). In essence, it wrought a breakdown in the deep connectedness that existed between nature, God and human beings in the pre-modern era which in turn became "injurious to a communal sense of faith" (p.19).

A significant manifestation of this breakdown was the emergence of the secular world view. Secularisation is the term given to the process whereby the "validity of the sacred and its associated culture" is denied and replaced by "logical, rational, empirical and scientific intellectual cultures in which the notion of the transcendent has no place" (Grace, 2002, p. 11). Secularisation led to a decline in the "external control of the Church...[and] religious adherence...[along with] the retreat of faith into the private realm" (Gallagher, 2003, p. 79). The retreat to the private realm was also an expression of the other fundamental change, namely, the "new value placed on individualism" (p. 227).

Beginning with the Renaissance (fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries), writers such as Dante, Petrarch, Machiavelli and Montaigne linked individualism to personal independence and individual expression. Enlightenment (eighteenth century)

philosophers, such as Bacon, Kant, and Locke, extended this thought by arguing in support of experiential knowledge, the moral autonomy of the individual, the equality of all and natural rights (Tarnas, 1991, p. 273). The world-view that emerged from these philosophical developments placed the Self at centre stage and laid the foundations for the modern understanding of individualism. *The American Declaration of Independence* (1776) took up and expressed the Enlightenment's concern for the Self in its fundamental belief that all people were created equal, endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights, to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Later, the term 'individualism' was coined by de Tocqueville (1840/2004) in his treatise on American democracy. In this work, he describes "individualism" as:

...a mature and calm feeling, which disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself. (Vol. 2, Section 2, Part 1)

At the same time, de Tocqueville (1840/2004) was scathing in his condemnation of individualism, as it drains goodness from life and breeds selfishness. However, such criticism was unheeded and, since the mid 1800s, "Individualism lies at the very core of American culture" (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985, p. 142).

In the period from the mid 1800s to the present, individualism took on a number of forms. The dominant form was that of "utilitarian individualism" which was promoted by John Stuart Mill and became a central value in Western society. The consequence of this was that "traditional values and traditional societies" were further broken down (Bellah, et al., 1985, p. 6). Mill (as quoted in Speake, 1979) wrote: "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness..." (p. 361). Thus, utilitarian individualism posits enlightened self interest as the basis for moral purpose and is primarily concerned with making the greatest number of people happy. This understanding "has an affinity to a basically economic

understanding of human existence” (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 336), in which, human contracts are seen to maximise self interest.

Despite its hegemonic status, utilitarian individualism has been open to criticism from a number of fields including sociology, the physical sciences and psychology. Sociologists have criticised utilitarian individualism for not having sufficient balance in its assumptions. People do not purely act out of the pleasure principle all the time. Nor do they come together into a social contract only to “advance their self-interest” (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 336). In fact, many people act selflessly out of a sense of duty, fairness or for higher moral reasoning. Utilitarian individualism is a “mono-utility concept” and needs to be balanced out by a “multiple-utility model” which is achieved by adding “the concept of morality to that of the pleasure utility, and the concept of community to that of competition” (Etzioni, 1988, pp. 22-23). Moreover, it is asserted that individualism has spawned a version of spirituality which is highly personal and anti institutional, justifying people from engaging with the commitments that institutional religion requires (Tacey, 2003, pp. 41-42).

Further, quantum theorists<sup>11</sup> advanced a world-view that was “organic, holistic and ecological” (Capra, 1982, p. 66) which stood in opposition to a fragmented universe. Bohm (1985) described this new reality as “quantum wholeness [which] is thus closer to the organized unity of a living being than it is to that obtained by putting together the parts of a machine” (p. 115). Overall, the critics of utilitarian individualism assert that it poses a deep “ecological”, “spiritual” and “social” crisis for society (Holland, 2005, p. 2). Consequently, by the end of the twentieth century, modernity and its particular expression in utilitarian individualism, had profoundly challenged the “established order of references for identity and community” leaving the “modern person...ontologically and culturally homeless” (Starratt, 2003, p. 76).

Modernity brought many goods to Western civilisation in terms of quality of life resulting from scientific advances, universal education, greater freedoms and the

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<sup>11</sup> Quantum theory, which is also called quantum mechanics, was developed during the first three decades of the twentieth century by renowned physicists including Albert Einstein, Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr. At the heart of this theory was the discovery that “Subatomic particles...are not ‘things’ but are interconnections between ‘things’, and these ‘things’, in turn, are interconnections between other ‘things’, and so on. In quantum theory you never end up with ‘things’; you always deal with interconnections.” (Capra, 1982, pp. 69-70)

rise of democracy. However, while many of its major claims have “fallen under suspicion and come to be largely rejected, the ‘turn to the subject’ born with modernity has not only survived the transition but become an even more crucial strand of our lived culture” (Gallagher, 1997, p. 106). One critical voice with regard to this turn to the subject or self is the psychologist, Seligman (1990) who writes:

...surely one necessary condition for meaning...is the attachment to something larger than you are. And the larger the entity that you can attach the self to, the more meaning you can derive. To the extent that it is now difficult for young people to take seriously their relationship to God, to care about their relationship to the country, or to be part of a large and abiding family, meaning in life will be very difficult to find. The self, to put it another way, is a very poor site for meaning. (p.11)

The authentic self which is central to psychological well being is identified as “relational in nature, in as much as it involves valuing and achieving openness and truthfulness in one’s close relationships” (Kernis, 2003, p. 15). That is, the development of the authentic self requires relational transparency involving presenting one’s genuine, as opposed to a ‘fake’ self, through a process of self disclosure. This process within a community creates bonds based on intimacy and trust and encourages others to do the same. A retreat to self is potentially destructive because it can lead to increases in “conflict and frustrations” (Etzioni, 1983, p.185) without the possibility of building community relations. These views are paralleled by a new emphasis in moral philosophy on the importance of community. McIntyre (1981) argued for the ‘encumbered’ self as opposed to the radically individualist self promoted in the modernist world view with its “abstract and ghostly character” (p. 31). The only alternative to this “ghostly character” is the recovery of the social virtues which are inseparable from some form of human community, grounded in a vital, living community with traditions and historical memories.

Australian social researchers (Mackay, 1997; Eckersley 2004) have also identified the problems associated with utilitarian individualism. Within the Australian culture it is argued that the notion of the self embodied in utilitarian individualism is destructive of “social trust”, “cohesion”, “intimacy of friendships” and the “quality of family life” (Eckersley, 2004, p. 41). To offset this development, these writers offer

an alternative scenario characterised by an Australian society that has “rediscovered the importance of community” (Mackay, 1999, p. xxxiii). Consequently, at the end of the twentieth century Australia was poised to negotiate its way between the two scenarios of individualism and community. Here it is assumed that “the sense of morality can only evolve out of the experience of belonging to a community” (Mackay, 1999, p. xxxiv). Thus extreme individualism threatens the social fabric of Australian society and education is not immune from its effects.

## **2.6 Conclusion And The Research Problem**

At the beginning, this research study focused the issue of the Catholic school as community. However, this proved to be a broad focus with many interrelated problems. Consequently, in order to clarify the research problem, Catholic primary school principalship was situated within the various interrelated contexts that impact on the principals’ discharge of their accountabilities and responsibilities regarding ‘leadership’ and ‘community’ within the Diocese of Lismore (Chapter 2). These interrelated contexts include the microsystem or the principals’ immediate environment of the Catholic primary school; the exosystem or institutional context of the Catholic school, namely, Catholic education and public education; and the macrosystem of societal and cultural change.

This contextual analysis revealed a lack of comprehensive guidelines for school community leadership within the Diocese of Lismore. While significant documents (Catholic Education Office, Lismore, 2002; 2005a; 2005b) framed the principalship as school community leader, this dimension of the principals’ role has not been detailed in further policy and practice. Moreover, while Church teaching and government policy favour the Catholic school as community, policy statements that refer to the school as community and school community leadership remain internally ambiguous and contradictory. Yet again, it was noted that social and cultural changes have cumulatively affected the “established order of reference for identity and community” (Starratt, 2003, p. 76) and schools are caught between the conflicting discourses of individualism and communitarianism.

In short, this contextual analysis identified that the school as community is an evolving and contested concept which significantly impacts upon school community leadership. Here it was concluded that while the policy context of Catholic education and public education may direct the principal to build the school as community, this direction remains problematic. The evolving and contested nature of community in contemporary society means that there is no obvious way forward in respect to school community leadership. Consequently, this research study was narrowed to focus on the role of the principal as school community leader. The purpose of this research study was identified in terms of developing a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the school community leadership role of the principal. It was expected that such an understanding would not only point to new directions for policy and practice in the Diocese of Lismore but also contribute to theoretical development in the field.



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

## **3.1      Introduction**

The purpose of this research study was to explore Catholic primary school principals' understanding and reconstruction of their community leadership role. The previous chapter clarified the research problem in terms of a number of contextual challenges facing principals. Here it was found that within the Diocese of Lismore, principal leadership is undertaken without any detailed policy guidance on school as community. Whilst the Catholic Church and broader government policy both direct the principal to build the school as a community, the competing understandings of what this means for principals appears to limit its potential. Moreover, principals work in a socio-cultural environment taken up with notions of the self and utilitarian individualism, which makes community building difficult.

Chapter 3 situates this research problem within the theoretical debate on the role of the principal in respect to school community. It does this by reviewing literature relevant to this research problem. In general, this review of the literature seeks to fulfil the four goals of a literature review as identified by Neuman (2006, p. 111):

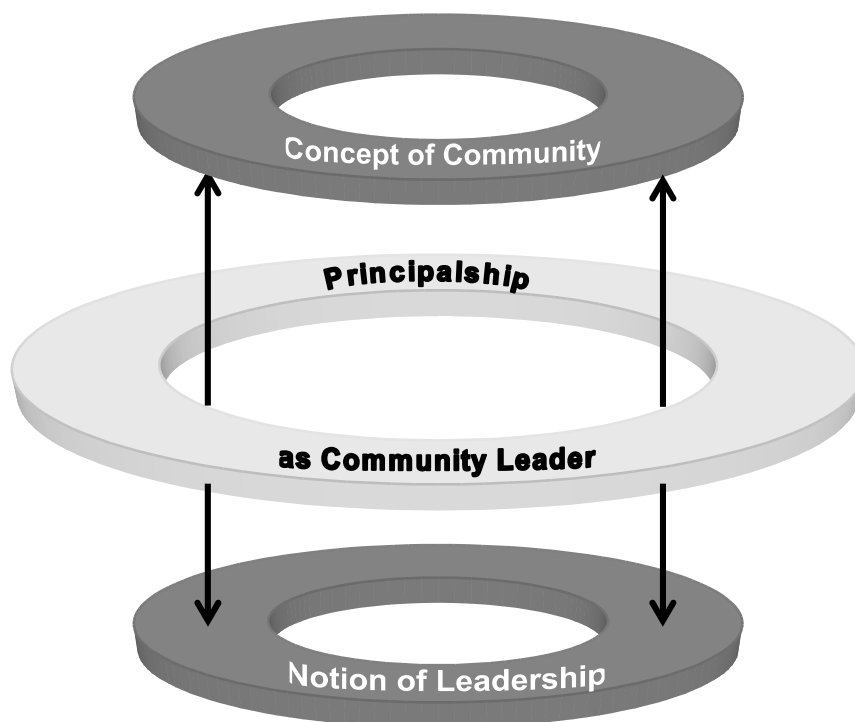
1. To demonstrate a familiarity with a body of knowledge about school as community and implications for leadership and establish the credibility of the study;
2. To show the path of prior research and how the current project is linked to it;
3. To integrate and summarise what is known about the role of principal as school community leaders;
4. To learn from others and stimulate new ideas that might be explored in this study.

To this end this literature review is divided into six sections. The first section outlines the conceptual framework which is based on the binary relationship between community and leadership in the role of the Catholic primary school principal. The second section details prior research upon which the literature review was developed. The third section explores the contested concept of community by

analysing its dominant models in the literature. The fourth section explores the emergent leadership theories, the dominant leadership models and the elusive nature of leadership. The fifth section explores the literature on the principalship and how new forms of the principalship are being developed. The final section synthesises the existing literature and highlights its relationship to the current study. Specifically, it confirms the need for further research in respect to the role of the principal as community leader in schools and identifies the research questions that will guide decisions in respect to the various moments of data collection, analysis and interpretation within the present study.

### 3.2 Conceptual Framework

This review of the literature is guided by a conceptual framework (Figure 3.1) that situates the principalship in the Catholic school within key theoretical developments relating to school as community and leadership.



*Figure 3.1* Conceptual framework of the literature review.

This conceptual framework reflects claims in the literature that community and leadership are connected in a binary relationship with the role of the Catholic school principal. Consequently, as Hanks (1997) writes:

...an interpretation develops which effectively sets notions of leadership side by side with the concept of community. Such an interpretation is particularly pertinent to leadership and Catholic schools. (p. 48)

### 3.3 Prior Research

This section details the prior research in respect to school community and school community leadership. A search of the database Educational Research Information Clearinghouse (ERIC) using the key words of *principal*, *school* and *community* revealed 80 research studies for the period from 1990 to 2004. However, it was found that none of this research specifically investigated the school community leadership dimension of principalship. Of the 80 ERIC documents there were 18 citations related to various aspects of the principal's role, with none of these studies directly related to the role of the principal as school community leader. The remaining 62 documents were indirectly related to principalship:

- a) Building of school community (13 citations);
- b) Devolution, restructuring, site based management and school reform (12 citations);
- c) Student welfare (6 citations).
- d) Parent/teachers/student communication (10 citations);
- e) Schools developing partnerships with the wider community (17 citations);
- f) Learning community (4 citations).

The ERIC database was also searched using the key words *Catholic school as community* as well as *Catholic school community and principal*. Again, not one document was found on *Catholic school community principal*. A search of the Australian Education Index on the key words *principal school community* found 144 documents from the period 1990 to 2004. Likewise with the ERIC search, not one document specifically dealt with the role of the principal as school community leader. 41 citations were not relevant to the principalship. 33 citations dealt with aspects of the principal's role but they were not directly related to the role of the

principal as community leader. The remaining documents were indirectly related to the topic in that they explored:

- a) Building of school community (15 citations);
- b) Devolution, restructuring, site based management and school reform (21 citations);
- c) Student welfare (9 citations);
- d) Community partnerships with schools (11 citations);
- e) Parent/teachers/student communication (4 citations);
- f) Learning Community (10 citations).

A search of the Australian Education Index (1995 – 2004) on the key words *Catholic school principal* revealed 59 documents. Not one document explored either of the descriptors related to *Catholic school as community* or *Catholic school community and principal*. Searches of both the Digital Dissertations and ACER Education Research Theses databases were conducted on the key words *principal school community*. The range of citations identified in the searches of these databases revealed no research studies in regard to the principal's understanding of the concept of community. There were, however, a limited number of research studies on the role of the principal as community builder.

The Digital Dissertations database yielded three citations directly related to the principal's role of building community. These three included one study which investigated "the complexities involved in establishing and maintaining productive professional relationships among and between teachers and principals" as a way of understanding how teachers and principals "seek community" (O'Reilly, 2002, pp. 2-3). Another study examined a "principal's practices, obstacles, and action plans in facilitating a school's movement from a conventional school to a democratic school community" (Font Sanchez, 2001, p. ix). Finally, a study by Spencer (2004) investigated how a principal can use relationships with others to build caring, learning school communities. The ACER database yielded only 1 citation directly related to the topic. In this study, Sands (2004) investigated "How does a leader construct and organise knowledge in the enactment of the principalship to deal with the dilemmas and opportunities that arise daily in school life? [and] What does this particular way of organising knowledge look like in the effort to build a sustainable school community?" (p. 26).

Thus a search of relevant research databases suggests an omission or “blank spot” (Heck & Hallinger, 1999) in respect to research studies that directly focus on the role of the principal as community leader. However, given the expectations and challenges of the principal’s role in respect to Catholic school community leadership identified in Chapter 2, it would seem that research around this issue is overdue. This is certainly recognised in the literature where the issue of school community leadership is identified as being undertheorised and in need of further research (Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p. 74). In particular, Punch and Wildy (1997, p. 97) state that “What seems to be missing from this body of research is an examination of principals’ experiences and their interpretations of these experiences in the face of restructuring efforts”. Hence there is a need to further explore principals’ perspectives on their role as community leader within the Catholic school. The starting point for this exploration is the body of literature that directly focuses on the concept of community.

### **3.4 Community**

This section will review and analyse the concept of community as it is applied in the literature. It will then review the literature on school as community.

#### **3.4.1 A Contested Concept**

The term community can be seen to have multiple meanings including “common identity”, “mutual commitment”, “physical location”, the way “power is distributed”, or as a description of “the good life” (Kenny, 1999, pp. 38-39). Moreover, this term can be used to cover up the social inequalities in society and legitimate oppressive legal practices against individuals (Kenny, 1994, p. 41) as well as to idealise “the ‘village community’ whose reality was in many instances oppressive” (Ife, 1995, p. 15). Still others identify the “counterfeit” or “pseudocommunity” that lacks authenticity as it avoids all disagreement whilst maintaining a façade of fellowship (Peck, 1990, p. 86; Shields & Seltzer, 1997, pp. 433-435). Hence, it can be argued that “because community today can take so many different forms, it resists being pinned down by definition” (Shaffer & Amundsen, 1993, p. 10). Indeed the term may be used so flexibly as to render it meaningless (Kirkpatrick, 1986):

We use the term 'community' in everyday discourse to refer to a social grouping. 'The' community refers to social structures of the area in which we reside or work: colleges call themselves community, as do churches, neighbourhoods, towns, cities, nations and even confederations of nations. People doing similar work, even when scattered across the world, form a community, such as the medical, legal and academic communities. Because of the extraordinary broad application 'community' covers a number of groups, to which each of us belongs...Because of the flexibility in the word...we often become either confused by its use or, more likely, so inured to hearing it in a multitude of ways that it eventually becomes a meaningless term. (p. 2)

Consequently, it is argued that "there is no more slippery concept in sociology than community [and] its multiple meanings make it a difficult tool with which to work" (Dempsey, 2002, p. 140). Despite these limitations, the language of community has become a powerful "explanatory concept" (Kenny, 1999, p. 42) which holds a general meaning among people "as a basis for the organisation and development of alternative social and economic structures" (Ife, 1995, p. 15; Kenny, 1999). Thus whilst the concept of community is widely explored within the literature, [it]...is one of the most contested concepts in the social sciences" (Dempsey, 2002, p. 149). To understand this contestation it is useful to bring to light how community studies have been understood and approached over time within the discipline of sociology<sup>12</sup>. Three models of community can be identified within sociology (Kirkpatrick, 1986). The first and second of these models use organic and mechanistic classifications of community, while the third model seeks to integrate the two previous models and in so doing minimises the excesses of each.

The German sociologist, Tonnies (1887/1957) is credited with the initial identification of the first two models of community in the late nineteenth century. In short, Tonnies explains the shift in western society from pre-modern to a modern form of community by identifying the movement from the "gemeinschaft" and "gesellschaft" understandings of community (p. 17). Community as "Gemeinschaft" offers a collectivist understanding of community and this understanding is characterised as:

...a real social relationship of obligation or mutual dependence resulting first of all from mutual promises, even though they may be expressly

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<sup>12</sup> The prime place of community studies in sociology was initially highlighted by Bell and Newby (1972).

stated by one side and only strictly understood by the other as an eventual promise. (p. 20).

Therefore “gemeinschaft” as used by Tonnies (1887/1957) occurs when human beings “are related through their wills in an organic manner and affirm each other” (p. 48). This will is exemplified in three levels of relationship found in “kinship, place and mind”. Of these three levels, kinship offers the strongest bonds of relationship and the experience of security, loyalty and trust as in a family. The levels of place and mind, however, are weaker bonds requiring more ongoing support through ritual, ceremony and tradition. In essence, “Gemeinschaft” is similar to what is commonly called “family life” (p. 267). This form of community is characterised by a sense of “family spirit” (p. 55).

Alternatively, the gesellschaft community represents a collective of autonomous individuals and is arrived at through the voluntary decision of those concerned with protecting their respective interests. In short, Tonnies (1897/1957) states:

The theory of the Gesellschaft deals with the artificial construction of an aggregate of human beings which superficially resembles the Gemeinschaft in so far as the individuals peacefully live and dwell together...in Gesellschaft they are essentially separated in spite of all the unifying factors. (p. 74)

In this model of community, personally owned and community values are replaced by contractual ones and the appearance of group unity is only superficial. Thus, nothing has a common value in itself. Further, each person is competitively working towards a personal agenda, rather than cooperating with others for the common good. Interactions become more impersonal, connections become more contrived. Getting ahead is a matter of the individual's success rather than success for the total community. In the construct of gesellschaft:

...nobody wants to grant and produce anything for another individual, nor will they be inclined to give ungrudgingly to another individual, if it be not in exchange for a gift or labour equivalent that he considers at least equal to what he has given. (p. 74)

Applying the *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* conceptualisations to the historical development of community in society, Tonnies simply distinguishes two models of community with two forms of relationships. In the *gemeinschaft* community of pre-industrial times relationships are real and organic, while in the *gesellschaft* community of the industrial era relationships are ideal and mechanical. Since Tonnies' early work, the *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* models of community have found both supporters and critics within sociological literature. Emile Durkheim (1984) whilst highly critical of the *gemeinschaft* model of community saw value in a modified *gesellschaft* model. For Durkheim, solidarity within the *gemeinschaft* model of community so strongly relied on homogeneity within the group that the group would strive to preserve this homogeneity at all cost, even if this meant the imposition of repressive and coercive punitive laws to preserve "the bond of social solidarity" (p. 31).

On the other hand, Etzioni (1991) advocates a contemporary interpretation of the *gemeinschaft* community model and is critical of the modern *gesellschaft* society as offering an inaccurate appreciation of human nature as far as it fails to recognise the constitutive import of community for personal and social development. Etzioni's views have been taken up into a communitarian discourse. The communitarian discourse incorporates the exercise of rights and responsibilities in a spirit of solidarity and mutual concern, as people balance personal needs with the common good (Etzioni, 1993). Within this discourse, common values validated by communities of enquiry provide the basis for mutual responsibility between members (Tam, 1998, p. 7). Etzioni (1991) expressed his essential position thus:

Individuals, as psychic entities, are not self-sufficient but are in part intertwined in ways they do not use to relate to objects. Their sense of identity, direction, their ability to function as individuals, their sense of inner stability and self-esteem, are all achieved in other persons and in groups. They are each others' keepers. The bonds of mutuality, are sociological bases of their treating one another as ends and not merely as means, on which the moral and, in turn, social order are based. (p. 594).

Recognising the limits of both the *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* models of community, contemporary scholars offer a third model of community that seeks to



integrate the two previous models with the intention of minimising their excesses. For Aku (2000) the intention here is to develop:

...a balanced vision of community that neither exaggerates nor underrates one end of the pole [a *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* continuum] at the expense of the other, lest one falls back to the selfsame errors of old. (p. 138)

This third model of community is said to be informed by the philosophy of personalism<sup>13</sup> as advanced by the classical work of Macmurray (1961) and further developed by Janssen (1970-71), Winter (1981), and Bayer (1999). An early explanation of this philosophical position places the person at the centre of a larger society. Macmurray (1961) argues that:

Any human society is a unity of persons...its unity as a society is not merely a matter of fact, but a matter of intention. It cannot therefore be understood or even described in biological terms. It is not a natural phenomenon. It is not an organic unity...its persistence and development is not teleological...Any human society, however, primitive, is maintained by intention of its members to maintain it. Short of the extermination of its members it can only be destroyed by destroying its intention. (pp. 127-128)

Here community, as persons in society, is not a taken for granted natural reality but rather it has to be continually maintained by the intention of its members to make a unique communal life possible. However, intentionality here has little to do with private intention. Rather it is to do with the person acknowledging that he or she does not exist for him or herself, but for others. "It is only in relation to others that we exist as persons; we are invested with significance by others who have need of us; and borrow our reality from those who care for us...what rights or powers or freedom we possess are ours by the grace and favour of our fellows" (Macmurray, 1961, p. 211).

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<sup>13</sup> Personalism as a moral philosophy has many forms and there is no general agreement that exists as to its definition or methods. However, many contemporary scholars refer to the interpretation of personalism that flourished in the early 20th century at Boston University in a movement known as Boston Personalism and led by theologian Borden Parker Browne. Browne emphasised the person as the fundamental category for explaining reality and asserted that only persons are real. Idealist in character this theory is also theistic in regarding God as the primary manifestation of personality (Bayer, 1999).

The centre of interest, attention and value is the Other and not the self. Thus for Macmurray (1961) true community entails a mutual heterocentric and disinterested care for one another. This situation enables a “positive unit of persons” that represents “intentional equality” rather than “de facto equality”:

Such a positive unity of persons is the self-realisation of the personal. For firstly, they are then related as equals. This does not mean that they have equal abilities, equal right, equal functions or any other type of de facto equality. The equality is intentional: it is an aspect of the mutuality of the relation. If it were not equality of relation, the motivation would be negative; a relation in which one is using the other as a means to his own ends. Secondly, they both realise that their freedom as agents...and each can be himself fully; neither is under an obligation to act a part. (p. 158)

Within this view of Macmurray (1961) community implies a heterogeneous group that acts together for mutual purposes and is founded on fellowship and communion (p. 161). Moreover, within this community “language is a major vehicle for communication...the sharing of experience” (p. 12). Intentionality is thus grounded in the inherent sociality of persons as interrelated beings and depicts interpersonal communion at its best.

Developing this third model, Winter (1981) frames community as:

...the artistic model that liberates the creativity and self-transcendence of human species life in history and language...from the oppressive forces of mechanism and the nostalgic yearning of tradition, organic bonds of blood and soil. (p. 27)

By associating creativity with historicity, the artistic metaphor takes account not only of “innovations and dynamic developments but also of continuity, memory and tradition” (p. 27). This metaphor also assumes a responsible form of subjectivity in which “we are seeing the human venture as co-creation with the source of life. This sets a context of responsibility for the human species life both within the cosmic realm of creation and in the historical realm of justice and peace” (p. 27).

Following this personalist legacy, contemporary writing in this area suggests that any viable personalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will necessarily need to reflect the significance and relationship of the autonomous individual and the community. In other words, there needs to be a dual emphasis on the person and the community, since the person is at once a person-in-community (Burrow, 1999). Consequently, fundamental themes of contemporary personalism include “the centrality of the person, subjectivity and autonomy, human dignity, person within community, and participation and solidarity” (Gronbacher, 1998). In recent times, these personalist themes have been applied to social economic and political issues in a reaction to contemporary tendencies to reduce human beings to their economic and political functions (eg, Ansell & Fish, 1999; O’Boyle, 2001; Gronbacher, 1998). In addition, these themes are also present in theological accounts of the contemporary world (Aku, 2000) as theologians respond to the growing pluralism and individualism in contemporary society.

The personalist model of community has significant support in the literature. Mok and Flynn (1996, p. 76) corroborated the previous research of Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) in finding that the quality of interpersonal relationships experienced in smaller Catholic schools affected student achievement. Interpersonal relationships in these schools permeate the whole of school life. Again, Fielding (2000, p. 5) strongly asserts that community is essential for schools, because “Human beings are communal by nature and develop through our relations with others”. Similarly, Wilson (1997, p. 5) argues that if pastoral care is to be effective it cannot be treated as something separate from the normal business of schooling because learning necessitates “a certain direct personal interaction or relationship”. Moreover, personalism as described by Macmurray (1961, p. 164) allows for a theistic view of community which opens up possibilities for Catholic schools to explore further the concept of application of *communio* to daily life.

Whilst there appears to be growing support in the literature for a personalist model of community, the literature also notes the difficulty of applying personalism to today’s world. As Whetstone (2002) asks, “Is personalism realistic? Is the standard it sets too high for imperfect human beings who exist in a world that is far from perfect?” (p.386). Needless to say, such questions lead to further concerns

regarding the nature of the Catholic school in a personalist model of community and the “leadership paradigm that might help people to engage in productive work to approach [the personalist] perspective” (pp. 386-387). These concerns then become the challenge “for an espoused personalism to be an embodied one...[which happens when individuals]...relate to others as though people and their relationships really do matter” (Cole, 2001, p. 24). Cole then goes on to state that this embodied personalism needs to group in local forms of community that “constitute a counter-cultural alternative *polis*” (p. 24). Catholic schools are one such potential local form of community.

### **3.4.2 School as Community**

Today, community is a rich and widely used concept in education (Merz & Furman, 1997):

...we use the term community with many different shades of meaning. In some senses, community means place; it means the connectedness of a geographically identifiable neighbourhood...Sometimes educators, particularly administrators, use the term community to mean the public, political world external to the school...Sometimes community means a group of people with shared values...Sometimes we use the term community to refer to a coherent quality of a school itself. (pp. 3-4)

Community has also been variously referred to as a partnership between the parents and school (Epstein, 2001). Partnership has been further defined by Cuttance and Stokes (2000) as “a degree of mutuality, that begins with the process of listening to each other and which incorporates responsive dialogue and ‘give and take’ on both sides” (p.11). Moreover, community may refer to the “internal [nature of the] school community”, the “requirement for a functioning democracy” within schools and, “connections between schools and neighborhoods, as well as schools and families” (Bushnell, 2001, pp. 140-141). Finally, it is argued that a “shared vision of a good education” underpins the school as community (Strike, 2000, p. 633). This vision of school as community is based on the constitutive values which people agree contributes to the human good and must be pursued cooperatively. Timpane and Reich (1997) assert that educators will require “a shared vocabulary, shared values, and common goals concerning children” (p. 469) in order to build

school community. It is asserted that good schools require this form of community (Sergiovanni, 1994).

The struggle to adequately define what constitutes community has led educators to use metaphors as a way of entering into its nature. The metaphor of family is most often used in the literature to describe the school as community. Typically, it is argued that schools are like families because they are based on “strong shared values”, a “sense of solidarity”, “mutual affection and respect” (Kefford, 1997, p. 34). This metaphor helps educators to “make sense of being in and out of community” (Beck 1999, p. 13). Teachers and parents report positive attitudes towards schools that had been like a family to them (Epstein, 2001) and the family metaphor addresses critical community issues of connectedness, mutuality, forgiveness, loyalty, trust, openness and shared purpose (Starratt, 1994).

However, the metaphor of family in describing the school as a community has also been heavily contested. Notions of parental authority, for example, can disempower school communities (Hargreaves, 1997). The family is also the private place for many where their spirit is renewed, whereas community is about social involvement and public lives (Whitehead & Whitehead 1992). Moreover, this metaphor suggests that there is an ontological “is-ness” which makes the school as community not dependent on the members’ conscious choice to create or join it (Beck, 1999). Thus the metaphor of family lacks a perfect fit to identify and unravel the views being expressed in regard to community.

Within the literature the most significant influence in understanding the school as community is Tonnie’s (1887/1957) *gemeinschaft* model. This influence is evident in Sergiovanni’s (1994) proposal that the metaphor for school should change from “formal organisation” to “community” (p. xx) with schools being organised “around relationships and the felt interdependencies that nurture them” (p. 4). Taking up Tonnie’s theorising on community, Sergiovanni proposed that the concept of community as applied to schools should be “*Gemeinschaft* of mind [which] refers to the bonding together of people that results from their mutual binding to a common goal, shared values, and shared conception of being” (p. 6). Furthermore:

Instead of relying upon control [it relied] more on norms, purposes, values, professional socialisation, collegiality and natural independence [and which] once established...[became] a substitute for formal systems of supervision, evaluation and staff development". (p. 216)

This application of the *gemeinschaft* understanding of community to schools has been further extended by theorists who have applied the notion of "social capital" (Putnam, 1993) to schools as community. Here social capital is said to involve "trust, norms and networks" (p. 167) or "the networks of social relations which are characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity which lead to outcomes of mutual benefit" (Stone & Hughes, 2002, p. 64). Social capital is the fundamental reality that holds communities together and is integral to the *gemeinschaft* understanding of community.

However, this *gemeinschaft* model of school as community has been criticised. Critics point to the difficulties of building social capital in the current socio-cultural context in which the traditional "customs and patterns, traditions, and norms for guiding their collective life together have disappeared" (Starratt, 2003, p. 77). The social capital which emanated from this traditional society is thinning and so changing the way people relate. Such thinning is a major threat to the "real community" which is the "community of memory" (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 77) in which storytelling develops "patterns of loyalty and obligation that keep the community alive" (p. 154). The community of memory appears to hold some sway in peoples' lives as they often return to it as a "second language" when other sources of strength are found to be inadequate (p. 154). Thus, new understandings have to be found in regard to the school as community and, in particular, there is challenge to "imagine communities". To this end, theorists advocate a "community of and for difference" (Renshaw, 1999, p. 3) that "begins, not with an assumption of shared norms, beliefs and values, but with the need for respect, dialogue and understanding" (Shields, Laroque, & Oberg, 2002, p. 132).

Hence, despite its wide and rich use in education, the concept of community as applied to schools continues to be contested. In particular, theorists criticise the reliance, within the *gemeinschaft* construction of community, on the indicators of "shared values" and "shared decision making" rather than "ongoing processes of communication, dialogue, and collaboration" (Furman, 2004, p. 219) with the

expectation of never reaching the ideal of shared meanings. Yet again, other theorists (Bottery, 2004) argue that a dominant *gemeinschaft* scenario of community would pose an unworkable challenge to the established bureaucratic organisational model that relies on control, supervision and evaluation. Finally, it is argued that within *gemeinschaft* communities there is the danger that the relationships based on strongly held values might become so thick that there is no respect for difference and so “exclusion”, “marginalisation” and “assimilation” become tools for control (Renshaw, 2003, p. 365).

Parallel to these insights, theoretical developments in learning theory have also contributed to the task of more rigorously understanding the concept of community as applied to schools. For much of the twentieth century, learning theory was primarily informed by the psychological paradigm of behaviorism<sup>14</sup>. Rooted in work by Piaget (1978) and Vygotsky (1978), the learning theory of constructivism emerged as a serious contender to behaviorism within education. From a constructivist perspective (Twomey Fosnot, 1996):

...learning is a constructive building process of meaning-making that results in reflective abstractions, producing symbols within a medium. These symbols then become a part of the individual's repertoire of assimilated schemes, which, in turn, are used when perceiving and further conceiving. (p. 27)

Here the learner is the key player as he or she must participate in generating new meaning or understanding within the medium of the school community (Howe & Berv, 2000; Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Gardner & Ford-Slack, 1995). The learner cannot passively accept the conclusions of others as constructivist learning requires a process of internalising or transforming information via active consideration. He or she connects new learning with existing knowledge gained through prior experience and this learning is optimised when he or she is aware of

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<sup>14</sup> “Behaviorism...explains learning as a system of behavioral responses to external stimuli” and advocates of this curriculum approach “are interested in the effect of reinforcement, practice, and external motivation on a network of associations and learning behaviors (Twomey Fosnot, 1996, p. 8). Based on the theoretical work of Bobbitt and Charters to Tyler and Taba, this curriculum approach relies on technical and scientific principles, and offers step-by-step strategies for formulating curriculum. “Usually based on a plan...goals and objectives are specified, content and activities are sequenced to coincide with the objectives, and learning outcomes are evaluated in relation to the goals and objectives (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004, p. 3).

the metacognitive processes or the procedural knowledge being used to acquire new knowledge. In addition, learning is enhanced (Twomey Fosnot, 1996):

As ideas are shared within a community, new possibilities are suggested for the individual to consider. These multiple perspectives may offer a new set of correspondences, and at times even contradiction, to individual constructions. Of course, these perspectives shared by others are not 'transmitted'; even the shared perspectives are interpreted and transformed by the cognising individual. But as we seek to organise experience for generalisation and communication, we strive to coordinate perspectives, to 'get into the head' of others, thereby constructing further reflective abstractions and developing 'taken-as-shared' meaning". (p. 27)

Consequently, individualist approaches to learning are "receding in favour of more cooperative learning relationships" (Murphy, 1997, p. 199) resulting in community becoming central to the theorisation of classrooms (Renshaw, 2003, p. 356). This approach has been taken up in a new understanding of school as a "learning organisation or community" (Voulalas & Sharpe, 2005, p. 187). Given this development in respect to learning theory it is interesting to note that there has been a limited application of personalism to education within the literature. For example, researchers (Lee & Smith, 1999; M. Phillips, 1997; Roser, Midgley & Urdan, 1999) have applied personalist understandings to the issue of student learning. In particular, this research has focused on the student-teacher relationship from a personalist view. From this viewpoint a quality student-teacher relationship is said to be responsive, supportive and closely matched to student developmental needs. Moreover, it is claimed that a highly personalist student-teacher relationship contributes to positive student attendance and achievement (Stone, Engel, Nagaoka & Roderick, 2005).

Hence, there appears to be the beginning of a shift away from a *gemeinschaft* model to a personalist model of school as community. However, given Whetstone's (2002) claim that there are difficulties in applying personalism to today's world, the question remains as to whether there is a "leadership paradigm that might help people engaged in productive work to approach its perspective" (pp. 386-387) regarding the school as community.

Thus, as Westheimer (1999) concludes:



Community is not a universally defined outcome. It is a way of travelling with a new view. Carefully and rigorously debating what that view should be is the task we now face. (p. 102)

Further, it is noted that failure to undertake this task may well be extremely damaging to the community dimension of schools (Croninger & Malen, 2002):

Without a more realistic and rigorous assessment of the possibilities for and limitations of community, calls for community building may well sink under the weight of public expectations and unfulfilled promises. (p. 285)

The above analysis suggests that of the three models of community outlined earlier in this chapter it is the *gemeinschaft* model of community that has been most influential in education. Although developments in learning theory suggest a shift to a personalist model, it also seems that without further theorising, the sociological concept of 'community' ought not to be used without qualification in education. It would be short sighted for educators to assume "that within our culture [and schools] the notion of community is nonproblematic" (Starratt, 2003, p. 67). Within this context it is argued that future developments around the concept of community "will lead to the greatest challenge and fruits" for schools (Conaty, 2002, p. 184).

In summary, the literature reveals that community is a contested, dense and widely appropriated concept. Three dominant models of community have been presented within sociology, each of which in varying ways has been applied to schools. While Tonnies' *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* models have been in the ascendancy, they have been subject to significant criticism and a third model, informed by the philosophy of personalism, is now offered as a way forward. This latter model provides a dual emphasis on the person and the community. The key leadership challenge for educators evident in the above analysis is that they recognise the problematic nature of community within schools and explore the potential of a personalist philosophy as they attempt to negotiate this complexity.

### **3.5 Leadership: An Elusive Concept**

The issues signalled in the above discussion point to the challenges of leadership in contemporary social and educational contexts. This section then explores the literature around the emergent leadership theories that have arisen from socio-cultural change and consequent theoretical developments in organisational theorising and their implications for schools as community. In recent years there has been a burgeoning body of literature on leadership generating a wide range of evidence claims. A key issue emerging from such studies is the ubiquitous nature of the concept (Crow & Grogan, 2005; Leithwood & Riehl, 2004). Consequently, as Leithwood and Riehl (2004) write: “Amidst the seeming certainty that leadership matters, there is much that we do not yet understand about effective educational leadership” (p. 4).

It seems that within a context of socio-cultural change, theorists constantly advance new organisational forms and approaches to leadership to respond to contemporary challenges (Dimmock & Walker, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 2, the macrosystem of educational leadership is currently in a time of radical socio-cultural change. For organisational theorists this moment in time represents a transition from an industrial to a postindustrial society (Shriberg, Shriberg, & Lloyd, 2002). Developments such as globalisation, new technologies, the information explosion, and the increasing diversity of our population have coalesced to “create a reality that is messy and ambiguous rather than orderly and predictable” (p. 212). Consequently, during the decade of the 1990s, organisational theorists advanced a new approach to leadership in order to meet the challenge of the new postindustrial technological society.

For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, leadership was associated with traditional forms of industrial leadership (Shriberg, Shriberg, & Lloyd, 2002). In short, this paradigm “saw leadership as the property of the individual; considered leadership primarily in the context of the formal group and organisations, and, equated concepts of management and leadership” (p. 203). Here leaders exercise “power and influence through controlling the rewards in an organisation, rewards they can offer or withhold from the workforce” (Bottery, 2004, p. 16). However, by the 1970s, this understanding of industrial leadership was challenged as theorists became aware

that the reality of leadership in postindustrial society did not readily relate to these assertions.

Initially, Greenleaf (1977) questioned the abuse of power and authority in the modern organisation and recommended “servant leadership” based on the notions of cooperation and support. In particular, Greenleaf posits that the servant-leader values people and demonstrates a commitment to their holistic development. Related to this, he or she makes a deep commitment to listening to others and striving to understand and empathise with their point of view. Here the servant-leader relies on persuasion rather than positional authority in making decisions and is effective in building consensus within groups. Moreover, they are able to understand the lessons of the past, the realities of the present and the likely consequences of a decision in the future. A shift to servant leadership involves seeing and embracing the power of responsible relationships, both with oneself and others, within the organisation and the wider society. It places the needs and desires of others before one’s own. Finally, the servant-leader is aware of the loss of community within the industrial society and seeks to build community within his or her organisation.

Reflecting on Greenleaf’s servant leadership, a number of scholars (Johnson, 2001; Kiechel, 1995; Werhane, 1999) have identified the strengths of the servant leadership model in terms of altruism, simplicity and self awareness. However, these same theorists also note its weaknesses in terms of appearing unrealistic, encouraging passivity, not working in every context, sometimes serving the wrong cause and being associated with the negative connotation of ‘servant’. More generally, it is argued that servant leadership can be subject to manipulation by followers (Bowie, 2000) and can be threatening to those wielding or seeking power in hierarchical structures (Di Stefano, 1995).

Offering an alternative to servant leadership, J. Burns (1978) recommends “transformational leadership” as it directly deals with the issue of change. Here Burns contrasts transformational leadership with the traditional forms of transactional leadership found in industrial society. Transformational leaders influence with their charisma and inspirational motivation, challenging followers to

be creative in problem-solving and providing a learning environment tailored to individual needs (Bartol & Martin, 1998). In particular, transformational leaders appeal to their followers by focusing higher order needs, including esteem, self-fulfillment and self-actualisation. Both leader and led are transformed to new levels of 'human conduct and ethical aspiration' (J. Burns, 1978, p. 20). Here vision is deemed all important and to be effective the transformational leader needs to be not only visionary but also capable of instilling this vision in others and inspiring them to achieve this vision.

In theory, a transformational leader has the goal of raising the level of morality within the organisation, fostering independent action and serving the common good. Indeed, Foster (1986) and later Bass (1995) argue the case for a genuine transformational leadership that is motivated by altruism rather than being self-centred. However, critics of transformational leadership argue that transformational leadership can be used for immoral ends (Whetstone, 2002) and "if the vision is flawed or the leader neglects to stress principled behavior towards the vision, then the results can be tragic" (Rasmussen, 1995, p. 297). Here there is also the possibility of transformational leaders ignoring or downplaying the contributions of others (Kelley, 1992). Moreover, followers may be open to manipulation and even become too dependent on the transformational leader as a charismatic leader (Johnson, 2001). Alienation may follow when the rhetoric of power sharing is not evident in reality (Ciulla, 1998).

Twenty years on from the original works by Greenleaf (1977) and J. Burns (1978), Rost (1991), again recognising the emergent postindustrial society and new organisational theories, further advanced a postindustrial paradigm of leadership. This new theory describes leadership as "an influencing relationship among leaders and their collaborators who intend changes that reflect mutual purposes" (p. 7). Thus leadership is based on influence rather than positional authority, and is characterised by collaboration and service rather than individualism and self-interest. The emphasis here is on substantive attempts to transform people's beliefs, values, motivations and behaviours rather than maintaining a narrow focus on organisational goals. Such leadership is said to promote goals that represent the aspirations of both the leader and his or her collaborators and not just the wishes of

the leader. Thus described, the postindustrial paradigm of leadership was congruent with the key organisation elements of the new adhocracy including horizontal power, participative decision-making, lateral communication and social responsibility.

Since this seminal work by Rost, other theorists have further developed this paradigm of postindustrial leadership by advocating a more relational approach to leadership. Aktouf (1992) raises the importance of leaders contributing to a “more human organisation” by restoring the meaning of work through collaborative decision-making. Wheatley (1992), reading leadership through the lens of the new science of quantum physics calls for participatory leadership, in which “the quantum realm speaks emphatically to the role of participation, even to its impact on creating reality” (p. 143). Bensimon and Neumann (1993) also advance collaborative leadership as a response to the information-rich and complex environment of the twentieth-first century. As a result of these theoretical developments, a new paradigm of leadership was emerging that “must be understood as a relationship, a collaborative process, a community of believers pursuing a transformational cause” (Shriberg, Shriberg, & Lloyd, 2002, p. 217).

While the above theoretical developments around the emergence of a post industrial leadership paradigm since the 1970s is evidence of positive new directions in response to the changing times, at the same time, leadership remains an elusive concept. Nevertheless, the field of inquiry around leadership has continued to generate significant work in respect to issues such as leading the learning organisation (Chawla & Renesch, 2006), moral leadership (Bennis & Rhodes, 2006), cultural leadership (Harris, Moran, & Moran, 2004), as well as inner leadership (Koestenbaum, 2002). Such theoretical developments are also reflected in recent educational literature that identifies structural, collegial, political, cultural and subjective models of leadership and management.

Whilst acknowledging the breadth and depth of this theoretical development, it is also interesting to note the early influence of personalism in the literature on leadership. Whetstone's (2002) work has been particularly influential in this by recommending a new conceptualisation of servant leadership that broadens the model by integrating altruistic aspects of transformational leadership. Here, post-

industrial leadership is put aside following criticism that this model gives too much emphasis to the system of relationships rather than the worth of the individual and threatens the common good by not necessarily situating decision-making within an ethical framework. Hence Whetstone (2002) argues that the:

...correctly thinking majority can appropriately use any and all means to convince those with minority beliefs of their politically incorrect error. Without principled ethics, post-industrial leadership may likewise result in a contest for power, in spite of its communitarian ideals of mutual trust, tolerance and participation. (p. 388)

In this way, Whetstone (2002) is asserting that servant leadership is the most consistent leadership approach with the basic themes of personalism<sup>15</sup>.

The servant leader sees himself called first to be servant, seeking not only to treat each follower with dignity as a person, but also to serve each beneficially while building a community of participation and solidarity. His motivation is to create value for the group of which he is a member; this is the extreme opposite of a leader who seeks first his own power and wealth. She listens with sincerity, openness and empathy, but has the *phronesis* and will to persist and persuade, not being diverted from his central vision or basic principles. (p. 391)

Servant leadership with its principal metaphor of the Good Shepherd (Touhy, 2005, p. 81) is also integral to any Christian conceptualisation of leadership. A Christian discourse of leadership requires a leader to acknowledge the Spirit-filled wisdom and gifts in others, listen to their insights and empower them to participate in the work of the faith community (Fitzgerald, 1990). However, to offset the association of servant leadership with weakness and the possibility of followers manipulating their leader, Whetstone (2002) goes on to recommend a synthesis of servant leadership and altruistic forms of transformational leadership.

A theoretically superior approach is a combination in which the morally tough servant leader adopts certain behaviours of Bass's altruistic transformational leader. To inspire followers with strength and sensitivity of a transforming vision, the servant leader would use proven

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<sup>15</sup> Whetstone (2002) identifies five themes of personalism which he later applies to conceptualising servant leadership. These themes include "centrality of the person", "subjectivity and autonomy", "human dignity", "the personal and community", and "participation and solidarity" (pp. 386-387).

transforming techniques such as developing a vision, enlisting others, fostering collaboration, strengthening others, planning small wins, linking rewards to performance and celebrating accomplishments. The leader would focus on the vision jointly formulated and refined, avoiding manipulation by any party through a mutual commitment to participation, solidarity of community, and respect for each person grounded in the philosophy of personalism. (p. 391)

In summarising this literature on leadership, it can be seen that social and cultural change precipitated the exploration of new approaches to leadership since the early 1970s. As a consequence of this change, the emergence of a post industrial and technological society placed new demands on leaders, especially in regard to power, relationships and the need to build community. The concept of leadership is elusive and if leaders lack a theoretical perspective on their roles it would appear to leave them vulnerable, because it is harder to test assumptions and tolerate ambiguities without it, especially in a time of transition (Napolitano & Henderson, 1998). The dominant leadership models to emerge out of this exploration took up notions of vision, collaboration and relationships. However, embedded in each of them are limitations resulting in the concept of leadership remaining elusive. Recently, a way forward has been offered that synthesises the servant leadership model with altruistic forms of transformational leadership and incorporating a personalist perspective on ethical decision making.

### **3.6 Principalship: In Transition**

This section reviews key literature in respect to principalship and begins to draw links between theoretical developments in respect to principalship and contemporary appreciations of community and leadership. Here the research to date suggests that principalship is in a moment of transition from an industrial to a post industrial appreciation of educational leadership.

In Australian public education, the principal was initially styled as the heroic head teacher. However, with the growth of State educational bureaucracies, such heroism was constrained. Up to the mid-nineteenth century, teachers often acted as “entrepreneurs establishing and running their own schools as businesses. There was no formal or mandatory qualification, no required minimum length of training, no test of knowledge or classroom competence” (Vick, 2001, p. 68). With the

establishment of Education Departments in the 1970s, the teachers' work, including the work of the head teacher, was regulated "for the sake of uniformity" (p. 68). Consequently, in the context of public education, the teacher was deemed to be a "regulated servant" (p. 68) and the heroic nature of leadership in schools was downplayed.

In Catholic education, however, the heroic nature of leadership continued to influence the principal's role. As Ryan (2001) argues, the story of the formation growth of Catholic schools relies on the myth of the hero's journey. Consequently:

Successive generations of Australian Catholic apologists and scholars have called the attention of the Catholic and wider community to the significance of the triumph of the Catholic heroes who stood firm against hostile forces. These forces threatened to undermine, not just the formation of Catholic schools, but the very right of the Catholic community to survive and thrive in Australia. (p. 219)

However, Australian research with potential aspirants for the principalship reports a marked reluctance to take up the role, as it is too complex due to its religious dimension. In particular, they noted a lack of "expertise", "knowledge and skills" related to the religious dimension of the role (d'Arbon, Duignan, Duncan, Dwyer & Goodwin, 2001; Carlin, d'Arbon, Dorman, Duignan & Neidhart, 2003). Moreover, with the school effectiveness and school improvement movements of the 1970s and 1980s, the 'principal as hero' emphasis re-emerged in the new form of managerial leadership (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999):

Managerial leadership assumes that the focus of leaders ought to be on function, tasks or behaviours and if these functions are carried out competently the work of others in the organisation will be facilitated. Most approaches to managerial leadership also assume that the behaviour of organisational members is largely rational. Authority and influence are allocated to formal positions in accordance with the status of those positions in the organisational hierarchy. (p. 14)

Within the context of the self-managing school, this approach to educational leadership is associated with functions such as "goal-setting, needs identification, priority-setting, planning, budgeting, implementing, and evaluating, in a manner which provides for appropriate involvement of staff, and community" (Caldwell,



1992, pp. 16-17). Subsequent to this approach, a series of professional development programs and textbooks (eg. Turney, Hatton, Laws, Sinclair, & Smith, 1992) were designed to 'train' principals as managers.

By the 1990s, principals were described as 'managers of change' as education systems struggled with demands for educational reform and school restructuring (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997). In this context, the theory and practice of educational leadership was heavily influenced by theoretical developments in respect to transformational leadership. Here the emphasis was on management of meaning, creating vision and empowering others. In policy and practice, the principal as school leader is said to play a significant role in the provision of quality education; "principals are seen as the fulcrum on which the quality of restructured school depends" (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998, p. 14). In short, the principal is positioned as the 'heroic', central figure in leading cultural change in schools (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997; Ehrich & Knight, 1999). Yet, this cultural leadership, exercised in a world described as "uncertain, ambiguous, constantly changing" (Scott, 2003 p. 18), makes heroic principalship in the style of transformational leader seemed less plausible.

Subsequently, contemporary theorists are advancing a new model of post industrial principalship. This emergent model is aligned to a post industrial paradigm of leadership which frames "successful school principalship [as] an interactive, reciprocal and evolving process involving many players, which is influenced by and, in turn, influences, the context in which it occurs" (Mulford & Johns, 2004, p. 56). At the heart of this emerging model is a belief that relationships are so important that "you can't get anywhere without them" (Fullan, 2001, p. 51). In short, this model of principalship involves establishing "reciprocal contributive relationships with their communities" (Limerick & Cranston, 1998, p. 40). Here it is argued that "relationships lie at the heart of the work of the principal" and unless principals build relationships it is hard to engage in "curricular and pedagogical reform" (Wildy & Clarke, 2005, p. 44). However, primary principals' professional capability appears to be most tested when faced with relational issues:

If leaders cannot remain calm when things go awry or are unable to work constructively with staff then, no matter how intelligent they may be or

how much they may know, they will not be able to productively resolve the situation (Scott, 2002, p. 7).

Within this post industrial understanding of principalship, the principal is ultimately responsible for the “creation and dissemination of the school’s vision” with the intention of building a strong school culture based on shared values (Voulalas & Sharpe, 2004, p. 202). Extending this view, Fullan (2001) asserts that any restructuring, or rebuilding, also requires reculturing, which is about “transforming the culture – changing the way we do things around here” (p. 49). However, as Voulalas and Sharpe (2005) found, there are “traditional culture[s]” which appear to be the “main psychological obstacle” for school improvement (p. 193). Fullan (1997) further differentiates these traditional cultures into “balkanised” in which at best groups work independently and at worst they are “actively hostile to one another”, or, “contrived collegiality where collaboration is mandated, imposed and regulated by managerial decree” (p. 55). Moreover, it is asserted that “conflict is a necessary part of change” as applied to schools (Fullan, 1993, p. 62). As a result of taking up this approach to educational leadership, research has found that through incremental change the school will become a “high reliability learning community” that is “inclusive, efficient and effective, and adaptable” (Leithwood et al., 1999, p. 223).

Further, the influence of the moral philosophy of personalism is becoming evident around this post industrial leadership understanding in education, due to the greater appreciation of the importance of ethical frameworks and moral decision-making in educational leadership. Here it is assumed that that leaders at all levels work from a value based vision: “administrators...[rely]...on core value and their commitments to particular ‘ends-in-view’ in their work” (Furman, 2004, p. 216). Since self-knowledge provides an appreciation of personal values:

It is critically important that leaders with soul come to terms with their own core values. Values determine how we interpret things, establish priorities, make choices and reach decisions... Values guide action through orientating us in particular ways towards social and political problems; predisposing us towards certain beliefs; guiding our evaluations of others and ourselves; and offering the means by which we rationalise our behaviour. (Barker, 2002, pp. 18-19)

However, self-knowledge also involves focusing on “habits of the mind” (Mackoff, 2000; Napolitano & Henderson, 1998) or perspectives on reality. Despite personal values and habits of the mind jointly influencing leadership behaviour, there are differences:

Whereas values reside in our innermost being, perspectives flow out of our cognitive, conscious processes with which we respond to reality. Whereas values are steadfast and unchanging... perspectives are ways of dealing with our experiences and, as such, are influenced by prevailing models or theories, which are subject to change as new data challenge existing paradigms and evolve in our understanding. (Napolitano & Henderson, 1998, p. 36)

To develop habits of the mind or new perspectives, it is recommended that the would-be leader embrace change, test assumptions, tolerate ambiguity and paradox, trust intuition, take risks, and seek synergies while modelling values (pp. 36-57). Such mind activities “reflect a growing awareness of the particular ‘habits of the mind’ that will be needed in order to respond to the complexity of the coming age” (p. 36).

Leadership integrity is also deemed to be important; “leadership integrity... [which involves]... being grounded in *knowing what’s right and then acting on it* (or conversely not acting on what you know to be wrong)” (Weeks, 2003, p. 37). In this view, the leader of integrity has a clear set of values grounded in a strong ethical framework and the “moral courage” to face the “mental challenges that are deeply connected to our core moral values... [and] to be ethical in the face of a conscious awareness of the risks” (p. 38). Supported by a strong ethical framework and moral courage the leader may engage in “breakthrough leadership” that crosses boundaries, questions the status quo and takes calculated risks in pursuit of improvement that remains true to core values (Hay Group, 2003).

Thus, ethical frameworks, moral and communal leadership, are closely aligned in recent literature. Starratt (2003) asserts that moral leadership is informed by three “ethics”. The ethic of “critique” is the capacity to uncover “who benefits”, “which group dominates” and “who defines” in a social situation (p. 141). The ethic of “justice” is about ensuring there is a blueprint for what must be criticised (p. 145). The third framework is an ethic of “care” which Starratt described this way:

A school community committed to an ethic of caring is grounded in the belief that the integrity of human relationships should be held sacred, and that the school as an organisation should hold the good of human beings within it as sacred. (p. 145)

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2000) argue that this tripartite framework of three “ethics” be extended to include “a paradigm of professional ethics” (p. 18) or the professional codes by which administrators are bound. With this paradigm of professional ethics there are “glimmers of and gestures toward the communal” (Furman, 2004, p. 218). However, it is also argued that these gestures towards community may be based on the “assumption of the individual administrator as ethical leader, decision maker, and moral agent” (p. 219). This assumptive base entrenches the position of the individual leader and consequently does not shift the “locus of moral agency to the community as a whole” (Furman, 2003, p. 4). To address this issue of educational leadership, theorists such as Bottery (2004) have advanced the concept of the “ethical dialectician” leaders who:

...acknowledge that communal visions have to be worked towards rather than thought of as neatly packaged personal creations. As this is done so a shared purpose and a shared sense of trust are developed...[they work from] internal compasses...[and recognise both] the need for dialogue...[as well as] the complexity and the need for the time to make the best sense of a situation. (pp. 210-211)

To date there is limited research in support of this emergent theory of post industrial leadership in education, although Australian research has led the way. Motivated by a concern for leadership in successful school reform, an Australian research team found that “the emphasis on the principalship as the centre of educational leadership was ill directed” (Crowther, Kaagen, Ferguson, & Hann, 2002, p. 49) as evidenced in the stress levels of those in school leadership positions and a decline in membership of the teaching profession. Taking a grounded theory approach to research design, these researchers identified that the principals of schools engaged in successful school reform “employed management and leadership strategies that were not easily explained through the traditional [heroic leadership] paradigm” (p. 50). In particular, these researchers noted that such principals recognised the importance of “enhanced quality of community life” (p. 10) in schools and engaged

in “collective action to build capacity” in the context of school reform. As a way forward, they promote intentionally distributed power and leadership in ways that embody “mutualism, shared purpose and respect for individual expression and contribution” (p. 11). This style of leadership was labelled “parallel” (p. 36) or shared leadership; the principal is responsible for “strategic development” while the teachers focus on “pedagogical development” (p. 44). Consequently, “stimulus ideas” run between teachers as leaders and the principal as leader resulting in “school-based learning”, “culture building” and a “shared approach to pedagogy” (p. 44).

Interestingly, scholars have begun to link this emergent theory of post industrial principalship with a personalist appreciation of moral leadership. For example, McGahey (2002) arguing from a personalist perspective on principalship moves beyond the transactional management of meaning, creating vision and empowering others, and advances a form of transformational leadership that “is more communal and relies on the collective voice of a community that is constantly engaging in dialogue with itself and with the greater world” (p. 74). Here, transformational leadership requires principals and teachers to put aside “organisational and personal goals to enter the realm of shared diversity” (p. 75).

This personalist perspective is also applied by Grace (2002) to leadership in Catholic schools. For Grace, a school community which is grounded in a personalist model allows for a sensitive response to the diversity of persons and their “expected levels of involvement” (p. 28), consonant with Christian values and the rhetoric of Church documents. However, in extensive research in the United Kingdom, Grace found that while the majority of schools in his study espoused Christian values, “there was some evidence that a more utilitarian discourse was beginning to emerge” (p. 132). In particular, this research found that the dominant leadership style among head teachers was that of the heroic or “strong” leader (p. 145), characterised by “commitment of purpose, clarity of vision and strength of character” (p. 146) with a strong mission focus. While the head teachers clearly rejected the traditional hierarchical model, their style was also “individual in emphasis and in some senses heroic in nature” (p. 146). Consequently, it was hard for these head teachers to make the transition to “new forms of shared, consultative and collegial

leadership” as required in a personalist perspective. Although a significant number of the head teachers wanted to move to “more consultative and collegial forms of leadership” (p. 147), it was not an “easy option” (p. 149) as it is not yet normative in Catholic school communities. Consequently, Grace’s research identified a gap between the rhetoric and reality of personalist values in Catholic schools and Catholic school leadership.

### **3.7 Conclusion And Research Questions**

This chapter has established a firm basis of knowledge and research upon which to proceed with the current study. Prior research has been reviewed and a gap identified in the research literature. The gap centres on the role of the Catholic school principal as community leader. Importantly, a conceptual framework was established between the binary concepts of community and leadership as taken up in the principalship.

A key issue emerging from the literature review is that the concept of community is contested and the concept of leadership remains elusive. Various models of both have been explored and critiqued. This has led to a renewed recognition that the principalship, itself, is in transition. The changing socio-cultural context has prompted the movement away from heroic, managerial leadership to new appreciations of principalship as post industrial leadership. A conceptual model of the key ‘learning’ in respect to this literature review is found in Table 3.1.

*Table 3.1 Conceptual Model of Key Learning in Literature Review*

	<b>Models of community</b>	<b>Leadership paradigms</b>	<b>Principalship</b>
Pre-Industrial Society	“Gemeinschaft” – real and organic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kinship</li> <li>• Traditional values</li> <li>• Ritual &amp; ceremony</li> <li>• Cooperation</li> </ul>	Premodern leadership – heroic leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heroic traits</li> <li>• Adventurous life</li> </ul>	Heroic headteacher
Industrial Society	“Gesellschaft” – abstract and mechanical <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contractual relationships</li> <li>• Contingent values</li> <li>• Superficial unity</li> </ul>	Industrial leadership – functional and mechanistic (heroic/strong) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transactional</li> <li>• Hierarchical</li> <li>• Self interest</li> <li>• Competition</li> </ul>	Principalship as managerial leader <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal-setting</li> <li>• Needs identification</li> <li>• Priority-setting</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Budgeting</li> <li>• Implementing</li> <li>• Evaluating</li> </ul>
Post-Industrial Society	Personalist model – creative and self-transcendent <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centrality of persons</li> <li>• Unity of persons</li> <li>• Heterogeneous group</li> <li>• Intentional equality</li> <li>• Disinterested care</li> <li>• Common good</li> <li>• Symbolic language and communication</li> </ul>	Post industrial leadership – integration of servant leadership and altruistic transformational leadership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influencing relationships</li> <li>• Collaboration and service</li> <li>• Ethical decision-making</li> <li>• Moral courage</li> </ul>	Principalship as post industrial leadership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture building</li> <li>• Shared decision-making</li> <li>• Policy development and implementation</li> <li>• Relationship building within community</li> <li>• Ethical and moral frameworks</li> <li>• Inner management</li> </ul>

As noted in Chapter 1 the concerns and questions of principals within the Diocese of Lismore provided the impetus for this research study. Typically, the principals asked questions, such as:

“Why is school community now so important?”

“How can you have community when so many people don’t practise their faith and family life is being increasingly disrupted?”

“Is it possible to build community given how different the school and parish communities are?”

“How can we bring parents into partnership with the school, especially when you have so many difficult ones?”,

“Why is parent involvement too time consuming on our limited resources?”

“What are practical ways to build school community?”

It seems that underlying such questions is a problem of finding meaning in change. Principals did not seem to have a clear idea regarding *what* should change in respect to new expectations of school community leadership and as well they were unsure *how* to go about it. The contextual analysis (Chapter 2) and this review of the literature further confirmed the problematic nature of the principal's role in school community leadership. Within a time of socio-cultural change and policy reform, it is hardly surprising that the concept of community is contested, that the nature of leadership remains elusive, that the principalship is in transition, and that there is no clear way forward in respect to school community leadership.

This recognition of the challenges in finding meaning in change led the researcher to identify the two research questions. In determining these research questions, the researcher was influenced by the seminal work of Fullan (1991) on educational change. Here Fullan identifies the importance of finding meaning in respect to educational change as well as developing theories around what he labelled “organised commonsense” (p. xii). For Fullan, “We have to know what change looks like from the point of view of the teacher, student, parent and administrator if we are to understand the actions and reactions of individuals...” (p. xi).

This understanding led the researcher to identify two research questions:

**Research Question 1:**

“How do primary principals conceptualise the Catholic school as community?”

**Research Question 2:**

“How do principals describe their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?”



Both these research questions seek the perspectives of primary principals. The first research question aims to understand the characteristics of the Catholic primary school as community from the perspective of the primary principal. Here, the researcher is interested in whether the principals align with one or other of the three models of community identified in the literature, or whether they conceptualise the Catholic school as community in other ways. This research question also offers the opportunity for principals to reflect on both the vision and reality of their school communities and to shape direction for policy and practice in respect to school community building.

The second research question seeks a deeper understanding in respect to the leadership role of the primary principal in building the Catholic school as community. The focus here is on the paradigm of leadership that underpins the work of the principals. A key interest is whether they are influenced by classical theories of industrial leadership or emergent theories, such as post industrial leadership. It is assumed that this research question will allow the researcher access to the commonsense wisdom of the primary principals which will subsequently inform the design of new organisational structures and strategies within the Diocese of Lismore.

With these research questions in mind, the researcher now turns to the task of situating the research study within an appropriate theoretical framework and making methodological choices in respect to the design of the research study. These approaches are outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

# **CHAPTER 4      THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM**

## **4.1      Introduction**

The theoretical framework provides the philosophical connection between the theoretical and practical dimensions of the research study. The choice of theoretical framework is a decision made in response to the focus of the research and the specific research questions (Punch, 2005). The focus of this research is an exploration of rural Catholic primary school principals' perspectives on the concept of community leadership as it applies to Catholic primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore. In particular, this study asks two questions:

1. How do principals conceptualise the Catholic primary school as community?
2. How do principals describe their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?

Given these research questions and the commitment to understanding school community leadership from the principal's perspective, this research study was situated within a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. Since the mid twentieth century, educational theorists have borrowed from general sociological theories to understand the social structures and processes found in schools (Ball, 2000; Hallinan, 2000). As a result, a large body of conceptually grounded and methodologically rigorous research has accumulated which recognises the social foundations of education (Orstein & Hunkins, 2004). This research study follows this tradition being positioned within the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism.

Following seminal writing with respect to symbolic interactionism (e.g., Blumer, 1997), this chapter explores the theoretical framework from two viewpoints: symbolic interactionism as perspective and symbolic interactionism as method. This is consistent with Blumer's view that symbolic interactionism began with a "view of the human being and of the society human beings form, then moves to methodological matters" (Stryker, 2002, p. 90). Moreover, this chapter also

discusses the possibilities and limitations of situating social research within this theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism.

## 4.2 Symbolic Interactionism As Perspective

The term symbolic interactionism was first used by the social psychologist Herbert Blumer in 1937 (Blumer, 1997). As a perspective or frame of reference, it asserts that how the world is experienced by persons is of vital importance. Further, it suggests that in order to gain greater understanding of the social order or social change a researcher must attend to the meanings provided by persons in interaction (Stryker, 2002). Initially, this theoretical framework was heavily influenced by Mead and the intellectual foundations of pragmatism, as well as the work of Charles Darwin.

Originally, Blumer (1997) identified three premises in respect of symbolic interactionism:

The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them... The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows... The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [sic] encounters.  
(p. 2)

However, in the second half of the twentieth century, this original thought was subject to further theoretical development. While the seminal work of Blumer continues to influence contemporary writing on symbolic interactionism, theorists (e.g., Charon, 2004; Stryker, 2002) sought to develop a theory of symbolic interactionism relevant to social situations today. Remaining true to the Blumer-Mead version of symbolic interactionism, contemporary theorists emphasise the symbolic nature of the human environment and cast human beings as purposive agents and symbolic actors in this environment. However, beyond this thought, contemporary theory also identifies the reciprocal relationship between the *self* and *society*, while presenting a more complex understanding of each of these elements. In addition, this theory highlights the part played by *interaction* in shaping both the self and society, as well as mitigating problematic social situations. As a theoretical

framework symbolic interactionism now enables the movement “from the level of the person to that of large-scale social structure and back again” (Stryker, 2002, p. 53). These thoughts are further developed below.

#### **4.2.1 The Symbolic Nature of Reality**

In the first instance, contemporary symbolic interactionism accepts that beyond ‘real’ reality that is apprehendable, there is an abstract reality of “social objects” (Charon, 2004, pp. 45-47) defined by human beings through social interaction. “The human environment is a symbolic environment, constructed on the basis of on-going activity” (Stryker, 2002, p. 90) and human action is understood to be “continuous, a constant process...a stream of action” (Charon, 2004, p. 137). This action is both overt and covert and is influenced by definition, social interaction and interaction with self. To understand this stream of action, it is necessary to isolate and objectify separate acts. These isolated acts become “social objects” (p. 120) which the symbolic interactionist defines according to current goals and objects deemed to be important in the present.

Thus, human beings exist in a world of social objects; “Objects may exist in a physical form, but for human beings, they are pointed out, isolated, catalogued, interpreted and given meaning through social interaction” (Charon, 2004, p. 45). Social objects are not just “things, bundles of stimuli that exist independently” (Stryker, 2002, p. 116). Rather, social objects come into existence in the course of human action. Moreover, “social objects are the creations of social acts which involve coordinated activity of more than one actor” (Charon, p.47). Thus, human beings come to “understand and use their environment [comprised of social objects]; they come to understand their environment through interaction with others and with self; and the environment is always changing for them as their goals change” (Charon, 2004, p. 59).

Symbols represent a class of social objects used intentionally to communicate or represent something in reality (Stryker, 2002, p. 37). Symbols include language and other “gestures” (pp. 36-37) and almost all acts around others contain a symbolic element. However, “words are the most important symbols, making human thinking

possible” (Charon, 2004, p. 59). Moreover, words are significant due to their impact on behaviour. Here:

Language and other symbolic systems incorporate terms [words] that refer to various aspects of these worlds in ways that represent meanings for human action. These terms are often, though not necessarily, generalisations of behaviour towards objects: they are class terms or categories. Human beings respond not to a naïve world but to the world as categorised or classified; the physical, biological and social environment in which they live is a symbolic environment. The symbols they attach to the environment have meaning, are cues to behaviour, and organise behaviour. (Stryker, 2002, p. 56)

In short, symbols are “social, meaningful and significant” (Charon, 2004, p. 48). They are social because they are defined in the context of social interaction, where they are created and agreed upon by people. Symbols are also “meaningful... the user understands what they represent” and they constitute something meaningful. Yet again, they are “significant” because they are used by people “for the purpose of giving a meaning that he or she believes will make sense to the other” (p. 49). In short: “Symbols focus attention upon salient elements in an interactive situation and permit preliminary organisation of behaviour appropriate to it” (Stryker, 2002, p. 56).

#### **4.2.2 Human Beings as Purposive Agents and Symbolic Actors**

Symbolic interactionism views human beings as social actors who can adjust their behaviours to the actions of other actors. They can do this through their capacity to interpret and treat the actions and the actors as symbolic actors. As Charon (2004) writes, contemporary symbolic interactionism offers:

...an important and unique perspective that regards human beings as active in the environment; an organism that interacts with others and with the self; a dynamic being; a being that defines immediate situations according to perspectives developed and altered in on-going social interactions. (p. 41)

Unlike the natural sciences, in which human beings make involuntary responses to environmental stimuli, symbolic interactionism posits that human beings make purposeful, voluntary responses to environmental stimuli. Blumer (1997, p. 194) asserts that “the most important feature of human associations” is that almost

everything they do takes others into account to some degree. So often when they act socially human beings are trying to communicate and such “social action makes the human being a social and symbolic being” (Charon, 2004, p. 140). The result is mutual social or group action or “fitting together of individual lines of action, each person aligning his or her action to that of others through taking the role of the others” (Stryker, 2002, p. 90).

This emphasis on symbols, negotiated reality and the social construction of reality led to an interest in people’s roles. However, the symbolic interactionist understanding of human action presupposes a new understanding of role within social groups that is more general than earlier versions of “role theory”<sup>16</sup> (Stryker, 2002):

Role theory proper has used the concept of ‘status’ or ‘position’ to refer to parts of organised social groups. Symbolic interactionism uses ‘position’ in a more general sense, to refer to any socially recognised category of actors. In this usage, positions are symbols for the kinds of persons it is possible to be in society... Like other symbolic categories, positions serve to cue behavior with reference to these persons. Attaching a positional label to a person leads to expected behaviours from that person and to behavior towards that person premised on expectations. The term ‘role’ is used for these expectations which are attached to positions. (p. 57)

In this view, roles or behavioural expectations are framed as “a set of rules” that are governed by negotiation (Charon, 2004, p. 168). Thus, roles are no longer an objective reality, a “set of expectations – or a script – that tells the individual what to do” (p. 168). Rather, roles are re-conceptualised as “social roles” that are “fluid, vague and contradictory” (p. 168). Here Stryker (2002) asserts that:

...the enactment or performance of a role is variable, that there is some choice in whether or not to perform a role and that there may be the opportunity to reject expectations attached to a position occupied or to modify the performance called for. (p. 79)

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<sup>16</sup> Role theory was initially developed by Georg Simmel, Max Weber and Ralph Linton. Contemporary writing in symbolic interactionism synthesises role theory into the concepts and ideas developed by Mead to provide a new account of role within contemporary social situations (Stryker, 2002, pp. 4-5).

Moreover, social roles are further defined as guidelines with individuals making decisions about these guidelines through a continuous negotiation process involving the self and others. Here, individuals have a choice with respect to role behaviour and they may not always “embrace” their formal role with the socially defined definition of the self within a specific situation (p. 81). This elaboration introduces new concepts of “role identity”, “identity salience” and “commitment” (pp. 60-62). Role identity refers to “internalised...[expectations]...in structured role relationships” (p. 60). Role salience assumes that individuals have a number of role identities and refers to the hierarchical position of a specific identity “in which the self can be organised” (p. 61). Finally, commitment refers to the degree of ‘fit’ between an individual’s perspective on his or her role identity or identities and the role expectations of others.

Beyond this new understanding of role expectations and role behaviour, contemporary symbolic interactionism highlights the importance of ‘fitting in’ with the expectations of others by “taking the role of the other” (Charon, 2004, pp. 108-115; Stryker, 2002, pp. 62-65). Here, “one takes the role of others by using symbols to put oneself in another’s place and to view the world as others do” (Stryker, 2002, p. 62). This is an empathetic process involving anticipating the responses of a “reference group”<sup>17</sup> (Charon, 2004, pp. 110-112) with whom one is involved in social interaction, as well as making judgments with respect to the group rules. However, beyond these social activities, role-taking also includes exercising “selfhood” by looking back on oneself or one’s actions in the situation and assessing this behaviour against a personal definition of the self. This is, therefore, an active rather than passive process characterised by conscious decision-making and deliberate action.

#### **4.2.3 Problematic Social Situations**

This symbolic interactionist appreciation of human action and role behaviour helps to clarify the nature of problematic social situations. In short, symbolic

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<sup>17</sup>Reference groups are made up of “significant others”, the “generalised other” and others in the social situation (Charon, 2004, p. 110). Significant others include “role models, individuals we respect, individuals who we regard as knowledgeable, individuals we love, individuals who love us, individuals with whom we interact on a continuous basis”, while the generalised other refers to a general view of a group of significant others.

interactionists argue that a social situation will be problematic and lead to “role conflict” (Stryker, 2002, pp. 73-76) if there are not clear definitions of the social situation and shared role expectations. Such conflict emerges when there are “contradictory expectations attached to some position in a social relationship...[which]...may call for incompatible performances...[or the requirement]... that one hold two norms or values which logically call for opposing behaviours; or...[the]...demand that one role necessitates the expenditure of time and energy such that it is difficult or even impossible to carry out the obligations of another role” (Stryker, 2002, p. 73). Such role conflict is normal in most ‘complex’ social structures. Role conflict can lead to less than satisfactory responses to situations, such as withdrawal, or it can lead to ‘novel’ solutions to problems.

Role conflict, at the level of the individual within a specific role position, is experienced as “role strain” within the larger societal structures in which the individual is situated. Such role strain is reflected in the “continual problem of maintaining continuity of social roles that underlies the stability of social structure” (Stryker, 2002, p. 76). Role strain is identified when a person experiences an ‘omnipresent’ sense of difficulty in meeting role obligations which is hard to manage. Further, Stryker (2002) states that role strain occurs as:

...not all persons accept the norms embodied in the roles or even central societal values; the degree to which people are emotionally committed to norms and value is variable; social class and other structural variations in society introduce variations in attachment to norms and values. (p. 76)

In addition:

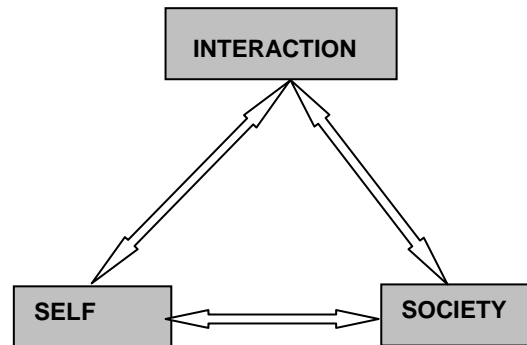
Since social structures are built out of role relationships attempts to deal with role strain necessarily affect the structures of society. Depending on how role expectations are or not met, social systems may be stable, or experience great change. Role strains are clearly fateful, not only for the individuals who experience them but for the larger societal structures containing them as well. (p. 78)

Role strain is normal in many situations and can be turned to good if those in conflict can be brought together and explained to each other. Nonetheless, this understanding of problematic social situations leads symbolic interactionists to advocate proactive role-making processes in challenging social situations.



#### 4.2.4 Role-Making Processes

Symbolic interactionism asserts that role behaviour is more than meeting expectations, and is in fact the “product of a role making process” (Stryker, 2002, p. 79) involving a reciprocal relationship between the self, society and interaction which makes it possible to deal directly with role conflict and role strain.



*Figure 4.1* Social behaviour as a product of a role-making process (Stryker, 2002, pp. 78-84)

Here, the *self* is deemed to be a “social object” (Charon, 2004, p. 72) that the individual may use to achieve his or her goals. In other words, the self acts towards itself through this process of “self indication” (Stryker, 2002, p. 50). This process involves activities such as “self-communication”, “self-perception” and “self-control” (Charon, 2004, pp. 80-89). Such activities represent “mind action [in which the individual] moves from situation to situation, defining goals and social objects, thinking, rehearsing and evaluating” (p. 103) leading to “self-development” or the transformation of the self.

Beyond such mind action towards oneself, social interaction also shapes the self and behaviour:

Identity results from a negotiation process that arises in social interaction. We label others in interaction; we attempt to shape the identities of others in interaction; we tell others who we think we are in social interaction. Through it all we come to think of our self as something; an identity is formed. (Charon, 2004, p. 156)

Consequently, Charon (2004) claims that instead of just responding to the environment human beings, through processes of self-indication and social interaction, can “understand it and use it to achieve [their] own goals in the particular situation” (p. 144).

Complementing this understanding of the self, *society* is defined as “any instance of ongoing social interaction that is characterised by cooperation among actors and that creates a shared culture” (Charon, 2004, p. 169). Society begins with social interaction, characterised by cooperative problem-solving and the achievement of mutual goals. Over time, such social interaction results in the negotiation of a culture of shared perspectives. Individuals in the course of ongoing social interaction agree to let the culture guide their beliefs and action. Moreover, culture, in turn, feeds into and contributes to ongoing cooperative social interaction. “Without a culture used by participants in social situations, society becomes an aggregate of individuals who are thinking and acting without concern for the whole, and on-going cooperative social interaction cannot continue” (p. 169). Here it is assumed that individuals may exist within a number of different societies “each with its own social interaction, cooperation and culture” (p. 170). Complex social problems will, therefore, reflect social interaction within a number of different societies.

This model of role-making assumes a “close, determining relationship of self and society...the person is the other side of the society coin” (Stryker, 2002, p. 79). However, this is not a static relationship in which the self and society literally reproduce one another; “Human society is not humans who blindly imitate one another, but instead it is human beings who direct themselves to cooperate” (Charon, 2004, p. 173), as evidenced in their commitment to taking the role of the other. Put simply, the self is more than the roles outlined by society, even though society shapes the self and the self, in turn, contributes to strengthening societal culture. To explain this paradox, this model highlights the importance of *interaction* in the role-making process. In particular, this role-making process requires three forms of interaction, including engaging with significant others, the generalised other

and the self as social object. Moreover, there is a commitment to taking the role of the other, or to take part in:

...an active process where the actor is able to take control of his or her situation, allowing more intelligent control of one's own actions in relations to others. Others do not simply become influences on us; instead, we are able to understand and actively form our actions according to our definition of what others are thinking and doing. (Charon, 2004, p. 115)

This appreciation of the importance of interaction within a role-making process raises issues with respect to social structures that enable or inhibit interaction. Symbolic interactionists define social structures as “the patterns of regularities that characterise most human interaction” (Stryker, 2002, p. 65), as well as “the more abstract social boundaries that crosscut all societies, but particularly large, industrialised, contemporary societies... a class structure, a power, an ethic structure and so on” (p. 66). As a result of these patterns of regularities or social boundaries, societies are differentiated with only certain people interacting with each other in certain settings. Here, it is possible to change these social structures. However, it does depend on whether social structures are ‘open’ or ‘closed’ to novel forms of interaction that support self-development, as well as allow for role experimentation through social action.

### **4.3 Symbolic Interactionism As Method**

Symbolic interactionism as method provides an interpretivist/constructivist persuasion within social research. Broadly ():

Proponents of these persuasions share the goal of understanding the complex world of those who live in it... The world of lived reality and situation-specific meanings that constitute the general object of investigation is thought to be constructed by social actors. That is, particular actors, in particular places, at particular times, fashion meaning out of events and phenomenon through prolonged complex processes of social interaction involving history, language, and action. (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118).

Blumer (1997) clearly situated symbolic interactionism within an interpretive persuasion. For Blumer, symbolic interactionism provides “a down-to-earth

approach to the scientific study of human group life and human conduct” (p. 47). Arguing this case, Blumer identifies a series of methodological implications for symbolic interactionism. Offering three underlying premises of symbolic interactions<sup>18</sup>, he encourages researchers “to take the role of the other” (p. 51) in order to “become familiar with [the other’s] world” (p. 51). Moreover, they are to collect qualitative data or “descriptive accounts from the actors of how they see objects in a variety of different situations and how they refer to the objects in conversations with members of their own group” (pp. 51-52). It is also important to recognise the formative nature of social interaction and move away from “the premise that group life is but the result of determining factors working through the interaction of people” (p. 53). Further, there is a warning to avoid “compression” (p. 53) or any form of reductionism that denies complexity in social situations. Finally, there is a recommendation that the researcher move away from framing social action as “a product of pre-existing factors that play upon the acting unit” to “observing social action as a process” and “begin[ning] to see the social action from the position of whoever is forming the action” (p. 56).

In engaging interpretivist thinking, Blumer (1997) argues for the uniqueness of human inquiry and offers a well-crafted refutation of a naturalistic interpretation of social science. For Blumer:

...the four customary means [of the natural sciences] adhering to scientific protocol, engaging in replication, testing hypotheses, and using operational procedure – do not provide the empirical validation that genuine social science requires. They give no assurance that premises, problems, data, relations, concepts, and interpretations are empirically valid. Very simply put, the only way to get this assurance is to go directly to the empirical social world – to see through meticulous examination of it whether one’s premise or root images of it, one’s questions and problems posed for it, the data one chooses out of it, the concepts through which one sees and analyses it are valid, and the interpretations one applies are actually borne out. (p. 32)

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<sup>18</sup> The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; The second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows; The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he [sic] encounters. (Blumer, 1997, p. 2)

In recent years, symbolic interactionists have moved beyond this critique of a natural science of the social by focusing more directly on “the instrumental and practical function of theory construction and knowing” (Crotty, 1998, p. 125), or the process of construction or meaning-making. Consequently, symbolic interactionism has taken a constructivist ‘turn’.

Constructivism offers a distinctive research paradigm with its own ontological, epistemological and methodological claims (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The choice of a constructivist tradition for this research study was deemed appropriate because “it assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 35). Moreover, constructivism relies on a hermeneutic/dialectical methodology aimed at understanding and reconstructing previously held problematic assumptions.

However, contemporary constructivism itself comes in “many flavours” (Burbules, 2000) and is said to be in “blooming, buzzing confusion” (D. C. Phillips, 2000, p. viii). Within the constructivist camp there are a number of polarised positions (D. C. Phillips, 2000; Schwandt, 2000; Woolfolk, 1998), with each of these positions offering a different view on the origin of human knowledge and reality. An initial point of difference occurs over whether knowledge and reality are constructed by individuals or acquired from society. Then, there are also different understandings of the constraints or influences affecting knowledge and reality construction. A key issue is in identifying whether the principal influences are ‘ideal’ (e.g., cultural or linguistic norms) or ‘realist’ (genetically determined brain structures or power structures).

Recognising these polarised positions, theorists have begun to re-frame the debate away from ontological and epistemological concerns and are moving to a more pragmatic future. As Schwandt (1994) writes:

To be sure, the future of interpretivist and constructivist persuasions rests on the acceptance of the implications of dissolving long-standing dichotomies such as subject/object, knower/known, fact/value. It rests with individuals being comfortable with blurring the lines between the science and the art of interpretation, the social scientific and literary

account... We can reject dichotomous thinking on pragmatic grounds: Such distinctions are simply not very useful anymore. (p. 132)

The need for pragmatic approaches 'fits' well with both traditional and contemporary perspectives on symbolic interactionism. The Mead-Blumer account of symbolic interactionism was situated within the school of philosophy known as pragmatism (Blumer, 1997). While contemporary writing continues to acknowledge this philosophical foundation, Charon (2004) points out that:

Pragmatism is very important to symbolic interactionism primarily in its approach to how humans relate to their environment. It teaches that we always intervene in what is real, that knowledge is believed and remembered because it is useful to us. And that humans must be understood primarily by what they do in their situations. (p. 40)

In line with this pragmatic approach, Charon (2004) identifies the following principles of investigation to guide research from a symbolic interactionist perspective:

1. The central principle of symbolic interactionism is that we can understand what is going on only if we understand what the actors themselves believe about their world; (p. 193)
2. Symbolic interactionists believe that it is important to gather data through observing people in real situations; (p. 194)
3. Symbolic interactionists are critical of traditional social science, its use of scientific methodology for the study of human beings and its definition of 'important causal variables' ; (p. 194)
4. The symbolic interactionist regards a careful description of human interaction to be a central goal of social science; (p. 195)
5. The symbolic interactionist in studying human beings believes it is important to move away from mechanical models of causation (characteristic of natural science) to processual models. (p. 195)

Thus, symbolic interactionism is positioned to compliment traditional scientific methods in social science. It seeks to understand action from the perspective of those who act and to describe the elements of human interaction as well as its cause. When this thought is applied to educational research, the symbolic

interactionist researcher asks, "What common sets of symbols and understandings has emerged to give meaning to people's interactions?" (Best & Kahn, 2006, p. 255). As Charon (2004) writes, empirical studies using symbolic interactionism:

... attempt to focus on interaction, definition, decision making and the development of both societies and identities. All are examples of observation/interviewing, often asking people to tell their stories or show how their perspective is created, altered or lost. All are interested in identity, how people define themselves and others, and how people's identity influences how they act in situations. And all of them, through showing the importance of definition, examine human actively forming his or her life rather than simply being influenced by personality, past, attitudes, emotional response, habit, other people, or society. (p. 205)

#### **4.4 Possibilities and Limitations of Symbolic Interactionism as Method**

Over time, contemporary theorists have strengthened Blumer's original thought and moved towards a more adequate theory of symbolic interactionism. Consequently, symbolic interactionism offers a general conceptual framework for the analysis of society and social situations (Stryker, 2002, p. 1). For Charon (2004):

...symbolic interactionist perspective is important to students of human action, interested in understanding the nature of human life, society, truth, and freedom... This perspective contributes to a liberal arts education: It deals intelligently and systematically with some of the important questions concerning human life. (p. 216)

To support this claim, Charon (2004) provides six examples of the application of a symbolic interactionist perspective to specific social situations, ranging from understanding racism in society, to understanding gender differences, and to understanding dating and marriage.

Beyond using the perspective of symbolic interactionism as an analytical 'tool' in this way, symbolic interactionism has been broadly applied in social research. For example, Charon (2004) notes the use of a symbolic interactionist approach in studies of pregnant drug users, pain and injury and identity formation in maximum-security prison. Furthermore, symbolic interactionism provides the theoretical underpinnings of much of the qualitative research in education (Best & Kahn, 2006;

Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Within Catholic education, recent Australian studies have also used a symbolic interactionist approach to study gender regimes in one Catholic school (White, 2004) and values-led principalship (Branson, 2004).

Despite this support in the literature, the limits of symbolic interactionism have also been noted. In particular, there are five fundamental criticisms of this theoretical perspective that restrict its efficacy (Stryker, 2002). Here, critics argue that key concepts, such as the self, are ill-defined and cannot provide the basis for sound theoretical development. Moreover, it is claimed that the emphasis on meaning and the import of reflexive thought in behaviour overlooks the pervasive influence of emotions and of the unconscious in human behaviour. Beyond these conceptual concerns, critics also point to methodological problems when symbolic interactionism is applied to social research (Ritzer, 1996). For example, it is noted that a symbolic interactionist approach to research generates few testable propositions and rejects scientific explanation in favour of intuitive insight and understanding. Moreover, an emphasis on the actor's perspective and the local social situation prevents symbolic interactionism dealing with the large-scale social organisation of the relations among societies. By failing to critically focus on social structures, symbolic interactionists risk ideological bias in support of the status quo.

In response to such criticism, Charon (2004) argues that it is "erroneous" (p. 190) to expect symbolic interactionism to explain everything. Symbolic interactionism offers a "perspective" that deliberately focuses on some things at the expense of others. Here the focus is on interaction. Consequently, "personality predispositions and social structures fail to be examined in depth [and] unconscious reactions are de-emphasised" (p.189). While this decision to deliberately concentrate on interaction results in a biased perspective, its value lies in offering an alternative view to mainstream social science. For Charon, "Expecting symbolic interactionism to explain everything is erroneous but, in my opinion, it is correct to say that symbolic interactionism is an exciting and useful perspective for understanding human life" (p. 190).

In a similar vein, Stryker (2002) recognises the limits of symbolic interactionism and argues that criticisms of symbolic interactionism are "not damning". However,



having put this argument, he warns that criticism should not be dismissed as being unimportant. Instead, those who situate their research within a symbolic interactionist theoretical framework “need to continuously strive for greater precision of concepts and more reasonable research procedures” and seek to provide a “better logic between social structures and individual behaviour, between macro- and micro-processes” (p. 155).

## **4.5 Conclusion**

Following identification of the focus and research questions that guide this investigation, it was deemed appropriate to situate this research study within a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a “useful perspective for understanding human social life”, especially for those who “work with people” (Charon, 2004, p. 203). Furthermore, symbolic interactionism provides the most appropriate perspective to access principals’ understandings regarding community and their leadership role in regard to building it,

In short, contemporary symbolic interactionism focuses on interaction with human beings as interpretive, proactive and rational problem-solvers. Further, this occurs within a society that represents a collective of individuals communicating through the use of symbolic language and taking the role of the other. The interaction that takes place between individuals is an important influence on individual behaviour and societal direction. The responses people make are based on the meaning they attach to actions. In particular, this thought highlights the symbolic nature of reality and frames human beings as purposive agents and symbolic actors. Moreover, it describes problematic social situations in terms of role conflict and role strain and recommends strengthening the interrelationships of the self, society and interaction through a role-making process.

In making this theoretical choice, the researcher was aware of the possibilities and limitations of symbolic interactionism. There is strong support in the literature for using symbolic interactionism as a perspective in research design and as an analytical/interpretive ‘tool’ to understand social situations. At the same time, the literature alerts the researcher to the limits of symbolic interactionism in terms of ill-defined concepts and its failure to critically focus on the affective domain and social

structures. Beyond these conceptual concerns, critics also point to methodological problems that reject scientific explanation and result in few testable propositions. Weighing up the possibilities and limitations of situating research within symbolic interactionism, the researcher accepted the argument that “expecting symbolic interactionism to explain everything is erroneous but...it is correct to say that symbolic interactionism is an exciting and useful perspective for understanding human life” (Charon, 2004, p. 190). Moreover, the researcher made a commitment within the design of this research study “to continuously strive for greater precision of concepts and more reasonable research procedures” and sought to provide a “better logic between social structures and individual behaviour, between macro- and micro-processes” (Stryker, 2002, p. 155). The design of the research study follows in Chapter 5.

# **CHAPTER 5      DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

## **5.1      Introduction**

In the previous chapter, this research study was situated within the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. Contemporary symbolic interactionism offers a way of studying “how individuals engage in social transactions and how these transactions contribute to the creation and maintenance of social structures and the individual’s self-identity (Gall et al., 2006, p. 500). In particular, it highlights the symbolic nature of reality and frames human beings as purposive agents and symbolic actors. When applied to research, symbolic interactionism is associated with an overriding interest in understanding how “humans think, solve problems, role take, apply their past, and look to the future in situations” (Charon, 2001, p. 208).

Thus described, symbolic interactionism, as argued in Chapter 4, may be comfortably positioned within a research paradigm of pragmatic constructivism. In line with this methodological choice, the researcher accepted Charon’s (2004) “principles of investigation” (pp. 193-196) to guide the design of this research study. As previously described, these principles included understanding the actors’ beliefs about their world, how they think, take on roles, solve problems, “apply their past, and look to the future” (p. 95). With these principles in mind, the researcher adopted a case study approach as an orchestrating framework and used a variety of qualitative methods for data collection, analysis and interpretation. This chapter details and explains the particular methods adopted and situates their potential in this investigation that focuses on how principals conceptualise community and describe their leadership role in building it. This chapter also provides an overview of the approaches taken in relation to the selection of participants, the role of the researcher, ensuring the rigour of the research design including important ethical considerations.

## **5.2      Case Study as Orchestrating Framework**

Case study was used as an orchestrating framework within this research study. In making this methodological choice, the researcher was aware of the confusion in the literature that surrounds the use of the term ‘case study’ (Merriam, 1998).

Within educational research there is “lingering uncertainty about its nature and appropriate usage” (p. 26) when “the process of conducting a case study is conflated with both the unit of study and the product of this type of investigation” (p. 27). In short, researchers have confused case study as a methodological choice appropriate to qualitative research and case study as a choice of what is to be studied using both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

To address this confusion, researchers, in the 1990s, described case study as an orchestrating framework and argued that “the single most defined characteristic of case study lies in delimiting the object of the study, the case” (Merriam, 1998, p. 37). Thus “as a form of research, case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used” (Stake, 2000, p. 435) and as such:

A case study may be simple or complex. It may be a child or a classroom of children or an incident, such as mobilisation of professionals to study a childhood condition. It is one among others. In any given study, we will concentrate on the one. The time we may spend concentrating our inquiry on the one thing may be long or short, but, while we so concentrate, we are engaged in case study. (p. 436)

Within this definition of case study, a case is a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25), which effectively becomes the researcher’s unit of analysis. Here, the emphasis is on identifying the “bounded systems” (Stake, 2000, p. 444) that will become the focus of the research because:

In the social sciences and human services, the case has working parts; it is purposive; it often has a self...Functional or dysfunctional, rational or irrational, the case is a system...It is common to recognise that certain features are within the system, within the boundaries of the case, and other features outside. (p. 436)

This research study represents a *regional* case study, that is, a study bounded by the geographical area of the Diocese of Lismore, the boundaries of which are described in Chapter One.

Beyond this appreciation of case study as a means of delimiting the object of study, it can also be characterised as being “particularistic, descriptive and heuristic”:

Particularistic means that the case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon... Descriptive means the end product of a case study is a rich, 'thick' description of the phenomenon under study... Heuristic means that case studies illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. (Merriam, 1998, pp. 29-30)

Thus described, case study may serve a number of interests. For the case study researcher there may be either "intrinsic" or "instrumental" (Stake, 2000. p. 437) interest in the case. The "*intrinsic case study*...is undertaken because, first and last, the researcher wants better understanding of this particular case". Within the category of "instrumental case study, a particular case study is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalisation". Here, the case plays a secondary role as the researcher's primary interest is in advancing understanding of interests, external to the case. However, beyond this singular focus, the researcher may engage in a "*collective case study*...[where the] instrumental study [is] extended to several cases" (p. 437).

Regardless of the motivating interest, case study is primarily concerned with what is "particular" about the case and "to show particularity, many researchers gather data [from] the nature of the case [its] historical background, the physical setting [and] other contexts" (Stake, 2000, pp. 438-439). Moreover, case study offers a distinctive understanding of learning from a particular case. Here:

The researcher is a teacher using at least two pedagogical methods...Teaching didactically, the researcher teaches what he or she has learned. Arranging what educationalists call discovery learning, the researcher provides material for readers to learn, on their own, things the teacher does not know as well as those he or she does know. (p. 442)

Assisting this teaching/learning process, case study knowledge is deemed to be "more concrete" and "more contextual" than abstract, formal knowledge derived from other research designs (Merriam, 1998, p. 31). In addition, case study knowledge is further developed by "reader interpretation – readers bring to case studies their own experience and understanding" and "based more on reference populations determined by the reader ... readers have some population in mind" (p. 32).

Within case study research, the researcher will start with the identification of a “topical concern...[and] may pose ‘foreshadowed problems’, concentrate on issue-related observations, interpret patterns of data that reform the issues as assertions” (Stake, 2000, p. 440). In particular, the case study researcher has responsibility for:

1. Bounding the case, conceptualising the object of study;
2. Selecting phenomena, themes or issues –that is, the research questions to emphasise);
3. Seeking patterns of data to develop the issues;
4. Triangulating key observations and bases for interpretation;
5. Selecting alternative interpretations to pursue;
6. Developing assertions or generalisations about the case. (p. 448)

The strengths and limitations of the case study method have been well documented in the literature (Bassey, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Here it is argued (Merriam, 1998) that:

The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand the readers’ experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence case study plays an important role in advancing the field’s knowledge base. (p. 41)

Given these strengths, case study is favoured within applied fields of study, such as education. In particular, case study is said to be particularly useful for “studying educational innovations, for evaluating programs and, for informing policy” (p. 41)

However, the strengths of case study outlined above may also present certain limitations in usage. For example, Merriam (1998) argues that “Although rich, thick description and analysis of a phenomenon may be desired, a researcher may not have the time or the money to devote to such an understanding” (p. 42). Moreover, case study research is limited by the “sensitivity and integrity of the investigator” (p. 42). A further possible limitation relates to the “researcher [being the] primary instrument of the investigator” (p. 42). Here, there are possible ethical issues with

respect to subjectivity, as “both the reader of the case study and the authors themselves need to be aware of biases that can affect the final product” (p. 42). Finally, as in other qualitative research designs, there are issues of ensuring rigour in respect of “the collection, construction and analysis of the empirical materials” within case study research (p. 43).

Aware of both the strengths and limitations of case study research, the researcher followed advice in the literature (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000) and chose a case study research design, as it seemed most appropriate to the research problem and the questions to be asked. Here the researcher found the possibility of gaining a rich and holistic account of school community leadership appealing. At the same time, being aware of the limitations of case study, the researcher sought to address within the research design concerns found in the literature with respect to ensuring rigour and taking an ethical stance.

### **5.3 Methods of Collection**

In line with the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, this research study involved the stages of “exploration and inspection” (Charon, 2001, p. 208) in data gathering. The exploration stage within the research study seeks to collate the data and gives a detailed description of ‘what’s going on around here’ in this particular area. Whilst giving a general description of the research problem, the exploration stage also identifies issues for further investigation. This investigation is carried out in the second stage of the research study, the inspection stage. This second stage involves identifying key coded elements and themes around the issues identified during the exploration stage. Accordingly, both the exploration and inspection stages allow the rich meanings and perspectives of the participants in the research study to be voiced.

Case study as an orchestrating framework allows for both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Stake, 2000). Within this research study, the researcher employed multiple research methods including an open-ended questionnaire, two individual interviews, a focus group interview and researcher’s journal. The use of multiple methods permitted an exploration of the case leading to a holistic appreciation of what was happening, as well as an inspection of isolated

elements within the case (Charon, 2001). Following is a detailed discussion of the multiple research methods employed in this study.

### **5.3.1 Open Ended Questionnaire**

Open-ended questionnaires give “good access to the spontaneous understanding respondents have of a target object” (Kronberger & Wagner, 2000, p. 299). The only constraint on the participants’ responses is the subject of the questions (R. Burns, 1995). This reduced level of constraint with such questioning can result in unexpected or unanticipated data, which in turn may suggest previously unconsidered relationships or research questions. Hence, it can be argued that this style of questionnaire facilitates a richness and intensity of data. However, the inherent flexibility with open-ended questions has the potential to produce irrelevant data and this is a perceived major problem. Hence, there is a need to carefully analyse and code the resultant data to ensure that it is applicable to the research questions.

The exploration stage of this research study began with an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix 1). Initially, the principals of all 34 Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Lismore were invited to participate in the exploration stage of the research study. Fifteen of these principals accepted this invitation and completed the open-ended questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of two sheets of paper containing three research questions, each in a box. A short explanation of the research study was provided by the researcher, along with a statement regarding the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were given as much time as needed to answer each of the questions and encouraged to answer each question thoughtfully. They were then invited to place the completed responses in a box placed in a private part of the room. The responses were typed up and the responses to each question collated together. The anticipated outcome was to record as much rich data as possible regarding the principals’ conceptualisation of the Catholic school as community and how they described their leadership role in building it. From this data some initial understandings could be obtained that would guide the construction of the individual interview questions.



### 5.3.2 Individual Interviews

Interviewing is advanced in the literature as a research method that offers “one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings” (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 645). Moreover, it is also suggested that interviews are a particularly valuable data-gathering research method when the researcher is endeavouring to understand implicit factors, such as the participants’ beliefs, feelings and interpretations of the world around them (Merriam, 1998). The use of individual interviews within this research study complemented its pragmatic constructivist nature. In line with a case study approach, the interview allows the participant to be more of an “informant” than a “respondent”. It does this by allowing participants to propose their “own insights into certain occurrences” which can be used as “the basis for further inquiry” (Yin, 1994, p. 84). The focus of the interview is the “*hows* of people’s lives...as well as the traditional *whats*” (Fontana & Frey, 2003, p. 62).

The following timeline was used to ensure that participating principals understood the study, and then to gather the data from the two individual interviews.

*Table 5.1 Timeline of Interviews in 2005*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>First Meeting</b>	<b>First Interview</b>	<b>Second Interview</b>
Albert	Monday 2 <sup>nd</sup> May	Wednesday 11 <sup>th</sup> May	Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup> July
Bruce	Monday 2 <sup>nd</sup> May	Wednesday 11 <sup>th</sup> May	Tuesday 18 <sup>th</sup> July
Charles	Monday 2 <sup>nd</sup> May	Monday 16 <sup>th</sup> May	Monday 25 <sup>th</sup> July
Denise	Tuesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> May	Monday 16 <sup>th</sup> May	Monday 25 <sup>th</sup> July
Elise	Tuesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> May	Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> May	Tuesday 26 <sup>th</sup> July
Frank	Tuesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> May	Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> May	Tuesday 26 <sup>th</sup> July

In the inspection stage of this research study individual interviews focussed the participants on the specific research issues, while seeking a more personal and natural response (R. Burns, 1995; Patton, 1990). The specific, standardised, pre-determined format of a structured interview, or the standardised format of an open-

ended interview, would not have provided this flexibility to generate the data pertinent to this research study. The individual interview method allows perspectives to be opened up for inspection, by facilitating subjective perceptions and personal professional narratives as sources of essential data (Fontana & Frey, 2000, pp. 646-647). Individual interviews are also posited as having the following advantages:

1. There are no constraints on time spent with participants which builds up trust and rapport with the researcher.
2. It is the participant's perspective that governs, rather than the researcher's.
3. The participants can use their own language, rather than that used in the study.
4. Both participants and researcher experience equal status in the dialogue (R. Burns 1995, p. 279).

Within this research study, the principals participated in two individual interviews. It was thought that two interviews were needed to bring to light a full understanding of the principals' perspectives on the Catholic school as community and their role as school community leaders.

Some guiding questions (Appendix 2), informed by the literature review in Chapter 3, were created to ensure that some level of relevant and similar data was gained from the participating principals. The unstructured dimension of the interviews allowed the rich perspectives of the principals to be given voice. Once a 'comfortable' relationship was established, the questioning style moved towards what Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1990) described as 'probing' questioning:

It is an indicator that the researcher is aware that he or she cannot take for granted the common sense understanding that people share because these may be differently interpreted by informant and interviewer. (p. 123)

Since the conceptualisations of 'leadership' and 'community' were so critical to this study, it was essential in these interviews that probing questioning was successful in eliciting the participants' understandings and meanings regarding the concepts. In

this matter the researcher took up the advice of Babbie (2004) to keep probes short, to use “silence” appropriately and finally to “be completely neutral” (p. 266). This was a critical aspect of the research process.

These interviews were approximately one hour in length, although the time varied according to participant responses. Many of the interviews were carried out in principals’ offices. As a way of counterbalancing any effects on the data, the researcher would listen to each interview immediately after leaving the site and, if necessary, clarify with the participant any information which may have been difficult to understand, while it could be still vividly recollected (Patton, 1990).

*Table 5.2 Individual Interview Participants’ Demographic Details*

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>School Size</b>	<b>Years as Principal</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Albert	43	614	8	Male
Bruce	44	186	7	Male
Charles	49	385	6	Male
Denise	62	198	10	Female
Elise	42	143	3	Female
Frank	44	187	2	Male

Taking note of the literature, the individual interviews were audio taped and transcribed (Patton, 1990). Audio tape recording was the chosen means of obtaining the most accurate record of the individual interviews. Audio tapes provide a “public record”, they “can be replayed and transcripts improved”, as well as preserve “sequences of talk” (Silverman, 2001, p. 162). Permission was sought from each participant at the outset to audio tape the individual interviews, as this allowed for maximum ‘presence’ by the researcher, as well as the accurate recording of the raw data. These tape recordings were later transcribed to facilitate data analysis.

The audio taping allowed for a more relaxed conversation to occur between the principal and researcher, without the distraction of note taking (Hook, 1990). It also allowed for the interviews to be replayed as required to re-live the data and clarify

any doubts (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Merriam, 1998). Each individual interview was completely transcribed so that no aspect of the data was lost. This rich store of data could not have been obtained without the use of the audio tapes (R. Burns, 1997). Soon after the end of an individual interview, each principal was provided with a transcript of the interview and invited to provide further feedback (Kelchtermans, 1993). This process allowed both the principals and the researcher to be assured that what was recorded was an appropriate and correct representation of the principals' perspectives.

### **5.3.3 Focus Group Interview**

The term "focus group" interview has been used by Sarantakos (1998) to denote a more formal and structured approach to a group interview at the end of the research process. However, in this research study, 'focus group' interview was used to describe a more exploratory process with an individual format and a moderately non-directive interviewer role. The focus group interview followed the individual interviews and allowed for the participants to further reflect upon the research questions as they listened "to others' opinions and understandings" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 114).

Focus group interviews are a significant qualitative research method which allow for the "multivocality of participants' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs" (Madriz, 2003, p. 364). The literature notes that focus group interviews are particularly suited to "uncovering the complexity of layers that shape...collective...and life experiences" (p. 383). Moreover, it is a research method that provides significant data within a short period of time. Consistent with the symbolic interactionist theoretical framework of this study, a focus group interview allows the researcher to observe "collective human interaction" among the participants (p. 365). The focus group interview is particularly useful in allowing the rich data of the participants' beliefs and experiences to be articulated in the interaction between the members. This rich data emerges from the ways that the participants take account of each other, symbolically communicate, understand one another's role and "interpret one another's acts" (Charon, 2001, p. 153). Thus, any undue influence from the researcher is restricted in this interactive process between the participants. The use

of the focus group interview in research is posited as providing a number of advantages and disadvantages (Patton, 1994):

The advantages are:

- They are relatively easy to conduct
- They require less time than multiple interviews
- They provide the opportunity to collect data from group interaction
- They provide an opportunity for group discussion and opinion formation of researcher-generated topics

The disadvantages are:

- They are not conducted in the naturalistic setting
- It is impossible to discern perspectives
- The degree to which the presence of the... [researcher] and other participants affects responses of any cannot be determined
- Comparison of data across focus groups is difficult because group interaction determines the direction or focus of discussion
- Fewer questions can be asked because more interviewees are involved. (p. 133)

Within this research study, the focus group interview involved 6 principals. The participants included four principals who had been involved in the individual interviews and two new principals. The reason for the two new principals was the unavailability of the remaining two principals who participated in the individual interviews.

*Table 5.3 Focus Group Interview Participants' Demographic Details*

<b>Coding</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>School Size</b>	<b>Years as Principal</b>	<b>Gender</b>
Albert	43	614	8	Male
Hayley	45	503	4	Female
Ivan	47	353	7	Male
Gordon	46	654	10	Male
Elise	42	143	3	Female
Frank	44	187	2	Male

The focus group interview was held at a regional conference facility that ensured privacy and solitude for the participants. This focus group interview was audio taped to provide an accurate record of the conversation and allow maximum 'presence' by the researcher. Again, this tape recording was later transcribed to facilitate data analysis. However, the transcript of the focus group interview was not provided back to the participants.

The first 20 minutes of the focus group interview was spent providing an opportunity for the participants to discuss their backgrounds, aspirations and plans, in order to provide a relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere and to raise awareness of the 'context' in which participants worked. Once this base line had been established, the researcher introduced guiding questions more specific to the research agenda (Appendix 3). The intention was to draw out information on how the principals conceptualised 'community' in schools, and how they described their leadership role in relation to building community. The principals were specifically requested to ensure that they incorporated narratives that embodied examples of professional practice when making points.

The focus group interview was facilitated using a schedule with key guiding questions and probing questions. It was considered important to balance the needs of the research with those of the participants. It was also important not to pre-empt the positions or value systems of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The focus group interview needed to have enough structure to fulfil the broader research agenda, yet pursue those issues, interests and perspectives within this agenda, which were important to the participants. Here, the researcher needed to balance the dual roles of directive interviewer and moderator and this required careful management of the group being interviewed (Fontana & Frey, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

#### **5.3.4 The Researcher's Journal**

Journal-keeping was also utilised as a recording strategy in this research. The journal became a repository of all the data that was gathered by the researcher, but which was not 'recordable' on the audio tapes.

A journal is not merely a flow of impressions, it is impressions plus descriptions of circumstances, others, the self, motives, thoughts, and feelings. Taken further, it can be used as a tool for analysis and introspection. It is a chronicle of events as they happen, a dialogue with the facts (objective) and interpretations (subjective), and perhaps most important, it is an awareness of the difference between facts and interpretations. A journal becomes a dialogue with oneself over time. (Holly, 1989, p. 3)

Accepting this understanding of the value of the researcher's journal, the researcher made a commitment to journal writing early in the research study. Taking up Neuman's (2006) advice, the journal writing occurred "immediately" after each interview as this provided "insightful reflection" (p. 399). Here the emphasis was not so much on what was *said* in the interviews (as there was a record of this on the tape), but rather on the *meanings* of the remarks, body language and dynamics present in the interview. The researcher carried on a dialogue between and among various dimensions of the experience, in the journal, responding to questions such as:

- What happened on arrival at the site?
- What happened in the interview?
- How did the researcher feel? Why?
- What was the flow of events, and what were the important elements of the event? What preceded it? What followed it?

Of particular significance was the role the journal played as the repository for all the interview data which emerged once the tape was turned off. Again, both the 'facts' and the interpretations of these were written into the journal for later analysis alongside the tape-recorded data. Such dialogue provided an opportunity for the researcher to document ideas and collect data using both analytic and interpretive notes (Neuman, 2006).

## **5.4 Participants**

In line with the conventions of qualitative research, participants in this research study were chosen using "non-probabilistic" and "purposive" sampling (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). This approach to sampling was deemed to be appropriate because there would be no attempt, as in "probabilistic" sampling, to generalise the results of

the data to the wider population from which it was drawn. Since this was a study which sought to explore, understand and gain insight, purposeful sampling was the appropriate strategy to use. A sample was selected from which “the most can be learned” (p. 61).

As an initial step in the selection of participants, the researcher took advice offered by Le Compte and Preissle (1993) to identify the essential selection criteria. Such criteria would depend on the purpose of the research study and guide the identification of information-rich cases. Within this case study, the researcher sought a “typical sample” or “one that is elected because it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon” of school community leadership (Merriam, 1998, p. 52). Moreover, to address ethical concerns within case study research, the sample came from volunteers (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). It was also considered important to ensure as much variation in the sampling as was appropriate (Patton, 1990). This would allow for a variety of perspectives emerging in the data concerning the phenomenon being studied, with a resulting possibility of differences being allowed to emerge. Another critical factor concerning membership in the study related to the willingness of principals to be involved at both a personal and practical level.

An initial round of 34 letters were given to all principals of primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore, inviting them to participate in the individual interviews (Appendix 4), with 15 principals completing the questionnaire. Regarding participation in the focus group interview, 11 positive responses were received. Of the 11, three principals had worked in the Diocese of Lismore for only four months and so they were not invited to participate. A further two principals were not invited to participate because they had identified that they would be away during the period of the second round of interviews. Therefore, the researcher decided to proceed with the remaining six, allowing for some attrition during the process. The researcher made contact with each of the willing participants to negotiate a time for the interviews. Each of the principals was offered the opportunity for clarification of the nature and purpose of the research before finally committing themselves to the project by signing a consent form (Appendix 5). The participants were not gender



balanced and so reflected the larger male cohort of principals within the Diocese of Lismore.

## **5.5 The Researcher**

The qualitative researcher is described in the literature as the research “instrument” whose honed ability determines “the possibility of excellent research” (Richardson, 2003, p. 502). Further, the qualitative researcher’s role of putting together pieces of data in order to describe a particular situation is sometimes referred to in the literature as a “*bricoleur*” (pp. 5-11). In so doing, the researcher is seeking to “make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 5). Using the multiple voices of participants, the researcher produces a complex text about a particular issue or context. Methodologically, the researcher as *bricoleur* adeptly performs a range of diverse tasks “ranging from interviewing to intensive self-reflection and introspection” (p. 9). As theorist, the researcher takes up the range of different “perspectives and paradigms” (p. 9) presented in the data, then analyses and interprets them. There is also a role of “interpretive *bricoleur*” which acknowledges that the researcher’s “personal history, biography, gender, social class...and ethnicity” are interacting with the same personal dimensions of others in the setting (p. 9). The researcher brings to the research process a series of attributes that creates a unique perception of the data. Therefore, any background information concerning the researcher that might influence the research and its findings must be made explicit (Merriam, 1998).

As discussed in Chapter 1, the researcher of this study worked as a consultant (1990-1998), and then as an Assistant Director (1988 to present), at the Catholic Education Office, Lismore. During these years, the researcher had varying degrees of professional relationship with each of the participating principals. However, as noted in Chapter 1, the Catholic Education Office has a predominantly service role in regard to schools within the Diocese of Lismore, and as such the researcher has no supervisory or management role. The service nature of this professional relationship contributed to a trusting and collegial relationship between the researcher and participants required for this research study (O’Donoghue & Dimmock, 1998). Moreover, it should be noted that while the researcher did not have a social relationship or personal friendship with any of the participants, “trust

and rapport” (Neuman, 2006, p. 391) were established with the participants from years of working together.

## 5.6 Data Collection, Analysis and Interpretation Procedures

The collection, analysis and interpretation of qualitative empirical materials is a complex process. Several authors provided useful guidelines and strategies to organise the data and build qualitative interpretations (Huberman & Miles, 1994; Merriam 1998; Neuman, 2006; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). A detailed description of each constituent element of the study’s design outline is provided in Table 5.4 below:

*Table 5.4 Overview of the Multiple Data Collection and Analysis Methods*

<b>Research Stage</b>	<b>Research Step</b>	<b>Research Method</b>	<b>Description</b>
Exploration	Step 1	Open-ended Questionnaire	34 primary principals from each Catholic primary school was invited to participate. 15 principals accepted invitation and completed the open-ended questionnaire.
	Step 2	Data analysis	Transcription of questionnaire data, categorisation, identification of key areas for interviews. (1 <sup>st</sup> order interpretation)
Inspection	Step 3	1 <sup>st</sup> interviews Research Journal	6 Catholic primary school principals; sought their conceptualisation of community
	Step 4	Data analysis	Transcribed interviews, code data, themes. (2 <sup>nd</sup> order interpretation)
	Step 5	2 <sup>nd</sup> interview Research Journal	6 Catholic primary school principals. Reviewed previous transcripts, pursued descriptions of leadership for community building
	Step 6	Data analysis	Transcribe interviews, coded data, themes. (2 <sup>nd</sup> order interpretation)
	Step 7	Focus group interview Research Journal	6 principals engaged around key themes identified by the researcher

*Table 5.4 Overview of the Multiple Data Collection and Analysis Methods (continued)*

<b>Research Stage</b>	<b>Research Step</b>	<b>Research Method</b>	<b>Description</b>
	Step 8	Data analysis	Transcribed interviews, coded data, themes. (2 <sup>nd</sup> order interpretation)
	Step 9	Data interpretation	Assigned general theoretical significance of findings (3 <sup>rd</sup> order interpretation)

In regard to data collection, the researcher was guided by Punch (2005) (p. 186) who notes “four common-sense things...to maximise the quality of the data”. In particular, the researcher should:

1. Think through the rationale and logistics of the proposed data collection, and plan carefully
2. Anticipate and simulate the data collection procedures
3. When approaching people for data collection, ensure that the approach is both ethical and professional
4. Appreciate the role of training in preparing for data collection. (p. 186)

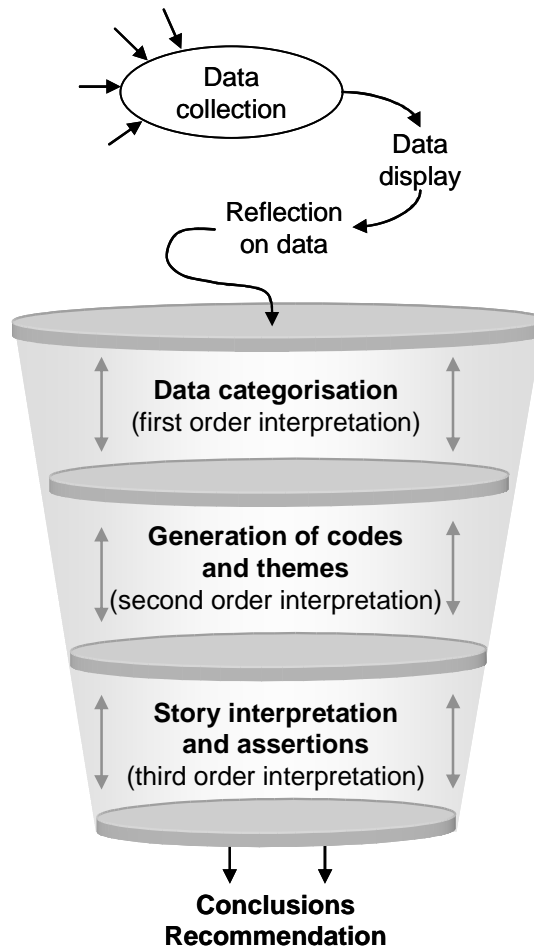
Given that a greater understanding of the research problem being investigated is gained by analysing and making sense of the collected data, the researcher collected the data and analysed it in a logical and simultaneous process (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). This process ensured that that all data collected would be increasingly relevant, as well as supportive of the research study’s purposes. It was important that the data collected related to the study, so “Concepts are developed inductively from the data and raised to a higher level of abstraction, and their interrelationships are then traced out” (Punch, 2005, p. 196). The importance of clarifying the process of collection, analysis and interpretation was heightened due to the amount of data generated by this case study through the questionnaire, individual interviews and focus group.

Here, it was accepted that the management of the collected data required an appropriate method of analysis in order to create meaning and form conclusions about it (Neuman, 2006; Punch, 2005). The process of collecting, collating, coding and building themes with the data could be described as a filtering process. In this process, the raw data was refined into coded themes and then later condensed into key themes. The key themes were then used to answer the research questions and generate the conclusions of the study.

The researcher adopted a three-step iterative approach to interpretation (Neuman, 2006, p. 160). The first step, a “first-order” interpretation, involved learning about the research problem from the meaning ascribed by the informants to the research study. This led to a categorisation of the initial data found in the responses to the stage 1 questionnaire. The “second-order” interpretation involved the researcher looking for underlying coherence or sense of meaning in the individual interview and focus group interview data. This was expressed in codification of the data. The third step, the “third order” interpretation, involved the researcher in assigning the “general theoretical significance” of the research findings and in expressing this in a series of assertions.

Within this research study, a three step iterative process enabled the researcher to start conceptualising the issues (Anderson, 1990). Consistently reflecting on the data in this way, organising the data into themes, and trying to discover what it had to tell, enabled the researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeded. The responses to the three questions in the questionnaire were collated and typed (see Tables 6.1, 6.3 and 6.5). Then, each question was analysed, one at a time, and each repeated response was marked with a tick on the transcript (see Tables 6.2, 6.4 and 6.6). Where the principals clustered their responses became major themes for further investigation. Figure 5.5 describes this iterative process of data collection, analysis, interpretation and conclusions:

### ITERATIVE PROCESS OF DATA ANALYSIS



*Figure 5.5* Data collection, analysis, interpretation and conclusions

Upon completion of each round of individual interviews the audio tapes were transcribed. Then, the transcripts were attentively read to in order to learn from the principals' perspectives on their leadership of the school as a community. To do this effectively, it was necessary to listen twice to the tapes and re-read the transcripts, as each listening and reading provided new insights or developed pre-existing ones. This in some ways represented an attempt to make sense of the data in terms of the initial research 'problem', which was to explore the principals' understanding of 'community' as applied to Catholic primary schools and how they describe their leadership role for building it. From this initial engagement with the interview texts a series of categories was generated. This was to assist in scrutinising and shaping the conclusions which emerged from the data. Alongside these categories an "analytic memo" was made forging "a link between the concrete data or raw

evidence and more abstract, theoretical thinking” (Neuman, 2006, p. 464). Numerous categories emerged including:

- understandings: for example, of ‘community’, ‘partnership’, ‘Christ centred’
- practices: for example, ‘evangelisation’, ‘dialogue’, ‘relationships’
- roles: for example, ‘conflict’, ‘strong’, ‘stress’.

*Table 5.5 Sample of Coding Procedure*

<b>Text and Codes</b>	<b>Analytic Memo</b>	<b>Theme</b>
<p>“Well...you’re the ultimate decision maker. But the there’s also guidelines that have been handed down through the government which you need to follow. I think that the marrying of those two paths is not feasible, they’re not often aligned across the school because of the lack of centrality to decision making”</p> <p>(Code: <i>Role Conflict</i>)</p>	<p>Conflict between what does it mean to be the ultimate decision maker and yet at same time to have to follow government policy.</p>	<p>Strain around leadership expectations.</p>
<p>“I’m in the position now and I’m not certain just in my school here I’m not really certain of exactly what the CEO or the Director wants for this particular school. I’ve developed over the last six months or so, talking to people, my own personal style, I’m developing my own leadership perspective and where I think things should be going, and I’m assuming that’s in line with the directions and thoughts of the diocese.” (Code: <i>Strong role identity</i>)</p>	<p>Uncertain about system expectations for the school causes strain around clarifying role identity</p>	

Table 5.5 Sample of Coding Procedure (continued)

Text and Codes	Analytic Memo	Theme
“Church is a dilemma because I don’t think there’s a unified approach.”(Code: <i>Dilemma and role diffusion</i> )	Most principals looking to system for guidance and not turning to inner self, leading to stress	

By attaching code names to these categories, the researcher gradually became familiar with both the findings and what was missing. Through this process, the researcher was shaping a focus that was somehow definable and at least partly manageable. However, the researcher was mindful that every categorisation rendered some data visible while making the other invisible. Thus, while the large task of selecting and sorting data was a mechanical one, it was also an interpretive undertaking. Each time a piece of data was tagged as significant, omitted or moved somewhere else, a judgment was required as to what was being elevated or obscured in the process.

The researcher chose to read the data as if it were a series of parts to a ‘story’ on the leadership of Catholic primary school communities. Here it was assumed that the similarities and differences would make visible and absent through language and practice what is the familiar or taken-for-granted in the ‘story’ of Catholic primary school principals’ perspectives on community. This process would also highlight any contradictory perspectives. Here, it was important not to allow the analysis to mask the uncertainties, ambiguities and complexities of meaning as they were communicated through the voices of the participants.

In writing up case study research there is a responsibility placed on the researcher to provide a cohesive representation of the data (and hence the subject) with skill and integrity. One of the concerns for the researcher was how to study the perspectives of the participants, without resorting to individualising or rendering as a ‘problem’ (professional, personal, or otherwise) their experiences of leading the Catholic primary school community. However, this should not become a

preoccupation to create a tidy and cohesive representation. Here, the researcher took the advice of Richardson (2003) that “The ‘worded world’ never accurately, precisely, completely captures the studied world, yet we persist in trying” (p. 500). In trying to capture the “studied world”, the researcher detailed the key findings identified in each stage of the research study. Following a first-order interpretation of the data collected using a questionnaire in the exploration stage, the researcher identified both sociological and theological perspectives on community and leadership. The second-order interpretation of the interview data collected during the inspection stage enabled the researcher to move from codification to the identification of key themes. Finally, in order to gain a deeper appreciation of the story on the leadership of Catholic primary school communities, the researcher, through a third-order interpretation assigned theoretical significance to the research findings. In particular, this third-order interpretation was informed by theoretical developments in respect to community and leadership, as well as the root images of symbolic interactionism. Taking the advice of Anfara, Brown and Mangione (2002), the researcher provides an overview of the progressive interpretation of the data in Table 5.6.

*Table 5.6 Progressive Interpretation of the Research Data*

Progressive Interpretation of the Research Data				
1 <sup>st</sup> Order Interpretation (Questionnaire)		2 <sup>nd</sup> Order Interpretation (Individual interview and focus group)		3 <sup>rd</sup> Order Interpretation (Assertions informed by general theoretical significance)
Sociological	Theological	Coding	Themes	
Research Question 1:				
How do primary principals conceptualise the Catholic school as community?				
Welcome (2)	Worship (4)	United	Unity and common ground	Principals espouse as their sociological ideal the 'gemeinschaft' model of community
Caring (1)	Prayer/religious practice (1)	Common agreement	Witness to Catholic beliefs and practices	
Compassion (1)		Conflict		
Inclusive (1)	Partnership family, school, parish(1)	Difference	Embedded in the parish	
Warmth	Common goals/vision in mission of Catholic education (1)	Deep/ superficial community		Principals describe the reality of school life as a 'gesellschaft' model of community
Comfortable		Witness		
Team Work		Parental partnership	Parental partnership	
Trust		Regeneration		
Good discipline	Parish... sense of parish			
Accept differences				



<b>1<sup>st</sup> Order Interpretation</b> (Questionnaire)		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Order Interpretation</b> (Individual interview and focus group)	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Order Interpretation</b> (Assertions informed by general theoretical significance)
<b>Sociological</b>	<b>Theological</b>	<b>Coding</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Parental involvement Dialogue	Church – school working within the parish – united body Faith filled community Cross on building	Worship The parish Caring community Relationships Culture Non-problematic ideal of community Theological understanding of community	Principals suggest the possibility of a ‘personalist’ model of community

#### **Research Question 2:**

**How do principals conceptualise their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?**

Authentic communication (4)	Link parish / school together (4)	Time Evangelise	Leading through making time	Principals are immersed in a dominant industrial leadership model
Strong people focus & relationships(2)	Proud of Catholic faith (1)	Conversation Dialogue	Developing conversation, communication and dialogue	Principals suggest a desire to move beyond an industrial model of leadership
Open school to family life (2)	Live out the gospel (1)	Communication Church	Evangelisation	
Listen(1)	Catholic focus in newsletters	Jesus Christ	Limited theological understanding of Christian leadership	Principals provide gestures towards a personalist leadership model
Value people (1)	Articulate parish priest's vision	Scripture Role identity		
Welcome (1)	Develop as followers of Christ	Role expectations	Little appreciation of leading the learning community	
Shared vision (1)	Help all grow in God's love	Role formation Role conflict		
Empower (1)	Promote Catholicity	Dilemma and role confusion	Ambivalent in leadership style	
Inclusive (1)	Visible at all faith gatherings	Stress		
Lead by example (1)	Pastoral care programs	Strong / individualist leadership style		
Support the needy (1)	Develop real Christian			
Clear role descriptions				
Come together				

<b>1<sup>st</sup> Order Interpretation</b> (Questionnaire)		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Order Interpretation</b> (Individual interview and focus group)	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Order Interpretation</b> (Assertions informed by general theoretical significance)
<b>Sociological</b>	<b>Theological</b>	<b>Coding</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Know your community	atmosphere		
Encourage staff to build community			
Social events			
Empathise			
Guide, support, resource			
Affirm & delegate			
Team building			
Sense of humour			
Decide together			
Strong staff links			
Be highly developed spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, physically			

## 5.7 Rigour

The differences between positivist and the newer paradigms in social science research are clearly defined in “the extended controversy about validity” (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 178). Across all the paradigms, however, there is ongoing conflict and debate regarding what validity means, but in the end it is an issue of “what constitutes rigorous research” (p. 178). It is about rigour relating to both method and interpretation. In qualitative research, rigour is concerned with ensuring that the results adequately reflect or capture the reality being investigated. Rigour ensures a sufficient guarantee that the findings are authentic and can be trusted enough to be acted upon. However, the process of going beyond orthodox notions of validity to ensure rigour requires new techniques and concepts for obtaining and defining what is known to be “trustworthiness” and “authenticity” in the data (Bassey, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 158).

Trustworthiness in research is achieved through establishing an explicit relationship between the research methods chosen in a research study and the analytical/interpretative processes used by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The most important issue in this type of study is the integrity between the data collected and the final results. In order to achieve this integrity, the research must conform to a number of rules (Drew, Hardman, & Hart, 1996). The reader must clearly know what point of view drove the data collection, how the participating principals were chosen, the characteristics of the context or setting boundaries, the analytic constructs that guided the study and what specific data collection and analysis procedures were used.

The trustworthiness of this research study is also guaranteed by the methodology and interpretation, which are informed by the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. Research within the symbolic interactionist perspective aims to develop an understanding of the individual within the social setting. It makes no claim to find any universal law or generalised principle. Thus, this research study did not attempt to produce reliable material that could be generalised. The fact that the result of a qualitative study cannot be reproduced in another time and place does not discredit the original study; meanings do not always travel intact over time and between people (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1994). Given the lack of knowledge in the area being researched, it was important to have rich, descriptive data producing valuable insights for further research. Any discussion of generalisation of the findings would relate to the fit between the situation being studied and similar phenomena (Janesick, 2000, pp. 394-395).

Along with trustworthiness, rigour in research is also achieved by addressing concerns in the literature with respect to authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Authenticity is about whether or not the findings are faithful to the research data, so that in this case the principals or Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Lismore, can act upon them. One way to ensure this is through authenticity which can be achieved through clearly explaining the researcher's assumptions, relationship to participants, participant selection process and a description of the social context from which the data were collected (Merriam, 1998). It requires that all voices in the

data are represented and treated with “fairness” and balance (Lincoln & Guba, 2000, p. 180). Multiple sources of data collection also contribute to authenticity and dependability. Another strategy promoted in the literature is the “audit trail”, whereby the reader can follow the analysis and come to the same conclusions (Merriam, 1998; Olesen, 2000, p. 230).

Here, authenticity is linked to the avoidance of bias. The literature notes the issue of researcher bias, arising from “historical and geographic situatedness... personal investments in the research, various biases... choices of literature... and/or the ways in which they have avoided or suppressed certain points of view” (Gergen & Gergen, 2000, p. 1027). While the debate on how to avoid this bias and guarantee authenticity has not been finally resolved, there is agreement that it is about social responsibility and an ethics of enquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, pp. 32-33). Consequently, the researcher must be vigorously self-aware and vigilant about the effects of involvement in this kind of research. One way suggested in the literature to minimise bias and enhance validity is data triangulation (Silverman, 2001, p. 233). The inclusion of the questionnaires and a total of 12 individual interviews, as well as the focus group interview, tape recordings, notes and a research journal, contributed to this end. “Member checks” (Merriam, 1998) are integral to the process of establishing data credibility. In describing the way the interviews were set up and the kind of questioning used, member checks were an ongoing feature of the interview process. Transcribed data were given to the participants so they could check that their views were adequately captured.

Within this research study, the use of the individual interview method and non-directive questioning techniques also lessened the possibility of bias or the intrusion of preconceptions (R. Burns, 1997). The interviews were taken up with the participants’ views and experiences rather than the researcher’s and was specifically focused on the research questions. The researcher was, therefore constrained from bringing any subjective issues into the interviews. Every effort was made to ensure that the principals knew that there were no generically correct answers, but rather it was their perspectives on the questions that mattered. The participating principals were also encouraged to view the findings of this study as another step in the journey to gain greater understanding of an area of their work

that all principals appeared to be struggling with, and that no comparisons would be made between them.

## **5.8 Ethical Considerations**

Finally, the approach taken in this research needed to be guided by ethical principles that contributed to the trustworthiness of the data (Silverman, 2001). Given the nature of the study, this included a particular emphasis on a respectful, dialogic relationship between the researcher and participants (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). In this study the non-hierarchical and service model of relationship provided a unique opportunity for researcher and participants to work in partnership.

Hence, the approach to ethics underlying this research study took up the key ethical issues of freedom and respect for the participants, the researcher-participant relationship and the professional standards relating to data collection, storage and dissemination, as well as bias in the results (Merriam, 1998; Sarantakos, 1998). Given that there was some focus on the personal as well as professional lives of the participants, the research process was guided by strategies to ensure that there was no harm to persons participating in the study. In respect to the regional boundaries of this case study research, it was important to ensure there was negligible opportunity for “risk exposure and embarrassment, as well as loss of standing, employment, and self esteem” (Stake, 2000, p. 447). The participants were advised verbally and on their written informed consent form that they could withdraw from the study at any time with their confidentiality respected (Babbie, 2004). Further, each participant and school involved in the study were given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

It was also important that the researcher observe the guidelines for interviewing in such a way that the participants’ viewpoints were captured as fully and accurately as possible. This involved the researcher setting aside pre-existing assumptions and engaging with the principals’ accounts of their experience. This was particularly important in this research given the possible claim that the researcher may have had vested interests in the results of the study, or the sponsoring educational system may have been presented with evidence that does not fit with its current paradigm. This also involves the issue of power, which the researcher needed to

monitor carefully given any inadvertent use of power may have resulted in participants being exploited or deceived (Christians, 2000). All participants were given the opportunity to critically review the transcripts of their interviews to ensure accurate representation and the opportunity to shape the final results of the study consistent with their lived experience.

Ensuring the ethical integrity of the study also involved keeping raw and coded data in a secure location. In this study, the data were locked in a filing cabinet to which no other person was given access. Additionally, a commitment was made by the researcher to consult with the participants before publishing material from this study. The study was conducted according to the requirements of the Australian Catholic University Research Projects Ethics Committee which gave the required ethics approval (Appendix 6). Clearance and approval was then sought from the Director of Catholic Schools, Diocese of Lismore, for access to the principals. Hence, every safeguard was adopted to ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of this research study.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

The purpose of this research study was to explore how rural Catholic primary school principals understand and reconstruct their community leadership role. This chapter provided a description of the methodological choices that best respond to this research problem. Firstly, it outlined the choice of case study as the orchestrating framework for this research study. Secondly, it detailed the two-stage research design of exploration and inspection that involved multiple qualitative research methods. In addition, this chapter outlined the process for selecting participants, the role of the researcher and how the data were collected and organised. Further, it detailed the three-step iterative approach to interpretation that moves from the meaning ascribed by participants in the research study through codification and identification of themes to the assignment of theoretical significance to the research findings. Finally, this chapter addressed the important issues of trustworthiness and ethics, with the steps taken to ensure their integral places in the research study. The following chapter displays the data gathered by this research design.

## **CHAPTER 6      DISPLAY OF THE DATA**

### **6.1      Introduction**

This chapter seeks to display the data gathered by the various research methods used in this research study. This display of data reflects the two research questions.

**Research Question 1:**            **“How do primary principals conceptualise the Catholic school as community?”**

**Research Question 2:**            **“How do principals describe their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?”**

In order to guide the reader through this chapter, the data are displayed under the headings of “exploration” and “inspection”. These headings reflect the two stages found in a symbolic interactionist approach to research (Charon, 2001, p. 208). Within this research study, the exploration stage involved the researcher in collating the data and providing a general description of the research site, as well as identifying specific issues for further investigation. Within this exploration stage, the researcher engaged a “first-order interpretation” (Neuman, 2006, p. 160) of the data with the intention of learning more about the research problem from the meaning ascribed by the principals who participated in this research study. A second stage, the inspection stage, focussed on the specific issues identified in the exploration stage and involved the researcher in identifying key coded elements and, eventually, themes within the data. This inspection stage involved a “second-order interpretation” of the data, as the researcher looked for underlying coherence or sense of meaning in the individual and focus group interview data. The steps involved in both the exploration and inspection stages of this research study were outlined in Table 5.4.

## 6.2 Exploration Stage

As discussed in Chapter 5, an open-ended questionnaire provided all primary school principals within the Diocese of Lismore the opportunity to express their understandings of the Catholic primary school as community. This questionnaire included three questions (see Appendix 1). The responses to the three items included in this questionnaire are displayed and analysed in Tables 6.1 – 6.6.

Table 6.1 presents a collation of the principals' responses to the first question in the questionnaire. This question focuses on the meaning the principals ascribed to the concept of the Catholic school as community.

*Table 6.1 Principals' Responses to Item 1 on the Questionnaire*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Describe your understandings of community in a Catholic Primary School?</b>
1	Worship Celebration Working together as a team- professional and personally.
2	Cross on building Near the church People <u>gather</u> at church and school Caring staff Good discipline Inclusive of all Staff listen to others, parents, children.
3	Gathering of people; staff, students and parents in school events are part of the visual signs of community. There are the hidden signs that manifest through actions. Positive and (negative) interactions between people; willingness to participate and the reflective nature that affirms and moves the community forward are key elements that denote community.
4	Warmth extended to newcomers. Welcoming – and making new members feel comfortable and want to add/become involved with the school initially and the parish community.
5	Parish ... sense of Parish. Church – school working within the Parish. United body. Faith filled community group.



Table 6.1 *Principals' Responses to Item 1 on the Questionnaire (continued)*

Participant	Describe your understandings of community in a Catholic Primary School?
6	<p>All are welcome</p> <p>We are proud to identify as Catholic and engage in Catholic practices, teachings and symbols and invite the school community to also participate in.</p> <p>Catholics within the school</p> <p>The Catholics that work in the school are hopefully members of the worshipping community.</p> <p>Prayer and religious practices are valued</p>
7	<p>Trust, compassion and commitment to assisting all members of community on their personal and shared faith journey.</p> <p>Regular celebrations of our Catholic beliefs.</p>
8	Nil Response
9	Nil Response
10	Nil Response
11	<p>Partnerships of family, school and parish</p> <p>Common goals in their mission of Catholic Education (deciding values and mission)</p> <p>Dialogue – ongoing</p> <p>Celebration of each step</p>
12	Nil response
13	<p>Christianity/love</p> <p>Compassion</p> <p>Care and encouragement of the growth of others.</p>
14	<p>Welcoming</p> <p>Accepting of differences</p> <p>Inclusive</p> <p>Prayer and worship are vital aspects of life</p> <p>Pastoral</p> <p>Religious education is given top priority</p> <p>Staff are united; have common vision</p> <p>Parental involvement</p> <p>Parish family school relationship</p>
15	<p>Value the dignity of the individual/inclusive</p> <p>Shared understanding that the teachings of Jesus Christ lead to a fulfilling and successful life.</p> <p>Shared belief in the significance of the Eucharist in bringing us together and sustaining us in life. (While I believe this is an authentic characteristic of a Catholic Primary School seeking to be a community, all members are at various levels of understanding this concept).</p> <p>Understand that we all learn together and support each other.</p>

The raw responses identified in Table 6.1 can be grouped into two key categories: sociological and theological. This is consistent with previous discussions in the literature review (Chapter 3), where it was highlighted that the concept of community within Church organisations may be positioned within two perspectives, namely, theological (Ratzinger, 2005) and sociological (Kenny, 1999; Ife, 1999). It, therefore, seemed appropriate that the principals' responses to research question number one align with these two categories (Table 6.2). It was expected that this first-order interpretation would facilitate deeper insights rather than definitive answers.

*Table 6.2 Principals' Responses to Item 1 on the Questionnaire by Key Sociological and Theological Categories.*

<b>Sociological</b>	<b>Theological</b>
Welcome ✓✓	Worship (celebrations) ✓✓✓✓
Caring ✓	Prayer and religious practice ✓
Compassion ✓	Partnership family, school, parish✓
Inclusive ✓	Common goals/vision in mission of Catholic education ✓
Warmth	Parish...sense of parish
Comfortable	Church – school working within the parish – united body
Team work	Faith filled community
Trust	Cross on building
Good discipline	Near the church
Accept differences	People gather at church and school
Parental involvement	Pastoral
Dialogue	Christianity/ love

Table 6.2 provides responses to question one in the questionnaire under the two categories of 'sociological' and 'theological'. If a key point had more than one response it is noted with a tick (✓). This first-order interpretation suggests that the principals identified both sociological and theological understandings of the Catholic primary school as community. However, it was unclear whether there was a clear

distinction in the minds of the principals between the sociological and theological categories. The spread of responses also suggests a lack of shared understanding or consensus among the principals as to what constitutes the Catholic primary school as community. These initial interpretations were further explored with the principals during the inspection stage of the research study.

Item two on the questionnaire focussed on the principals' perspectives regarding building community in primary schools. Table 6.3 displays the collated responses to this item.

*Table 6.3 Principals' Responses to Item 2 on the Questionnaire*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>How do principals exercise leadership in building the Catholic primary school as community?</b>
1	Shared vision Team building Identifying practical specific community building activities that we do and implementing new ways of doing the same.
2	Communication with community Listen to all Empathises with children and parents Welcome all Promote Catholicity
3	Provision of opportunity to develop as followers of Christ. Principals promote the personal intention, whether it be through personal or professional focuses that create a positive morale. Guiding, supporting, providing resources and giving authentic feedback demonstrate genuine interest by the principal. This interest is valued by the community and it responds accordingly.
4	One of the most important jobs of a principal is to make the school environs _ "inclusive". Many approaches are recommended but I believe social events – BBQ/ morning teas/dinner meetings include not only parents into the school community but also extended family and friends. Feeling comfortable within the community ensures principals have support.
5	Help bring "Parish" together as "one". Strong sense of vision, purpose and mission – clear role descriptions.

Participant	How do principals exercise leadership in building the Catholic primary school as community?
6	<p>Being seen to be part of the community</p> <p>Provide opportunities for the community to come together to celebrate, learn, review and achieve together</p> <p>Try to encourage staff to be part of building the school community</p> <p>Getting to know your community.</p>

Table 6.3 *Principals' Responses to Item 2 on the Questionnaire (continued)*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>How do principals exercise leadership in building the Catholic primary school as community?</b>
7	Being there (not just open door) in the midst of the mess and the joys with our staff, students and families. Follow/lead by example Overt weekly catholic editorial focus in our newsletters. Try to see those in need and quietly offer to walk with them or provide assistance or direct appropriate personnel to walk with them.
8	Strong people focus Warm welcoming atmosphere People feel valued and welcome Good communication with community informed of school life Parish Mass attendances with children at week day Masses LAP programs Local community program involvement going out of the local school Also planning that includes community and parish in projects, eg spiritual/environment.
9	Liaison with different faith groups Articulating the Parish Priest's vision to staff and students. Promoting social justice/underling how we live out the gospel. Being proud of tradition, success and identity of the Catholic Faith
10	Being visible at all faith gatherings Developing a real Christian atmosphere on staff not a surface one – care/concern/forgiveness/encouragement. Opening the school to family life.
11	Living Christian values themselves Developing positive relationships with students, staff and parents Linking and networking with Parish and community Verbalising priorities, verbalising faith Giving affirmation
12	Delegating responsibilities that help others have ownership and take initiative Being positive in the face of difficulties – valuing others Being a person of hope, believing in the good. Having a sense of humour Being honest authentic and genuine in interaction with all.

*Table 6.3 Principals' Responses to Item 2 on the Questionnaire (continued)*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>How do principals exercise leadership in building the Catholic primary school as community?</b>
13	In everything they do, ask staff to do, invite parents to do, model for students In all they write, speak In deciding their priorities (personal) In deciding with parents their priorities In deciding with staff their priorities The celebration we all participate in By living that sense of community.
14	By being an equal part in the community By inviting people to be involved By listening By being available By making people feel a sense of worth in the everyday functions of the school By empowering all members of the school community.
15	Being open and empathic with children and adults Being alert to and aware of the needs of those in our community Caring about their welfare and growth and taking action to help them grow in God's love.
16	Developing strong staff links Effective communication strategies Create opportunities for family participation in school social, academic and liturgical Kinder induction program ongoing then throughout infants years Provide parent education and support sacramental programs parenting Pastoral care programs for children and families Share 'good news' stories Welcoming rituals Try to link Parish and school when ever possible Reach out to local community.
17	By giving witness to their faith in word and deed. Communicate a vision for the school that empowers others. Clearly communicate the role and purpose of Catholic School and expectations we have of our members. By being spiritually emotionally intellectually and physically "intelligent". (Have highly developed capacities in these domains).

As with Item 1 of the questionnaire, the raw data in response to Item 2 of the questionnaire were also categorised in terms of the two key categorises of sociological and theological. Table 6.4 categorises the data according to these categories and if a key point had more than one response it is noted with a tick (✓).

*Table 6.4 Principals' Responses to Item 2 on the Questionnaire by Key Sociological and Theological Categories*

<b>Sociological</b>	<b>Theological</b>
Authentic communication✓✓✓✓	Link parish/school together ✓✓✓✓
Strong people focus & relationships✓✓	Proud of Catholic faith✓
Open school to family life✓✓	Live out the gospel✓
Listen✓	Catholic focus in newsletters
Value people✓	Articulate Parish Priest's vision
Welcome✓	Develop as followers of Christ
Shared vision✓	Help all grow in God's love
Empower✓	Promote Catholicity
Inclusive✓	Visible at all faith gatherings
Lead by example✓	Pastoral care programs
Support the needy✓	Develop real Christian atmosphere
Clear role descriptions	
Come together	
Know your community	
Encourage staff to build community	
Social events	
Empathise	
Guide, support, resource	
Affirm and delegate	
Team building	
Sense of humour	
Decide together	
Strong staff links	
Be highly developed spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, physically	

Consistent with responses to research question one, the spread of responses suggests that there was no shared understanding or consensus among the principals about their role in building community within the Catholic primary school. Moreover, it appears that the platform from which they appeared to construct community leadership was heavily weighted to the sociological understandings and

the principals seemed to have limited theological understandings of their leadership role in building community.

Table 6.5 provides the principals' responses to Item 3 in the questionnaire. This question was designed to elicit concerns regarding the Catholic primary school as community and community leadership. This question was considered important to broaden data beyond responses to the first two questionnaire items.

*Table 6.5 Principals' Responses to Item 3 on the Questionnaires*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>What other comments would you like to make about Community and Catholic Primary Schools?</b>
1	Actions speak louder than words-we must do what we proclaim we do.
2	My school has a high number of non-catholic – 40% Evangelising is priority Catechesis is necessary High percent of non-Catholics produces apathy from some children - this would come from their parents.
3	Community is made-up of people and it is the people that respond to each other that develop the community.
4	In the wider community –they (parents/potential members) perceive Catholic Schools as places where children are genuinely respected, cared for and where discipline is instilled.
5	Importance of vision– direction
6	Nil Response
7	We exist <b>not</b> to be different, but to make <b>the</b> difference in the personal and communal Catholic faith/spiritual journeys of our community.
8	Most projects today need to be community based to be ongoing sustainable.
9	Nil response
10	Community is eroded by stressed parents and staff Genuine care and concerns for individuals and groups builds community.
11	Each community is different due to the many differences between the members and their life experiences The secret is to work with what is there and enjoy the journey.
12	The Catholic School community is fast becoming the central element of the Parish community and the principal is seen as the Community Leader as the Parish Priest was 30-40 years ago.



*Table 6.5 Principals' Responses to Item 3 on the Questionnaires (continued)*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>What other comments would you like to make about Community and Catholic Primary Schools?</b>
13	At the core of every authentic Catholic Primary School should be/is community based on love respect and growth in the knowledge of God.
14	Without community there is no life in a Catholic school setting.
15	We do not build community for the sake of having a community. Being a community is a means to an end. We want people to feel they belong to a group that enhances and develops the four domains of our being – spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical. In schools we can only grow to the best of our ability when we are all working together. The principal is the Key person in bringing this community together.

Again the responses in Table 6.6 are categorised according to sociological and theological categories. If a key point had more than one response, it is noted with a tick (✓).

*Table 6.6 Principals' Responses to Item 3 on the Questionnaire by Key Sociological and Theological Categories*

<b>Sociological</b>	<b>Theological</b>
Care ✓	Evangelising a priority
Respect ✓	Catechesis is necessary
People make community	Non-Catholic parents produce apathy
Do what we proclaim	Make difference in faith/spirituality
Discipline	School central element of parish
Vision	Principal taking on role of Parish Priest
Eroded by stressed parents/staff	Growth in knowledge of God
Differences	
Work with what is and enjoy	
Love	
Community is life of school	
Community means to an end	
Working together	
Principal is the key to community coming together	

The apparent lack of a shared understanding or consensus identified in the responses to questions one and two seems more pronounced in question three. As noted previously, in Table 6.4, the sociological responses appear far more extensive than the theological responses and this interpretation led the researcher to question why this was so. Moreover, in including this question, the researcher had expected the principals to comment about problems associated with building community in a Catholic primary school. The literature (Cranston, Ehrich & Billot, 2003; Scott, 2003) highlights the difficulties that exist in school community leadership. However, the principals' did not raise this concern during the exploration stage.

Beyond these issues, the researcher was also alerted to an unanswered question in respect to learning. Given theoretical developments in respect to the integration of the theories of community and leadership, it was surprising that the data appeared virtually silent on this development, as the principals did not promote the idea of the school as a learning community. Further, the researcher was interested in gaining further understanding of the principals' perspectives on the place of the Catholic primary school as a Church entity and its role in the Church's mission of evangelisation (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997). With these issues and thoughts in mind the researcher moved into stage two of inspection.

### **6.3 Inspection Stage**

The inspection stage involved individual interviews (Tables 5.1) with six principals followed by a focus group interview (Table 5.2) with these principals. Data gathered in this stage allowed the researcher to investigate the issues identified in the exploration stage of the research study. In this inspection stage, the researcher engaged a second-order interpretation with the intention of identifying the underlying coherence or sense of meaning in the interview data. This inspection stage involved codification of the data and the identification of themes emerging from the data. In the section that follows, the themes identified in this inspection stage are identified around the two research questions.

**Research Question 1:            “How do primary principals conceptualise the Catholic school as community?”**

The data collected during the inspection stage resulted in the researcher identifying five themes in respect to the conceptualisation of the Catholic school as community. These themes include *unity and common ground, witness to Catholic beliefs and practices, embedded in parish, care and parental partnership*.

### **Theme One: Unity and Common Ground**

Principals' responses in the inspection stage suggested the importance of "unity" (Elise) and "common ground" (Elise) in their conceptualisation of community. The individual interviews revealed a number of principals asserting that real community involved like minded people. Denise was quite clear that the staff and principal have to be of one mind. Bruce believed that staff, parents and principal have to want that unity of mind:

If you're pulling together as a staff with the one goal and the one focus in mind, then that makes community a lot easier. (Bruce)

Yes. Well yes, but I think you've got to believe it too, and I think the staff, the parents have got to want it and believe it too and you work together to achieve that. (Bruce)

The questionnaire responses suggested a strong press for a clear and non problematic 'ideal' of the Catholic primary school as community. The individual interviews confirmed this interpretation. This clear and non problematic ideal was captured in Albert's reporting of how he describes his school to new parents:

So, we say, "Well, this is what St. Ambrose's is all about and this is how we go about things and this is what we do. If you'd like to be part of our community, by all means come on board, but you come into the community with an understanding that this is what it is all about. Once you become part of the community, you start to contribute and through that we have interactions and we develop experiences". (Albert)

Other principals, like Bruce, also portrayed a positive understanding of community in regard to their schools:

But to me I'm still positive with it because I still think there are lots of ways we can touch it [community] and we chip away at it, and that the

little miracles that we see are evidence of that. You've just got to hold onto that. (Bruce)

Later within the focus group interview, the principals again identified positive attitudes to the development of the Catholic primary school as community:

Then I think you can say that the use of that concept, it's got problems but it's not problematic, you know? (Charles)

Here, there seemed to be general agreement with this statement implying a non problematic 'ideal' of the Catholic primary school as community. However, the principals now started to identify the problems associated with making this 'ideal' a reality. During their discussion, Gordon made a very strong statement that he would have to disassociate himself from any view that community was a clear and unambiguous concept in regard to his principalship. He stated that:

I would like to raise my hand and say I am not sure what community means in regard to schools and I am struggling with making sense of it. I would like help to understand it and find ways to be a better builder of it. It is problematic for me. (Gordon)

This statement by Gordon led to a strong response from Albert. Here, Albert reiterated his claim that the concept of community was a non problematic 'ideal'. However, later, he conceded that there were problems in making this ideal a reality:

I don't think it makes it problematic at all. I think what it does for the leadership of the school, it straightens the focus. If you're a football team and you like to play a game, you've got a whole heap of players who are not very good at passing and kicking the ball, so you work with them in a very proactive way to improve their skill and knowledge about the strategies of the game, hence to improve their participation in the game. And I think as a Catholic school that's a major part of our role too – the evangelisation of our non-Catholic families and to revitalise our non-practising Catholic families through the paces of our Catholic practice to try and energise and encourage and pass on the word of Christ that enables them to participate more fully in their own lives and hopefully within the Eucharistic life that we try and provide. But I think the essential component to that is the leadership, and we're talking about teachers who are maybe not practicing, may not have the heart to it as such. (Albert)

There's lots of issues relating around how we monitor and supervise and criticise, give feedback to the players who are running the game, that is our teachers, and it is problematic for rural Australia where the resources and the personnel and the attraction to those areas may not be as good...and until we work on those areas these particular concepts will always be a bit of a problematic component, problematic for the building of community, it's problematic for the people to have the skills to maintain in the building of that community. (Albert)

There was general agreement within the focus group interview regarding Albert's statement. For these principals, the 'ideal' of the Catholic primary school as community was in the first instance non problematic. Despite problems with making this 'ideal' a reality, it was believed that these problems could be overcome with a good "game plan".

Hence, the data suggest that principals appeared to be determined to maintain a belief in a non problematic understanding of community, despite any problems they were encountering. However, this view was contested in the focus group interview and it would seem that with sufficient critical reflection principals may be prepared to engage more openly with the problems they are experiencing in building community. The data also suggest that both unity and common ground are not easily achieved. Elise identified that it is very hard to find unity in a school around common beliefs:

There's so many diverse ways of thinking and different spiritualities and different measures of where people are in their own story that it is hard to find unity in schools. (Elise)

It's very hard to find common ground. People actually don't care any more, whereas once upon a time the authority of the Church or the head clergy person in the church – Brother, Sister, whatever – would never be challenged. (Elise)

Surprisingly, the issue of conflict did not arise in the responses to the questionnaire, or in the focus groups. It would seem that the commitment to unity and the struggle to problematise community may inhibit principals' mind sets around conflict. Further, given the variety of differences identified in the data among parents, teachers and the Church, it would be expected that conflict would have been identified as a substantial issue. However, conflict and community were not major issues for the

principals. Albert was the only principal to name conflict as something to be expected, given the precious reality of the children who were the core of school life:

School community is full of conflict and is full of discussion and negotiation, because we're very heavily focused on children and they're a precious commodity that we're working with. (Albert)

Charles, on the other hand, thought that it was a sign of a good community that he did not have too much conflict or strife:

I think we've got a pretty good community here, and we don't have too much strife, but it's a battle to maintain things that way. (Charles)

Conflict is open, resolved and then people move on. (Charles)

Frank concurred with Charles, insofar as the Catholic nature of the school meant that people could be different:

What are things that you need to make it a Catholic school community? Certainly you need a loving, safe place, which is what you've said, a place where people can feel like they can come and present themselves and all the diversity in their lives. (Frank)

It is worth noting that, despite Albert's appreciation of the role of conflict in community, there were limits to how much he would tolerate. Albert tells parents that this is the way things are done in his school, he will listen and try to help them, but if they don't like it, then his advice is that they reconsider why they are in that school:

And that's where the conflict comes in. It's the old case, in the school sense, of the parent who comes in and is unhappy with this and that, when really, I mean okay, you're there for them, you listen, you try and help, but when it comes down to it, basically this is what we're on about, we're a Catholic school and if you can't work along those lines, well really, what are you doing here? (Albert)

Overall, the data suggest that the principals struggled with moving beyond a non-problematic ideal of community characterised by simple understandings of unity and

common ground. It appeared to the researcher that this struggle is embedded in a difficulty relating to their sociological and theological conceptualisations of community as applied to Catholic schools. Overall, the data indicated, at first glance, that both the questionnaire (Tables 6.1 - 6.6) and the initial individual interview responses identified this difficulty. The researcher repeatedly noted in his journal the difficulties principals experienced in responding to questions around sociological and theological understandings of community and the considerable probing it required.

This difficulty appeared to be more noticeable when it came to the principals' theological understandings of community. Here, continued probing revealed very impoverished responses. This was best highlighted in the interview with Denise. Denise's first response as to why there is community in Catholic schools was because it provided the optimum atmosphere for students to learn:

Again, it comes back to that feeling of belonging. They feel they belong here, so they are happy to be there, and if people are happy and feel they belong and feel safe and secure in that environment, then you're creating the best atmosphere for them to learn in. (Denise)

Later, after much prompting, Denise said it was because Catholic schools are centred upon Christ and this meant for her that the school should behave in the same way Christ acted towards people:

Because Christ was about looking after everyone, wasn't he? I mean the philosophy of our Catholic religion is based on Christ, who was a caring person who looked after the marginalised and who was a person who established family himself almost with the Apostles and his friends. Most of the stories are based on that. So therefore that's our roots, that's where it should come from as a school, and if we're encouraging and looking after families, which we must be, because we're taking these children into our Catholic school community, so if we're doing that, then if we're not a family ourselves as a staff, what are we about? (Denise)

The centre of our faith is Christ, how he lived and behaved, and, to me, that's where our Church has come from. Everyone has different ways of coming to terms with it, but the belief in Christ as the centre, that should never, ever change, and I believe that's where our schools come from. (Denise)

While there was a theological basis to her conceptualisation of community, Denise did not access it without strong probing. However, when she did go to the theological foundation of community there appeared to be a lack of breadth and depth in her statements. There was no evidence of engaging with a 'communio' theology as an extension of her belief that Christ is the centre of Catholic schools. Nor could she simply or clearly articulate the nexus between her beliefs and the nature of school as community.

However, closer analysis of the data suggest a significant conceptual development here regarding the nexus between beliefs and the nature of school as community. Unlike the other respondents, Albert used relational, interpersonal and theological language, in an integrated way, to describe why there is community in Catholic schools. He started with some general comments about "fellowship" with everybody sharing and "exploring" the same philosophy and thoughts, specifically in regard to learning.

The sense of community comes from interaction and comes from the fellowship and the purpose of the gathering often dictates the type of community. (Albert)

We all share the same philosophies and thoughts so we come together to share in exploring and developing those thoughts and philosophies, and I think that's a purpose thing, that's why we have a community. The Catholic school community in particular is guided by the beliefs of learning. (Albert)

Later, in response to considerable probing by the researcher, he took up his previous conceptualisation of community and placed it strongly within a Christian religious explanation that embraced the scriptural elements of the "mystery of Christ" and the "Resurrection".

We have community to celebrate the Christian story as a Catholic school community, focused on the Catholic tradition and way of life, which is like a common thread coming through the whole community. The story is about relationship and our focus on the mystery of Christ, and I think that the whole Resurrection story is part of our daily life; the walking with



Christ along the way is very much who we are, and our relationship with each other is based upon that whole principle. (Albert)

In the focus group interview, Albert extended his previous explanation on why there is community in Catholic schools by making an anthropological assertion that to be human is to be communal:

So then I started thinking, well why am I building community...We're communal beings, so we have to feel we belong somewhere. (Albert)

Also, in the focus group interview, Hayley extended Albert's thoughts by conceptualising community around the integration of relational and theological concepts. She said that community was about relationships, which in a Christian context is about the Holy Spirit and the Trinity:

When I see relationship, I think of Spirit. To me in the Trinity that's part of how I interpret Spirit in community. (Hayley)

Hence, the data suggested that principals do not easily conceptualise community sociologically or theologically. The strong beliefs which principals hold about community were not accessed easily and revealed impoverished understandings. However, two principals extended their strong relational and personal approaches to community by integrating them with theological categories. This conceptualisation appeared to be a promising development for understanding community in a Catholic school.

The principals' commitment to unity, common ground, being of one mind and minimal conflict appeared to suggest a form of community that is ideal. Further, in the course of this research study, the principals also identified four additional themes in respect to the Catholic school as community. These themes included witness to Catholic beliefs and practices, embedded in parish and Catholic practice, care and parental partnership. Yet, each of these themes spoke to a 'reality' that was contrary to this ideal of unity and common ground.

### **Theme Two: Witness to Catholic beliefs and practices**

Here, the principals were of the view that teachers and parents giving personal “witness” (Gordon) to Catholic beliefs and practices is integral to their understanding of the Catholic school as community. Bruce stated it this way:

It’s more than a job, it’s got to be a witness where teachers see themselves as being on about the vision of the Church and the culture of the Church. That comes from their faith and that they are committed, not only just to turning up to teaching or whatever, but they are committed to the Catholic faith. Because really, if you haven’t got that, and you don’t see it as a sense of commitment, I don’t know how far you’re going to go really. (Bruce)

However, it was the absence of witness that appeared to cause many problems with calling the school a Catholic community. In particular, they noted problems associated with changing attitudes among teachers and parents toward the Catholic Church and what this did to the community nature of schools.

Elise said it was hard to find unity in her school because of what she called “creep”:

It is creep, rather than wholesale, but if you don’t confront them in some way, then more creep will occur. (Elise)

I think sometimes in formulating our vision and our policy we’re numbing the edges and taking away the Catholic part of it. We’re building a good Christian community here, you know? (Elise)

Confirming this thought, Albert saw this “creep” occurring among teachers in his school:

I think that as the society develops and some people would argue Catholic schools are becoming more secular. I think that the role of the Catholic school teacher is also a little bland. We have the nice rhetoric perspective. Staff members, and even our middle-aged ones, may agree to that perspective, but their lived action doesn’t represent it. (Albert)

Catholic teachers may have differing attitudes to the sense of the Eucharist. (Albert)

In the focus group interview, Albert again took up this issue that teachers were not where they should be with commitment to the Catholic faith. He believed this was a central problem for the school as community because teachers are expected to be leaders, yet some seem to have no heart for the Catholic faith and do not practise it.

Moreover, younger teachers coming through seem to have limited world views, reflecting a lack of knowledge:

And we're talking about teachers who are maybe not practising, may not have the heart for it as such. (Albert)

Yes, young people, some of the people you interview, you go, "God, wish they'd get a life. Wish they'd do something," a lot of the young teachers. The interest area in the greater world is not there. ...If you ask them their views on aspects of perhaps what the Church, where it could go, they can't answer you. Their views on social justice, they haven't got any views and that's at the core of what we are about. (Albert)

According to Gordon, he is working with some young teachers who have minimal knowledge and appreciation of Church tradition, as well as a lack of 'heart relationship' to the Catholic Church:

But a lack of knowledge behind some of the young teachers coming through there is a reality that there is no lived experience that goes with their knowledge. (Gordon)

In a similar vein, Bruce described a more 'wary relationship' with staff regarding their involvement in 'out of school hour' liturgical activities. This change of staff attitude to school liturgical activities was reported by several principals. Bruce put it this way:

Now I find myself saying, "It would be great if people could turn up," do you know what I mean? Because if you say, "You've got to turn up," you turn them off. (Bruce)

Gordon was deeply concerned that both teachers and parents are not providing the witness that is so influential in the development of the Catholic school as community:

I mean the classic is the Eucharistic Sacramental program, three teachers in our place are working on a parallel program with the Parish, and they tell the children how important it is to attend Mass and but they never go themselves. So you've got that sort of double standard perspective. So we're talking about the Catholic community, school as Catholic community, we have the appropriate symbols and rituals and such, but maybe the witness component, which we all say is so powerful

in reaching the children isn't there. It's not in their parents either. (Gordon)

Yet, these thoughts of Albert, Bruce and Gordon regarding the teachers are treated in a more qualified way by the other principals:

I don't agree with you those teachers increasingly having no heart for faith matters, I think they do, except their faith journey is a different one to what we have. I think God's revelation may be different to them but it's still, I don't think the Holy Spirit's gone away. They might have a different understanding but I don't think they've got no heart. (Hayley)

And who are we to comprehend what's in a person's heart or soul? They certainly should be centred on Christ, but the expression of that mightn't be through a Church. (Ivan)

This contestation around whether the schools can be called Catholic communities was also raised in terms of parents. Albert described the parents at St. Alban's school as virtually disassociated from the Catholic Church:

I think that sense of affirmation or sense of involvement from the parent community may have changed a bit. (Albert)

I think that when we're dealing with an unchurched group of families that has implications for the community in terms of trying to ensure that we have a whole philosophy that's enacted both at school and at home, and not just provided with lip service. (Albert)

Minimal, if you look at three hundred people turning up to Mass on a Saturday night and there are only eight or nine children walking around from a primary school perspective, I think that in a school of six hundred kids, that's awful. (Albert)

Catholic schools are getting away from their essential ethos. The reason why we're here is to provide support to Catholic families in terms of the Catholic faith. (Albert)

Where once we may have been more supportive, now we're the originators rather than the supporters. (Albert)

Denise reflected the views of most principals interviewed. She acknowledged that the Catholic parents are virtually completely disconnected from the Church, which makes it hard to implement the mission of the Church in the school. She also stated that almost 40% of the parents are not Catholic, with presumably no connection to the Catholic Church. Denise reflected an almost quiet desperation regarding

engaging parents around the main purposes of Catholic schooling. Yet, she believed that that this lack of engagement doesn't substantially affect the sense of community:

The parents are totally disconnected. They seem to have their parents' old beliefs, but they haven't developed from there and they're applying them in the wrong context to a whole new world. (Denise)

Church doesn't have relevance for a lot of the people now because they're so caught up in making a living, having some relaxation and family involvement. They don't see that there's another side to what we're doing. So it's a very difficult thing, and I think the disenfranchised Catholics are making it harder to get that message. Keep in mind as well that we have about 38-40% parents who are not Catholic. (Denise)

I just don't know how you would get through to them because they're not coming to the Church...when I talk with them the caring aspect is considered and whenever I've hear people talk about Catholic schools it's been about how they do nurture the children, and moral education and things like that. (Denise)

But no, it doesn't affect the sense of community in the school, you work on it in small doses, because we believe that we're there as the Catholic school to help all our people. (Denise)

Bruce also affirmed this view and suggested that parents are "lost". However, he then went on to say that the parents' relationships with the Church can be regenerated over time:

I think parents are lost. Along the journey they get lost. They have children and then send them to school. Over the years they have bad experiences and that sort of thing. But you see a growth again and that's where you can go hand in hand with them to see that growth regenerated again. (Bruce)

Frank and Denise gave the following insights as to why many of the Catholic parents were disaffected from the Church:

Quite a number of parents I think have got their old fears, having been separated from the Church for whatever reason. A lot of them are personal reasons or having old ideas, antiquated ideas about the Church. (Frank)

You know the same old thing you hear. And it's interesting, I don't know why it is but they do harbour these things and they're frightened to talk about it or what, but a lot of them haven't come to terms. (Denise)

Well some have had bad experiences from the past, about half and half I'd say. I mean it was strict, but I haven't heard of any majorly bad experiences. (Denise)

Charles also identified another issue whereby parents are placing a strain on the witness required for community:

I also believe that our parents are more educated and more, say, committed but more articulate in what they want for their kids, not necessarily Church-related. (Charles)

Elise also believed it would be a big mistake to take for granted that parents are sending their children to Catholic schools for the same reasons that the schools exist:

I think the big mistake we make is that we take it for granted that parents are clear about "why" they choose our schools, and what they think we are on about. I really think that's where we've got to go; if it makes sense, evangelise a whole lot better. (Elise)

The complexity around the capacity of parents' to meet the expectations for witness as espoused by the principals was further developed in the focus group interview. Here, a cumulative effect of parents' disaffection from the Church, their lack of understanding regarding the purpose of Catholic schools and the impact of the secular culture was identified as a substantial challenge to the community leadership of Catholic schools. Hayley explained this by way of a recent example from her school:

I'll just quote an example, with the changing family structures and changing Church structures and changing school structures, and I think that's been layered over the last two decades and has substantial impact on our purpose. We had a Year Camp last week and I remember Camps in a Catholic school, where one of the things that you did when you went away was meet people and interact with people and put up with the people that you didn't like in the cabin and you had your liturgies. I've had an influx of parents complaining about their child not getting the

cabin they wanted, and I met with each one of the thirteen parents and in dialoguing with them, they've got one child or two children, and they're so insular on their child now and their Y Generation needs that that whole feeling I had growing up in a Catholic school of what a Retreat was or what a Camp was, is very different in a parent's eyes in some ways, and it made me think here's the next wave of change coming. That's what I felt like. (Hayley)

But it just made me question after I'd gone through a few conversations with parents, and you know, twenty years ago if the parent was talking to a Principal in a school about an issue, there was a different understanding of the Catholic philosophy, and I found I was actually explaining it to the parents as, you know, this is part of the Eucharistic community, that we're together, that we accept one another, and it's not about 'I get my own way'. Everything then seemed to be okay until the list of buses came out and they weren't happy then! I just think it's another change, probably a little one, but significant. (Hayley)

It was this complexity around parents' witness to the beliefs underpinning Catholic schooling which led Charles to first raise the question as to whether "deep" or "superficial" communities existed in Catholic schools:

Things like School Forums are great. They're good and they get people in, but are they just superficial community or are they deep spiritual communities, I don't know. (Charles)

While he raised the question in the context of spirituality, it nonetheless went to the heart of a range of concerns raised by the principals. It could be implied from the data that the principals idealised community as being "deep", but struggled with the reality of the lack of depth which they regularly encountered. In the individual interviews, the principals confirmed and extended the researcher's earlier interpretation based on responses to the questionnaire that there are both sociological and theological perspectives to community. During the interviews, the principals took these two perspectives to a new level, by identifying that, within their schools, teachers and parents experienced two types of communities; the possibility of a "pretend" Catholic school community and a "real" school community. In other words, these two communities represented two different perspectives on the Catholic primary school, perhaps a sociological and a theological perspective.

Elise stated that although she wants “real” community there was concern in her mind as to whether an authentic or pseudo/pretend community existed in the schools:

Funnily in my time here I have never had anybody disagree about something Catholic...I think in some cases, even with students, they have learned that if they don't agree with something it's really much easier to pretend they do...I think we are bordering on a pretend community...which borders on something almost like apathy...people used to think they wanted Catholic schools for religion, now discipline and we have helped them accept the pastoral side and trying to drift them back to religion. We need to build real community. (Elise)

As Albert reflected on these comments in the focus group he said that underneath schools there are breakdowns in the understanding of community which are causing schools to live at two levels of community:

So I think that under our daily reality of community, there is almost an underworld community, which is made up of the breakdowns in the understanding of community. (Albert)

Hayley took up the previous comments by stating that she did not believe there was a pseudo community. For this principal, all that was needed was time, permission for voices to be heard and an in-depth exploration of an issue, for commonality to occur:

I actually don't feel it's a pseudo community, but maybe that's, once again, just a woman's perspective. When I walk out into the playground and see kids really showing great interaction, I feel hope and optimism, and I also feel when I'm confronted with a parent who's going to challenge me that if I give enough time for the voice to be heard and spend a little bit more time really depthing the question and the issue, then we'll come to a commonality and it's usually their love for their child and it can build a relationship. (Hayley)

Hence, the data suggest that principals idealise community as being “deep”, but struggle with the reality that in schools there are in effect two communities, the “real” and “pretend”. Here, principals appeared to struggle with owning what they were saying about this split in the nature of community and accepting that the matter needs to be considered more problematic if there is to be an adequate response.



Hence, while the data suggest that witness to Catholic beliefs and practices are integral to the Catholic school as community, there was a problem in respect to teachers and parents. This problem appeared to be due to a “creep” away from religious affiliation due to a lack of theological knowledge and the absence of a ‘heart relationship’ with the Catholic tradition. Here, principals appeared united around a quiet desperation regarding the absence of witness to Catholic beliefs and practices that, in turn, threatens the Catholic school as community.

### **Theme Three: Embedded in the parish**

The data strongly suggest that any conceptualisation of community in Catholic schools be embedded both in the relationship to the sponsoring parish and Catholic practice. Frank stated that the parish provided the school with its identity as community which the school then took up through its building of shared vision:

So for me anyway, particularly in schools, we already have that sense of community through the parish and then it's that ongoing shared vision, the emphasis on partnership that tightly brings community together.  
(Frank)

However, given the problems previously identified relating to ‘witness’, it was not surprising that the principals also identified significant concerns with respect to religious practice and the connection with the sponsoring parish. The data from the questionnaire suggested that the principals’ understandings of the Catholic primary school as community were strongly centred around notions of worship, celebration, ritual, religious practice, prayer and parish partnership (Tables 6.1 & 6.2). This interpretation was confirmed in the individual interviews and in the focus group interview.

Elise made the following point concerning the role of ritual and celebration in the building of community:

But probably what binds us more so than common beliefs at the moment is the idea that we have rituals. People don't necessarily understand them well I suppose, such as Anzac Day. But there's something about

the ritual in how we do it, with our faith understanding of these things. In times of crisis, or the rituals created for significant public events such as Anzac Day, a deeper sense of common ground seems to emerge among parents and the school. And it is in these circumstances, as soon as that surface is scratched, that it is there. It is clear as day what the community expects and everyone is on the same page. (Elise)

Celebrate anything that you can, it builds community. (Elise)

Frank placed emphasis on the religious life of the school by encouraging prayer at all staff meetings, and getting staff to reflect upon their spiritual development, so that they become more inner directed persons:

I think prayers at the beginning of our meetings; prayer is a really important thing, making staff stop to think about their own personal development, their spirituality. I think a Spirituality Day a year is an absolute necessity. I think the role of Ministry is really, really important in the school. I try and develop staff as persons who have inner direction, too, so we have Spirituality days. (Frank)

Overall, there was a positive attitude among principals towards the parish priests. The presence of the parish priest in the school was understood as being vital to the development of the Catholic school as community. The responses did not evidence any explicit theological or canonical understanding of the role of the parish priest in regard to the school. However, the presence of the priest helped shape a sense of Catholic community:

Here in this community, it's one, and we're lucky with the proximity to the Church and we've got a really active Parish Priest. So to me there's a oneness, and I think that's unique. (Bruce)

It's important for the priest to be seen at the school...if that person who was up on the altar...can actually come over and talk about some of the things I'm also interested in, then I think there's a little bit more of a community feel to that. (Elise)

In a similar vein, Frank said that the parish priest's openness was critical in order to address the important issues they faced:

The Parish Priest is willing to open up the conversation to sort of define what the future will be.

However, the data also indicated a significant change emerging in some principals' understandings regarding the relationship between the parish and the school. For example, Albert and Elise were of the view that the school was becoming the parish:

Yes, I think that the parish in its current state is probably still operating out of an old mindset that the school is just a sub-section of the parish. We endeavour to ensure that that link is there but I think that the school community is probably gaining its own life as a faith community. I think eventually the school will be the parish community and the Church will be the building across the road. (Albert)

[The school has] a greater life than the parish community, where once the school was part of but now are sort of separating. (Albert)

I told Father the other day that we were the new Church...he said No, the new Church is still the old Church...I then said "do something about it because you've got no one coming in there." (Elise)

For Charles and Albert this change in parish school relationships was due to people seeing the school rather than the parish church as a place for spiritual nurture and conversation:

People are not going to the Church, they're coming to us for their conversations...people have found solace here or some sense of purpose that they can't find in a Church. (Charles)

I think that the people that we we're ministering to are becoming more accepting and quite comfortable with the school being their spiritual community, as opposed to their local parish. (Albert)

They're finding comfort in that support that the school gives to the family where once upon a time that may have been given through the parish, because I think their community has changed. (Albert)

Some strategic responses on how to manage these gaps were named in the interviews. Albert wanted to bridge this movement from the parish to the school, and Denise wanted the school to provide the religious experiences for children that they were not receiving in their families. It was Frank, though, who placed a strategic priority in trying to build understanding between himself and the parish priest:

I would be looking at developing a plan of attack or an action plan to best meet these needs. I can appreciate the constraints and the difficulties of parish life for our priests, but I think there is an opportunity to move forward in a very graceful and life-giving way for our families. (Albert)

Schools need to ensure that the children are provided with experiences that they may not get in their families. (Denise)

I think that you have to build your relationship with your parish priest...We talk about the Church itself, where we're going and his role in the Church. (Frank)

Albert took up this point in the focus group interview as he tried to explain why he believed that the school will become the real Church in the future. He reasoned that for some families the Church is really about gathering together rather than being centred on the Eucharist. This sociological understanding of why Catholics come together will require further attention, as it is at variance with Catholic beliefs and practices:

When we say that eventually the real Church will be the school, I think the essence of that comment is really saying that the gathering of people and being part of a church-type community is really the essence, rather than an attendance at, say, Mass on Sunday. (Albert)

Hence, the data suggest that any conceptualisation of the school as a Catholic community must be done in relationship to its sponsoring parish and embedded in Catholic tradition, particularly prayer, worship, ritual, religious practice. The parish priest is very important to the shaping of community. However, it was significant that the data suggest that a shift is occurring whereby parents are now seeking from the school the solace and sense of purpose they once found in the parish church community. It appeared that at least one principal actively supported this transition.

This shift in parental affiliation to the Catholic parish was taken further in the focus group when Gordon forcefully raised the question as to what sort of community is present in Catholic schools. Gordon was not convinced that parents are making this shift to the school for spiritual meaning. He called into question whether there was any real Catholic community in his school because its parent population is virtually completely estranged from lives centred on Christ and the Church:

Calling us a community is one thing but calling us a Catholic community is a whole different ballgame. If we are talking about the importance of 'centred on Christ', then, well, I don't know, every individual school has got a different ratio of non-Catholics to Catholics, but it certainly colours

what the community is about. If there is a high proportion of Catholic families in your school, then there's a common understanding, a common expectation, but if you've got a reasonably large proportion of non-Catholics in it, then the assumption of knowledge is not there, nor the assumption of expectations. You take them to church and it's a very difficult situation because kids never go to church, even the non-practising Catholics. All that puts pressure upon what we believe a Catholic community is like. I think there's a problem there. (Gordon)

Elise affirmed that there were two types of communities in her school, but in this case it was between the notion of being Christian rather than Catholic:

To build community a school has to know who it is first. If you know your role then you can build your vision...But I think the biggest one I deal most with is that attitudinal thing, that you have to create a like minded group of people to create community...the thing we struggle with here is that the attitude isn't necessarily Catholic anymore, so we have to push until we get it. We often hear the word Christian; we're working in a Christian community. (Elise)

Here, principals appeared to be ambivalent in accepting as reality that parents apparently any longer share the Catholic tradition that they once did. There is serious doubt as to whether there is a Catholic dimension to community in the schools. However, the idea that this matter will be redressed by pushing "until we get it" seems to be a highly inadequate response to a complex reality.

#### **Theme Four: Care**

Care was a notion that featured prominently in the data, although there appeared to be a lack of consensus around its meaning. Frank was the only principal in the individual interviews to explicitly state that care was central to his understanding of community:

Well I promote that we are a community of care...and I expect forgiveness and dignity. (Frank)

Likewise, Bruce was not alone in expressing the view that compassion for each other was at the essence of community as he saw it:

We're here, we're together, we have direction, we have needs, we have compassion for each other, we know what we're on about and we've got to go on that journey together. And to me that is what a community is all about. (Bruce)

Pastoral care was mentioned by both Frank and Denise as fundamental expressions of a caring community. Whilst they each preferred different features of a community of care, it was interesting to note that Denise conceptualises this through the metaphor of family, whilst Frank brought a more pragmatic perspective:

I promote a family orientation with mutual support and informal pastoral care. (Denise)

Pastoral care has got to be real. Well, now we're in this together, what can we do together? (Frank)

While Elise and Bruce did not expressly mention care, it was implied in their concern for individuals:

It's being honest with staff, it's having a genuine concern for individuals and letting them know that you have that initial concern, and you have to be open and honest with that leadership team and pull as a team. (Bruce)

I meet with each teacher once a term, if not each month. (Elise)

Neither did Frank nor Charles expressly mention care, but it was implicit in their expectation that each member of the school community be involved in mutual support:

Being available and setting up a structure in your school that says, "Yes, we want to help each other." (Charles)

We have an expectation with our School Forum that everyone is expected to do just one thing...About 70% of the parents do something to serve the school, it's intrinsic here. (Frank)

Charles extended his implicit caring approach through the promotion of induction, welcoming and social gatherings:

Induction programs, welcoming people, making them feel at home, parental partnership things, social opportunities. (Charles)

Charles' broad implicit understanding of the caring community was expressed more explicitly among all principals in their questionnaire responses to both questions one and two. While care appeared to be a major characteristic of community, the data also suggest that it is not clearly conceptualised, as it holds a variety of meanings among the principals.

Beyond this lack of clarity, the data suggest that care within the Catholic school community is being challenged by contemporary cultural values. In the individual interviews, the principals expressed concern that cultural values, such as self absorption, individualism, materialism and secularism were making it difficult for them to build community. Charles, who is principal of a poorer school community, stated that parents in his school are becoming more "self absorbed" and consequently:

These days I think people are into, like there just doesn't seem to be a great deal of time for things, and people are interested more in the individual, interested in their own child more than their community side of things...Forget about community, look after number one, thank you. And, you know, if the school doesn't perform for their child, they take the child out of the school, find another school, thank you. (Charles)

In the focus group interview, Gordon said it was very disappointing to talk with parents for reasons similar to Charles'. However, for him, it was worse because this self absorption extended to wider issues of social justice and Church concerns:

I'm continually disappointed in the conversations I have with parents on, you know, "I'm all right, Jack. I don't really care." On things like immigration and political savviness no one cares. You get questioned on the missions, you get questioned about Koori studies and I wonder about the true Catholic ethos, whatever that is, is very worrying to me. (Gordon)

However, discussion in the focus group interview was challenged by Ivan who said it was really only elements that were in this individualist and self absorbed mindset:

Or are we being unkind in saying this as a generalisation when there's elements of those kinds of people. I mean I've got some super-fabulous parents and I wouldn't like to generalise to their detriment. (Ivan)

Hayley and Albert supported Ivan's comment:

I suppose as a Principal you're often confronted with the other side. (Hayley)

Yes, or you don't take time to appreciate the good ones. (Albert)

Charles then commented on the impact of materialism when trying to build community. While it makes it difficult, he picked up on Hayley, Albert and Ivan's warning not to generalise. He said that it was more of a problem in the larger towns of the diocese where there was more affluence and wider choices for people to be involved:

I think values do change with materialism. It makes it very difficult to build community if people are only interested in the material things. (Charles)

Beneath all these difficulties, Albert believed that principals had to be proactive in managing the inroads of secular thinking:

We need to be one step ahead of secular thinking. (Albert)

The data suggest that, while the principals espouse care as central to their understanding of community, the reality is that the changing cultural values are, in some schools, destroying the possibility of creating community. However, while the dominant cultural values of secularism, individualism and materialism are named by principals, they are done so almost as throw away lines, and their impact on the building of community even contested by other principals. Further, there appeared to be no awareness of the debate that is occurring within Australia or internationally around the destructive influence of these values on the possibility of community.



## **Theme Five: Parental Partnership**

In the stage one questionnaire responses, the theme of parental partnership was mentioned twice. However, in the stage two data parental partnership was strongly linked to the development of the Catholic school as community. In the individual interviews, Bruce stated that the parental role was part of a bigger framework involving partnership and community:

Partnership is huge and all those things come together in community. The only thing that I feel I keep coming back to is that we have put a sense out there of belonging, and I think we have to have a sense of gathering, belonging and partnership. (Bruce)

Albert extended Bruce's comments by saying that there was a research base to parental partnership. This was significant, as it was the only evidence in all of the data to indicate that principals were including research in their perspectives:

There's lots of research to tell us that parents have a vital role in effective schools, so if you want your school to be successful in all areas, our parents have a vital part. That part is in terms of decision-making is in part of contributions to ongoing daily life, such as demonstrating to children that reading is important by being part of the reading program. (Albert)

While Bruce and Albert had a broader understanding of the parental partnership role, and all interviewees named parents as a characteristic of community, nonetheless, any comprehensive understanding of this partnership appeared to be missing from the responses. The responses appeared to be segmented and pragmatic. For example, Frank stated:

I think that you provide the opportunities for parents to have their say and to express areas of need. (Frank)

Parent Forum has enhanced community...it's very open and flexible...it ensures that parents are vocal, interested and contributing. (Frank)

Albert thought that schools were not managing decision making well:

I think some of the decision-making processes that schools have embarked upon have been fairly dismal. (Albert)

Charles ensured that the voice of parents was heard from the moment their children enrolled in kindergarten. He also thought that parents were quite happy to go along with the principal's views on things:

Fresh people coming in and the kinder parents have a voice right from the beginning. (Charles)

Oh well, just make sure that everyone's involved. You always find that someone will go, "I think we should do it this way, this way, and then I as the Principal go, "Well, have you thought about whatever?" and all the other parents go, "Oh yes, that sounds like a good idea." They're quite happy to agree with the Principal. (Charles)

Management of difficult parents was an issue raised by some principals and the researcher noted in his journal that there was quite a degree of emotion behind their comments:

I am personally concerned that parents can overstep the mark and at times take on an overpowering role. (Bruce)

There are people in schools who, through very kind-heartedness, want to be part of everything, but they're strong characters and whatever, and other people shy away. (Charles)

The issue of difficult parents was taken further in the focus group interview. Hayley and Gordon led the discussion which centred on the difficulties encountered with parents. This caused Ivan to speak strongly in support of the fact that not all parents behaved in these ways, in fact, there were some "super-fabulous" parents:

Parents have changed; they're more articulate and know what they want. (Gordon)

I'm continually disappointed in the conversations I have with parents. (Hayley)

And I found I was actually explaining it to the parents as, you know this is part of the Eucharistic community, that we're together, that we accept one another. (Hayley)

I mean I've got some super-fabulous parents and I wouldn't like to generalise to their detriment. (Ivan)

Hence, while the data suggest that parents are important to a conceptualisation of community, this belief was segmented, pragmatic and lacking in sound theorising. It appeared that this resulted in some principals expressing fear, disappointment and frustration regarding working with parents. This inspection stage was extended further through the following themes identified from the data regarding Research Question 2.

**Research Question 2:            “How do principals describe their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?”**

Data collected during the inspection stage allowed the researcher to clearly identify six themes in respect to the Catholic school principal's leadership role of building community. These themes are *leading through making time; developing conversation; communication and dialogue; evangelisation; limited theological understanding of Christian leadership; little appreciation of leading the learning community; ambivalence in leadership style; and criticism of the policy context.*

**Theme One: Leading through making time**

A close analysis of data revealed that the principals had a shared understanding or consensus about the importance of making time in respect to their leadership role in building the Catholic primary school as community. In their questionnaire responses, the principals listed a variety of activities, such as “listening”, “supporting the needy” and “affirming”, with community building. When probed about these activities in the individual interviews, the principals noted that these activities all required leadership through making time.

Further, in the individual interviews, time was identified as a significant issue for the construction of community. For Bruce, time was a major issue because it not only allowed for reflection but it also had a spiritual dimension:

The main concern to me in modern schools is the time factor....we need to reflect and sit with Christ. (Bruce)

Other principals also believed that from time together comes trust and rapport. Elise believed that it will take a long time to build a new form of community, requiring a strong capacity to be human:

It is going to take a long time for us to build a new form of community...We need a humanness to say "I don't know let's go and find out." (Elise)

Charles and Frank spoke of the busyness of family and school life which restricted the time available for community building in schools:

So the busyness of family life of one community may have a different impact upon the school from what another community would have, even though they're facing the same busyness and pressures. So it just depends on how they operate. (Charles)

There are certain periods of time within the school community that are more frantic and more hectic than other times, and the community needs to balance how they deal with those things and what they operate and put things together. Unless we gather, there is no community. (Frank)

Albert believed that building community requires time with staff to affirm them. He also stated that beyond the mere fact of time together, it needs to be time that is inspirational and reflective:

We actually become the community through providing time to digest and work that whole relationship. (Albert)

We need to maintain community by ensuring that the Catholic identity is inspirational and reflective of what's working and what's not. (Albert)

I provide a lot of opportunities to meet the people to develop that personal rapport, a sense of trust between the leader, the principal, and the rest of the community. (Albert)

I think one of the biggest things is staff affirmation and working with staff. I try to provide staff with feedback on a term-by-term basis. (Albert)

Therefore, the data suggest a strong consensus that, despite the busyness of school life and the lack of balance, there is a priority around making quality time for

community building. Yet, despite the apparent importance assigned to time, the principals also stated that leading the building of community was a demanding burden on their time and energy:

Enormous burden on the principal. (Bruce)

Bloody hard again! The constant demand. (Charles)

It's tiring building community...you've got to have a lot of energy. (Elise)

Part of the demand and burden came from trying to balance both the interpersonal and administrative dimensions of their roles in the time available:

The more you interact with people the more community that you're able to develop. The problem that we have is balancing the administrative leadership of principals today versus their interpersonal leadership. (Albert)

The principal builds community by being approachable...open and honest...and it's not always easy. (Denise)

In addition, Albert thought his role was made harder as he tried to keep focused on the mission of Catholic schools, amidst a drift away from the mission:

I think that more and more, if I can generalise, that the Catholic schools are becoming less focused on their original mission, in terms of the poor and the oppressed and the disadvantaged. There are a lot of constraints that limit the amount of concessions we give children and give families, to bring those families into the fold. (Albert)

Part of the burden also came from an acknowledged sense of inadequacy or insecurity around publicly promoting the Catholic identity and mission of the school. Bruce said that the parish priest provided a depth of knowledge around the 'why' of Catholic schools which principals feel inadequate to express:

We're fortunate because our parish priest comes to those meetings, he sits down with the parents and we do all the input and we use technology, we use PowerPoint, but there's that opportunity there for the parents and even the teachers to ask questions and say, "Why are we doing that?" and having someone there who has that background, that depth of knowledge. (Bruce)

Moreover, both Albert and Denise talked about the impact of government policy on their community building activities. While being compliant, they nonetheless felt a pressure that does not support community building, so for survival reasons they came up with best fit solutions:

While we are always compliant with government policy, we do it in a way that best suits our community. (Albert)

When it impacts upon over and above what we're providing currently, like an add-on that does cause pressure. It causes unwarranted stress on various individuals and sometimes I think it actually inhibits what the community can do, because it changes the structure and the nature of life in general. (Albert)

I think it impacts mainly on the teaching staff, because they could get to a position where they say, "Oh look, we've just had all these new documents introduced and now the government wants to change the whole assessment system and go back to the old days". (Denise)

The whole lot of us together came to the understanding, without even saying it, that we're going ahead and doing this. No matter what is coming in from outside, we are going to stick to our guns and do what we think is the best thing for our children. (Denise)

The principals did discuss two aspects of leadership dispersion which were helping them to manage these burdens and consequently find more time. Bruce believed that principals were beginning to delegate and that there were more people who could take on the work:

There is, but I think what we've learnt to do of late, probably some better than others, is to delegate it. There are people there now to support each other in roles, where I don't think we've always had that. Because all of a sudden I think people are more comfortable and understand shared leadership a lot more than what they did in the past. I convey a message to people that says, "Okay, we work as a team, we want you on our team." (Bruce)

Albert extended this thinking by talking about how he intends to continue sharing out the understanding of leadership with the school:

I think the principal needs to be creative in developing within schools leadership teams and roles and responsibilities that are diverse. (Albert)

We have a lot of staff with wisdom and we need to explore and provide opportunity for those teachers to develop as leaders in their own right within their classroom. (Albert)

The principals also discussed the possibility of taking time for peer support in leadership. Albert then went on to say that it was hard to find a safe place to talk about the demands and burdens. He felt he could do this with other principals. He also added that the possibility of having coaches or life trainers to work with principals through the demands of sustaining community would be helpful:

One of the greatest things that I've had in terms of my role as principal is the ability to step out of my community and talk to others, whether it be, like for here, a Regional Principals' meeting and sharing what we're doing and all that sort of stuff, and feeling comfortable within that group to say, I'm falling apart. Without the sense of, well, if I say those things they might think I'm doing a poor job and my contract won't be renewed. It would really help to have a coach or a life trainer; I think there's a role for that in sustaining school community. (Albert)

Albert paused for a few minutes after the previous statement. Appearing almost uncertain as to whether to proceed, he then went on to say that while principals' "pride", "guilt and "self esteem" blocked them from seeking help, system management of principal problems was also a source of worry, affecting their work:

Leaders don't want you [the Catholic Education Office staff] to know that they are in crisis. I think that what stops them from asking for help is pride and guilt. Principal image and self esteem can be a major impediment to saying "I have a problem". It really bothers principals when they look at what happened at St. Gloria's school, why wasn't it dealt with earlier? How could a community be allowed to fall apart like that? Without taking any sides, because I don't know what happened, I would have to say that it really worries principals and affects how you work. Can we find ways to support principals and priests to deal this before it all ends up in a mess? (Albert)

Therefore, the data suggest that while time is a vital factor in leading the building of school community there are major blockers to finding that time. These blockers are the lonely burden of the role and the competing demands of interpersonal and administrative responsibilities. Two directions appear to offer some relief. One

direction is to share leadership and learn to delegate. The other direction is about making time for peer support.

## **Theme Two: Developing Conversation, Communication and Dialogue**

Conversation, communication and dialogue have been joined together in this theme because they emerged in the stage two data as being closely related in the principals' leadership responsibility to build community. Albert clearly expressed the majority view that communication was essential to ensuring that community prospered in a Catholic school:

I think one of the key principles in ensuring community prospers is the area of communication. (Albert)

We are interacting with people and developing directions and such, that involves people and, to me, that's what community is about, and I think that conversation is the essence of community. (Albert)

Bruce further asserted that community is best kept alive by communication, conversation, dialogue and social networking:

You've got to keep it alive and I think the best way to do that is to communicate with the people. (Bruce)

Class parents build social networking, we appoint the leaders, and this leads to dialogue and a sense of inclusion. (Bruce)

Bruce also believed that people were having their conversations at schools now rather than in the Church. He then spoke of the intimate connection between conversation and dialogue and did so within a theological framework:

People are not going to the Church. They're coming to us for their conversations. (Bruce)

We need to ensure that the invitation of the gospel is there, and you can't underestimate the Spirit. Conversation is important because it's dialogue and it suggests two [people]. It's about people feeling included and listened to. (Bruce)



Specifying the important leadership strategies for conversation, communication and dialogue, Albert and Denise identified “reflective listening”, “flexibility”, the “search” for “new ideas” and being “informed” so that people can “contribute fairly successfully”:

Reflective listening or that discussion you have with people listening to the feelings behind the words. (Albert)

Each year you have to be flexible and search out new ideas ...communication is a big thing. (Denise)

We need to ensure that we provide significant communication lines so that parents are well informed...and can contribute fairly successfully. (Denise)

Denise stated that the processes and strategies used to have conversations with new families had improved over the years, and it seemed to be working well:

Processes, strategies and procedures to encourage conversation have been developed over a number of years and they seem to work well. (Denise)

At the same time, in the focus group interview it became clear that some principals believed that they needed to improve their leadership skills related to conversation and dialogue:

We have to have those conversations and I don't think we do it very well. (Elise)

For Hayley, the issue around conversations was about the lack of sustained ongoing dialogue:

A lot of the problems we are discussing come from people not having the conversations often enough so that they understand...I also think it is because we haven't sustained them or had ongoing dialogue about them. (Hayley)

Thus, capabilities in respect to conversation, communication and dialogue were considered central to the community leadership role of the principal. Moreover, there was an evident need for further professional development in this area.

### **Theme Three: Evangelisation**

During this research study, the topic of “evangelising”<sup>19</sup> emerged gradually to become a major issue in regard to the community leadership role of the principal. In the questionnaire responses, only one principal identified evangelisation as a priority. Later, in the individual interviews, evangelisation took on greater importance in community building:

Yes, I think it is a big mistake that we take for granted the parents are where we are, and I really think that we have to evangelise a whole lot better. (Albert)

We need to be very focused on that whole evangelisation perspective and we need to work currently with our parish. (Albert)

The understanding of evangelisation was later enlarged upon by both Albert and Bruce, including extending it to all aspects of school life, especially teaching:

We need to evangelise and revitalise non-practising Catholic families through the paces of our Catholic practice to try and energise and encourage and pass on the word of Christ that enables them to participate more fully in their own lives and hopefully within the Eucharistic life. (Albert)

We’re still bringing people to Christ. I think we’ve got to get over ourselves a bit too. Children advancing in their learning are still coming to Christ. It’s still evangelical. (Albert)

Quality of worship, quality of teaching and the witness of key people build community and together they’re really giving you evangelisation as such. (Bruce)

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<sup>19</sup> Evangelisation means that “Through baptism, each person...participates in the mission of the Church; each person is obliged and possesses the right to proclaim the gospel message” (Beal et al , 2000, p.22). “Evangelising means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new” (Pope Paul VI, 1975, #18).

Charles was clear that the role of the principal was professional support for staff to grow as witnesses to the Christian faith:

So it's the role of the principal to ensure that the Catholic school teachers demonstrate through witness a faith perspective as well as provide some professional support for them to develop in this. (Charles)

Yet, this broader view of evangelisation espoused by Albert and Bruce appeared not to be fully shared by Elise, who presents the school's religious beliefs and seeks to bring people to them by expressing them in everyday language:

We say this is what we believe and if you're here, then we would like you to consider these beliefs. I think slowly you win. (Elise)

putting our religion into everyday language. (Elise)

However, in the focus group interview there was significantly more discussion about evangelisation as the principals raised faith issues in respect to parents and teachers. Here Bruce, Albert and Charles identified a range of evangelising activities that they believed led people, especially the non-practising Catholics, back to a sense of appreciation of the Church:

But there are things that have been put in place, particularly here, to ensure that once a month they do get together, and that happens...this is what we're all about and this is what we expect, just like attendances from this staff here at children's liturgies on a Saturday night, which is probably tough to get people to go to, but we get great attendance...there are opportunities too for the social, particularly afterwards, there'll be a cuppa and chat and that's probably an incentive. (Bruce)

Out of this you see a growth again, that's when it starts, and then you can go hand-in-hand...education pulls people back in and nurtures the regrowth. By giving them experiences of celebrations, like the Mass and all the different sorts of rituals that we have in our schools, that's where that growth can happen for those people. (Bruce)

I don't know what processes people use, but I think it's important that from the very beginning wherever possible that we have a process whereby parents are inducted into the ways we do things...and I think Hayley's point that the bottom line is about being centred on Christ, just has to be continually brought to the fore as to why we do everything this way in our schools. (Albert)

Thus, there was a commitment among many of the principals to an evangelising approach which reaches out and invites parents, as well as teachers, into a more active practice of the Catholic tradition. The data suggest that, while the meaning of evangelisation is not clearly articulated, it appears to be understood as something that is done to parents and teachers, rather than any seeking to dialogue with them.

#### **Theme Four: Limited theological understanding of Christian leadership**

In approaching their community leadership role, the majority of principals identified the importance of Jesus Christ as the central value informing their leadership:

As principals, it's all about the leadership. We've got clear leadership principles from Christ that were there and that's what we've got to try and follow. (Bruce)

Elise and Frank expressed succinctly the principals' view that every decision they make must be based on how Christ would act:

When Jesus went back to heaven, he left us here, and I suppose that what we're doing is what He started. Anything I suppose is based on the whole idea of would Jesus have done this if He was here? (Elise)

We imply all the time the Christ centred nature of our life, and there's a real relationship between life and faith. (Frank)

While this strong Christian influence is found in the data regarding leadership style, it was of interest to the researcher that, despite probing, the data suggest that there appeared to be very little theological understanding informing it. The silence around any scriptural influence on leadership style was notable. In the individual interviews, only one principal, Frank, directly related his role to a scriptural understanding of leadership:

The scriptural model of community leader for me is the Good Shepherd. My role is pastoral. I have had to come to terms with some of the management side of things. (Frank)

However, apart from Frank, there was no evidence in the data of this Christ centred leadership style being more widely informed by other aspects of scripture. In particular, no principal extended this centrality of Christ in their leadership style with its scriptural sequitur of the servant role. In fact, the only mention of the servant role was to reject it:

We've overdone that whole servant model of things. I think that people see servant as being a person like a butler, doing things for people, you know like "I asked the servant to empty the waste bin." But I think it's more of providing opportunities for people to lead themselves. (Albert)

Moreover, it appears that not only scripture, but also the education documents of the Catholic Church do not inform the principals' leadership styles. When asked about the influence of Church documents on their leadership styles, the responses were consistently vacuous. Albert, however, was an exception because he acknowledged that while these documents have had a foundational impact upon his leadership style, he has now moved on from them:

Those initial documents which impacted upon my earlier leadership style through study and such may be the foundations of what I believe now and how I interact with the school community. But currently, I think that I've moved on from that philosophical base into a more holistic approach to relationships, which may not necessarily be faith related, but more interpersonal directed. (Albert)

One reason for some of the apparent vagueness and lack of clarity around the Christian leadership dimension of their community leadership role was given by Denise, Charles and Elise. They were of the view that from as far back as their school years there was insufficient preparation for the faith dimension of the leadership role:

It was more in the feeling and love that I found my religion. (Denise)

I grew up in the 'love, care and share' catechesis time and I am aware that this has left me lacking a lot of Church knowledge required for my leadership of the school. (Elise)

When we were growing up religion wasn't taught, it was an airy-fairy, feeling beautiful, having a nice time type. I can even remember going on a retreat and I don't think we actually mentioned God. (Charles)

Thus, the data suggest that the principals' valuing of Jesus Christ as the inspiration for their leadership also needed to be informed by wider scriptural study and Catholic teaching, in order for them to effectively take up the role of principal. The inadequate theological preparation which these principals appeared to have undertaken prior to taking up their roles was hindering their capacity to conceptualise themselves as Christian community leaders.

### **Theme Five: Little appreciation of leading the learning community**

While a focus on learning was a significant matter for several principals, it did not feature heavily in the questionnaire responses or individual interviews. Only two principals named learning as central to community building:

Our core business is about learning [and] the Catholic school community in particular is guided by the beliefs of learning. (Albert)

I think that as a result of just simply gathering around the issue of providing education for our children, discussing and conversing about improved student learning, as leaders of those processes we are constantly developing community. (Frank)

For these principals, student learning was important, for example, Albert talked about the need to offer children quality education and the need to reach out to the children. He even went so far to say that children should be the centre of the school. However, neither idea was tied to a comprehensive understanding of the relationship among leading, learning and community.

Catholic families have always struggled hard for the best education for their kids, from Ireland to Australia, and I mean if we can't offer quality education as well as a Catholic faith, those families are going to make another choice. So I think that's an important part of our character as well, to offer good quality education. (Albert)

Building community in a school is reaching out to the children, making the children the centre of our little universe here. (Albert)

Extending this thought, Albert suggested that teachers and parents must take more responsibility for students' learning

I think there's a lot to be gained from ensuring that our teachers take responsibility for students' learning and work more directly with parents. I think that's a real angle that needs looking at. (Albert)

So, what we need to do is to engage our parents in the learning cycle. It's also the nuts and bolts of our faith, and through very strategic programs where we work with parents and help provide both a core knowledge background as well as a reflective discussion background with forums and discussion papers and newspaper comments and that type of stuff. (Albert)

Whilst these data suggest a relationship among, leadership, community and learning, it appears that the notion of the school as a learning community was not theorised and the principals lacked sufficient depth of understanding to support the development of the learning community.

### **Theme Six: Ambivalence in leadership style**

Within this inspection stage, the principals' responses suggested that they moved between individualistic and collaborative styles of leadership. As principals, they saw it as their role to make the mission of the school clear to the community. Yet, they also wanted to invite the community members into this mission, but in a controlled way. Albert exemplified this ambivalent leadership style in the following statements:

At the end of the day, you need to have a leader, a person designated to ensure that the focus of the Catholic school is at the forefront of all action, and I think that's the role of the principal. As long as you're very clear and very vocal about what we're on about, people respond. (Albert)

I'm very open to discuss in a public forum certain things about the school, but other things I'm not open to discussing. So as time unfolds, that control will be less and less. (Albert)

I think that in terms of community, as a leader of the community, or the deemed leader, you're really managing and interacting with people. (Albert)

By being an equal part in the community. By inviting people to be involved, by listening, by being available, by making people feel a sense of worth in the everyday functions of the school and by empowering all members of the school community. (Albert)

In a similar vein, Frank began by identifying that he had a clear individualist leadership style, but then broadened it to a more collaborative and personalist approach. He was transitioning to a style that guides and works in dialogue, believing in the sacred ground of relationships:

Okay I think you make your mission clear to the community first, what you're on about...you have to define your community, who they are...then you build partnerships and see how you can witness the model. You can only bring them back in bits and pieces...the parish priest is willing to open up the conversation to sort of define what the future will be. Conversation is important because it is dialogue, and it suggests two. It's about people feeling included and listened to. (Frank)

We've got to witness the sacred ground of relationships. I try to guide and persuade rather than dictate and build relationships with staff and parents. If they don't trust you enough, nothing's going to happen. (Frank)

Again, Bruce and Charles talked of a leadership style centred on themselves, in which they had to lead and yet also involve everyone as well:

I guess it always comes back to your vision, what your vision is, how we see ourselves, how we see our culture in our school. (Bruce)

It's about making sure that everyone's involved. (Charles)

At the same time, Denise extended evidence of the ambivalence when she talked about influencing people to be involved in the vision for the school and her commitment to a more personal leadership style:

Well the Catholics, you try to encourage them with attendance at Mass and we try to provide incentives and things like that, and that's all we can do. (Denise)

It's a personal connection, and nothing can beat that personal connection, I swear to that. (Denise)

This ambivalence in respect to leadership style was reflected in the principals' inconsistent attitudes to consultation and engagement with the various members of the school community. Albert, for example, on the one hand stated that he sets the



direction for the school and then consults with staff and parents so that they can understand it and work with it. On the other hand, he stated that a principal is to engage with the staff and parents to set the foundations of the school:

So there is I believe, a mandate to say this is the direction that we should be heading, and then you work with the staff and the parent body to understand the needs of that direction. (Albert)

Every community that I've entered into has already been formed, so I bring to the table a different perspective or a fresh outlook, my role is to engage the people and to set some sort of foundation so that we can move forward. I think that the community itself is very flexible. (Albert)

Bruce was convinced that the building of community depended on the way that people have input into what is important:

I think that when you move into a community, there are a lot of expectations and often those expectations are hidden and they're not easily extracted. (Bruce)

The way that people have input into things matters most. How comfortable the experience is significantly affects the success of the building of the school as a community. (Bruce)

Charles spoke strongly to his belief that the individuality of each school community had to be respected. This meant that what worked to bring people together in one school may not necessarily work in another school:

Very important to note that all school communities are different and they have different processes and means towards achieving their own goals. (Charles)

Albert, then, commented that any real change in the school will first require working with individuals, giving them time for personal change prior to any structural change:

Fullan would say, "Well that's nice, but what we need to be doing is focusing on the individual person and what their role is in introducing and implementing a new reading activity. So I think that in terms of community, understanding the different levels of the order of change, first level versus second level, is an important ingredient to sustainability. (Albert)

Thus the data suggest that principals were ambivalent in conceptualising their roles. On the one hand they talked about themselves as strong individualist leaders. Yet, on the other hand, there was a desire to be collaborative, personal, relational and attentive to the needs of individuals. It seemed that these principals were undergoing a process of negotiation between these styles. However, they appeared to be hindered in this task by their lack of engagement with contemporary leadership theory.

### **Theme Seven: Criticism of the policy context**

During the individual interviews, several principals expressed concern that there was a lack of clear direction from both the Catholic Education Office and the Catholic Church about how they were to develop community in their schools. They stated that they resolved this uncertainty by making pragmatic judgements about what needed to be done and assumed that it was in line with the Catholic Education Office and Catholic Church expectations.

Albert provided two seemingly ambiguous insights into his community leadership role and his relationship with the Catholic Education Office. On the one hand, he was not sure what was expected of him from the Catholic Education Office and this posed difficulties for him. However, on the other hand, at the second interview he expressed the belief that his capacity to build community was strengthened by the decision making freedom given to local communities by the Catholic Education Office:

I'm in the position now and I'm not certain just in my school here I'm not really certain of exactly what the CEO or the Director wants for this particular school. I've developed over the last six months or so, talking to people, my own personal style, I'm developing my own leadership perspective and where I think things should be going, and I'm assuming that's in line with the directions and thoughts of the diocese. (Albert)

I haven't ever had a conversation with any CEO personnel to say, "Well this is your job, mate, to do these things." I don't think there's a real developed position that this is what you are to do. It may be because in our role that's inherent in what we do. The mandate is not overly clear from the system. (Albert)

I think that the support structure of the Catholic Education Office with that whole servant model, providing advice and guidance when asked and needed, enables the community to operate comfortably and work well. I

have seen and been part of other dioceses where it's a different model, and that actually restricts and inhibits the growth of the school community because a lot of the decision making and conversations have already been done for them and they're imposed upon the schools, and I think that in terms of school community life, that is a great inhibitor to what they're able to develop and achieve. If they're not in control of their own destiny in terms of the direction they want to go, whether it be a staffing process or whatever be the case, I think you limit the opportunity for the community to develop. (Albert)

Elise and Charles voiced a concern that they were not sure which direction to go with community building in their schools. They asserted that the Church was not sure what direction it wanted schools to go and consequently was not giving them clear direction:

It makes it very hard for the school to say who we are if the Church itself is not sure. (Elise)

Church is a dilemma because I don't think there's a unified approach, so you could hit with lots of different things under the guise of the one topic, or heading or whatever. (Charles)

With regard to the Church, Albert did not report any of this concern; rather, he expressed a freedom to both choose which guiding beliefs of the Church that he will allow to impact on him and how to interpret them. His stance is influenced by study he has undertaken and mentors he has had:

So we teach on one hand the Church's doctrine, but on the other hand we say, "Well, that's what the Church believes, but to me personally, I don't know," and then that has an influence. And when you have a variety of conflicting thoughts, obviously our actions dictate who we are, and that comes from our own internal belief system. So as time changes, I think our guiding beliefs also change. (Albert)

So all the traditional doctrines will always be there...How we interpret, how we interact with those doctrines and how we utilise those to our time will change. (Albert)

Experience is one big thing. I think my lesson also come from further study. Very important to me has been the role of mentors. (Albert)

Therefore, the apparent lack of systemic direction appeared to fuel a pragmatic, individualist style of leadership among these principals. The data would suggest that this lack of direction is not necessarily a positive factor for principals. It would

seem that there is a strong need for study programs and mentors to support principals.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has displayed the data gathered during the various stages of this research study. The data were presented according to the two research stages of exploration and inspection, which are integral to a symbolic interactionist study. The data gained from the exploration stage of the study allowed each primary school principal in the Diocese of Lismore to express their perspectives on what community means in the context of Catholic primary schools and to describe how he or she understood his or her leadership role in applying this to the building of community. Although, less than fifty per cent took up the invitation to fill in the questionnaire.

In this exploration stage, a first-order interpretation led the researcher to conclude that there was a lack of a shared understanding or consensus in respect to the Catholic primary school as community and the role of the principal as community leader. Here, sociological responses appeared far more extensive than the theological responses and this interpretation led the researcher to question why this was so. Moreover, while the researcher had expected the principals to comment on the problems associated with building community in a Catholic primary school, responses to the questionnaire suggested that the principals saw this aspect of their role as being non-problematic. Beyond these conclusions, the researcher was alerted to an unanswered question in respect to learning. It was intriguing that the principals did not promote the idea of the school as a learning community. Further, the researcher was interested in the principals' perspectives on the place of the Catholic primary school as a Church entity and its role in the Church's mission of evangelisation. With these thoughts in mind, the research study moved into the inspection stage.

This inspection stage involved two individual interviews with six principals and a focus group interview. Following transcription, the data collected during the inspection stage was codified leading to the identification of a number of themes relating to research question one. In particular, five themes were identified in respect to the conceptualisation of the Catholic school as community. Here the data

pointed to *unity and common ground* as being a dominant characteristic of the Catholic primary school as community. In addition, a further four themes were identified, namely, *giving witness to Catholic beliefs and practices, embedded in the parish, care and parental partnership*.

Here, the principals identified both the 'ideal' and the 'reality' of the Catholic primary school as community. Ideally, for the principals in this research study, the Catholic primary school as community was characterised by unity and common ground, with the members of the school community providing witness to Catholic beliefs and practices. Structurally, the school is embedded in a parish, with a strong sense of care and evidence of parental partnership. However, whilst this was the ideal, conversations in this inspection stage revealed the problematic nature of the 'reality' of the Catholic primary school as community. This gap between the ideal and the reality was of interest given that data in the exploration stage suggested that the principals in this research study saw the Catholic primary school as a non-problematic 'ideal'. Data collected during the inspection stage around research question two allowed the researcher to identify four themes in respect to the Catholic school principals' leadership role of building community. These themes included *leading through making time, developing conversation, communication and dialogue, evangelisation, limited understanding of Christian leadership, little appreciation of leading the learning community, ambivalence in leadership style, as well as, criticism of the policy context*.

In summary, this display of the data represents the conclusions drawn at the end of the first and second-order interpretation of the data. Through a first-order interpretation of the data collected in the exploration stage, the researcher learnt about the research problem from the meanings ascribed by the principals who participated in this research study. A second-order interpretation during the inspection stage enabled the researcher to focus on specific issues identified in the exploration stage and to suggest emergent themes in respect to the two research questions.

Chapter 7 that now follows discusses the research findings following a third-order interpretation of the data. This deeper level of interpretation enabled the researcher

to assign theoretical significance to the themes outlined above. In particular, this research study was to draw on contemporary theories of community and leadership, as outlined in Chapter 3, as well as the account of symbolic interactionism provided in Chapter 4.

## **CHAPTER 7      DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **7.1      Introduction**

As outlined in previous chapters, this research study had as its focus principals' perspectives on the application of the concept of community to Catholic primary schools. To this end, the review of the literature in Chapter 3 enabled the identification of the following specific research questions to guide this study:

**Research Question 1:              How do primary principals conceptualise the Catholic primary school as community?**

**Research Question 2:              How do principals describe their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?**

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings of the research study following a third-order interpretation of the data. In short, this third-order interpretation of the research findings assigns theoretical significance to the data and allows the researcher to offer a number of assertions in response to the two research questions. In particular, this third-order interpretation was informed by contemporary theories of community and leadership (Chapter 3) and the root images of symbolic interactionism as a perspective (Chapter 4).

Within this chapter, the first section makes a number of key assertions about how Catholic primary school principals in this study conceptualised their schools as communities. The second section makes a number of key assertions about how the principals understood their leadership roles in the building of community. The third section applies a symbolic interactionist perspective to these findings. These sections reflect the three step iterative approach outlined in section 5.6. The final section offers a summary of the findings.

## **7.2 Discussion – Research Question One**

**“How do primary principals conceptualise the Catholic school as community?”**

This research question sought to reveal how the participants conceptualised the concept of community as applied to Catholic primary schools. This question acknowledges that principals carry guiding beliefs about what characterises the school as community. Therefore, any guidance or support offered to them in their roles as community leaders must build on existing understandings of being a leader of the school as community. As discussed in Chapter 6, the principals in this research study were able to identify both the ‘ideal’ and the ‘reality’ of the Catholic primary school as community. Ideally, for the principals in this research study, the Catholic primary school as community was characterised by unity and common ground and the members of this school community gave witness to Catholic beliefs and practices. Structurally, the school is embedded in a parish. There is a strong sense of care and evidence of parental partnership. However, whilst this image represented the ‘ideal’, the data also revealed the problematic nature of the ‘reality’ of the Catholic primary school as community. This gap between the ideal and the reality was of interest given that data in the exploration stage suggested that the principals in this research study saw the Catholic primary school as a non-problematic ‘ideal’.

A third-order interpretation of these research findings informed by theories of community allowed the researcher to offer a number of assertions in response to the first research question.



**Assertion 1:                      Principals espouse as their sociological ideal the ‘gemeinschaft’ model of community.**

As the data interpretation progressed within this research study, it became evident that the principals were working from an implicit “gemeinschaft” understanding of community with its understandings of people being “related through their wills in an organic manner” and exemplified in relationships of “kinship, place and mind” (Tonnies, 1987/1957, p. 48). Here, the principals’ dominant understandings of community were found in sociological notions of “welcome”, “caring” and “warmth”, as well as “family spirit” and “mutual support”. This view is supported in the literature where it is proposed that schools should be like families, offering “mutual affection and support”, along with a “sense of solidarity” (Kefford, 1997, p. 34). It is also promoted by Tonnies (1897/1957, p. 55) who asserted that “family spirit” is at the heart of the “gemeinschaft” understanding of community.

Consistent with the gemeinschaft model of community, the principals voiced a strong concern for unity and common ground. As Albert noted in his interview, “We all share the same philosophies and thoughts so we come together to share in exploring and developing those thoughts and philosophies... that’s why we have a community”. For Bruce, the ideal community requires that “staff, the parents too, have to want and believe it and work together to achieve it”. This understanding is also exemplified in Albert’s recounting of his statement to parents that, “If you’d like to be part of our community, by all means come on board, but you come into the community with an understanding that this is what it is all about”.

Also consistent with the gemeinschaft model of community, these principals considered giving witness to Catholic beliefs and practices to be a symbol of unity or oneness with the school community. For Bruce, teaching is “more than a job. It’s got to be a witness where teachers see themselves as being on about the vision of the church and the culture of the church”. Also for Bruce, the presence of the parish priest is a sign of community within the Catholic school. “Here in this community, it’s one...and we’ve got a really active parish priest. So to me there’s a oneness, and I think that’s unique.” Sharing this view, Elise stated that it is “important for the priest to be seen at the school... then I think there’s a little bit more community”.

A further indication that the principals espoused a *gemeinschaft* understanding of community was suggested in their acceptance of what Tonnies (1897/1957) described as “mutual promises” (p. 20). Here, mutuality is expressed as a firm promise by one party and only understood as an “eventual promise” by the other. In the minds of several principals, there was a belief that many of the Catholic parents were in the category of the “eventual promise”. Several principals believed that the parents would eventually re-engage with the mission of the Catholic school in response to their initiatives. Therefore, at first glance, the data suggest that the principals were seeking to promote a *gemeinschaft* ‘ideal’ of community and applying it in a “non problematic” way to schools (Starratt, 2003, p. 67).

A closer analysis of the data suggest that the principals who espoused this *gemeinschaft* and “non problematic” ideal of community had not engaged in a sufficiently critical assessment of it. The reason for this is that the deeper *gemeinschaft* understanding of community “as a real social relationship of obligation or mutual dependence” (Tonnies, 1887/1957, p. 20) could not be found in the data. Here, principals described parents as “totally disconnected” (Denise) and relevant terms, such as, mutuality and social obligation were only minimally present. The experience of being “each others’ keepers” (Etzioni, 1991, p. 594), foundational to contemporary understandings of *gemeinschaft* community, was not strong in the data. The changing attitudes and religious culture of parents, as described by principals, fundamentally challenge a *gemeinschaft* understanding of community.

Further, as a consequence of their ideal and non problematic understanding of community, the principals appeared hindered in their capacity to fulfil their leadership roles (Starratt, 2003). However, when Gordon stated in the focus group interview that “I am not sure what community means in regard to schools and I am struggling with making sense of it”, the principals began to move beyond their ideal and non problematic conceptualisation of community. This, then, enabled them to take up notions of “respect, dialogue and understanding” (Shields, Laroque, & Oberg, 2002, p. 132) and experience of the need for “community of and for difference” (Renshaw, 1999, p. 3), consistent with the direction the data suggest they wished to take. In a *gemeinschaft* model of community there appears to be

little need for dialogue or collaboration because of the thick level of assent to common beliefs.

**Assertion 2: Principals describe the reality of school life as a 'gesellschaft' model of community.**

While principals appeared to accept the 'ideal' of *gemeinschaft* community, the data also heralded the presence of a *gesellschaft* form of community, in which loyalty and obligation are replaced by individualist, competitive and contractual ways of relating. This development towards individualistic, competitive and contractual ways of relating was reflected in the principals' stories of daily life at school:

I'll just quote an example, with the changing family structures and changing Church structures and changing school structures, and I think that's been layered over the last two decades and has substantial impact on our purpose. We had a Year 6 Camp last week and I remember Camps in a Catholic school, where one of the things that you did when you went away was meet people and interact with people and put up with the people that you didn't like in the cabin and you had your liturgies. I've had an influx of parents complaining about their child not getting the cabin they wanted, and I met with each one of the thirteen parents and in dialoguing with them, they've got one child or two children, and they're so insular on their child now and their Y Generation needs that that whole feeling I had growing up in a Catholic school of what a Retreat was or what a Camp was, is very different in a parent's eyes in some ways, and it made me think here's the next wave of change coming. That's what I felt like.

But it just made me question after I'd gone through a few conversations with parents, and you know, twenty years ago if the parent was talking to a principal in a school about an issue, there was a different understanding of the Catholic philosophy, and I found I was actually explaining it to the parents as, you know, this is part of the Eucharistic community, that we're together, that we accept one another, and it's not about 'I get my own way'. Everything then seemed to be okay until the list of buses came out and they weren't happy then! I just think it's another change, probably a little one, but significant. (Hayley)

This appreciation of a gesellschaft reality is also reflected in the data as principals described parents as “lost”, “hard to find common ground” with (Bruce) and attitudinally not “necessarily Catholic anymore” (Elise). Moreover, the data strongly suggest that there is a “breakdown” (Bruce) between parents and the Catholic identity of the schools. Elise described a “creep” away from the unity and common

ground required for a Catholic school community among both an increasing group of teachers and the parents.

Given the strong agreement in the data around the previous references to issues such as “creep” and “lost”, it is of interest to the researcher that the principals could not agree in the focus group interview as to whether there was “real” (Bellah, et al., 1985, p. 77) or “pseudo” community (Peck, 1990, p. 86) in their schools. In the focus group, Charles was the first to raise the question as to whether “deep” or “superficial” communities existed in Catholic schools:

Things like school [parent] forums are great. They’re good and they get people in, but are they just superficial community or are they deep spiritual communities, I don’t know. (Charles)

In the literature, it has been argued that “real” school communities require a common ground based on “shared vocabulary, shared values, and common goals concerning children” (Timpone & Reich, 1997, p. 469). Moreover, the school as community requires constitutive values which all agree contribute to the common good and are willingly pursued in a collaborative manner (Strike, 2000). Therefore, the findings in this research study beg the question whether there is sufficient unity and common ground between members of the schools to claim the existence of “real” communities.

Here, it is noteworthy that the data to support claims in the literature that “social capital” is dissipating as “customs and patterns, traditions, and norms for guiding their collective life together have disappeared” (Starratt, 2003, p. 77). Social capital is said to involve “trust, norms and networks” (p. 167) or “the networks of social relations which are characterized by norms of trust and reciprocity which lead to outcomes of mutual benefit” (Stone & Hughes, 2002, p. 64). The dissipation of traditional social capital is said to be a major threat to the “real community” which is the “community of memory” (Bellah et al, 1985, p. 77) in which storytelling develops “patterns of loyalty and obligation that keep the community alive” (p. 154). The community of memory appears to hold some sway in peoples’ lives as they often return to it as a “second language” when other sources of strength are found to be inadequate (p. 154). Thus, new understandings have to be found in regard to the

school as community and, in particular, there is a challenge to imagine new forms of community.

Yet, despite evidence in the data suggesting the emergence of the *gesellschaft* community within Catholic primary schools, the principals, in this research study, continued to believe in the possibility of the *gemeinschaft* 'ideal'. For Elise, rituals can 'tap into' the deeper layer of common ground just under the surface of the school community:

But probably what binds us more so than common beliefs at the moment is the idea that we have rituals. People don't necessarily understand them well I suppose, such as Anzac Day. But there's something about the ritual in how we do it, with our faith understanding of these things. In times of crisis, or the rituals created for significant public events such as Anzac Day, a deeper sense of common ground seems to emerge among parents and the school. And it is in these circumstances, as soon as that surface is scratched, that it is there. It is clear as day what the community expects and everyone is on the same page. (Elise)

Celebrate anything that you can, it builds community (Elise)

For Elise and the other principals, there was little awareness that the gesellschaft community represents a collective of autonomous individuals and is arrived at due to the voluntary decision of those concerned with protecting their respective interests. In short:

The theory of the Gesellschaft deals with the artificial construction of an aggregate of human being which superficially resembles the Gemeinschaft in so far as the individuals peacefully live and dwell together...in Gesellschaft they are essentially separated in spite of all the unifying factors. (Tonnies, 1957, p. 74)

In this model of community, personally owned and community values are replaced by contractual ones and the appearance of group unity is only superficial.

**Assertion 3:** Principals suggest the possibility of a 'personalist' model of community.

Despite the dominance of the *gemeinschaft* model of community, the data in this research study did suggest some thinking to support the possibility of a personalist model of community that balances the *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* models of community. This possibility was best revealed in Bruce's statements that there had to be "a genuine concern for individuals" balanced by an equal commitment to "gathering, belonging and partnership". Or again, when he said, "We have compassion for each other" and "a genuine concern for individuals". This "balanced vision of community" is what Aku (2000, p. 138) asserted is the best way forward for a new conceptualisation of community, accounting for the strengths and weaknesses in the *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* models. Moreover, it is consistent with the "community of and for difference" (Renshaw, 1999, p. 3) that "begins, not with an assumption of shared norms, beliefs and values, but with the need for respect, dialogue and understanding" (Shields, Laroque & Oberg, 2002, p. 132).

Central to the personalist understanding of community is the belief that "It is only in relation to others that we exist as persons" (Macmurray, 1961, p. 211). This belief is founded in Albert's statement that he builds community, because "We're communal beings, so we have to feel we belong somewhere". Taking up Macmurray's (1961) view, it could be suggested that Albert espoused an "intentional equality" based on a "self-realisation of the personal" (p. 158). Whereas the personalist elements in a number of comments by the other principals' appeared founded more on a "de facto equality" which simply imputes equal rights, functions and abilities to people, for Albert, it was based on an anthropological belief.

A personalist model of community also provides a promising direction for Catholic education as it allows for a theistic interpretation of relationships (Bayer, 1999). The data strongly suggested such that a theistic interpretation of relationships was integral to several principals' conceptualisations of community, as Hayley stated, "When I see relationship, I think of Spirit. To me, in the Trinity, that's part of how I interpret Spirit in community". The majority of the principals were united in the belief that being "Christ centred" (Frank) is the primary theological understanding of a Catholic school community. However, despite this theological commitment to Christ as the "cornerstone" (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, n. 61), the

data suggest an underdeveloped theological conceptualisation which appeared to impact on the principals' capacities to embrace a personalist approach. In particular, there was evidence within the data that the principals were unable to connect faith in Jesus Christ with a personal and 'communitarian' way of life (Abbott, 1966, pp. 58-59, n. 32). Furthermore, there was no evidence of engagement with the "communio" theology of community which is fundamental to the identity of the Catholic Church (Coriden, 2000; Doyle, 2000; Komonchak, 2003). Finally, the data does not suggest that these principals were applying Catholic social teaching regarding collaborative organisational structures and community building strategies in their leadership roles (Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977).

Beyond this lack of theological understanding, the principals' capacity to fully take up the personalist approach was inhibited by the silence around learning and the learning organisation. Apart from Albert, no other principal mentioned learning. Albert stated that "Our core business is about learning" and that "The Catholic school community in particular is guided by the beliefs of learning". Albert extended these thoughts with comments about how he intended to engage parents and teachers further in the learning cycle. However, he was not able to extend his theorising of this guiding belief by taking up issues around the acquisition of knowledge as being by nature a social and communal activity (Twomey Fosnot, 1996). In an era in which individualist approaches to learning are being taken over by more cooperative understandings and community is becoming central to the theorisation of classrooms (Renshaw, 2003, p. 356; Murphy, 1997, p. 199), this study found no engagement with these developments. Therefore, it could be concluded that for an adequate conceptualisation of community there is a need to engage the incipient personalist approach found in various parts of the data with the silence around the educational theorising of teaching, learning and the classroom.

In summarising, consistent with the literature (Furman-Brown, 1999; Kenny, 1999), the data appears to suggest that the principals, individually and collectively, struggled with providing a unified theoretical conceptualisation of community appropriate to a Catholic school. The inability to articulate this conceptualisation was consistent with the literature, where it is noted that community is a "contested concept" (Dempsey, 2002, p. 141), resistant to "being pinned down by definition"

(Shaffer & Amundsen, 1993, p. 10) and “not a universally defined outcome” (Westheimer, 1999, p. 103). Without a unified theoretical conceptualization of community, the principals in this research study seemed to be caught between the *gemeinschaft* ‘ideal’ of the Catholic school as community and a *gesellschaft* ‘reality’. However, there are glimmers of hope for the further conceptualisation of community appropriate to contemporary Catholic schooling, if the personalist approach could be linked with more traditional understandings.

### **7.3 Discussion – Research Question Two**

#### **“How do principals describe their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?”**

The second research question built on the previous one, which explored the principals’ perspectives on the conceptualisation of community. It investigated the proposition in the literature that as an inevitable consequence of macrosystem socio-cultural change, shifts in theological theorising, educational restructuring (Kofman & Senge, 1993, p. 17) and consequent developments in organisation theories (Hock, 1999; Gilley & Matycunich, 2000), the roles of school principals have been repositioned in recent years (Scott, 2003). This section will illuminate repositioning of the principal’s role as a community leader in relation to the data generated in this study.

As discussed in Chapter 6, the first-order interpretation of data, during the exploration stage, identified a range of beliefs and practical ideas for building community in the context of the Catholic primary school. In the inspection stage, the second-order interpretation identified a number of themes in respect to the role of principal in building the school community. These themes included *leading through making time, developing conversation, communication and dialogue, evangelisation, limited theological understanding of Christian leadership, little appreciation of leading the learning community, ambivalence in leadership style and criticism of the policy context*. In the course of a third-order interpretation, theoretical significance was assigned to these themes, allowing the researcher to make the following assertions in response to the second research question.



**Assertion 4:****Principals are immersed in a dominant industrial model of leadership.**

The views of the principals suggest that they were strongly influenced by an industrial understanding of leadership centred on the “great leaders” (Senge, 1990, p. 340) or “heroic” approach (Shriberg et al., 2002, p. 212). This understanding was evidenced by statements, such as, “As long as you’re very clear and very vocal about what we’re on about, people respond” and “At the end of the day you need to have a leader” (Albert), “you make your mission clear to the community first” (Bruce) and then you can “chip away” (Bruce) at the many problems facing community in Catholic schools. This finding is consistent with research findings in respect to Catholic headteachers in the United Kingdom that identified the presence of the heroic or “strong” leader in Catholic schools (Grace, 2002, p. 14). This prior research had identified heroic/strong leadership with having clarity of vision and mission and an ability to bring this vision and mission into reality.

This adoption of this style of leadership in Catholic education is understandable given the mythology that surrounds previous generations of leaders in Catholic schools that highlights “the triumph of Catholic heroes who stood firm against hostile forces” (Ryan, 2001, p. 219). In addition, it is reasonable to expect that leaders in Catholic schools have been influenced by traditional forms of industrial leadership that “saw leadership as the property of the individual; considered leadership primarily in the context of the formal group and organizations, and, equated concepts of management and leadership (Shriberg, Shriberg & Lloyd, 2002, p. 203).

Interestingly, the findings of this research study also suggest that in taking up the heroic/strong style of leadership, the principals justified their stance through a particular theological conceptualisation of leadership. As Elise stated, “When Jesus went back to heaven, He left us here...what we’re doing is what He started”. This appeared to be a theological justification for the heroic leadership model which has also been correlated with a discourse identified among Catholic principals as “strong” leadership (Grace, 2002, p. 143). Moreover, this theological interpretation of their leadership role expressed itself in a particular understanding of evangelisation that favours heroic/strong leadership over collegiality through “a

profound dialogue with culture” (Bevans, 2005, p. 6). According to Albert, principals have “to be very focused on that whole evangelisation perspective” which involves “bringing people to Christ”. This understanding of evangelisation is consistent with literature that promotes evangelisation as a particular faith obligation incumbent on principals of Catholic schools (Hutton, 2002) and suggests that it is something which is done to other people through a proclamation and a call “to restore Christendom” (Tinsey, 2002, p. 5).

Unfortunately, the enduring influence of the heroic/strong, industrial leadership model within the principals’ understandings of their community leadership role appeared to rob them of the very energy that such a model requires. Given the high reliance on the individual leader in this model, it was of no surprise that principals reported having very little time available for the critical and reflective processes that nurture their inner worlds. As Charles stated, the role of the principal is one of “constant demand” and “bloody hard”. Elise said that “building community” is “tiring”. Here, principals’ stories confirmed previous research findings that emotional pressures impact on principals’ capacity to “productively resolve” situations (Scott, 2003, p. 7) and are detrimental to personal wellbeing and family relationships (Carlin, d’Arbon, Dorman, Duignan, & Neidhart, 2003). Yet, as will now be further observed, the data also indicate that principals are beginning to identify these more negative aspects of this heroic/strong, industrial leadership model upon their role and seeking an alternative approach.

**Assertion 5:                      Principals suggest a desire to move beyond an industrial model of leadership.**

The data in Chapter 6 clearly suggest that the principals in this study were seeking to move beyond an industrial model of leadership in their approaches to a community building leadership model characterised by “reciprocal contributive relationships” (Limerick & Cranston, 1998, p. 40). This desire was expressed in notions of “relationship”, “interact” and “trust” regarding leadership for community building. Albert stated that the more “you interact with people, the more community that you’re able to develop”. Frank said that he tries to “guide and persuade rather than dictate in building relationships”.

Such desires are consistent with the literature since the 1970s which has questioned the usefulness of industrial models of leadership in a post industrial era (Burns, 1987; Greenleaf, 1977; Rost, 1991). These post industrial theories of leadership advance a relational approach to leadership that is based on influence rather than positional authority, and is characterised by collaboration and service rather than individualism and self-interest. Within the educational literature, the post industrial style of leadership is framed as a quest to “understand the culture” and promote “collaboration” (Fullan, 2001, p. 72), positioning principals as leaders of the cultural change required for school reform and restructuring (Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

Despite the principals’ desire to engage with aspects of the post industrial leadership model there appeared to be little evidence that they were seeking to understand their school cultures as part of their community leadership roles. Charles stated that culture has “a greater influence than the parents” on students’ values and has “sort of won out” with them. He, then, went on to say that “people are interested more in the individual than their community side of things”. He also noted that values have changed due to “materialism” which “makes it very difficult to build community”. However, he could not be drawn further on the implications of these comments. At the same time, other principals expressed concern regarding “pretend” or “superficial” forms of community in their schools rather than a “real community” (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 77). Moreover, they were concerned that there was a “breakdown” with parents (and possibly teachers) with an “underworld” developing, effectively described as a “balkanized” culture in the literature (Fullan, 2001, p. 72).

Yet, there is no evidence in the research findings that the principals associated these challenges with a post industrial understanding of cultural leadership. They mostly offered strategies for building community in ways that have been described as “contrived collegiality” (Fullan, 2001, p. 72). The findings of this research study suggest that, while principals place an importance on relationships, there was little evidence that they understood the centrality of collaborative leadership in a post industrial model of leadership (Bensimon & Neuman, 1993). Without collaboration there can be no real “community of believers” (Shriberg et al., 2002, p. 102) and the

necessary “mutuality” and “responsive dialogue” (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000. p. 11) required in a post industrial era.

The apparent inability of the principals to embrace a fully post industrial leadership model is particularly problematic within the context of the Catholic school. For the past thirty years, Catholic Church documents have advanced Christian leadership styles conceptualised around understandings of “communion” or a “communio” style of community (Coriden, 2000, p. 41). The emergence of a strong post industrial leadership approach for Catholic school principals would require engagement with these understandings. Yet, within the research findings, there did not seem to be an adequately developed theological conceptualisation of the principalship and its community leadership role. Here, principals (Elise and Charles) recognised this limited theological conceptualisation by reporting inadequate theological preparation for their leadership role. This apparent lack of theological preparation for the post industrial leadership style is further evidenced in their silence around taking up a collegial approach to leadership.

Principals’ capacity to fully take up a post industrial, relational leadership approach appeared to be further negated by issues relating to ‘fear of losing control’ and the management of their inner worlds. Here, the principals were “afraid of things getting out of control” because if they gave too much then parents might “take too much” (Bruce). At the same time, there appeared to be few opportunities for principals to safely share their concerns. For Albert, the regional principals’ meeting was the only place where he could safely step out of his community leadership role and to “say I am falling apart” without judgment. However, as Albert noted, the principals were hindered in their sharing with others by “pride and guilt” and not wanting to be seen as “in crisis”. Given that the inner world takes on fresh importance in “conditions of turbulence and change... [and provides both]...a secure sense of self...and...a basis for understanding others” (Seagal & Home, 1997, p. 56), then, the research findings suggest that the principals need to develop the inner resources required to expand their roles.

Further, the research findings indicate that for some principals inadequate knowledge of system expectations fuelled their fear or reluctance to expand the



leadership” (Cooper, 2001; Dalla Costa, 1998) that relies on core values and a commitment “to ends in view” (Furman, 2004, p. 216).

Within this research study, findings indicate that the principals’ were motivated by core values, based on their Christian faith. Denise exemplified this motivation in saying that she was spurred on by an “overriding belief...[in the]...children...[and the need to give them]...a loving Christ based place where they can feel safe and ...feel loved by the teachers”. Elise also expressed a strong commitment to these values by saying “...we go from our values base. We say this is what we believe and if you’re here, then, we would like you to consider these beliefs”. Such comments suggest a commitment to a principalship informed by the Christian value of love or Starratt’s (2003) “ethic of caring” which is “grounded in the belief that the integrity of human relationships should be held sacred and that the school as an organisation should hold the good of human beings within it as sacred” (p. 145). However, it should be noted that the principals’ understanding of moral leadership appeared to be based on the assumption of the “individual administrator as ethical leader” (Furman, 2004, p. 219) and consequently does not shift the “locus of moral agency to the community as a whole” (Furman, 2003, p. 4). Here, it seems that these principals had not accepted recent arguments that associate leadership with principals as “ethical dialecticians” who work towards “communal visions” and build “shared purpose” (Bottery, 2004, p. 211).

In addition, claims made by the principals about values based leadership do not appreciate the findings of recent research (Branson, 2005) that principals display limited self-knowledge of personal values and the capacity to apply them. This is a matter of concern since values reside in the innermost being of persons exercising enormous influence over behaviour. Again, it can be argued that through increasing self knowledge it is possible for the principals to enlarge perspectives and change behaviour (Napolitano & Henderson, 1998). However, as noted previously, the findings of this research study suggest that the principals found it difficult to make time for the development of self knowledge and the “habits of the mind” (Mackoff, 2000; Napolitano & Henderson, 1998) required to engage moral leadership.

Finally, there appears to be no evidence in the research findings that the principals' commitment to Christian values reflected appreciation of a Christian moral leadership style characterised by appreciation of the gifts of others, empowering followers to participate and listening to their wisdom (Fitzgerald, 1990). Extending this point the researcher noted silence regarding any scriptural perspectives by the principals on their community leadership roles. Given the central place of the servant leadership model in Christian communities (Fitzgerald, 1990), Albert was the only person to mention it, and then this was in the context of saying that it had been "overdone". Consequently, it has to be concluded that there is no evidence that the principals have taken up the core value of Christ and carried it through into its necessary consequence of servant leadership. The servant leadership approach with its "respect for each person" [while also] "building a community of participation and solidarity" (Whetstone, 2002, p. 391) is integral to a Christian leadership model. Hence, it is concluded that the personalist approach, while hinted at in the data, still awaits further reflection and study to be of value in a new community leadership paradigm for the principals in this study.

## **7.4 Symbolic Interactionist Perspective**

In Chapter 4, it was proposed that symbolic interactionism is a "useful perspective for understanding human social life", especially for those who "work with people" (Charon, 2004, p. 203). In particular, it stated that symbolic interactionism is relevant to this study as it provides a way to ask people "to tell their stories or show how their perspective is created, altered or lost" (p. 205). Chapter 4 also identified a number of key understandings within the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. These understandings include:

- The focus on symbols;
- The symbolic nature of reality;
- Human beings as purposive agents and symbolic actors;
- Problematic social situations; and
- Role-making processes.

During the final stage of analysis, this understanding of symbolic interactionism is now applied to the research data in order to gain a deeper appreciation of the views

of the principals in respect to the Catholic school as community and their role as school community leaders.

### **The importance of cultural consensus about ‘community’**

As a perspective, symbolic interaction emphasizes the essential importance of shared understanding for the building and maintenance of culture or society. Here ‘culture’, or the human environment, is understood as a variety of “social objects” (Charon, 2004, pp. 45-47) defined through social action. Symbolic language includes words as key social objects which are “constructed on the basis of an ongoing activity” (Stryker, 2000, p. 9). Moreover, a shared symbolic language, again including words, is crucial to thinking, social communication and social action.

The thinking, social communication and social action required to build Catholic schools as communities require words and other gestures which are the most “important human symbols” (Charon, 2004, p. 59). However, symbolic communication is particularly difficult when, as described in this study, there are “diverse ways of thinking and different spiritualities...[among]...people...that is hard to find unity in schools” (Ivan) and parents are “totally disconnected” (Denise) from the Catholic Church. To add to this challenge, the principals in this research study seemed to be ambivalent regarding their intentional understanding and use of Catholic symbolic language. On the one hand, there was strong agreement that Christ and Gospel values are the sure foundation of their leadership roles. Yet, there were also clear statements that they would be more confident if the priest was present to explain Catholic teaching to teachers and parents. Moreover, several principals stated that they were not adequately theologically educated for their leadership roles.

In short, the principals in this research study appeared to lack the symbolic language required to communicate the Catholic symbols foundational to building the school as community. Consequently, in order to respond to this reality, there appears to be a strong need for principals to be involved in social interaction around



the symbolic language required to lead the building of the Catholic schools as community.

### **Role salience and commitment: A struggle for principals**

Within this research study, principals revealed how their identity is being negotiated in the face of multiple role expectations. The data suggest that the principals' leadership role of community building is in transition. For Bruce, the increasing expectations of his role resulted in his "learning to delegate". Moreover, for Frank and Gordon, the role is shaped not only by expectations they place on themselves but also expectations of the Catholic Education Office, the parish and their families. In the absence of significant interaction from the Catholic Education Office, Albert took it upon himself to renegotiate his role. Thus "role salience" and "commitment" (Stryker, 2002, pp. 60-62) emerged as significant issues, because principals are forced to prioritise expectations and address the degree of 'fit' between personal and societal goals and purposes.

The data suggest that some principals in the study no longer viewed their roles as an objective reality, a "set of expectations – or a script - that tells the individual what to do" (Charon, 2004, p. 168). Rather, their roles were being re-conceptualised as "social roles", framed as "a set of rules" that were governed by negotiation (Charon, 2004, p. 168). The group of principals engaging in this re-conceptualising were also exercising "selfhood" (Stryker, 2002, p. 168) or actively reflecting on their actions and making decisions against a personal definition of self. However, it is of concern that only one principal appeared to be actively engaging with these processes. The other principals appear to be renegotiating their roles only as a response to an overwhelming work load. Yet, the symbolic interactionist perspective suggests that social roles are "fluid, vague and contradictory" (Charon, 2004, p. 168) and in need of continuous negotiation. Therefore, every opportunity should be made to enable principals to engage in ongoing role negotiation processes in order to enhance the possibility of a more adequate conceptualisation of their leadership roles in community building.

## **The impact of role conflict and strain**

Within this research study, the symbolic interactionist perspective helped to explain the problematic social situations impacting on the principals' leadership role of community building in Catholic schools and the resulting "role conflict" (Stryker, 2002, p. 73). The problematic situations identified in this study are around unclear definitions of Catholic school identity and purpose, as well as the apparent lack of shared expectations regarding the role of principal. Principals, such as Bruce, reported feeling "swamped" and "frustrated" by the multiple demands from government and Church. For Denise, the conflict came because parents could not see her "side" of things. Gordon reported being constantly "questioned" about matters concerned with the "Catholic ethos" of his school. Albert experienced it as not knowing what the CEO expected of him. Across the data, it appears that parental expectations of Catholic schools are creating major conflict for principals. The symbolic interactionist perspective asserts that such role conflict is normal in a complex social structure, such as the principalship of a Catholic school. However, the data would suggest that the majority of principals are responding to conflict by using withdrawal, rather than using it to create novel solutions. This is a less than satisfactory solution and cannot lead to positive development.

Further, prior research (d'Arbon et al., 2001; Carlin et al., 2003; Spry, 2004) within Catholic education has suggested that role conflict for individual principals has turned into "role strain" across the larger societal structure (i.e., Catholic education within the Diocese of Lismore), in which individual principals are located. Findings from these studies suggest that social structures, such as parish-school relationships, educational decentralisation and the legislative environment, are serving to increase rather than decrease individual role conflict and, consequently, role strain is threatening the stability of the social structures that make up Catholic education. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, social structures should provide "resources for interaction" (Stryker, 2002, p. 70) that support open dialogue and debate, leading to a resolution of role conflict for individuals and diminishing the potential of role strain across the larger society. The resolution of role strain is found in bringing the conflicting parties together so that they can communicate. Given the intention principals' identified in this study to move in these directions it

provides one of the most promising directions for the building of authentic community in Catholic schools.

### **Clarifying roles and expectations: Mind action and social interaction**

The symbolic interactionist perspective states that role negotiation occurs and role identity arises through processes of mind action and social interaction (Charon, 2001, pp. 155-166). Interestingly, within this research study, there is evidence of at least one principal naturally engaging in such processes. As noted previously, Albert, being uncertain of system expectations of him developed his “own leadership perspective”. While he did this by “talking to people”, it was also quite clear that did it by conversing with himself. He further elaborated that when faced with external regulatory demands he converses with himself about “How do I best use that and what do I want to achieve with that?” Only after he has done this mind action does he go to the school community with a proposed line of action. However, it also seems that managing these processes was not easy and there was a plea by several principals for more productive ways to develop their roles. Gordon said he needed “help” with the role. Albert described the need for time to share with other principals in a safe and comfortable environment where he could reflect on his work. He also said that there is a role for a “coach” or “life trainer” to help principals in their leadership role of “sustaining school community”.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, being in a state of flux and transformation in respect to social roles is not necessarily aberrant or problematic. Rather, it should be considered normal, provided there is a process for ongoing negotiation. Consequently, this perspective recognises the importance of intentionally engaging role-making processes to address role development, role conflict and role strain. The self is also “an ever-changing social object” (Charon, 2004, p. 77) constructed through processes of social interaction and “mind action” (pp. 97-107). Such cognitive activity involves a concern for the “reference group” of significant and generalised others (p. 76) and processes of “self indication” (Stryker, 2002, p. 50) or “self-perception” action towards the self (Charon, 2004, pp. 80-89). As a purposive and symbolic agent, the self is capable of “taking the role of the

other” or choosing to cooperate within a social situation (Stryker, 2002, p. 90). However, several principals in this study identified that the possibility for interactive support through reference group activity was not that accessible. Moreover, the highly individualist approach to leadership apparent in this study would tend to preclude principals from engaging in the interactions required to open themselves up to new understandings of the self and their roles. Hence, it would seem that further system support needs to be made available to enable these processes.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the findings of the study by placing them within the literature on principalship, leadership and community as well as contemporary developments in respect to the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. In particular, this chapter presents six assertions in line with the two research questions:

**RESEARCH QUESTION 1: “How do primary principals conceptualise the Catholic school as community?”**

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2: “How do principals describe their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?”**

In response to the first research question, the findings of this research study suggest a confused conceptualisation of the Catholic school as community. Here it is asserted that while principals assume a *gemeinschaft* understanding of community they also acknowledge that Catholic schools are, in reality, a *gesellschaft* model of community. Moreover, it is also asserted that embedded in the data are significant indications that a personalist approach to community is an emergent conceptualisation. Consequently, it is argued that the sociological conceptualisation of community is an unfinished task for these principals as they struggle to provide a unified theoretical conceptualisation of community appropriate to a Catholic school. A symbolic interactionist perspective reminds us that without a shared symbolic language, these principals are incapable of mind action, symbolic

communication and social action to further envision the Catholic school as community.

In response to the second research question this chapter asserts that, while the principalship is in transition and principals are searching for ways to improve their community leadership in schools, an industrial model of leadership remains dominant. At the same time, it is claimed that a new post industrial leadership paradigm is emerging and the gestures towards a personalist model of leadership are noted. However, while the principals are able to identify more personalist approaches to school community leadership, they nonetheless appeared to be hampered by the lack of theoretical understanding regarding their leadership roles. Again, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, these principals appeared to lack the symbolic language required for the mind action and social interaction needed to clarify their leadership roles and behaviours. Symbolic interactionism also explains the conflicting expectations of school community leadership, as well as the role conflict experienced by these principals and the consequent role strain as this role conflict spreads across an education system. Moreover, this theoretical perspective also offers a role-making process as a way forward in role development.

The final chapter of this thesis presents a review and synthesis of the entire research study and concludes by offering a series of propositions for consideration by the Catholic Education Office and primary school principals in the Diocese of Lismore.

## **CHAPTER 8            REVIEW AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **8.1     The Research Problem and Purpose**

Initially, this research study focused on the issue of the Catholic school as community. This issue was first identified by the researcher in the mid 1980s. At this time, as a lecturer in postgraduate leadership education, the researcher was convinced of the value of framing the Catholic school as a community. In 1990, the researcher was appointed as a consultant for community services within the Catholic Education Office, Lismore. By the mid 1990s, the researcher came to appreciate the challenge of building the Catholic school as community. While the importance of the principals' school community leadership role was identified, principals struggled with this dimension of their role. Here, there were more questions than answers and most principals appeared to be operating from intuitive and pragmatic approaches, rather than from well-developed theoretical principles or frameworks.

In identifying the issue of school community leadership as a potential research problem, the researcher came to recognise that this was a broad focus with a number of interrelated problems. To clarify the research problem within this research study, Catholic primary school principalship was situated within a number of interrelated contexts (Chapter 2). This contextual analysis revealed a lack of comprehensive guidelines for school community leadership within the Diocese of Lismore. Moreover, while Church teaching and government policy favour the Catholic school as community, policy statements that refer to the school as community and school community leadership remain internally ambiguous and contradictory. Yet again, it was noted that social and cultural changes have cumulatively affected the "established order of reference for identity and community" (Starratt, 2003, p. 76).

This contextual analysis identified that the school as community is an evolving and contested concept which significantly impacts upon school community leadership. Here it was concluded that while the policy context of Catholic education and public

education may direct the principal to build the school as community, this direction remains problematic. Understanding the research problem in this way, this research study was narrowed to focus on the school community leadership role of the principal in Catholic primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore. The purpose of this research study was identified in terms of developing a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the school community leadership role of the principal. It was expected that such an understanding would not only point to new directions for policy and practice in the Diocese of Lismore but also contribute to theoretical developments in the field.

## **8.2 The Research Questions**

The research questions that were to guide this research study were developed following a comprehensive literature review with respect to the principalship, community and leadership (Chapter 3). This review revealed that there is contestation around the concept of community and three models of community were identified, namely, the *gemeinschaft* community, the *gesellschaft* community and a new personalist understanding. The literature review also pointed to the elusive nature of leadership and identified the theoretical development from an industrial leadership account to various post industrial models of leadership, including a personalist approach. This theoretical development is also reflected in writing on school leadership. Finally, the review of the literature suggested that as there are no clear answers with respect to the school as community and school community leadership; the importance of meaning-making around these issues has been highlighted.

This understanding led the researcher to identify two research questions. In determining these research questions, the researcher was influenced by the seminal work of Michael Fullan (1991) on educational change. Here Fullan identified the importance of finding meaning in respect to educational change, as well as developing theories around what he labelled “organized commonsense” (p. xii). For Fullan, “We have to know what change looks like from the point of view of the teacher, student, parent and administrator if we are to understand the actions and reactions of individuals...” (p. xi).

**Research Question 1:**           **“How do primary principals conceptualise the Catholic school as community?”**

**Research Question 2:**           **“How do principals describe their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?”**

The first research question aimed to understand the characteristics of the Catholic primary school as community from the perspective of the primary principal. Here the researcher was interested in whether the principals align with one or other of the three models of community identified in the literature or if they conceptualize the Catholic school as community in other ways. The second research question sought understanding in respect to the leadership role of the primary principal in building the Catholic school as community. This research question was intended to illuminate the theory of leadership that underpins the work of the principals in this research study.

### **8.3     The Theoretical Framework**

Following the clarification of the research problem and the identification of the purpose of this research study and research questions that could guide this investigation, it was deemed appropriate to situate this research study within a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism (Charon, 2004; Stryker, 2002). Symbolic interactionism, as a perspective, focuses on interaction with human beings as interpretive, proactive and rational problem-solvers. Here, it is argued that individual behaviour and societal direction are influenced by the meaning people place on action and this meaning is expressed in symbolic communication within interactive contexts. Problematic social situations, as evident in role conflict and role strain, require a role-making process involving the self, society and interaction that contribute to shared perspectives and symbolic language.

Developing this concept, symbolic interactionism as a research methodology focuses directly on the process of construction or meaning making in contexts of social action. As such, it provides a constructivist persuasion within research. The



choice of a constructivist tradition for this research study was deemed appropriate because it relies on a “hermeneutic/dialectical methodology” aimed at understanding and reconstructing previously held problematic constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, pp. 111-112). The pragmatic constructivist epistemology shares the essence of the interpretivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Both seek to access the world of meaning through interpretation to determine how meaning is constructed, as well as to clarify what meanings are embedded in the language and actions of social actors. Moreover, the pragmatic perspective is able to illuminate an issue about which little is known or is hidden from view (Heck & Hallinger, 1999).

#### **8.4 The Design of the Study**

This research is concerned with a regional case study of rural Catholic primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore, serviced by the Catholic Education Office. Case study as an orchestrating framework focuses “on a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25) and, as such, allows the researcher to gain a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the research focus. In this research study, the case or unit of analysis was Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Lismore and the focus was on the Catholic school as community and school community leadership. The key informants to this study were the primary principals who participated in this research.

In line with the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, this research study employed a multiple research methods approach in the two research stages of “exploration” and “inspection” (Charon, 2001, p. 208) and engaged in a three-step iterative process of data interpretation as proposed by Neuman (2006). These methods, outlined in Table 5.1, included an open-ended questionnaire, two individual interviews and a focus group. In the exploration stage, an open-ended questionnaire allowed 15 primary principals in the Diocese of Lismore to express their understandings of the Catholic primary school as community and their role in school community leadership. Here, ideas, concepts, understandings and beliefs were gathered, actively modified and adjusted as new data were presented, in order to understand the perspectives of the principals. A first-order analysis of these exploratory data resulted in issues being raised with respect to principals’ conceptualisation of community in a Catholic school and how it is built. These

issues were then investigated in the inspection stage of the research study that was to include individual and focus group interviews. Nine principals were involved in one or more of these data collection moments. These interviews were audio-taped and transcribed and then underwent a second-order interpretation, thus allowing for the generation of codes and themes in response to the two research questions. A third-order interpretation enabled the researcher to make a series of assertions by assigning general theoretical significance to the research findings. The propositions that follow in this chapter reflect these assertions (see Section 8.7).

## **8.5 Research Questions Answered**

The use of multiple research methods and this three-step iterative process of data interpretation within this research study resulted in a “rich picture” of principals’ perspectives on the Catholic primary school as community and their leadership role in building this community.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How do principals conceptualise the Catholic primary school as community?**

In response to this research question, the data suggest that while community related issues take up an inordinate amount of their time, the participant principals evidenced poor conceptualisation of community. It appeared that the principals assumed a *gemeinschaft* understanding of community, while acknowledging that schools are, in reality, experiences of the *gesellschaft* model. However, embedded in the data are indications of an emergent personalist approach as some of the principals both described “a community of and for difference” (Renshaw, 1999, p. 3) and also noted the importance of subjectivity, autonomy, respect, participation and solidarity within the Catholic school as community. However, these personalist views were not consistently held and, consequently, it is argued that the conceptualisation of community is an unfinished task for these principals.

In order to take up this unfinished task, it appears that principals will need to acknowledge that the many problems they identified regarding school as community actually renders the concept of community problematic. Given the many concerns the principals identified, it seemed a challenge to construct their schools as

communities. While there appeared to be consensus among the principals that unity and common ground, being of one mind and ensuring minimal conflict were at the heart of their conceptualisation of community, the other four themes they named appeared to speak to a reality that was contrary to this ideal. The data suggest that there is a serious decline among parents and, to a lesser degree, teachers with regard to the social capital, community of memory, participation in the local parish community and commitment to common beliefs, identified in the literature as being essential for community. Embedded in the data are clear indications of social, cultural and religious change impacting dramatically on the possibility of community within Catholic primary schools. However, the principals found it extremely difficult to acknowledge this problematic reality. It would seem that acknowledging the concept of community as inherently problematic is an important step for the principals in their journey to conceptualise it effectively and construct appropriate responses.

**RESEARCH QUESTION 2: How do principals describe their leadership roles in building Catholic primary schools as communities?**

In response to the second research question, this research study found that an industrial model of leadership remains dominant. Here principals' responses evidenced an understanding of leadership centred on the "great leaders" (Senge, 1990, p. 340) or "heroic approach" (Shriberg et al, 2002, p. 212). For these principals, leadership is, more often than not, associated with having clarity of vision and mission and an ability to bring this vision and mission into reality. However, a new post industrial leadership paradigm is emerging and there were gestures in the data towards a personalist model of leadership. Some principals also spoke of their commitment to a "moral leadership" (Cooper, 2001) that relies on core values and a commitment "to ends in view" (Furman, 2004, p. 216). From a practical perspective, principals named making time, conversation, dialogue, parental partnership, and relationship building as their strategic directions for building community.

However, in their interviews, the principals appeared ambivalent as they moved between industrial and post industrial descriptions of leadership. In struggling to

provide a coherent account of their leadership, the principals appeared hampered by the limits of their theoretical understanding of their leadership roles. In particular, these principals appeared unable to address the issue of school community leadership due to their limited appreciation of the link between learning, community and leadership evident in emergent organisational theory. Moreover, there appeared to be limited understanding of the importance of cultural leadership and inner leadership in post industrial organisations. Finally, these principals recognised that inadequate theological formation restricts their leadership capabilities within a Catholic school.

In short, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, these principals appear to lack the symbolic language required for the mind action, social communication and social interaction needed to clarify their leadership role. While the principals appeared to have greater facility with sociological rather than theological language when describing community and leadership in Catholic schools, their depth of understanding regarding sociological accounts of community and leadership should not be overestimated. It was also clear that principals' theological understanding of community, while very Christ centred, did not evidence any comprehensive understanding of Catholic Church teaching on Christian community and moral leadership. This lack of symbolic language points to the need for formal professional development opportunities that provide a deeper appreciation of both sociological and theological accounts of community and leadership. However, it should also be noted that this research study has found the busy demands of the principalship, the lack of opportunity to safely share concerns regarding school community with colleagues, as well as very little guidance from the Catholic Education Office, to reinforce their seemingly poor capacity to theorise community.

## **8.6 Towards a Model of Community Leadership in the Catholic Primary School**

The purpose of this research study was to explore Catholic primary school principals' understanding and reconstruction of their leadership roles. Here, it was intended to offer a model of community leadership in Catholic primary schools that would support principals as they engaged in the reconstruction of their community leadership roles. The application of contemporary theories of community and

leadership, as well as the symbolic interactionist perspective to the research findings, allows the researcher to propose a model to further community leadership in Catholic primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore:

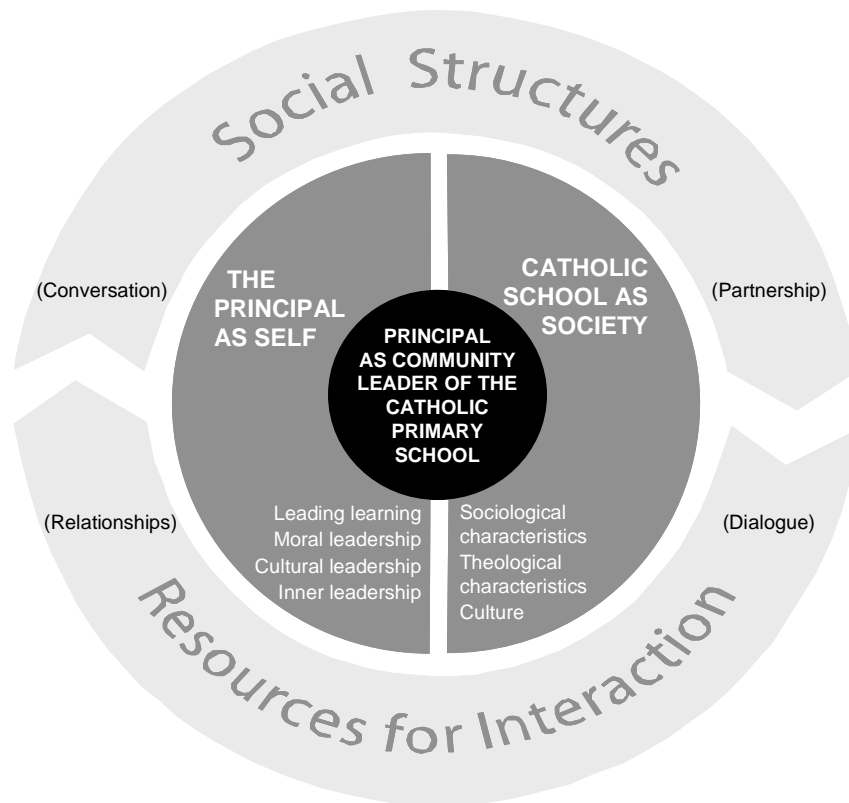


Figure 8.1 A model of community leadership

In this model of community leadership it is assumed that role behaviour is “not simply given by expectations but is the product of a role-making process” (Stryker, 2002, p. 79) involving a reciprocal relationship between the self, society and interaction. Here, the *principal as self* is deemed capable of acting towards oneself and developing a role identity through processes of mind action (Stryker, 2002, p. 50) and social interaction (Charon, 2004, p. 156). The findings of this research study suggest that in this role making process the principals may come to a reconstruction of their community leadership role. The literature suggests that this new reconstruction would include aspects of post industrial school leadership, including leading learning, moral leadership, cultural leadership and inner leadership. Yet, social action and social interaction may take these principals in a different direction as they grapple with the integration of leadership theory and practice.

Complementing the symbolic interactionist understanding of the principal as self in society, *Catholic school as society* is defined as “any instance of ongoing social interaction that is characterised by cooperation among actors that creates a shared culture” (Charon, 2002, p. 169). To develop this shared culture, members of the Catholic school as society need to make a commitment to learning more about the various sociological models and theological foundations of community. Recognizing the findings of this research study, this professional learning process would provide the principals with theological, as well as sociological categories, to describe the Catholic school as community. Through mind action and social interaction, a shared symbolic language should develop as members of the group test tentative models of school community leadership in practice.

This model of school community leadership also assumes a “close, determining relationship of self and society” (Stryker, 2002, p. 79). This is, however, not a static relationship in which the *principal as self* and *Catholic school as society* literally reproduce one another; but rather one in which the *principal self* is regarded as a purposive and symbolic agent (Stryker, 2002, p. 90). To this end, this model for community leadership highlights the importance of *interaction* in the role-making process. In particular, this role-making process requires three forms of interaction, including engaging with “significant others” and the “generalised other” (Charon, 2004, p. 110), as well as the “self as social object” (Charon, 2004, p. 71). Moreover, there is a commitment to “taking the role of the other” or “an active process where the actor is able to take control of his or her situation, allowing more intelligent control of one’s own actions in relations to others” (Charon, 2004, p. 115).

To support this interaction and not inhibit the role making process, symbolic interactionists advocate ‘open’ rather than ‘closed’ social structures and resources for interaction. The findings in this research study also highlight the importance of structures and resources for interaction that incorporate ‘open’ dialogue, conversation, relationships and a commitment to partnership. Further, to offset difficulties with respect to symbolic communication, the research findings identify the need for a new symbolic language as a foundation for community leadership to reach its potential. Here, there is a significant role for the Catholic Education Office

to sponsor collaborative policy development regarding the Catholic school as community. Moreover, there should be opportunities for principals to experience effective peer support, mentoring and coaching regarding their community leadership roles.

## **8.7 Implications of the Study for Policy and Practice**

This research study has explored the issue of school community leadership in Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Lismore. It has done so by inspecting how community is conceptualised and how the building of it is described. In so doing, this study is intended to increase knowledge around the topic. In particular, this research study had an intrinsic value in that it sought to understand this dimension of the principalship from the perspectives of all primary school principals within the Diocese of Lismore. In addition, there was an instrumental value in seeking to clarify the general meaning of this concept of community as applied to Catholic schools. From this instrumental perspective, the research study raised many issues and consequently the following propositions are advanced:

1. The Catholic Education Office, Lismore, needs to develop policy and guidelines with regard to the Catholic primary school as community.

Principals reported that while strongly motivated to build community in Catholic primary schools, they were hindered by the lack of clear policy and guidelines detailing the system expectations of them. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, such policy development would also allow individuals and groups to identify a “generalised other” (Charon, 2001, p. 175) or the perspectives, rules and guidelines that represent the shared cultural expression of Catholic education within the Diocese of Lismore. This generalised other would provide a strong platform for taking the role of the other and cooperative action in respect to building the Catholic primary school as community.

2. Role-making processes are required to clarify and document the role of the Catholic primary school principal as community leader.

This research study identified that individual principals were experiencing role conflict and that, collectively, role strain was occurring across the diocese. It is

necessary, therefore, to establish deliberate role-making processes, as described in Figure 8.1, to clarify the role of the principal as school community leader. Such role-making processes should respect the interrelationship between the self, society and interaction. Moreover, these processes should be situated within 'open' social structures and there should be adequate resources for interaction. Here, it is assumed that the principal as self is deemed capable of acting towards oneself and developing a role identity through processes of mind action and social interaction, within a cooperative and shared culture.

3. The professional development of principals should include regular, confidential opportunities for social interaction and learning.

This research study has highlighted the role that peer principal support plays in supporting principals with the changing and uncertain demands of their roles (Scott, 2003). It was stated that the forces of "pride and guilt" and not wanting to be seen as "in crisis" hindered principals from asking for help from the Catholic Education Office. Consequently, the perspectives which the principals appeared to bring to their roles showed very little evidence of embracing new theoretical knowledge, taking risks or embracing change (Napolitano & Henderson, 1998). It is, therefore, proposed that informal peer networking, formal mentoring programmes and professional development opportunities be provided to support principals with their need for a safe and supportive environment to explore the concerns and problems which they experience as school community leaders. This will allow them to embrace a more transformational leadership style (McGahey, 2002).

4. The professional development of principals should educate and challenge them to develop more adequately theorised understandings of school community leadership in Catholic schools.

This research study described how the principals struggled to provide a coherent account of their leadership role as they appeared to be hampered by the limits of their theoretical understanding of it (Wildy & Clarke, 2005). For principals wanting to expand their leadership capabilities, it would seem essential that they be given stimulating educational opportunities for professional development to extend their theoretical understanding (Mackoff, 2000). Opportunities are required for principals to engage in reflective practice (Day, 2000). In particular, the literature alerts us to



the importance of such professional development including both sociological and theological conceptualizations of the Catholic school as community, as well as theoretical developments in post industrial leadership (Limerick & Cranston, 1998; Grace, 2002). The implications of the moral philosophy of personalism for community and leadership should be explored given the support for this philosophical position in the literature (Whetstone, 2002).

Finally, this study has implications for further research. The lack of theoretical conceptualisation by principals of their community leadership role needs to be investigated with a wider group. The inner world of principals was identified as a significant issue impacting on their capacity to undertake the role, yet it appears to be poorly understood in the literature and this study only began to open it up. The importance of the inner life of principals is further highlighted in the literature with the importance given to their capacity to relate (Limerick & Cranston, 1998; Fullan, 2001).

## **8.8 Limitations of this Research Study**

While this research study was focused on the phenomenon of school community leadership, as a case study, this was a study of school community leadership in “bounded context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25), namely, Catholic primary schools within the Diocese of Lismore. Moreover, although 34 principals were invited to participate in the research study and 15 principals completed the initial open-ended questionnaire, the main data source came from the 9 principals who participated in the individual and focus group interviews. It could be argued that this strategy made the study more manageable and allowed for information-rich cases to be explored (Merriam, 1998). However, this limitation in respect to sample size means that the findings of this research study are specific to the schools described herein and cannot claim to represent the whole population. The external validity of this research is dependent upon its “reader user generalisability” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211) through “case to case transfer” (Firestone, 1993, p. 16).

Further, this research study acknowledges the inherent limitations of the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism. There is strong support in the literature for

using symbolic interactionism as a perspective in research design and as an analytical/interpretive 'tool' to understand social situations. At the same time, the literature alerts the researcher to the limits of symbolic interactionism in terms of ill-defined concepts and its failure to critically focus on the affective domain and social structures (Charon, 2004; Stryker, 2002). Beyond these conceptual concerns, critics also point to methodological problems that reject scientific explanation and result in few testable propositions (Ritzer, 1996). This research study is clearly not in the positivist tradition, as there are no claims to objective knowledge, verified hypotheses and established facts. Nor are the positivist canons of validity and reliability invoked.

This research study is also limited by its reliance on the perspectives of the participating principals who were interviewed. It needs to be stated that although this account was sought and highly valued, it is not presented as the 'truth', but simply 'reality' as it is interpreted by the participants. Others, such as parents, clergy and Diocesan Catholic Education Office staff, may well offer perspectives that offer different accounts of school community leadership. Moreover, this was not an evaluative study; it simply sought understanding and insight. The emphasis here is on the principals' perspectives and is not an observation of their actual community building activities.

The topic for this research study emerged from the researcher's professional interest in and responsibility for supporting principals with the community leadership dimension of their work. As such, a further limitation can be identified in the self-interest of the researcher. The methodology, as well, was founded in the researcher's biases, experiences, perspectives and professional responsibilities. Consequently, it could be asserted that the researcher had a self-indulgent dimension to it (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). Of particular concern was the fact that the researcher had a professional relationship with the participants. However, given that the Catholic Education Office is only a service organisation and the principals have no direct accountability to the researcher, this was not considered to be a problem. The honesty with which the participants responded to the questionnaire and engaged with the researcher in the individual interviews and focus group

interview would seem to indicate that there was a high degree of trust and confidence by the participants.

## **8.9 Recommendations for Future Research**

As the review of the literature revealed, there has been no direct prior research conducted into Catholic primary school principals' perspectives on the application of community to Catholic schools. Although this study sought to contribute towards redressing a gap in the literature, further research is necessary. It is argued that the benefits gained from this particular research into the topic of principals' perspectives on their community leadership roles would be greatly complemented by additional research. Hence, future research studies in educational leadership should:

- a) Investigate the topic of Catholic primary school principals' perspectives on the application of community to Catholic schools in other contexts.

This research study, as a case study, was limited in scope, as it studied the phenomenon of school community leadership within the bounded context of Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Lismore. Consequently, it would be worthwhile to replicate this study beyond primary schools and outside of the Diocese of Lismore, particularly in Australian secondary schools, public schools and independent schools.

- b) Systematically examine all dimensions of inner leadership as they affect principals' community leadership roles.

This research study has shown that in the area of inner leadership the participating principals had to create public versions of the self which were not strengths for their community leadership. This issue appeared to be founded in the inability to name clearly the problematic issues they were daily facing, their "pride and guilt" around not wanting to appear "in crisis" to the Catholic Education Office, or even their apparent inability to extricate themselves from the heroic/strong leadership style. It seemed that cumulatively these forces would not allow principals to transition to the new forms of shared, consultative and collegial leadership roles required of them (Grace, 2000). Given the

importance that this self-understanding is to their community leadership roles, it warrants further close examination through research.

- c) Investigate principals' understandings on learning and its relationship to community.

This study has found that there was a silence around the principals' perspectives on learning. Although one principal did name the centrality of learning to the life of the school, it was not fully developed or theorised in terms of community. The literature noted that the emerging model of school is that of the "learning organisation or community" (Voulalas & Sharpe, 2005, p. 187) and that there have been major developments over the past 50 years in learning theory. These developments have significantly contributed to a more rigorous understanding of the concept of community in schools. Hence, it would be beneficial to understand better why principals have not given such major developments greater prominence in their thinking and discussions.

- d) Investigate principals' concerns with implementing dialogue in the building of Catholic school community.

In this research study, principals identified the role of parents in the building of community as a major theme. Further, they named conversation and dialogue as critical elements in the building of partnership and community in their schools. Yet, there was limited evidence in the data that principals worked from such understandings or were comfortable moving in these directions. However, more often, the parents were discussed as a problem for principals in the building of community and there were self reported inadequacies by principals around implementing conversation and dialogue. They expressed a fear that such a direction would lead to things "getting out of control" or parents taking "too much". Therefore, while principals promoted the notion of partnership, it did not reflect the literature which understood it in terms of "mutuality", "listening" and "responsive dialogue" (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000, p. 211) and a having a "shared vision of a good education" (Strike, 2000, p. 633).

This complex relationship between principals and parents is critical to the building of community and is, therefore, worthy of further investigation.

## **8.10 Conclusion**

The findings from this research study suggest that Catholic primary school principals have a limited conceptualisation of school community leadership as it applies to Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Lismore. Principals appear unable to extricate themselves from the competing understandings of community that shape their views. There is a challenge here to take forward their conceptualisation of community to 'fit' a post industrial world. Despite the complex realities of school life which they described, they struggled with acknowledging the problematic nature of community. While they appeared more comfortable with sociological than theological understandings of community, their sociological conceptualisation of community appears to be an unfinished task.

The results of this study suggest that the community leadership role of the principal is in transition between competing leadership models. In particular, the apparently enduring influence of the heroic/strong industrial leadership model is a major block to their taking on a more appropriate post industrial model. Both the dominance of the industrial model and problems with inner leadership appear to make leadership of the school community a burdensome task. Principals also appear to be hampered in their community leadership by poor formation for the role. Yet, the data indicate a range of positive ways to take forward a new model of community leadership. Hence, principals would appear to benefit from peer support, coaching and theological education. Consequently, it is recommended from these findings that a range of professional development opportunities be made available for principals.

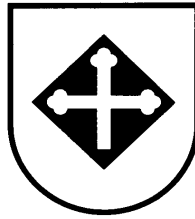
Finally, it is acknowledged that this research study concludes with important aspects of the research questions answered. This research study provides a more informed and sophisticated understanding of the phenomenon of school community leadership in Catholic schools. Furthermore, it recommends a way forward in respect to the reconstruction of this phenomenon that involves policy development, role-making processes and formal and informal professional development.

However, this research study is offered with the caveat that the phenomenon of school community leadership must continue to be “carefully and rigorously debated” (Westheimer, 1999, p. 102), otherwise “community building may well sink under the weight of public expectations and unfulfilled promises” (Schorr, as cited in Croninger & Malen, 2002, p. 285).

# APPENDICES

Appendix 1	Open ended questionnaire
Appendix 2	Guiding questions for individual interviews
Appendix 3	Guiding questions for focus group interview
Appendix 4	Invitation to participate in interviews
Appendix 5	Consent form
Appendix 6	Ethics approval

## APPENDIX I



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
McAULEY CAMPUS

### PRIMARY SCHOOLS PRINCIPALS' OPEN ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

Please take some time to think about your answers to the three following questions. The three questions are simply seeking *your* considered understandings and experience about each one.

PLEASE RETURN THESE PAGES IN THE CONTAINER PROVIDED AT THE DOOR.

QUESTION ONE: Describe your understandings of community in a Catholic Primary School?

QUESTION TWO: How do principals exercise leadership in building the Catholic primary school as community?

QUESTION THREE: What other comments would you like to make to the researcher about community and Catholic primary schools?



## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Individual Interviews Guiding Questions**

#### **Question One:**

How would you describe Catholic schools as communities?

What are your guiding beliefs about what makes a school a community?

If a Catholic school was known as a good example of community how would you describe it?

What differences might there be between the experience of community in a Catholic school and that found in a public school?

Are there expectations on you as a principal to create community? If so what are they and where do they come from?

#### **Question Two:**

Is there anything that you would like to comment on regarding the transcript of the first interview?

How does a school become a community?

How is community maintained?

What is the role of the principal in building the school as community?

Are there any particular strategies that you have used to build community in your school? What have you learned from implementing them?

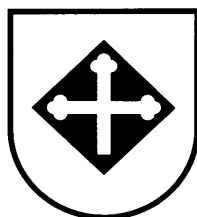
Where does leadership fit in to the principals' role as community builder?

## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Focus Group Guiding Questions**

1. Would it be true to say that principals' have no problem in applying the concept of "community" to Catholic schools?
2. How much does community building feature in your strategic and annual planning processes?
3. Is community to be understood differently in Catholic and state schools?
4. A lot of issues were shared in the individual interviews which appeared to make the building of community in Catholic schools a difficult task? Have you got any personal stories around these issues that you would like to share?
5. Parental involvement in decision making and communication appear to be significant issues for principals in building community, please explain further about this.
6. It seems from the individual interviews that you are describing your leadership as having to be redefined, what does that mean?
7. Your leadership of school communities seems to carry with it the responsibility to create and hold the vision for the school and to carry it through with teachers and parents. Would you care to discuss that?
8. Evangelisation appears to be an important part of your leadership role, could you elaborate on this?
9. In what ways are you leading the building of learning communities?

## APPENDIX 4



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
MCAULEY CAMPUS

### INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** An exploration of Catholic primary principals' perspectives on the concept of community as applied to schools

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Mr John Graham

Dear Principals,

You are invited to participate in a research project to explore what principals consider are the hallmarks, or authentic characteristics, of the Catholic primary school as community. The research will also seek to understand how principals go about building community.

Community is a commonly used term in regard to parish primary schools. The purpose of this project is to develop a more informed and sophisticated understanding of how the concept of community is used by principals in parish schools of the Diocese of Lismore. The results of this project will strengthen the Catholic Education Office's capacity to serve principals in regard to their community building responsibilities. As well, the results will enable further discussion and support between principals in this important area.

This project is part of my Doctor of Education degree and will involve the following three research stages:

1. **General Questions** which all principals are invited to complete here today and return in the box by the exit. Participation is voluntary.
2. **Two individual interviews** with 6 principals. A response form is attached with this letter for any principal willing to voluntarily participate.
3. **Focus group interview** with 6 principals willing to explore in more detail the issues identified in both the general questions and interviews in the attached questionnaire. A response form is attached with this letter for any principal who would like to participate.

Participation in this research project is voluntary. Participants can withdraw from the study at any stage without giving a reason. Confidentiality will be maintained during the study and in any report of the study. Individual participants will not be identified in any reports of the study as only aggregated data will be reported. All participants in stages 2 and 3 of the research will be given a code and names will not be retained with the data.

If you have any questions about the project, either before or after participating, please contact me (John Graham) on telephone number 02 66 220422 at the Catholic Education Office, Lismore, NSW, 2477. Alternatively you can contact my Doctoral supervisor, Dr. Gayle Spry, at [g.spry@mcauley.acu.edu.au](mailto:g.spry@mcauley.acu.edu.au).

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may write to:

Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

C/o Research Services

Australian Catholic University

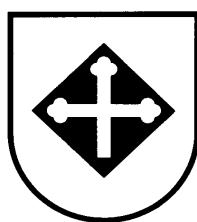
Locked Bag 4115

FITZROY VIC 3065 Tel: 03 9953 3157 Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint will be treated in confidence and fully investigated fully. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

If you are willing to participate in the research please sign the attached consent form. You should sign both copies of the consent form and retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the researcher. Your support for the research project is most appreciated.

Mr. John Graham



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
MCAULEY CAMPUS

**EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY**

**RESPONSE FORM**

An exploration of Catholic primary principals' perspectives on the concept of community as applied to schools

Please mark boxes with the appropriate response and place in the box at door.

**(1) FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW:**

I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN BEING PART OF THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW MEETING:

YES ☐  
NO ☐

**(2) INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS:**

I WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH THE RESEARCHER:

YES ☐  
NO ☐

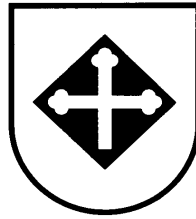
NAME:

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

BEST WAY TO CONTACT ME:

## APPENDIX 5



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP  
MCAULEY CAMPUS

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT: An exploration of primary school principals' perspectives on the concept of community as applied to Catholic schools

Researcher: Mr. John Graham

#### Participant's section

I ..... (*the participant*) have read and understood the information in the letter inviting participation in the research, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

Signature:

Date: .....

## APPENDIX 6

Australian Catholic University  
Brisbane Sydney Canberra Ballarat Melbourne



### Human Research Ethics Committee

#### Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: **Dr Gayle Spry** **Brisbane Campus**

Co-Investigators: **[Redacted]**

Student Researcher: **Mr John Graham** **Brisbane Campus**

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:

**An exploration of selected rural Catholic primary school principals' perspectives concerning their leadership role in regard to community and Catholic schools.**

for the period: **20 June 2001 to 31 October 2006**

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: **Q2000-01 TI**

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 cursive script, reading "K. Paskey".

Signed: **Date: 3 November 2006 (original date of approval: 24 May 2001)**

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