

**Independent school principals' wellbeing: Exploration of
inhibitors and enablers**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy by
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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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GLOSSARY

AACS	Australian Association of Christian Schools
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AHISA	Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia
AICD	Australian Institute of Company Directors
AISNSW	Association of Independent Schools New South Wales
ASC	Anglican Schools Corporation
ATAR	Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CECNSW	Catholic Education Commission New South Wales
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSA	Christian Schools Australia
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
ISCA	Independent Schools Council of Australia
NESA	New South Wales Education Standards Authority
NSW	New South Wales, Australia
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QCEC	Queensland Catholic Education Commission
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SRS	School Resource Standard

TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEMAG	Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group
WHO	World Health Organisation

DIAGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the enabling and inhibiting factors that impact on the wellbeing of principals of independent schools in Australia. The wellbeing of the principal in an independent school directly influences their ability to operate an effective school. Principals in all schools have key management roles and take responsibility for successful educational outcomes (social, performance, sporting and academic) of students and the wellbeing of students, staff and parents.

The study contributes to the knowledge of factors affecting principals, of the ways they create and utilise strategies and provides insights to assist newly appointed principals. As little research exists in this area, this thesis contributes to a broader understanding of the issues.

A plethora of research exists regarding student or learner wellbeing, and even teacher wellbeing. The bulk of this work relates to programs which support and inform students, parents and teachers about resilience and mental health. This makes the exploration of wellbeing for principals timely and highly legitimate. The intention of this thesis is to inform those responsible for employing principals in these schools. The findings are aimed at providing insights and directions for employers of principals.

The overarching methodology of this study is phenomenological, working within a hermeneutic interpretive paradigm. It involves the participation of 39 Australian independent school principals with interviews employed as the primary research method. The project developed a theoretical model to assist current principals and newly appointed principals of independent schools to operationalize pathways that seek to create improved and increased professional wellbeing.

The research findings have implications regarding principals' self-imposed actions for improved wellbeing. The study concludes with an identification of related areas for further research.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*“Success is to be measured not so much by the position that you reach in life, as by the obstacles that you overcome while trying to succeed”
Booker T. Washington.*

1.1 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND OUTLINE OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This thesis explores the wellbeing of principals of independent schools in Australia. More specifically, the thesis addresses a perceived gap in the research and literature regarding the provision of information and strategies to enhance the wellbeing of the principal. Personal wellbeing of the principal is the specific focus of this research, incorporating information on how to cope with the task load, in contrast to research on programs and support for the wellbeing of students and teachers in the care of the principal.

The research problem and the theoretical framework provide the scaffold for the exploration of wellbeing inhibitors and enablers for leaders of the independent school sector in Australia. The following three objectives provide the focus:

1. To determine the inhibitors to wellbeing for the independent school principal
2. To determine the enablers for wellbeing of the independent school principal
3. To explore what strategies independent school principals do use to manage their wellbeing.

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The role of the principal in independent schools is similar to the role of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) in the corporate world, with an added layer of complexity derived from managing the emotional context of parent and child relationships. The role is highly demanding, publicly accountable and significantly important in society. There is little research on the wellbeing of independent school principals and this study addresses this serious research gap.

1.3 PERSONAL ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

My interest in this subject emerges from my own experience as principal of schools in the government and independent sectors in Australia over ten years. My parents were part of the British Raj in Burma. My father, the son of a British Army General, and his wife, and my mother's parents, were employed as managers in restaurants. My father had finished his qualifications as a draughtsman and engineer when he married my mother. They were both very young when they had their first child. The Japanese Army invaded and they were forced to flee with only what they could carry on their backs. Women and children were taken in one direction and men were inducted into the war effort. At the end of the war when demobbed in Bombay, they were persuaded to come to Australia by a friend. They arrived with virtually nothing. They worked hard and subsequently moved because of affordability to what are now the western suburbs of Sydney. They built two houses themselves, starting by building a garage and living in that until the house was completed. The last house they built was on a dirt road, later to become the Great Western Highway in Wentworthville. They worked extremely hard to send my sister to a private girls' school. Some 20 years later, I came along despite all the medical impossibilities, as a surprise, a happy one.

My parents decided to send me through the public school system. They did not believe that they or my sister had received the benefits or achieved the expectations they were promised for their substantial investment in private education. I thoroughly enjoyed my education and excelled as I had fabulous teachers who excited me with the wonders and possibilities of learning. My parents always told me that education is the single most important opportunity in life. Apart from a financial windfall, it is the most life-changing opportunity that is afforded to anyone. Prior to sitting the Higher School Certificate, the Australian National University in Canberra offered two students entrance into their Law or Medicine faculties based on studies undertaken to that point. I was offered one of these. I thanked them and kindly declined, as I knew that I wanted to study in education. I understood its potential to change people's lives. No one had previously declined this fantastic opportunity. I still have the same beliefs now as when I made my decision then. Given the opportunity again, I would do nothing differently. I began my career in the public system and broadened my experience by moving to the independent system.

Thus it is through my professional and personal experiences, augmented by my research in comparative education internationally, and my role as a leader of professional development that I have been led to this study. I have worked in the education sector in Australian schools my entire career. I initially worked as a classroom teacher in a government school in the western metropolitan area of Sydney, NSW, Australia. I have taught students in Early Childhood, Primary, High School, TAFE and at university. My experience has been forged in small schools of two teachers, to large schools of 300 staff and 1600 students, in inner city and regional schools. I have been a principal of schools in the government and independent sectors over ten years. I have led a school with specialist services for students with learning

needs and a selective school for students with high ability. I taught in disadvantaged primary schools with large migrant populations who were non-English speaking particularly from Malta and Italy. I taught in a small primary school with three teachers, located in Sydney. I taught gifted students with IQ 140 plus in a selective government primary school. I became an assistant principal, retrained as a teacher of French language for high school and taught at Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges in Sydney. Promoted to the position of principal in the government sector in NSW, Australia, I led small pastoral care schools and large primary schools with selective units for Gifted and Talented Students. Moving to the independent sector, I was educational leader in a large, elite Sydney coeducational Preparatory-Year 12 school. I was then employed as principal of a large pre-eminent coeducational independent school in northern regional NSW. It became clear to me that the role of the principal was vastly and significantly different in an independent school compared to a government school. It was through these roles as educational leader and principal that my awareness was heightened to poor attention for the wellbeing of the leader.

My personal experiences of this role as principal have led to interest in and dedication to this area of research as I have experienced a range of support levels for this highly demanding role. As principal, my depth of expertise focused on wellbeing for teachers and students and contrasted with the poor attention given to the wellbeing of the principal. All these rich experiences have led to my current research focus in the educational sector. This now brings to the fore the context of this study.

1.4 CONTEXT OF STUDY

The context for this research is the independent sector of education in Australia. This context is chosen for this study as it is a convenient

sample, accessible for the researcher due to her previous role as an independent school principal.

The two providers of public education in Australia are government and non-government. The non-government sector is comprised of Catholic and independent schools. In 2017 there were 3,849,225 students in schools in Australia, with 14.5% of students attending independent schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2017). To further clarify the size of this student cohort, of the 9,444 schools in Australia, 1016 are in the independent sector.

The Independent Schooling in Australia Snapshot 2017 (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2017) reveals that:

- 43% of these schools have 200-999 students;
- 38% of these schools have less than 200 students;
- 18% of these schools have 1000-1999 students;
- 66% of these schools are combined primary and secondary;
- 88% of these schools are coeducational.

Independent Schools are not-for-profit organisations. As stated on the MySchool website (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014):

Revenue derived by independent schools through tuition fees not only covers the education of students but also pays for the costs of managing a small to medium sized, not-for-profit business. These additional costs include governance, legal, compliance, debt servicing, employment relations, human resources and professional development costs. Government and Catholic systems utilise economies of scale by partially or wholly managing these activities at a regional or state level on behalf of their schools.

It is therefore clear that studying independent school principals is important given the size of the independent schooling enterprise.

1.5 RATIONALE FOR THIS RESEARCH

The rationale for this research is to discover ways to enhance the wellbeing of the independent school principal. There is a wealth of research centred on the wellbeing of students and teachers in the educational sector (and other sectors like health). This current study is significant to the education sector particularly as there are many principals retiring or resigning. The impact of this highly stressful role, without significant support or active collegial networks, due to the sensitivities surrounding their high status role, requires investigation. Principals score below the general population average for health, wellbeing and quality of life (Riley, 2017). Negative symptoms like stress, burnout (Maxwell & Riley, 2017) and depressive symptoms are higher than for the general population (Riley, 2017). Actual violence against principals is 8.6 times the rate for the general population (Riley, 2017). Furthermore, younger, aspiring teachers are not always attracted to the leadership role. Riley's article (2016) entitled "It's not just lonely at the top, it's dangerous" (p. 1) provides an estimate that there will be a loss of 70% of principals in the next four years as there will be a large number who are eligible for retirement. There will be a need to replace these personnel with capable and enthusiastic, dedicated people. Increased wellbeing for these principals has the potential to benefit society at large.

In their 2018 study, Dicke, Marsh, Riley, Parker, Guo & Horwood (2018) find that depression and stressors are linked to poor wellbeing among Australian principals in their study. Wellbeing is linked to confidence and autonomy. The study acknowledges that school principals are an understudied group and this need for further research is crucial in its

own right. Cherkowski and Walker (2016) also acknowledge that wellbeing is an under-researched factor relating to educational leaders and their study explores the positive perspective of flourishing and school leaders' understanding and experience of this. The sample size is small, Canadian and unable to support generalised findings but gives insights into the importance of wellbeing research for leaders of our schools. Robbins (2013) reviews literature available in the United Kingdom from the perspective of larger teacher training providers and also concludes that there is a very limited range of research regarding the school leader and wellbeing.

1.6 JUSTIFICATION AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses upon the gap in the literature (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Dadaczynski & Paulus, 2015; Robbins, 2013) related to the wellbeing of Australian independent school principals. In doing so it will investigate the current gap in support, identifies structures that may be effective and provides direction for further research and study. It is particularly useful to professional organisations, such as the Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia (AHISA) and national and international educational bodies and to those responsible for employing independent school principals. The study is of relevance to the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) as it educates the CEO members and Directors in how to manage their workload and personal time in order to protect their wellbeing. The study may be used as an advocate for independent school principals when negotiating with school boards and school councils to foster a respectful caring relationship. This study fosters a deeper understanding of the inhibitors to wellbeing, the enablers to wellbeing and provides an exploration of the ways in which this specific sample of experienced Australian independent school principals manage their wellbeing for leadership.

The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey (Riley, 2017) presents evidence about the significant costs to mental health of school principals. This is shown to be due to the role of leading a school through change improvement and innovation. This longitudinal annual survey over six years involved 5247 senior educational leaders. The major stressors included increased workload and lack of time to focus on teaching and learning. Principals also scored lower in health and wellbeing measures compared to people in the general population. The longitudinal study included feedback from principals, assistant principals and senior executive leaders and thus considered a larger group than my study. The senior executive and assistant principals report directly to the principal; thus their reported stress levels and mental wellbeing levels are different to that of the independent school principal who bears the sole burden of total and final decision making in a school, with the proviso that some independent schools are part of systems such as the Anglican Schools Corporation or the Catholic Education Commission. It is possible, therefore, that Riley's results mask the true depth of the wellbeing issue of principals. Further, the number of participants in Riley's survey (5247) represented mostly government schools (74%) (Riley, 2017), not independent schools only (12%) (Riley, 2017). The Riley survey does not look at enablers unlike this current research. Thus there is a need to investigate further the wellbeing of principals in the independent sector.

Whilst it would be worthwhile to study the possible link between student wellbeing and principal wellbeing, I have not focussed on this. This is a limitation of this research.

This study contributes to the research and literature surrounding educational leadership, wellbeing and the role of the independent school principal.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

While there are many possible subsidiary research questions, the principal ones are:

1. What factors impact on the wellbeing of independent school principals?
2. What enablers enhance independent school principals' wellbeing?
3. What enables some principals to thrive in the principal leadership role?

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter One has set the scene for the research by establishing its importance, relevance and scope. This chapter delineates the research problem and the objectives, describes the background to the problem and the personal justification and significance of the research.

Chapter Two presents an extensive review of the literature. The definition of wellbeing for this research is stated. Research on wellbeing is critically examined, particularly in relation to the wellbeing of the school principal and its relevance to teachers. An understanding of the role and responsibilities of the school principal and leadership styles is followed by an exploration of the evolution of the education system in Australia.

In Chapter Three, the theoretical framework is presented and analysed so that the key assumptions regarding the research are explicit. The use of the socio-ecological wellbeing framework is detailed.

Chapter Four presents the methodology, with detailed reference to the qualitative, interpretive, hermeneutic phenomenological approach.

Following this, the research design, the process and criteria involved in selecting participants for this research, data collection and analysis techniques are explained.

Chapter Five details the findings from the research process, using the voices of the independent school principals, presented in an emerging thematic framework from an interpretive perspective.

Chapter Six draws together the results for critical analysis and discussion in depth, presented as themes and sub-themes to make phenomenological sense of the inhibitors and enablers to wellbeing of the independent school principal.

Chapter Seven is the final chapter synthesizing the conclusions, limitations of the research and recommendations of ways to benefit independent school principals' wellbeing and the knowledge of those who employ these principals. It outlines the implications of the research and makes recommendations for future work in this area.

1.9 CONCLUSION

Existing studies indicate the stresses experienced by principals. This current study of this discrete group of Australian independent school principals reveals deeper and detailed understandings of these pressures as it is recognised that the principal's role in the independent school is highly demanding (Degenhardt, 2015). This chapter introduces the research and offers its justification, explains the rationale and significance of the research and shares my personal orientation to the study.

Chapter two provides a review of relevant literature on wellbeing in the education sector: the definition of wellbeing for this study, the wellbeing

of school principals, inhibitors and enablers to the wellbeing of the principal and teachers' wellbeing. By referencing School Leadership Capability Frameworks we then explore the role of the independent school principal. Focusing on school leadership, we review the evolution of leadership styles and leadership in schools today. A discussion of the context of education in Australian schools, followed by an exploration of the evolution of the independent sector for education of students, follows.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This review gives an understanding of the research surrounding the central topic, wellbeing in the education sector. I then examine the roles and responsibilities of the principal as leader of the school. This leadership role is further explored with a close look at leadership styles and their evolution. In this chapter I consider the leadership style that predominates in our schools today and consider why this is so. Explanation of the context, how Australian schooling has evolved and the independent education sector's growth follows. This review is divided into four sections, namely Wellbeing, The Role of the School Principal, Leadership, and Education in Australian Schools.

2.2 SECTION 1: WELLBEING

In this section definitions of wellbeing are explored, and the definition for use in this research is determined. The implications of wellbeing for principals and teachers, the main stakeholders in a school environment, are enumerated. Inhibitors and enablers to the wellbeing of the principal are considered.

2.2.1 What is wellbeing? How is it defined in this research?

McCallum and Price (2016) cite five dimensions for a holistic view of an individual's wellbeing: cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual and social. As these dimensions are comprehensive and incorporate subjective and objective wellbeing measures, it is these aspects that will be focussed on in this research as they also reflect current research (Stein & Sadana, 2015) in their applicability for data collection, findings

and discussion. For this study wellbeing is defined as the aggregation of cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual and social dimensions. The reason for this selection follows.

There is a lack of a common, explicit and consistently applied definition of wellbeing (Charlemagne-Badal, Lee, Butler, & Fraser, 2014; Lehnert, Sudeck, & Conzelmann, 2012). There are many dimensions to be included or deficit models to be applied, but a comprehensive definition is required (Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2015). Wellbeing is more than physical health and measurable aspects of health acquisition, such as limited intake of alcohol and not smoking (Mellor & Webster, 2013). Wellbeing includes aspects such as mental health, quality of life, job satisfaction and happiness (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015). These aspects are subjective and difficult to measure according to a scale as each individual person's interpretation or measure will vary in degree. A broader definition is offered by Wyn (2009) who states that "Wellbeing is very often an umbrella term used to encapsulate quality of life, happiness, satisfaction, and good physical and mental health. Underlying these terms are conditions such as economic security, safety, shelter, connection to others, having a sense of meaning in life, having control over decisions in life and having positive personal relationships" (Wyn, 2009, p. 107). Wyn's definition comprehensively covers dimensions that are both objectively and subjectively measurable.

Thus the definition of wellbeing is multi-dimensional in construct. The irregularity in the domains included in any definition of wellbeing, calls for consensus. A review by Charlemagne-Badal, Lee, Butler and Fraser (2014) of the domains included in 250 studies of wellbeing and life satisfaction identified fifteen domains in total for a definition and few studies reported the use of more than ten domains as part of the wellbeing instrument used. The "OECD Guidelines on Measuring

Subjective Wellbeing” (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013) relate to a specific definition of subjective wellbeing that focuses on life evaluation, reflecting on how the subject feels life is going, the affective and emotional state of the person and how they feel at that time, and their eudaimonia, feelings of purpose in life and sense of meaning (psychological wellbeing). This covers a wider range of feelings rather than just happiness.

Subjective wellbeing is self-rated (Bericat, 2013; Steptoe, Deaton, & Stone). Health and other objective concepts are not included. The Steptoe, Deaton and Stone (2015) study evaluates how satisfied people feel about their lives, their judgements about the meaning and purpose of life and feelings of happiness, worry, anger and sadness. Many definitions of wellbeing include those factors that are measurable objectively such as wealth or financial status. In subjective wellbeing, the concepts included are comprehensive of the quality of life of people. These encompass cognitive evaluation of one’s progress through life, positive emotions such as joy and pride, and negative emotions such as worry and anger. Subjective wellbeing is a multi-dimensional construct (Huppert & So, 2013). Wellbeing includes feeling good and eudaemonic aspects of living well, having positive relationships, autonomy and achievement, meaningfulness in work (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010) and a sense of mastery and personal growth (Huta & Ryan, 2010; Keyes, 2002; Keyes & Annas, 2009; Seligman, 2002).

The OECD “2015 How’s Life? Measuring Well-Being” report shows that international comparability of wellbeing has been established, incorporating the factors of health status, work-life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement and governance, environmental quality, personal security, subjective well-being, income and wealth, jobs and earnings and housing (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2015). These data incorporate

measurable factors of non-abstract concepts, such as education level achieved. But psychological wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing and emotional wellbeing are foundational to a broad comprehensive definition of wellbeing. These factors are difficult to measure on a scale, yet are significant in their contribution to the definition of wellbeing. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has determined to use both subjective and objective wellbeing measures over time to define wellbeing (Stein & Sadana, 2015). This is a more comprehensive and accurate approach. Thus, in this current research study, the dimensions to be covered by a definition of wellbeing, need to provide a comprehensive approach, able to be applied to the educational context of leadership. It is because of this purpose that wellbeing, in this study, is defined as the aggregation of cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual and social dimensions.

2.2.2 Wellbeing in the schooling sector

Research in the area of wellbeing for the educational sector has existed for decades. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians charters that “schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the nation’s ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion” (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008, p. 4). The task in the Declaration is explicit. School is the central context for ensuring the development of wellbeing of students. The hours spent in the school environment are powerful for promoting, educating and practising skills for students’ wellbeing and all round intellectual development.

2.2.3 Inhibitors to the wellbeing of the school principal

While student wellbeing is discussed in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians and is an important issue, similar concerns need to be considered about principals of schools because the school principal is the head of school towards whom, all staff and students and parents, look for decisions and strategic leadership of the school (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Degenhardt, 2015; Fullan, 2014; Wallace Foundation, 2012).

A longitudinal study in Australia has shown that the role of the principal is isolating, stressful and can be dangerous, especially as there is an increased incidence of bullying behaviours exhibited by parents and students (Riley, 2017). Further compounding these issues of concern is the assertion that “Isolation is the most damaging working condition of the principalship but it doesn’t have to be this way” (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008, p. 74).

O’Connor’s study (2006) affirms that “the job of school leader exacts a high emotional price on principals. Loneliness, isolation, poor affirmation, poor control over non-educational issues and a lack of authority to deal with difficult staff situations were among the key triggers of negative feelings about the role” (p. 56). This study, using in-depth interviews, closely audits the emotional responses to their role, of four post-primary school principals in Ireland. While a very small-scale study, the results are supported by Riley’s latest surveys (2014a, 2017) and can be applied widely and internationally.

The Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety & Wellbeing Survey: 2011-2016 Data (Riley, 2017) is an ongoing annual longitudinal survey which records details such as hours worked, alcohol use, hours spent on physical exercise, causes of stress, sources of support and work-family

conflict. The average principals' and deputy/assistant principals' wellbeing survey scores are lower than the general population average. Principals' work hours per week show that "work-family conflict occurs at approximately double the rate for the population generally" (Riley, 2014a, p. 16).

However, when using these surveys as a data collection tool, there is a lack of deep detailed analysis of the subjective wellbeing aspects experienced by the principal. Additionally, these survey data are gained from a group that includes all senior leaders, deputy principals and principals without clear discrete information regarding the school sector from which they derive. It would be beneficial to distinguish carefully between the data from each educational sector (private or public) as well as the specific role of the participant (deputy head or principal or senior executive) and also the size of the school (in terms of student enrolment numbers). It would also be helpful to have the data relating to the discrete group of principals who lead the independent schools in Australia. Many aspects of the principal's wellbeing have been examined in these studies, but other aspects need further attention.

A thorough literature research completed by Robbins (2013) also found that there is a paucity of research on the head leader with regards to stress and wellbeing. Robbins concluded that "school leaders show higher levels of stress than other professions, they have poor mental health and work-life balance, and school leader research needed to be developed with regard to the dimensions of stress that are particular to school leadership" (Robbins, 2013, p. 2). This study's conclusions are echoed by Dadaczynski and Paulus (2015) who found that principals and their roles require examination in theory and practice as there is a dearth of research in this area. They concluded that "we know very little about the health of principals and how they deal with their everyday demands" (Dadaczynski & Paulus, 2015, p. 255). As the principal

operates in a swiftly changing, complex and often turbulent environment, any research must include reference to the context as well (Devos, Bouckenooghe, Engels, Hotton, & Aelterman, 2007) because decision making is influenced by a wide variety of factors and pressures (Alsbury & Whitaker, 2012). In this current research I focus on the context of Australian independent schools.

The association of stress with work overload reveals that work overload is a major characteristic of the life of the principal (Billot, 2002; Buckingham, 2004; Collard, 2003; Criswell, 2008; Friedman, 1997; Liming, 1999). The resulting burnout of principals is investigated in further studies (Bly, 2002; Friedman, 1997, 1998; Guglielmi, Simbula, Schaufeli, & Depolo, 2012). Other studies focus on principal efficacy, showing also the range of abilities required to carry out the varied responsibilities of the principal (Powell, 2013) thus further emphasising the work overload (Teasdale-Smith, 2007). Federici and Skaalvik (2012) found a clear positive relationship between principal self-efficacy and job satisfaction level. If the principal effectively leads the school, there is heightened personal job satisfaction. The stress and the workload reduce levels of job satisfaction and impact on motivation to quit and the experiencing of burnout. High job demands linked to increased burnout was endorsed by the study of Guglielmi, Simbula, Schaufeli and Depolo (2012). The principalship “is defined by stress, moving targets, heightened responsibility, and a remarkable turnover rate. Unfortunately it’s no surprise that a recent report indicates that over one-fifth of new principals leave the job within two years” (Hall, Childs-Bowen, Cunningham-Morris, Pajardo and Simeral, 2016, p. 1).

Studies focussing on the wellbeing of the school principal are limited (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016). Cherkowski and Walker (2016) state that “attending to well-being in the work of leading schools is an under-researched area of educational leadership” (p. 378). Hewlett and Luce

(2006) documented the negative effects on the relationships, longevity and health of those involved in extreme jobs, requiring a 70 hour week and linked this to the work conditions and role of the principal in a school.

Inhibitors to wellbeing are deficiency of healthy eating, not managing task load to achieve work-life balance, lack of sleep or rest, dearth of meaning or purpose in life, stress, no time for reflection or peace to seek purpose, understandings or belief (spiritual succour) and poor attention to physical health and activities. These are fundamental to wellbeing and health and are the responsibility of the individual as personal choice and willpower are factors of influence. There is a plethora of literature on the effects of workload and stress on employees in various fields such as health care, finance and sports (Chana, Kennedy, & Chessell, 2015; DeFreese & Mihalik, 2016; Griffiths, Baxter, & Townley-Jones, 2011) and in schools (M2 Presswire, 2016; Mulholland, McKinlay, & Sproule, 2013; Thornton, 2004) but little has been done on these in relation to independent school principals.

There is a deficit of phenomenological studies of Australian independent schools' principals, their inhibitors to wellbeing and the strategies they employ to cope. Subjective wellbeing studies of this particular group of principals have also been neglected (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016).

2.2.4 Enablers to the wellbeing of the school principal

Due to the principal's workload, the occurrence of bullying, high job demands and a wide range of responsibilities, strategies and supports to enable wellbeing are essential. Riley (2009) discusses that mentoring is often used to support newly appointed principals and assist wellbeing. He notes that an unexpected side effect of mentoring

programs has been the improved wellbeing of the aspirant leader and the new leader, as these are the predominant participants in mentoring programs offered. The issues of insufficient time for mentoring, personality differences between the pairs and the lack of expertise of mentors were commonly cited as impediments to the success of mentoring as part of the induction process (Riley, 2009). Curry and Gardner-Webb (2015) concur with the positive effect of mentoring when collaboration and interaction with others were involved. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Report (2008) proposes that principals network and meet with colleagues to discuss issues of concern and share solutions to problems and challenges. A study by Leithwood and Azah (2016) confirms this as an effective support.

Social networks and friendship group membership have a profound impact on mental and physical health. A 2012 study by Jetten, Haslam and Haslam (2012) shows that being part of a social group and meeting regularly, builds social capital and increases self-esteem and wellbeing. Group activities and membership promote coping strategies, adjustment capability and wellbeing particularly for those dealing with stressors. A 2015 report on group identification strongly supports these findings (Greenaway et al., 2015), showing that identifying with a group or social group enhances personal control measures that affect health and personal wellbeing. Family and friends provide equally impactful support for wellbeing (Yamaguchi, 2014) and develop social capital and thus increase self-esteem.

The supervisor of the principal has the ability to impact wellbeing. A 2015 study by Chang, Leach and Anderman (2015) explains that the principal has increased wellbeing and job satisfaction if their line managers (or supervisors) are supportive of their autonomy. This is particularly highlighted for beginning and newly appointed principals who feel reassured when their decisions regarding personnel, finances,

curriculum, leadership and discipline are autonomous (Chang et al., 2015) and the school council or school board is understanding.

Positive interpersonal relationships and a religious or spiritual belief are linked to wellbeing and health (Jordan, Masters, Hooker, Ruiz, & Smith, 2014). A warm interpersonal style is linked to compassion (Lilius et al., 2008) and gratitude and a spiritual construct (Lyubomirsky, 2008) is related to positive relationships with others and less loneliness. This attitudinal style is of importance as the role of the principal is isolating (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008). Support for this interpretation comes from a meta-analysis conducted in 2014 which argued that kindness-based meditation benefited wellbeing and health and social interaction (Galante, Galante, Bekkers, & Gallacher, 2014). The role of spirituality as an aid to resiliency was observed also by Robertson (2008).

Another great support for wellbeing and health is to balance the time spent on work and life. A significant study in 2014 (Lunau, Bambra, Eikemo, van der Wel, & Dragano, 2014), involving 24096 employees found that poor wellbeing and poor health resulted from poor work-life balance. The principal has the autonomy to be proactive. Taking the time to engage in leisure activities or reflection would be highly beneficial as an intervention to improve wellbeing (Zawadzki, Smyth, & Costigan, 2015). A study by Notman (2012) found that influential intrapersonal factors such as critical self-reflection, physical and mental wellbeing and resilience impact positively on principal leadership, especially if mentoring was provided for personal development support. Notman acknowledges the lack of understanding of how the principal copes with the role, particularly over time.

When considering wellbeing, studies into appropriate diet and limiting alcohol, giving statistical advice and data regarding consumption levels,

are common reference points. Understanding nutrition and the aspects required for personal physical health to be achieved are researched and explicitly explained by Donnatelle (2014) and Whitney and Rolfes (2010).

Earlier research found the enablers for the leadership role of the school principal to be balanced work-life ratio, adjustment of workload, reflection time, prioritisation of time for self and family, physical health activity, appropriate diet, attention to spiritual health and sleep (Bork, 2009; Coleman & Perkins, 2004; Criswell, 2008). These enablers may be activated by an individual or a principal dependent on the prioritisation of daily tasks. Wellbeing has to be the option actively sought by the individual to achieve personal wellbeing. It is up to the individual to self-impose an active response. However, inhibitors, such as stress and work overload, disempower or remove these options from personal choice.

2.2.5 The school leadership team, teachers and wellbeing

The principal is the leader of the school leadership team or the senior executive team. In Australia, senior leadership positions may include deputy principals, assistant principals, deans and directors of curriculum (Ridden & De Nobile, 2012). There are many studies on the leadership team and its influence on the school and teachers (De Nobile, McCormick, & Hoekman, 2013; R. Federici & E. Skaalvik, 2012; Kelleher, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2007). Often the available research relates to the school leadership team and the impact of their cumulative decision-making on teachers (Burkhauser, 2017).

Ascertaining the attention to wellbeing at schools, and at what is provided for teachers and students in the school, illuminates the paucity of attention to wellbeing for the principal, yet the principal has a significant part to play in the impact on teacher wellbeing. De Nobile,

McCormick and Hoekman (2013) indicate that the impact of the school principal as part of a leadership team may cause occupational stress for teachers. The opportunity for teachers to participate in democratic decision-making in schools is important for teacher wellbeing. To be part of organisational communication practices such as negotiating teaching load and openness and support are related to stressors for teachers (De Nobile et al., 2013).

It is fundamental that the classroom teacher is happy at school, demonstrates interest and care for students and has positive wellbeing. To measure and ensure for this, the emergence of various teacher wellbeing research draws new attention to the relevance of the wellbeing of the provider of classroom education (Paterson & Grantham, 2016; Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2015). Kern, Adler, Waters and White (2015) affirm that teachers are at their best when their wellbeing is catered for. Roffey (2012b) echoes this. Measures of whole school wellbeing in students and staff have shown that happy, optimistic students have increased vitality; and highly engaged staff employed in meaningful activity are happier at school and have increased commitment to the organisation and greater job satisfaction (Day, Sammons, & Stobart, 2007; Kern et al., 2015).

Teacher wellbeing scales show that teachers' wellbeing is linked directly to their general wellbeing, job satisfaction levels and their stress levels and workload (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011; Collie, Shapka, Perry, & Martin, 2015; Paterson & Grantham, 2016). The role of the classroom teacher features high workload, complex requirements, coping with speedy innovation and continuous stress (Kugiejko, 2015). Stress and burnout have been linked to teacher attrition (Jepson & Forrest, 2006). Teacher wellbeing is strongly influenced by positive interpersonal teacher-student relationships in the class (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013; Hagenauer, Hascher, & Volet, 2015; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011).

These relationships affect the personal and professional self-esteem of the teacher (Paterson & Grantham, 2016).

2.2.6 Summary

In this section the definition of wellbeing for this research is determined after exploration of various definitions, incorporating subjective and objective, abstract and concrete elements. Following this there is focus on the wellbeing attributes, their inhibitors and enablers, in research on principals. Teachers' wellbeing literature is reviewed. There is a wealth of research in the field of teacher and student wellbeing further highlighting this opportunity to contribute to the gap in the research regarding the wellbeing of the school principal.

2.3 SECTION 2: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Wellbeing of the principal is imperative to the wellbeing of all those involved in their school, as the role of the school principal is as pedagogical and administrative leader who disperses the leadership role across the executive team and teachers (Conway & Andrews, 2015; Gurr & Drysdale, 2015; Hall et al., 2016; Pont, 2014). In this section we enquire into the breakdown of this role as specified in the various principal role statements, showing similarity across government and independent school systems in Australia. The independent school principal answers to a school board or school council, yet has autonomy unlike peers in government and Catholic systems.

2.3.1 Leadership frameworks in Australia

Leadership frameworks specify the role description for the school principal. Each framework encapsulates the range of responsibilities

required and this is relevant to understand any interpretation of the size of the role and its potential impact on wellbeing. The state and federal governments of Australia provide leadership capability frameworks. The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has provided a public statement of standards principals are expected to know, understand and undertake in order to succeed as school leaders (Dinham, Anderson, Caldwell, & Weldon, 2011; Dinham, Collarbone, Evans, & Mackay, 2013). The five areas of professional practice focus on:

1. Leading pedagogical development,
2. Self-development and peer development,
3. Change and improvement,
4. Managing the school and
5. Engaging and working with the community.

This focus on educational leading was previously endorsed by the Australian Council of Educational Leaders (Lewis, 2009). This framework echoes the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA) Model of Autonomous School Principalship (2013) which includes operational leadership, self-leadership, community leadership and educational leadership as factors.

Principals Australia Institute (2016) provides a leadership framework with five foci: leadership starts from within, is about influencing others, develops a rich learning environment, builds professionalism and management capacity and inspires leadership and leadership actions and aspirations in others (Principals Australia Institute, 2016). Thus there are obvious commonalities across the principal role statements in formal leadership capability frameworks. Whilst there are many leadership frameworks in Australia, there is little to guide their use and it is left to the individual to navigate functionality (Gurr & Drysdale, 2015).

2.3.2 Demands on the principal that may affect wellbeing

The role of the principal is increasingly complex (Feser, Mayol, & Srinivasan, 2014; Wildy & Clarke, 2008). Duignan (2012) states:

When facing complex situations involving competing or contested values or ethical principles, leaders need to draw on all their resources- knowledge, skills and wisdom- in order to exercise good judgement. Many of these resources are derived from the lessons of life's experiences and are crafted into capabilities from accumulated learning, or earned with great personal cost and sacrifice from the school of hard knocks (p. 201).

In today's practice, an important aspect of the role of the school leader is the pedagogical development of teachers' professional practice (Hall et al., 2016; Pont, 2014), the achievement of student outcomes and the academic profile of the school (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014). Conway and Andrews (2015) argue that there is a mutualistic relationship enhanced with trust as the strategic leadership of the principal harnesses the power of the individuals in the team to create context-relevant pathways to achieve academic success at the individual school level. Fullan (2008b) endorses this development of a culture of improvement. The leaders learn alongside the team members in parallel leadership (Conway & Andrews, 2015; P. Duignan & Cannon, 2011; Hall et al., 2016; Mestry, Moonsammy-Koopasammy, & Schmidt, 2013).

Parents are valued partners in the educational process and professional learning communities flourish to achieve improved student outcomes (Conway & Andrews, 2015; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Fullan, 2008a, 2008b, 2014, 2015; Hall et al., 2016; Hargreaves & Boyle, 2015;

Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This is especially pertinent to the current study as the parents of students at the school, are stakeholders whose opinions and views impact on the wellbeing of the principal, especially in the manner in which parents communicate these views with the principal. Sometimes actions by parents such as physical violence towards the principal and bullying of the principal occur (Riley, 2017).

A method to foster collaborative learning between the teachers in a school environment is the use of professional learning communities. A professional learning community is defined as a group of educators who meet to share their expertise, working collaboratively and collegially to achieve improved academic excellence of students. This may take the form of teachers organised into working groups for professional learning. Sometimes community members are brought into the school to enhance the curriculum or learning activities for students. Successful professional learning communities result in sustainable school-wide pedagogical changes and encourage effective management and leadership, underpinned by collaborative learning (DuFour, 2004). Professional learning communities flourish when the principal is perceived as being welcoming and supportive (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Much research exists around successful teacher leadership resulting from dispersed leadership (where team members exercise their leadership in a specific and controlled context) and delegated authority (a mutualistic relationship where teachers' expertise is trusted by the principal to take the role of leadership and management) (Conway & Andrews, 2015; Gurr, 2015; Harris, 2011; Stewart, 2013; Wilhelm, 2013).

Extensive research also exists that endorses the importance of the principal regarding the pedagogical direction and success of the school (Branch et al., 2013; Degenhardt, 2015; Fullan, 2014; Wallace

Foundation, 2012) and being an effective change agent (Green, 2010; Hall et al., 2016).

In contrast to the current role as leader of school learning and improvement, Kowalski (2010) observes that most of the twentieth century saw principalship as primarily a managerial role. The earlier traditional model of the leading teacher role with close involvement with teachers and students (Kowalski, 2010; Murphy, 1994) has changed into a broader management role with accountability demands and responsibility for the vision and strategic direction of the school (Cranston, 2002; Hall et al., 2016). The changing role of the school principal from purely pedagogical leader to administrative manager, operational manager along with the increased devolution of systems, paired with greater accountability requirements of governments (Stringer & Hourani, 2016), provides further challenges (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Goodwin, Cunningham, & Childress, 2003; Kowalski, 2010; Cranston, Ehrich & Billot, 2003; Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998; Sahid, 2004). The administrative aspect of the school's effective functioning is a large portion of the responsibility of the school principal. Kowalski (2010) argues that a current challenge for the principal of today is how to find the time to do both leading and managing with acuity. He further expounds that the contractual employment of teachers and extra-curricular staff, including administrative staff, are a further responsibility of the principal.

The ethical and moral decision making of the school principal (Frick, 2009; Starratt & Leeman, 2011) is supported and monitored by the school council or school board or tethered to the religious affiliation or ownership body of the school. Degenhardt (2015) emphasises the corporate leadership required of the Australian independent school principal as "the Principal is also CEO, answerable to the school board,

and with overall accountability for the organisation. This includes oversight of a multi-million dollar annual turnover; delivery of the school's strategic direction; and management of complex human resource issues, valuable property and plant, wide-ranging compliance areas, and multiple stakeholder groups. Overall, leadership of independent schools is becoming more corporate" (p. 6). Yemini, Addi-Racah and Katarivas (2015) found that the role of the school principal was as entrepreneurial CEO. Cunningham (2014) supports this notion that "schools are complex hierarchical and heterarchical organisations and in Australia the principal holds immense formal and informal power" (p. 30). Borasi and Finnigan (2010) concur.

An extensive search of the literature regarding the history and evolution of the role of the school principal resulted in limited and dated information as this is a small and incomplete body of research (Billot, 2002; Cranston, 2002; Goodwin et al., 2003; Hallinger, 1992; Kafka, 2009; Murphy, 1994; Portin et al., 1998; Rosenfeld, 2008; Sahid, 2004). Most of the references are American in origin (Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008; Yemini et al., 2015), further reinforcing the value of this research.

2.3.3 Summary

This section identifies a paucity of research involving the role of the school principal, particularly in the past. However, the findings from the current research are unanimous in their view that the role of the current independent school principal is one of overload, with accountability to many stakeholders, managing administrative tasks and complex human resource issues. Additionally there are high expectations for leaders by the educational community. This current study will test these earlier findings. While the various frameworks delineate the specifics of the role and include a reference to self-reflection and development, this is

not in terms of personal wellbeing, but in terms of school-based decision-making. The styles of leadership utilised to manage school improvement as required by the role frameworks are varied. They are explored in the following section.

2.4 SECTION 3: LEADERSHIP

An understanding of the foundational tenets of leadership and knowledge of the leadership styles a principal utilises for organisational change and improvement is required. Different styles of leadership predominate on different occasions for different purposes with each different group of stakeholders. An understanding of the variety from which the principal selects an operational style gives a deeper understanding of the complexity of the leadership role and its demands on the wellbeing of the principal.

Collaborative, collegial decision making for change management in schools is evidenced through the role of the school principal. This management style affects all aspects of delivery of the school's target vision and strategic planning. Seamless change management processes require positive relationships to be developed. This context is relevant as it impacts the wellbeing of the leader. To further understand this context, this section outlines leadership theories and changing definitions of effective leadership. In the early theories and frameworks the concept of leadership focused on the behaviour and characteristics of an effective leader. Later theories of leadership include the behaviour of the team members and the context of the leadership delivery. All styles of leadership are evident in organisational management. The section concludes with an explanation of leadership styles and influences predominating in schools today.

2.4.1 Leadership development

The concept of leadership has moved from a focus on the individual to a rising awareness of the importance of team members (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; Blake & McCauley, 1991; Hersey, Blanchard, & Johnson, 2013; McGregor, 1960; Northouse, 2016; Rue & Byars, 2003; Yukl, 2013). Contingency leadership theories (Fiedler's, Hersey-Blanchard, Tannenbaum and Schmidt) moved towards action centred leadership and then servant leadership, where the focus was explicitly driven by the team members (Belbin, 2011; Cunningham, 2014; Hersey et al., 2013; Klein, Knight, Ziegert, Lim, & Saltz, 2011; Tannenbaum & Schmidt, 2008). Servant leadership recognises the duty of the leader to serve (Brumley, 2011; Chacksfield, 2014; Greenleaf & Spears, 1998; Johnson, 2015; Northouse, 2016; Quality Progress, 2013) and leads to increased organizational performance (de Waal & Sivro, 2012; Schwantes, 2015).

Transactional leadership is relevant in today's practice where transformational and distributive leadership (Harris, 2013) reign. In partnership with the transformational leader, dispersed leadership has evolved (Bartol et al., 2008; Hargis, Watt, & Piotrowski, 2011; Lester, 2013; Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013; Rue & Byars, 2003). This model of leadership implies that every member of the organisation is a leader in some capacity (Heifetz, 1994). The leadership influence is shared by all. The focus is on the organisation's culture and climate. The leader's role is dissociated from a hierarchical position, so at all levels of the organisation, members are leaders and demonstrate their skill for colleagues to follow.

Transformational leadership refers to higher level needs of Maslow's hierarchy (Lester, 2013). Transformational leaders focus on higher order needs, engage with followers and inspire them to achieve extraordinary outcomes (Avolio & Bass, 2002; Badshah, 2012; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Hemsworth, Muterera, & Baregheh, 2013; Kovjanic, 2013; Northouse,

2016). There is creation of positive change. Charisma and influence combined with inspirational motivation, intellectual challenge and personal attention to individual needs (Johnson, 2015) enhance self-worth and fulfil needs for self-fulfilment and empowerment. “Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them” (Northouse, 2016, p. 161).

“In most versions of transformational leadership theory, it is a basic postulate that an effective leader will influence followers to make self-sacrifices and exert exceptional effort. Influence is unidirectional, and it flows from the leader to the follower” (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013. p. 358). Transformational leadership has high correlation with teachers’ collective efficacy (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015; Dussault, Payette, & Leroux, 2008; Maier et al., 2016) and there is significant research evidence that transformational leadership leads to increased employee engagement and improved job performance (Hetland et al., 2015; Pourbarkhordari, Zhou, & Pourkarimi, 2016). Tichy and Devanna (1986) further maintain that transformational leadership behaviour can be learned. Transformational leaders engage the head, the heart and the hands of the followers (Badshah, 2012). They are interpersonally sensitive. They move the attention to the good for the group, the organization or society as a whole (Hooper & Potter, 1997). They inspire the team members to a higher moral purpose and the benefit is achieved by the organisation. All these theories exist today in relation to organisational change and are utilised to different degrees in different contexts.

2.4.2 Leadership in schools today

An understanding of the varied leadership styles evidenced by the principal in schools today gives contextual information regarding the

challenge of the role for the principal and its impact on wellbeing. Juggling leadership styles to suit the task, occasion and tailored to the relationship with the group members requires seamless flexibility, creativity and, sometimes, instantaneous decision-making. Whilst a principal may have a dominant style, various other styles are demonstrated by the principal depending on the situation and task. The principal is the most influential source of leadership in the school (Feser et al., 2014). Effective school leadership “is the exercise of influence in a group context (Johnson, 2015, p. xix) and accompanies a clear understanding that leaders work collaboratively with followers as they seek the achievement of shared goals (Drysdale, 2014; Pont, 2014). “They are relational partners who play complementary roles” (Johnson, 2015, p. xix). Effective school leadership takes final responsibility for the direction of the group, whilst also exerting a greater degree of influence when required. Abrahamsen (2016) summarises that this “leadership is not about making teachers follow the explicit and visible strong principal. Instead, leadership is described as practice between people” (p. 82) and the leader is required to “shield and protect the teachers so that they can do their work” (p. 82). This is a facilitating role enabling the teachers to liaise and collaborate to improve student learning.

New educational leadership models have emerged, reflecting the increasingly broad and complex role (Mette & Scribner, 2014; Pont, 2014). Literature (Edgar, Geare, Halhjem, Reese & Thoresen, 2015; Huang, Ahlstrom, Lee, Chen & Hsieh, 2016) provides support for the positive link between wellbeing and performance and this is a relevant component of human capital as described in the following new models of effective school leadership. Fullan (2014, 2015) argues that these focus on developing 1. human capital, the quality of the individual; 2. social capital which refers to the quality of the group as a whole; and 3. decisional capital which is the ability to make fact-based decisions from

relevant evidence. The leader takes on a leading learner role and is a group member rather than an observer. The leader takes active part in the learning and development process. The leader is a system player, actively contributing to, and learning from, the larger system, or networking with collegial schools to accomplish something. Systems are collaborative. Change leadership involves taking a small component, making it gel and then building the capacity and ownership by the group. Hargreaves (2015) further posits that inspiring the team is the role of leadership. His uplifting leadership proposition combines factors that are paradoxical combinations of opposites. “Counterintuitive thinking combined with disciplined action, dreaming with determination, collaboration with competition, metrics with meaning, pushing and pulling people into change, long term sustainability with short-term success” (Hargreaves & Boyle, 2015, p. 45) comprise the new model proposed as a framework for educational leadership, change and development. Collaborative, inclusive and distributed leadership in schools are key (Degenhardt & Duignan, 2010; Duignan & Cannon, 2011; Harris, 2013).

Sustainable school leadership, explored by Conway (2015), is evidenced when principal and teachers work collaboratively to build leadership capacity for pedagogical development and improved school outcomes. This capacity building is required as there is the reality of personnel change in schools. Hargreaves and Fink (2004) concur that there is need for immediate planning for succession. All teachers should benefit; and planning should be equitable in its distribution. To prosper in increasingly challenging environments, diversity is to be celebrated and welcomed as others’ practices enable further adaption. Ideally leaders take care of themselves and use resources to share talent development as leadership is only sustainable if the leaders sustain themselves. “Leaders don’t usually let their schools down; the failure often rests with the systems in which they lead. The results of our study indicate that

sustainable leadership cannot be left to individuals, however talented or dedicated they are” (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004, p. 8). Gurr and Drysdale (2015) concur and recommend the immediate need for the provision of effective leadership development in schools.

Successful school practice is a target of the school leader. Examining internationally high performing schools, as measured by global testing, reveals the pointers for successful change management. Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) developed six pointers for system leaders in the pursuit of educational excellence in schools. These pointers involved the creation of an inspiring and inclusive dream, constant and continuous communication, the intelligent use of benchmarking for assessment in a school, prudent use of testing, the development of professional capital in staff and the preservation of local authority for school leaders.

There is a need for formal and appropriate leadership preparation programs to aid beginning principals (Bezzina, 2012; Gurr & Drysdale, 2015; Russell & Cranston, 2012; Young, 2015). Gurr (2015) proposes a need for systematic identification of potential leaders in schools, providing encouragement and assistance for achievement of leadership roles. Petrie (2014) notes four trends for future educational leadership development: vertical stages of development rather than competency attainment, individual responsibility for development, focus on collective leadership and innovation in leadership development methods.

Clearly the expectations of effective school leadership are all-encompassing, expansive and highly demanding of the professional and personal resources of the school leader. This is extremely pertinent to an exploration of the wellbeing of the independent school principal, the school’s most influential leader.

2.4.3 Summary

This section described developments in leadership theory. All theories exist today in relation to organisational change, in different contexts and environments. In the current educational context, the transformational leadership style is more likely to be evident (Allen et al., 2015; Harris, 2013; Maier et al., 2016; Moolenaar & Slegers, 2015; Northouse, 2016), using collaboration and distributed leadership as foundations. The following section details how this current educational context arose in Australia including the formation of the private education sector.

2.5 SECTION 4: EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

This section reviews independent schooling. The capacity for teacher selection in independent schools is explored as it relates to the research regarding teacher quality and its impact on student achievement. Teacher selection is the task of the principal, added to their role and these important decisions affect wellbeing.

In 2018, education in Australia is provided by State and Commonwealth governments and by not-for-profit institutions and fully commercial institutions. At a federal level, Australia provides public funding to government and non-government schools without a limit on the amounts that these schools may generate from school fees and other sources and there is broad acceptance that funding is to be provided on a needs basis (Wilkinson, Caldwell, Selleck, Harris, & Dettman, 2007). Independent schools operate under the governance of a school board or school council, which may be accountable to a religious authority.

2.5.1 The evolution of the independent school sector

Initially, in the late 1800s, “private” schools meant the owner was one person or one family. The school depended on fees from their principal owner. Most of these schools were short lived. Later the term “private” referred to any non-public school. These were systems developed by churches, often governed by councils or independent trusts, and small parochial church schools (Campbell, 2014). In the late 1800s, legislation abolished assistance from the state to schools that were non-government led. These were mainly the church schools, of various denominations. Government schools were to be free, secular and compulsory as determined by the Education Acts (Campbell & Proctor, 2014).

The 1964 Science Grants Bill enabled Commonwealth funding to both government and non-government secondary schools for science facilities. This was a major turning point regarding funding provision (Campbell & Proctor, 2014; Connell et al., 2013). In the early 1970s school choice was cited as an argument for government funding to private schools (Windle, 2014) and this became a ground rule as the education funding system was reformed.

In the twenty-first century, “private” can refer to schools of Anglican, Catholic, Uniting, Orthodox, Lutheran and other denominations. Most Catholic schools are part of the Catholic Diocese system, run by the Catholic Education Office. The definitions of “public” and “private” schooling are fluid and continuing. Today, parents are able to select the system of schooling that they feel best suits their child.

Parents seek to provide the best possible quality education for their children to enable full access to educational choices after secondary school completion. Parents who select an independent school education for their child decide so on the basis of varied factors. Ryan and Watson (2004) assert that funding received by independent schools has enabled

the improvement of services (with lower student to staff ratios) and facilities and resources offered by these schools. An effect of this increased attraction to independent and Catholic schools by parents has been the increased proportion of students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds now in government schools. Additionally, Ryan and Watson (2004) affirm that increased funding to independent schools through government sources and from school fees paid by parents, has resulted in a higher quality learning process being delivered. The background of students who attend Catholic schools and independent schools is contrasted in their research. They cite “the average SES of students is highest in both cohorts for those who attend Independent schools, followed by Catholic schools and Government schools” ((Ryan & Watson, 2004, p. 24). Their results show a clear, strong movement to private education of students from higher socio-economic background and that “the average SES of private school students was about 17.5 percentage points higher than government school students in both 1975 and 1998” (Ryan & Watson, 2004, p. 29). Perry and McConney (2010) established that both student and school socio-economic status are positively related to increased student academic performance. The academic performance of students attending a certain school is positively impacted by the socio-economic profile of the school. This profile is collectively formed from the individual socio-economic status of all students derived from their parent backgrounds. Dronkers and Robert’s (2008) analysis also reflects these results. This is strong evidence for increased parent choice of independent schools in Australia.

In a society where Australian Tertiary Admission Ranks (ATARs) provide access to the university of choice, the research by Marks (2009) is a highly persuasive result for parents. Marks (2009), trying to establish if students were more successful with university entrance scores dependent on the sector of education from which they graduated, found

that university entrance performance was “partially attributed to socio-economic background” (p. 34) and that the arguments regarding better teachers in the independent sector, better discipline and improved academic achievement were plausible. Further analysis found that the non-government school improves student performance with a more academic environment. The research further found that students who transferred from a government school between Year 9 and Year 12, achieved a significantly higher ATAR, compared to students who remained in the government sector. This choice by parents exerts an additional pressure on the principal of the independent school whose role is to deliver quality academic results.

Teacher quality is imperative for the delivery of quality academic and curriculum results. The independent school principal has the autonomy to recruit and select quality teachers. Hattie’s (2009) synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement showed that the teacher has the major impact on student achievement compared to the home, peers, school and principal. “The effect size of 0.40 sets a level where the effects of innovation enhance achievement in such a way that we can notice real world differences, and this should be a benchmark of real world change” (Hattie, 2009, p. 17). Hattie’s meta-analysis clearly establishes the main contenders of impacts to improve student learning (being teacher clarity, teaching strategies, reciprocal teaching, teacher-student relationships). The knowledge of the important impacts to increase student learning, enables the principal to select teachers wisely, thus further compounding the importance of the autonomy of the independent school principal to hire and fire, recruit and retain quality teaching staff.

The Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training has focussed on the fact that “it has long been recognised

that teacher quality is the single most important factor in a school, in influencing student engagement and achievement” (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2015). Hattie (2015) also found that the greatest influence on learning for students is the teacher with high expectations of the students’ learning making the greater gains in student learning. This research is echoed by Rubie-Davies’ work (2014) on high-expectation teachers.

The latitude of independent schools with regard to teacher choice is a significant difference from the government school system (Potts, 1999). Further studies on teacher quality (Darling-Hammond, 2012, 2014) and what matters most in a classroom to achieve improved student outcomes, demonstrate the importance of teacher selection. Teachers’ behaviour in the classroom, orientation to the lesson, explaining the importance of engaging in the lesson delivery, how they interact with students, modelling solutions to problems and providing students with opportunities to interact and the classroom as a learning environment are all significant effect factors (Kyriakides, Christoforou, & Charalambous, 2013). Teacher selection procedures in independent schools are rigorous and may include teacher demonstration lessons prior to employment. Windle (2009) labels this autonomy to be additionally rigorous with extensive teacher selection procedures, a consequence of no regulatory scrutiny regarding the selectivity of the independent school on student enrolment and teacher selection. He remarks that the independent sector has “high combined private and public resources, power over curriculum standards” (p. 241).

The drift to private education is evidenced by increased enrolments in the growing independent sector. Parents aspire to give their children the best quality education and know that a quality teacher is key. The ability of the independent school to select teachers through rigorous recruitment processes (Caldwell, 2010) further increases the attraction

to the sector. Funding from Commonwealth and state sources further enables enhanced facilities and resources to be offered in the independent school sector (Donnelly, 2012). The resulting opportunities provided by the independent school raise the expectations of parents and this increased scrutiny impacts on the role of the principal, increasing pressure and affecting the principal's wellbeing.

2.5.2 Private sector accountability: The school board

An independent school principal is employed by the school board and understanding this accountability structure is highly relevant and important.

The majority of non-government independent schools are "not for profit" organisations that are accountable to parents and students of the school and the wider members of the community (McCormick, Barnett, Babak, & Newcombe, 2006). Government and Catholic schools are governed by state and religious bureaucracies. The independent school is governed by its own school board, members of which are appointed and elected or volunteer from the school or local community. There are usually between eight to fourteen members on the board. Regular meetings occur generally on a monthly basis. The chair is the title given to the holder of the highest office in this organised group. The chair presides over regular meetings of the board (or council, as it is sometimes named) and ensures business is conducted in an orderly manner.

If the independent school is owned or affiliated with a parent organisation, for example, the Anglican Church, the board or council is accountable to a higher authority through a constitution (Browning, 2014). There may be church appointed members of the board.

The institutional role of the independent school board is significantly different than the role of a board or school council for a systemic school (McCormick et al., 2006). Independent school boards are not funded. The board is responsible for the mission and vision of the school and for the guidance of the school's programs and strategic direction (McCormick et al., 2006). The strategic plan provides the detailed steps for achieving the vision. The board is responsible for fiscal, staff and legal accountability. "Australian independent school boards are established in common and statute law, and each school's Constitution, and high standards of due diligence are required from all members of school boards in the exercise of their duties and responsibilities" (Krishnan, Barnett, McCormick, & Newcombe, 2016, p. 289).

The school board is responsible for the appointment of the head (sometimes referred to as principal, headmaster or headmistress), evaluation of performance of the head and the provision of feedback on progress (McCormick et al., 2006). The head is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, the implementation of policies and programs and all administrative matters.

It is vital that board members are collaborative and cohesive as their function of governance is critical (Conger & Lawler, 2009). Research shows that challenges such as poor understanding of the role of the board members (Gray, Campbell-Evans, & Leggett, 2013) and lack of common agreement about the role of board members (Land, 2002) impact the effective performance and functioning of the board (Leggett, Campbell-Evans, & Gray, 2016). Poor professional relationships between the board and the head are also a challenge (Leggett et al., 2016).

There is little research available on school governance in Australia (Austen, Swepson, & Marchant, 2011). Suggested guidelines for Australian independent schools' board management (Walkley, 2014) are

not used by all schools. A match between knowledge of school operations and management and the requirements of the role of board membership would be valuable (Robinson, Ward, & Timperley, 2003). Due to the varied skill set that board members bring to the role, there are challenges regarding the appropriate knowledge that will advantage and not hinder the effective support offered by the board member (Taylor, Chait, & Holland, 1996). Effective expertise varies in its depth (Conger & Lawler, 2009). Boards and board members vary in their ability to respond to issues in a sophisticated, timely, wise and informed manner. Teamwork behaviour is essential for collective efficacy (Krishnan et al., 2016). Attention to the relationship with the principal, policy, budgeting and student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) would be a positive direction.

2.5.3 Relationship between the principal and the board chair

Developing a deeper understanding of the potential impact of the board, its intentions and strategic management driven by the board chair, will illuminate the importance of the board chair's relationship with the principal and its potential influence on the principal's wellbeing.

The professional relationship between the principal and the board chair is highly important (Browning, 2014; Cornforth & Macmillan, 2016; Hiland, 2015; Leggett et al., 2016; Young, 2006). The principal is employed under a fixed term contract, usually five years in length. Contract renewal is linked to achievement of key performance outcomes related to the strategic plan and vision of the school. The principal meets regularly with the chair, providing updates on progress of school goals and reports for the board. The relationship is vital for security of employment of the principal (Browning, 2013). The opportunity for regular communication is essential, especially during some vacation

periods where important decisions are to be made and shared with the board at the following meeting. These decisions are initially made by the principal and the chair (Leggett et al., 2016). Highly confidential, sensitive staff and student issues are their domain.

The board chair benefits from professional development regarding the role for quality of governance leadership. This is pertinent for operational support of the principal. The functions of the board chair are to ensure compliance of legal and process obligations of the board and to maintain the team of board members and their professional interactions to achieve a unified direction (Youngs, Cardno, Smith, & France, 2007). An informed and experienced board chair can ease the reliance on the principal for direction and guidance. If the board chair is uninformed and inexperienced, there is more reliance on the principal for direction.

2.5.4 Summary

This chapter discussed the evolution of independent schooling in Australia. Parent choice for their children's schooling is paramount. On the basis of research that supports the influence of teacher quality to student experience, independent schools contribute to teacher recruitment and retention (Caldwell, 2010; Potts, 1999). Independent schools offer a quality education, achieving improved student outcomes, supported by quality resources and strong financial status derived from student fees paid per annum by parents (Marks, 2009; Ryan & Watson, 2004; Windle, 2009). This evidences the autonomy and responsibility of the Australian independent school principal who is recruited and employed by the chair and the school board to direct and deliver the school's vision and strategic plan.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This review of literature has revealed several key findings. There is an abundance of research surrounding the wellbeing of students and teachers, but a paucity of research on the wellbeing of the independent school principal; the literature and research that exists focuses on the efficacy of the principal in providing wellbeing support, wellbeing education and wellbeing programs for teachers and students.

There is also a dearth of research regarding the original role of the school principal. This role morphed through a phase as instructional leader with a managerial focus, to this current day, as transformational leader with much research evident on the principal's effective change management skills and emphasis on outcomes-driven decision making to drive political agendas for reform of educational goals.

The current research on the wellbeing of the principal has largely been about all senior leaders, including deputy principals, assistant principals, deans and directors of departments in schools. These existing data need a specific focus on the sole leader: the principal of the school. This current research provides specific relevance to the wellbeing of the independent school principal in Australia. This research is not diluted by the inclusion of the participation of senior management and senior executive in schools. It asks the question: what enables some principals to thrive and some to merely survive the principal leadership role?

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Chapter three presents the theoretical framework for this thesis. It highlights the rationale of using ecological systems theory and social ecological theory. The purpose of the theoretical framework is to understand, interpret and analyse data later in the thesis. The theoretical underpinnings of the research are articulated in this chapter. The following section explains the reasoning for the use of a theoretical framework to structure and support the research.

3.2 Ontological and epistemological assumptions

Beliefs about ontology, epistemology and methodology that are held by researchers guide their focus, their vision of the world and their actions in it (Mertens, 2005).

3.3 Constructivism

I believe that the views of humans are constructed individually and uniquely to each person. My views guide the way I interpret the perceptions, beliefs, opinions and thoughts of the independent school principals. In this research, the unique views of the principals are constructed by each participant who has his/her own meaning and perception of the phenomenon of wellbeing. The meanings may be different because each principal's lived experiences are different. In my view, each participant describes his/her own view of reality. Hence, the theoretical perspective is constructivist and interpretivist. Truth, "or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind" (Crotty,

1989, p. 8). Different people may have different meanings for the same phenomenon. Gray (2014) repeats that truth and meaning are created out of the participant's interactions with the world. Lincoln and Guba (1985) concur. Neuman echoes that "the interactions and beliefs of people create reality" (2006, p. 89). Gray (2014) agrees that:

Truth and meaning do not exist in some external world, but are created by the subject's interactions with the world. Meaning is constructed not discovered, so subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Hence, multiple, contradictory but equally valid accounts of the world can exist. A theoretical perspective linked to constructivism is interpretivism (p. 20).

3.4 Interpretivism

In this research, each participant relates an interpretation of wellbeing from the perspective of his/her experience. I chose an interpretive paradigm because my philosophical position is that the phenomenon is subjective, meaning that it is the *interpretation* by the human participant (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The school principals relay their perspectives and the perceptions of their reality, reflecting their lived experiences and their experiential learning. Reality is socially constructed and "there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 9). The researcher constructs or interprets the meaning of the world as perceived by the participants in the research.

An interpretive researcher wants to learn what is meaningful; or relevant to the people being studied, or how individuals experience daily life. The researcher does this by getting to know a particular social setting and seeing it from the point of view of

those in it. The researcher shares the feelings and interpretations of the people he or she studies and sees things through their eyes (Neuman, 2006, p. 88).

As the principals' perceptions and understandings of wellbeing are shared in interviews, comparison is made of the definitions and components of wellbeing provided.

3.5 Qualitative approach

The goal of this research is better understanding of the phenomena experienced by principals in terms of their wellbeing as well as the achievement of new perspectives, framed by socio-ecological theory. Qualitative methods allow the researcher to gain in-depth understanding that would be poorly served with quantitative methods (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

The themes that emerge from the interviews with the independent school principals will be analysed to develop new understandings of the research focus as patterns collected develop insights. Bogdan and Taylor (1984) explain that the research looks at the setting and the participants as a whole, accessing what they do and experience in their daily life and its significance as perceived by the participants. The interviews will explore each principal's daily practice and experiences and the resulting understandings and perspectives each principal develops. The qualitative researcher is obtaining the depth and detail of an insider's perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by exploring how these principals think and act in their daily lives (van Manen, 2014). Potter (1996) labels this as "meaning making by humans" (p. 67).

3.6 The use of a theoretical framework

Using a theory to guide the design and the development of this research is useful, especially to ensure consistency of definitions and constructs (Koh, 2013). Research that is based on theory provides consistent cohesion and structure and is of high relevance in new studies and fields of study. Merriam (1998) argues that a theoretical framework or conceptual framework is essential and we would not know what to do for the completion of research, if there was not a theoretical framework that provides “the structure, the scaffolding, the frame of your study” (Merriam, 1998, p. 45). Miles and Huberman (1994) support this by discussing the conceptual framework that the researcher brings to the research in whatever format, be it rudimentary, casual or elaborate. The theory is a compass to guide the research methodology, method and design, as it influences data collection, analysis and interpretation (Swanson & Holton, 1997).

The many theoretical frameworks that exist originate from various fields and disciplines of study (Anfara & Mertz, 2014). They allow us “to see in new and different ways what seems to be ordinary and familiar” (Anfara Jr & Mertz, 2014, p. xxvii). The selection of the two complementary theoretical frameworks for this thesis (discussed below) is guided by the extensive use of both theories evidenced in the discipline of education, involving research with students, teachers and parents. This is apt as this research focuses on these stakeholders as they have impact on the wellbeing of the independent school principal, as discussed in the literature review. The use of both theories further deepens, enriches and explicates the understandings gained from the research.

3.7 Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory

Urie Bronfenbrenner was a Russian-born American developmental psychologist. Bronfenbrenner's life work was achieved over six decades of research into child development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, 2009; Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The ecological perspective originated from his discontent with prevailing theories where researchers looked at "the strange behaviour of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 513). Development was studied out of context. However, Bronfenbrenner's studies focussed on understanding how relationships and environments are responsible for shaping the development of the individual. His theory focussed on the contexts of individuals: their home, school, work place. His theory, incorporating direct and indirect factors, shows the influence of culture as well as influences on the individual's development which inform how behaviours and decisions are made. This is particularly apt for this current research as the direct and indirect factors influencing perceptions of wellbeing for these principals are explored.

The theory that incorporates the four aspects of process, person, context and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and focuses on the development of the individual within the context of the range of their environments, has further evolved from the previous theory that focussed on varying contexts (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1983). These four components influence development independently and concurrently in a person's environment. The 2006 theory explores the individual's development, including complexities within contexts, such as the processes that occur between individuals and their environments. Processes of continuity and change, proximal processes, in the individual's characteristics are included (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The influence of Bronfenbrenner's mentor, Kurt Lewin, is evident.

The “phenomenological conception of the environment...takes the position that the environment of greatest relevance for the scientific understanding of behaviour and development is reality not as it exists in the so-called objective world but as it appears in the mind of the person; in other words, he focuses on the way in which the environment is perceived by the human beings who interact within and with it” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b, p. 23). The perceptions of the participant at the centre are significant. This theory acknowledges the subjective component is very powerful as a force for human development and subjective feelings are linked to the context in which they exist. Lived experiences are included in the framework which makes possible the identification and representation of all other influences on the individual at the centre (in this study, the school principal).

The later versions of the theory include proximal processes. This refers to interactions between the individual and the environment. The three defining properties of these interactions are the person (biological factors, personality factors, personal resources, disposition), the context (the distal and immediate environment) and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The interactions are multidirectional, not one way. If a system is influencing an individual, the individual is also influencing the environment. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) added two propositions that define Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory. Proposition one focuses on proximal processes. These are “complex reciprocal interactions between an active evolving biopsychosocial human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment” (p. 797). Proposition two focuses on:

The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person; the environment – both immediate and more remote – in which the processes are

taking place; the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration; and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 798).

The independent school principal is the developing individual and the central character in this research. Both the propositions emphasise that the individual is an active agent and brings an accompanying active context. In terms of an independent school principal, this refers to the lived experiences that are brought along with the participant. The developing individual is in constant interplay with the environments that influence him or her and in turn, he/she influences others. In this research, the principal influences others, namely, teachers, students, the school board and parents and they, in turn, influence the principal and his/her wellbeing. These proximal processes are “the primary engines of development” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 798) and apply to all individuals over time.

The principal’s proximal relationships and interactions are recognised conceptually by the different layers and relationships of influence that affect personal development over time. Positive influences are supportive and negative influences are subversive. Developing a career, problem solving, change management, managing multiple roles and learning skills are examples of activities of a principal that increase in complexity over time.

The validity for the use of the Ecological Systems Theory is Bronfenbrenner’s emphasis on the importance of the participant’s own recollections and lived experiences which is fundamental to this research. The research illuminates the inhibitors and enablers to wellbeing from the investigation of the participant’s experiences and

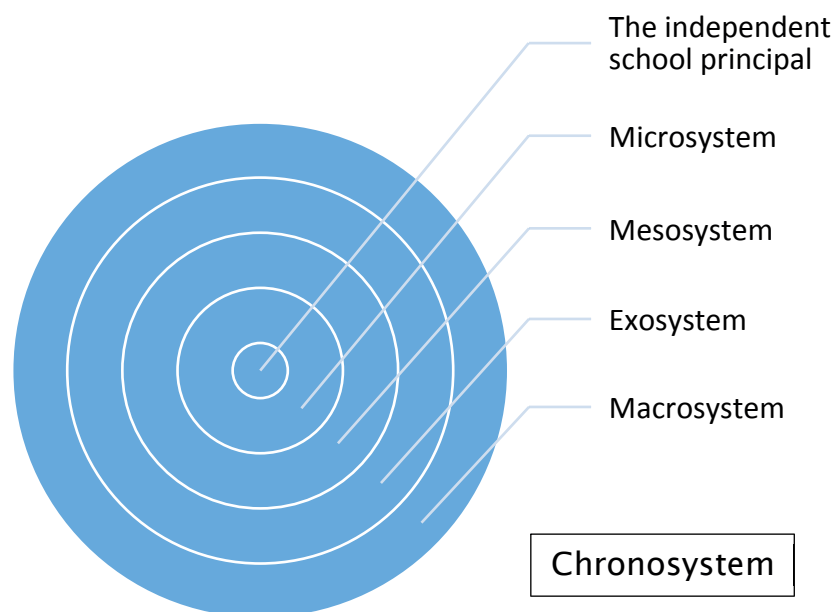
perceptions. “Here the emphasis is not on the traditional psychological processes of perception, motivation, thinking, and learning, but on their content – what is perceived, desired, feared, thought about, or acquired as knowledge, and how the nature of this psychological material changes as a function of a person’s exposure to and interaction with the environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b, p. 9).

The Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory is the most suitable theory for this research as it enables observation of the interconnections between processes of human development, the environments in which they occur, and the reciprocal nature of these interactions and environments. The independent school principal interacts with teachers, parents and staff at the physical location of the school, complying with direction of the board’s vision and strategic mission for the school. The strength of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory is in its ability to combine differing disciplinary areas: “The ecology of human development lies at a point of convergence among the disciplines of the biological, psychological, and social sciences as they bear on the evolution of the individual in society” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b, p. 13).

In this research, the microsystem contains the principal, the school board, students and the teachers. The Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development (see Diagram One) shows how five systems affect the development of an individual (Onwuegbuzie, Collins, & Frels, 2013). The ecological environment is represented by a set of concentric spheres which are nested within each other just like a set of Russian dolls (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a). The individual principal is at the centre of these spheres and the spheres of influence grow larger and more distant around the individual. The closest system is the microsystem. It is the most immediate situation in which the individual is operating. “A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by developing person in a given

face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features, and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 227). The microsystem involves “the structures and processes taking place in an immediate setting containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 80). “Of equal importance are connections between others present in the setting, the nature of these links, and their indirect influence on the developing person through their effect on those who deal with him or her firsthand” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 54).

Diagram 1: Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b)



In this research, the mesosystem contains the interactions between the school board and the teachers, between the teachers and the parents, and between the students and parents. The mesosystem refers to the linkages and “processes taking place between two or more settings

containing the developing person” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 80). It is a system of microsystems. Dyads, triads and larger interpersonal relationships are included in this level. In this research, the mesosystem is represented by, for example, the interconnection between the parents and the teachers. “The principle of interconnectedness is seen as applying not only within settings but with equal force and consequences to linkages between settings, both those in which the developing person actually participates and those he or she may never enter but in which events occur that affect what happens in the person’s immediate environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 54).

The exosystem refers to settings in which the developing person is not included but in which the developing person is impacted upon by the influence (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). For example, the Anglican Church is part of the exosystem if the independent school is owned by that organisation. In this research the exosystem also contains the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) in regard to principal competence requirements, NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for Registration and Accreditation of individual Non-Government Schools (RANGS) requirements in NSW, and the Association of Independent Schools (AIS), for example. These organisations have requirements of performance to be met by member schools to achieve continued mandatory membership. The central independent school principal may not be directly involved, but is impacted upon by these organisations and their requirements.

The macrosystem is the culture or subculture expressed through the micro, meso and exo systems, and underlying ideology, customs, knowledge transfer, political and economic trends, societal values and lifestyles. It is an “overarching pattern of ideology and organisation of the social institutions common to a particular culture or subculture... It may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture or

subculture” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 81). It is the wider culture in which the individual lives. In this research, it can be the tight connection between schooling, employment and productivity caused by national economies or the influence of school funding models provided by the Australian governments, state and Commonwealth. The impact of decreased Commonwealth funding for the school might be the removal of specialist programs and services for students in the school who are gifted and talented, for example. Another example of the macrosystem influencing and changing societal values might be the changing styles of parenting in the zeitgeist, with an increasing occurrence of ‘helicopter’ parenting, that is, the parent who is always observing, interacting and monitoring the child constantly. This may affect the parent’s level of participation in the child’s life, producing an increased number of parent-teacher interviews required by the parent.

The chronosystem shows the effect of time and influences which create change or consistency and continuity in the environment over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Changing societal roles, changing parenting styles, global government funding of school systems and financial recession are examples pertinent to this research. This is evidence of the impact of time in which the proximal processes occur. The Bronfenbrenner theory recognises the ongoing process of human development through life and particularly during periods of transition and change.

The developmental importance of ecological transitions derives from the fact that they almost invariably involve a change in *role*, that is, in the expectations for behaviour associated with particular positions in society. Roles have a magic-like power to alter how a person is treated, how she acts, what she does, and thereby even what she thinks and feels (Bronfenbrenner, 1979b, p. 6).

The chronosystem in this research can refer to the transitivity of principal network meetings and the turnover of new principals in those networks. These are events and changes that occur over time and influence the principal. It can also include the homophily of other principals who are reciprocal social equals. "The critical feature of such events is that they alter the existing relation between person and environment, thus creating a dynamic that may instigate developmental change" (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, p. 201). As an example, financial economic recession in the country might lead to decreased student enrolments, which may affect the salary paid to the principal or the pressure exerted by the members of the school board on the principal, to increase enrolments. This economic situation is out of the range of the principal's control and yet influences the principal.

The individual at the centre of the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development is in constant interplay with the surrounding relationships and environments that also influence the individual at the centre who influences others through these interactions. This is the requirement of reciprocity. The interactions are not one way. They are multidirectional (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The systems affect an individual's development and the individual influences his/her environment.

Ecological systems theory recognises human development as an ongoing process over life, including periods of change and transition. This theory underpins the aims of this research and the related semi-structured interview questions (refer to Appendix 4) facilitate a flow. The principal is able to reflect on the microsystem of school influences, through to the macrosystem where government policies may influence wellbeing for the leader and the chronosystem has influence of time that plays a significant role.

Bronfenbrenner's systems theory shows a hierarchy of developing influences through which the individual gains knowledge and makes sense of their world and impacts on the world. It shows how the individual makes meaning in life and how development occurs, as social ecological theory recognises the context and the geographical/cultural/social setting of the learning and individual. Socio-ecological theory provides a meaningful way of looking at the spaces that the individual reacts within and enables viewing of the factors that impact on perceptions, learnings and practices, by representing place, lived experiences and learning experiences. This is significant for framing this research and enabling the resulting data to be logically understood.

3.8 Related applications of Bronfenbrenner's theory

Support of the strong relevance and apt use of the Bronfenbrenner theory for this research is evidenced by its extensive contemporary use in the field of education to analyse school contexts and parental influences with great efficacy (Cross & Hong, 2012; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013; Price & McCallum, 2015;)¹. These contemporary studies further endorse the appropriate choice of this theory for the current research involving key stakeholders in school education.

The Bronfenbrenner perspective has been used to examine interactions between context, wellbeing, time and societal roles (Moen, 1996). Bronfenbrenner's theory has also been extensively used to understand and examine the affects in health related behaviours (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000a, 2000b, 2001; Hickey, Sumsion, & Harrison, 2013;

¹ Benner, Graham, & Mistry, 2008; Criss, Shaw, Moilanen, Hitchings, & Ingoldsby, 2009; Darling, 2007; Durlak et al., 2007; Gest & Rodkin, 2011; Leonard, 2011; Swick & Williams, 2006.

Nettleman, Brewer, & Ayoola, 2007; Van Horne, Wiemann, Berenson, Horwitz, & Volk, 2009) and earlier works also showed the usefulness of this framework (Ayers, Wagaman, Geiger, Bermudez-Parsai, & Hedberg, 2012; Berry, 1995; Bogg & Finn, 2009). This has a high degree of relevance justifying the use of this theory to the research into the wellbeing of the principal.

3.9 Socio-ecological theories

Physical place and the power to change and participate in one's environment are relevant in socio-ecological theory. The interconnection and intersecting components of an individual's social context with physical place, organisational systems and influences from society have been explored by Moos (2003) over the last four decades. The research focussed on using situational influence, power and health and wellbeing as the receptors of impact from social contexts. West, van Stralen and Michie (2011) theorised about factors affecting interventions to behaviours and used a wheel of influence with similarity to Bronfenbrenner's social ecological theory to show the radiating factors of power and influence. In this study the ability to alter and change a range of factors, using power and influence, affects wellbeing of the principal.

The use of social ecological theory proves useful for understanding how complex combinations of factors, including place or location, influence a certain participant. Physical place is relevant in this study as the location for reflection and peace for the principal or as the location for stress and critical incidents affecting wellbeing. Falk and Dierking's (2005) Contextual Model of Learning has the factors of personal context, physical context and sociocultural context as influential for a person's meaning-making interactions with the world. An explicit reference to Bronfenbrenner's theory as a feature is referenced. Kola-Olusanya

(2005) looked at free choice environmental learning through learning contexts, children, home, museums, zoos, national parks and wilderness using social ecological theory emphasizing the radiation style of effects and the emphasis on place, learning experiences and lived experiences.

Socio-ecological theory “encompasses and promotes socio-cultural understandings and practices” (Wattchow et al., 2014). When taking a socio-ecological pedagogical view, four foundational concepts are central: place, lived experience, experiential pedagogies, and agency and participation (Wattchow et al., 2014). These cover the experiences and interactions with people, places and processes in an educational perspective.

The inclusion of lived experience reflects the phenomenological approach to understanding the world of the protagonist and acknowledges the “importance of their social, cultural and historical background” (Wattchow et al., 2014, p. 29). It is highly relevant to the methodological approach of this research. “The concept of social ecology draws on such existential qualities as spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), temporality (lived time) and relationality (lived other)” (Wattchow et al., 2014, p. 28). We know much more about the principal if we know more about the lived experiences he/she presents as a starting point and the places in which these experiences occur.

In this current research the significance of the office of the independent school principal, the school board room, school campus and places selected for respite are representative of culture, values, beliefs and thoughts. Place contributes to our sense of identity. “Place within a socio-ecological approach is about how people develop and experience a sense of attachment to particular locations and has both imaginative and physical realities” (Wattchow et al., 2014, p. 31). Place reacts to the

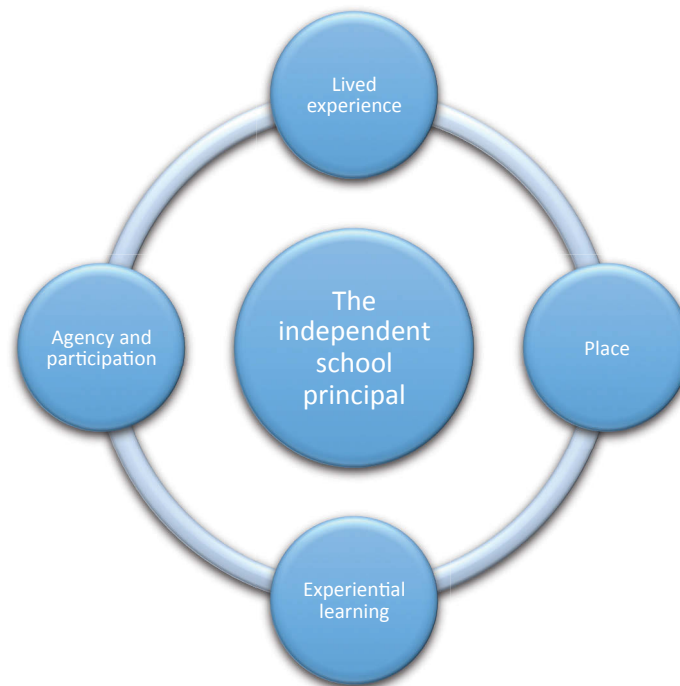
individual and the individual impacts and can alter the place. Somerville (2012) echoes the importance of place for the development and evolution of the individual and group. “Place results from an interaction between the geophysical reality of a location, cultural values and practices, and individual experience and interpretation of those experiences” (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 1). Places teach us about ourselves and how our world works (Gruenewald, 2003a). A person’s perception of themselves and their position in socio-ecological systems is impacted on by the physical environment and place (Devine-Wright & Clayton, 2010). The interplay between person and place is reciprocal in affect, as the person defines the place through their interaction with it and the place affects the person (Greenwood, 2013). Massey (2004) refers to this as a “Russian doll geography” (p. 9) and the interconnected elements of Bronfenbrenner are echoed. Gruenewald (2003b) contends that place teaches us about ourselves, how the world works and how we fit in it (or not). Additionally, relating to this current research, studies in the health sector strongly support the notion that the settings in which we live our lives impact on our wellbeing and resilience (Moos, 2003; Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, & Othman, 2007; Waters, Cross, & Runions, 2009). As this current research explores, the school and the places principals use for respite, impact on their wellbeing.

The socio-ecological concept of experiential pedagogy is based on experiential learning and is “the provision of an experience for the learner and the facilitation of that experience through reflection. It is the process of reflection that is considered to turn mere experience into experiential education” (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 10). It is the reflection that takes place after the learning activity that enables the richness of the learning to occur. “Experience and meaning making are not individual events but rather collaborative processes. What is learned is situated in a particular place, directed to a purpose or goal, with a particular group of people who bring differing knowledge and

attributes” (Wattchow & Brown, 2011, p. 12). This is an eminently suitable concept for the example of the independent school principal meeting with parents with the intent to resolve a complaint regarding a student. The behaviour of the principal, his/her discussion and intention to resolve the issue will be reflected upon by the principal, and the behaviour may be replicated or amended for the next similar complaint situation, dependent on the learning of the principal. This experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Philpott & Menter, 2014) occurs in this current research. The focus is followed by the action, which is then supported with feedback and followed by reflection. This is the cyclic learning experience.

With a pedagogical perspective, the concepts of agency and participation, in socio-ecological theory, refer to the ability to “facilitate positive change over their lives, environments and communities” (Wattchow et al., 2014, p. 37), to shape the responses to situations that are problematic. In this current research, this can refer to the ability of the independent school principal to change the culture of a school, perhaps, for example, by introducing and attending a regular lunch with student leaders so that the principal is informed of the issues relevant to the school students. This approach enables students to have a voice which can lead to a change of culture as the principal responds to problems that can facilitate positive change. “Structure is created through human agency and this in turn shapes how individuals interact within particular structures” (Wattchow et al., 2014, p. 38).

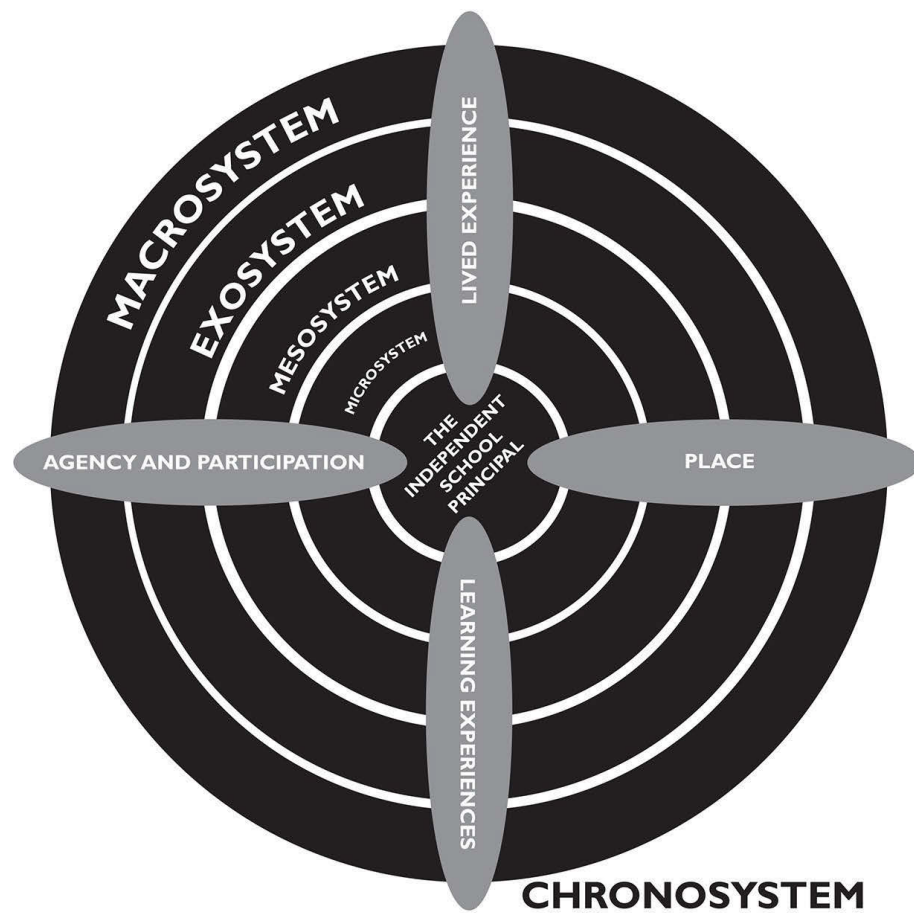
Diagram 2: The independent school principal (adapted from the socio-ecological approach) (Wattchow et al., 2014)



3.10 Combining the two theories

As this current research centres on the independent school principal, and the context in which he/she operates, more depth is required to focus, enrich and bring rigour to the understandings of the behaviour of the principal and the influences upon the principal. Therefore, the combination of two socio-ecological theories to structure the depth of understanding about the individual, that is the principal, at the centre, is used for this purpose (see Diagram 3). It creates the socio-ecological wellbeing framework.

Diagram 3: Socio-ecological wellbeing framework: The combined Diagrams 1 and 2, showing how they influence one another.



Clearly, a useful and appropriate theoretical model to understand a human's interactions within the world is underpinned by socio-ecological theory. Socio-ecological theory partners in this current research as it facilitates a deep understanding of the principal, who

resides as an individual at the centre of the Bronfenbrenner model (see Diagram 1), and of the lived experiences, places, agency and the experiential learning that the individual principal brings to the research (see Diagram 2). These two complementary theories, that is, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development and social ecological theory, are chosen as they enable an in-depth analysis of the principal and the perceptions of inhibitors and enablers to wellbeing; and the identification of the different influences as the individual engages with the surrounding environments. An individual's social, historical and cultural environments influence development as they are essential elements for construction of meaning and social practice: influences without and within affect the development of the individual (Elder, Lüscher, & Moen, 1995).

These theories are complementary; one builds on the other. Greenwood and McKenzie (2009) advocate the weaving together of experiences through the cognitive and the sensory environments. Lived experiences are the foundations to the ways of knowing and perceptions of phenomena.

As discussed, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development (2006) (see Diagram 1) is composed of five systems which together affect the behaviour and development of an individual. The broadest system incorporates the ideologies and attitudes of the culture in which the individual rests and the narrowest system relates to the most immediate social and physical environment of the individual and the affects that emanate from this. Thus the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development is a strong theoretical framework to examine and explore the perceptions of the inhibitors and enablers for the wellbeing of independent school principals. The inhibitors and enablers to wellbeing for the principal, derive from the

five systems surrounding the principal. They impact individually or in an inter-related manner or in a reciprocal manner.

Socio-ecological theory complements the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development by specifying the components of the influences upon the individual principal. These aspects are specifically: the lived experience, place, experiential pedagogies, agency and participation (Wattchow et al., 2014). The interpretation, pairing and use of these socio-ecological theories for this current research, is a fresh application of these theories. It is intended that the socio-ecological wellbeing framework provides a contribution to knowledge and that the framework will be valuable for future research in the educational and wellbeing areas.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development (2006) shows cultural and social contributors and affects on the behaviour of an individual and this is a broader systems concept. The additional overlaying use of socio-ecological theory allows a more specific and finite understanding of existing behaviours, experiences and affects from the five surrounding systems, that are brought to the analysis by a current stasis or psychosocial state of the individual at the centre of the model (see Diagram 3). This is very pertinent for this current research, as the principal is the primary source of data about wellbeing and perceptions of the inhibitors and enablers to wellbeing. Thus a key component is the recognition of individual experience. This is essential for this research. In this new model there is an intersection and overlap of influence. This model represents the five systems and their influences and impacts on the independent school principal along with the four factors' impacts and influences in each system and their influence and impact on the independent school principal. In the educational context, the definition of wellbeing encompassing the social, spiritual, emotional, physical and cognitive dimensions,

combined within the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, allows the internal and external influences on the wellbeing of the principal to be corralled and examined.

3.11 Summary

The Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development is a lens through which this research illuminates the personal, social and environmental layers and their relationships. Socio-ecological theory is a complementary lens for narrow and close viewing of each affect from each system surrounding the individual independent school principal who is the focus in the centre of the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory. The two are highly compatible and complementary in their contribution to illumination of the inhibitors and enablers to the wellbeing of the independent school principal for leadership. As the research identifies and understands influences and impacts, socio-ecological theories of human development and learning facilitate this. The interplay between Bronfenbrenner's multidimensional systems and socio-ecological place, lived experiences, learning experiences and agency and participation are strong theoretical foundations. The model is referred to as the socio-ecological wellbeing framework.

Before introducing the following chapter, this chapter concludes with a restatement of the overarching research proposal and alignment with the theoretical framing for this research.

3.12 Aligning the research proposal with the theoretical framework

The overarching research question is:

What are the inhibitors and enablers to the wellbeing of independent school principals?

The theoretical framing links the factors of the social ecology systems (place, lived experiences, learning experiences, agency and participation) with the Bronfenbrenner multidimensional systems. That is in theoretical terms the research asks:

What elements of socio-ecological systems theory impact the wellbeing of independent school principals?

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters presented the literature review and the theoretical framework for this thesis. The goal of this research is an investigation of the perceptions of wellbeing of independent school principals in Australia. The research uses a qualitative, interpretive paradigm to show how principals understand wellbeing and how they perceive their wellbeing is impacted by certain factors. This chapter outlines the rationale for the hermeneutic phenomenological approach taken. Specific details as to how the interpretive phenomenological approach is applied in the analysis of the data are provided. Transcripts are analyzed to enable the emergence of categories and themes. The research design is described giving details about the planning and conduct of the research, the interview structure and procedures. Ethical concerns, replication and triangulation are addressed.

4.2 Phenomenological methodological principles: The ‘methodos’

The rationale for choosing hermeneutic phenomenology is to understand and explore the meaning of wellbeing for principals, as contribution to general knowledge. Utilising the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, phenomenology helps in this research as a way of looking at the perceptions of the principals to understand the way the participants make meaning of their lived experiences. The researcher’s personal philosophical perspective aligns well with this approach. Understandings and construction of meaning and knowledge about phenomena are based on interactions with the real world. Being situated in a context enables the creation of meaning from that context.

This experience is not isolated but interacts with the contexts and the interrelationships shared with other human beings. The world is interpreted through experiences and relationships shared with others. The researcher's knowledge is grounded in her lived experiences and relationships. A hermeneutic phenomenological description is one interpretation of a lived experience. Interpreting and understanding this description enables hidden meanings to emerge. For this reason, hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology aligns with the researcher's philosophical understandings and facilitates the socio-ecological wellbeing framework.

Phenomenology seeks to understand how individuals construct their reality. In phenomenology we describe phenomena as they are from our perception. Phenomenology originated as a philosophical movement led by Edmund Husserl (1970). His belief was that one's knowledge is created through the experience of phenomena. Seeking to remove personal interpretations based on past experience, judgement is suspended by the researcher. This is referred to as bracketing of understandings (van Manen, 2007). The meaning or essence is sought to be understood from the individual's perception (van Manen, 2007).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is associated with ontology and the study of human beings and their lived experiences as they exist in the world. It interprets descriptions of their lives and the meanings attributed in those descriptions. The interpretivist approach allows insight into lived experiences and the meanings derived from these through analysis and interpretation by the researcher (van Manen, 2006).

Hermeneutic phenomenology does not conform to a set of procedures for the research process. The researcher has to keep an open mind as current understandings are confirmed or changed through the research process. This is feasible when bracketing of past experiences is enacted

whenever possible. The current research is seeking to describe the underlying structure and essence of wellbeing by exploring the lived experiences of the participants. It is an interpretive inquiry into wellbeing of independent school principals, bringing a perspective to the essence of a phenomenon from the perception of the principals. We know the world in which we live as human beings through hermeneutic study. Van Manen (2006) suggests a 'methodos': a way. This is not a prescriptive format. This current study uses the elements of this 'methodos' as permission to be playful and full of wonder. His methodological structure of human science research involves the dynamic interplay of six activities. He cautions for these not to be used as a formula. They are:

- Turning to the nature of lived experience.
- Investigating experience as we live it.
- Reflecting on essential things.
- The art of writing and rewriting.
- Maintaining a strong and oriented relation.
- Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (van Manen, 2006).

In this current research the interview transcripts are broken into parts and units of meaning and themes in each part are sought. The findings from each individual transcript are synthesized into emerging themes, then these themes are gathered into major themes and compared and contrasted. The thematic synthesis enables interpretation of the description of the phenomenon (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

4.3 Selection of methodology

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and an approach to inquiry. Reading from the works of Husserl (1970), Heidegger (2010), Merleau-Ponty (Marshall, 2008) and Van Manen (2006) informs the researcher about descriptive phenomenology, existential phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Phenomenology is not actually about searching for the truth. It is providing an interpretation of human experience that has been lived. We engage with another human being's experiences. We accept an invitation into another person's lived experience. The perceptions of the participants provide new insights into their lived experience and understandings are gained through the thematic analysis. This enables the capture of what the experience of wellbeing is like for the participants in the study. The words used by the principals describe the perceptions, feelings and understandings gained through lived experience of the phenomenon.

4.4 The role of language

When a person chooses words and language to express and describe an experience, the personal interpretation of that experience is voiced. It is a hermeneutic description giving meaning to the events in their lives through the interpretation of their lived experiences.

This study seeks to discover the essence of wellbeing; what words and language are used to describe wellbeing. These choices of words and language are carefully made by each participant to describe the personal lived experience of wellbeing. Through dissection and looking carefully at the words chosen to describe the essence of wellbeing, understandings of what wellbeing is and what the specific elements of

wellbeing are, arise. This is essentially describing the third space, the “zwischen” as described by Gadamer (1989): the between space. Between the language used and the lived experience recalled, lies the ‘between space’ which is the essence of wellbeing. The researcher needs to have alert powers of observation, judgment and reflection. This insight is important in hermeneutic phenomenology. The interpretation falls in this middle space between the text and the interpreter. This exposes the common meaning in the encounter.

Husserl (1970) recognizes the limitations of language. We only ever understand an aspect of things or a perspective of things. The entire understanding eludes us. A simple example of this is when one looks at a couch. One only sees the front of the couch. One does not see the back of the couch or the back of the legs of the couch. One sees a partial aspect every time one looks at the object. We are seeing the couch as it is to us. We are not seeing the couch as it is. This does not even begin to explore the physiological experience of sitting on the couch and feeling the spongy comfort. This is the authentic lived experience. Through hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry, we discover the interpretation of that lived experience through the perceptions and interpretation of the participant. We discover what it feels like to sit on the couch through the language and interpretation of the participant. This is why this methodology is apt.

This study does not aim to generalize or prove an hypothesis. The interpretations and conclusions result from the narrations during interviews with the 39 participants.

Phenomenology allows flexibility in use. The socio-ecological wellbeing framework enhances my understandings of categories and themes. Coupled with the hermeneutic phenomenological methodos, socio-ecological theory enables close study of the sources of impacts on our

lived experiences. The Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory and socio-ecological systems theory, combine to become the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, described in detail in Chapter 3, enabling the framing of lived experiences of participants in this hermeneutic phenomenological research.

4.5 Bracketing

The researcher is a past-immediate principal of an independent school so phenomenological reduction and bracketing is applied as she consciously suspends her own interpretation and meaning to be in the world of the interviewee (Ashworth & Lucas, 1998; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to the extent possible. As advised by Ashworth and Lucas (1998) holding apart prior experiences and knowledge of the literature enables a clear understanding of the resulting data. Being aware of her own knowledge and expectations avoids imposition of a personal existing view on the resulting data (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to the extent possible.

Setting aside and bracketing personal views and perceptions of the phenomenon and focusing on the responses of the participants is essential. Being mindful that it is not possible to completely forget experiences, past knowledge and experiences are not engaged as the participants' experiences are described (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The phenomenological attitude is important in this research. Looking closely at the lived experiences of principals using the *methodos* of phenomenology, consciously bracketing personal beliefs and understandings to ensure perceptions and meanings are heard and interpreted correctly, looking closely at the language used to describe

lived experiences, enables the discovery of the essence of the meanings. The methodos of phenomenology is a philosophical approach of inquiry for this research. Acknowledging the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, explicated in Chapter 3, it becomes evident which social relationships and environmental factors impact on these principals. This invites communication of the findings from this research in a logical, lucid and accessible manner.

4.6 Reflexivity

Attention is paid to reflexivity. The researcher is mindful of the possible power imbalance perceived by a newly appointed principal participant who might feel intimidated by the researcher who is an experienced principal of many years. Thus the researcher is impartial to the extent possible, remaining neutral when personal viewpoints of participants are revealed. Body language is considered and controlled to be encouraging of trust and neutral in response. Probst and Berenson (2014) note that “reflexivity is generally understood as awareness of the influence the researcher has on what is being studied and, simultaneously, of how the research process affects the researcher. It is both a state of mind and a set of actions” (p. 814). Considering power relations, positionality and insider and outsider stances and the mutual affect of the research process on researcher and the participant, engages reflexivity.

During interviews with principals the researcher is reflective regarding the practice demonstrated, viewing the situation as if from a distance, as well as from a personal point of view (Scaife, 2014), ensuring a meaningful understanding of the situation is gained (Impedovo & Malik, 2016). Clarifying questions are asked in the semi-structured format of the interview.

4.7 Researcher bias

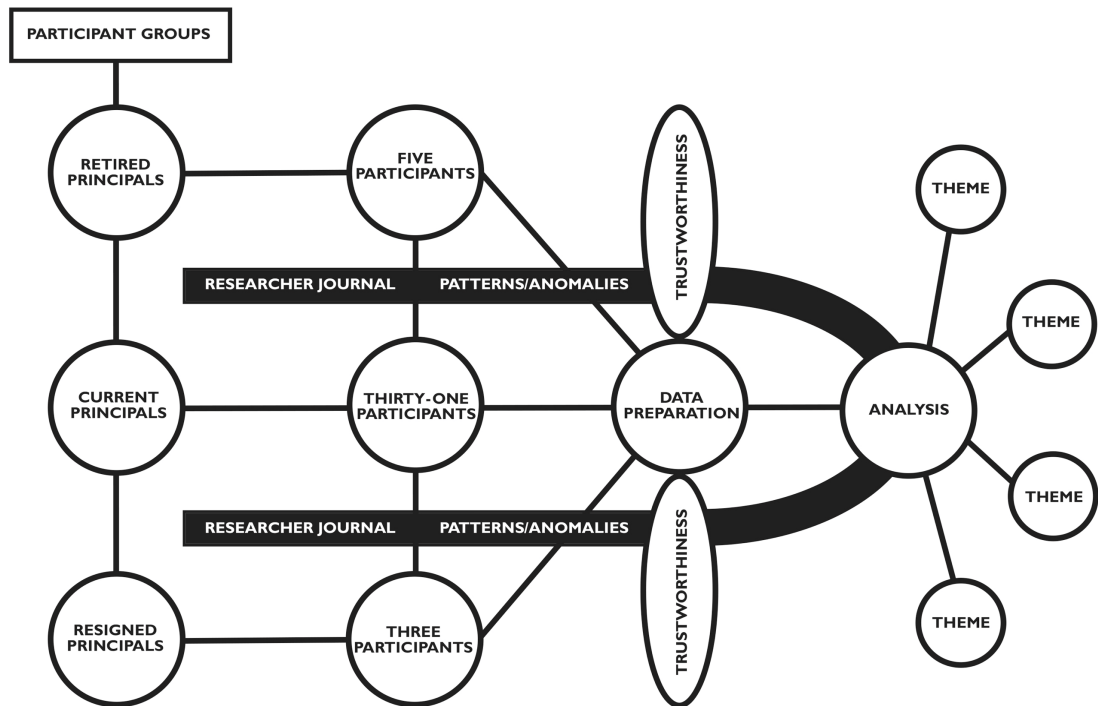
Employing active and sensitive listening skills facilitates the nuances of meaning to be interpreted by the researcher (Hammersley, 2013) whilst using open and probing questions (Sproull, 2002). It is important to be mindful that the participants may feel less comfortable if they perceive feelings of inadequacy regarding their experience level as principal of a school, compared to that of the researcher. The researcher is aware of the possible asymmetries of power and the possible distorting effect due to the relationship with the principals as fellow colleagues. This results in reflection on the concept of bias in this research interview situation, because it is both advantaged and disadvantaged. “Interviewers and interviewees alike bring their own, often unconscious, experiential and biographical baggage with them into the interview situation” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 150). This is inevitable. A possible advantage is that the participants may feel more comfortable discussing these beliefs, perceptions and issues with a person who has shared the role, a colleague. A concrete example of the feelings of one principal, repeated by others, is a sentence starter like “You know how it feels to have a student die”. Potter refers to this as “the proper level of competence in the group/situation” (1996, p. 102) to gain acceptance by legitimizing the researcher’s presence (Lichtman, 2013).

4.8 Data collection methods

Diagram 4 contains a diagrammatic representation of the overall research process.

Diagram 4

Diagrammatic representation of the overall research process



4.8.1 Participant selection

Thirty-nine principals of independent schools and members of AHISA responded to an initial email (refer to Appendix 2) seeking volunteers to participate in this research. Fifteen are female and 24 are male. A purposive sampling approach is employed to engage select individuals able to inform the research question and the central phenomenon for this study (Creswell, 2013; Hammersley, 2013). Neuman (2006) endorses that it is “appropriate to select unique cases that are especially informative” (p. 222). Flick (2009) emphasises that the participants “should have the necessary knowledge and experience of the issue or object at their disposal for answering the questions in the interview” (p.

123). Denscombe (2010) and Creswell (2014) endorse that this is the best way to gain quality information and valuable insights. The researcher acknowledges that the volunteers may not be a representative sample and may have some vested interest in the topic of wellbeing. It may be of heightened interest due to its current negative state for the individual so the principal is keen to contribute his/her perception. The converse may also be a possibility. These volunteers may be particularly concerned about wellbeing compared to the total population of principals.

Participants “are chosen not for their representativeness, but for their relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 269). Mertens (2005) notes that the purposive approach to sampling is often a characteristic of researchers working in an interpretive paradigm.

The participants in this study are highly educated. All have post-graduate tertiary qualifications in the field of education or educational management and administration. They are all articulate and measured in their responses that they provide after reflection. This is a factor of their daily public speaking to large audiences and a heightened awareness of the desire to be accurate and specific in the choice of language and vocabulary to provide responses, without error and to minimise the chance of misinterpretation. This ability is part of their daily role and duty.

4.8.2 Gaining access to independent school principals

Through the chair of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia (AHISA), seeking assistance and volunteer participants from across Australia for this research, participants are contacted after the

email invitation (see Appendix 2) to participate to arrange suitable convenient interview times and to give further information regarding the research. Through the retired and former AHISA principals' FMHeadNet email list, retired principals or those who have resigned are contacted in a similar manner. As these three groups (current, retired and resigned principals) are part of the AHISA membership and email list, all received the request for volunteers. As the principals are leaders of independent schools, no further permissions are required. These principals are the Chief Executive Officers and the final decision makers in their school environment. The principal decides if the chair of the governing school board or council is to be consulted.

Of the nearly 9,444 schools in Australia, 1016 are in the independent sector. Each principal in this research is a member or a prior member of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools Australia (AHISA) of which there are 420 member schools (Independent Schools Council of Australia, 2014).

All participants who return signed Information and Consent Forms (See Appendix 3) swiftly, enabling the research location and time to be organised, are interviewed.

4.8.3 The interviews and their timing

All interviews took place in the months of September, October, November and December in 2016. The timing enabled access to current principals who were on site at school prior to the busiest time of the school year. It was prior to the summer vacation which is often taken by principals. Thus, data collection occurred during an opportune period so there was a high level of availability of current principals. The retired and resigned principals were available after this period during school holidays. Details relating to the demographics of the participants and

the conduct of the interviews appear in Table One. The interviews were of approximately one hour's duration (Seidman, 2013; Silverman, 2013) and were conducted either face to face (F2F), by Skype or by telephone (Tel). The three groups were current principals (C), retired principals (R) and principals who resigned and quit from the position (Q). The face-to-face interviews took place at the venue of choice for the principal and in every case for current principals this was the school site. For retired principals and resigned principals the face-to-face interviews took place at a local venue of their choice.

TABLE ONE: THE PARTICIPANTS

Name	Age (in years)	Gender	Length of principalship (in years)	School type	School size (enrolments)	Interview format
C1	52	M	16	P-12	1500	F2F
C2	57	F	15	7-12	1400	F2F
C3	50	F	6	K-10	200	Tel
C4	49	M	11	P-12	1350	Tel
C5	65	M	26	P-12	1100	F2F
C6	63	M	18	P-12	950	Tel
C7	65	M	10	P-12	1000	Skype
C8	63	F	7	K-12	600	Tel
C9	57	M	6	K-12	300	Tel
C10	52	M	2	EL-12	1600	Skype
C11	40	M	10	R-12	500	Tel
C12	56	M	19	K-12	550	Tel
C13	60	M	14	5-12	1600	Skype
C14	49	M	6	EL-12	1600	F2F
C15	47	M	2	EL-12	600	Tel

C16	67	M	25	P-12	1600	F2F
C17	56	F	3	P-12	750	F2F
C18	55	M	10	P-9	1000	Tel
C19	52	M	10	P-12	1200	Tel
C20	50	F	9	P-12	950	F2F
C21	52	M	15	P-12	700	Tel
C22	49	M	8	P-12	1450	Tel
C23	50	F	1	P-12	1500	F2F
C24	46	M	1	7-12	550	Tel
C25	47	M	3	K-12	1100	F2F
C26	54	F	6	7-12	450	Tel
C27	47	F	1	7-12	400	Tel
C28	57	F	17	P-12	700	F2F
C29	55	M	16	K-12	1100	Tel
C30	53	F	17	P-12	650	Tel
C31	60	M	24	P-12	1600	F2F
R1	70	F	17	EL-12	700	Tel
R2	60	M	18	P-12	1800	Skype
R3	63	F	12	P-12	700	F2F
R4	70	M	21	P-12	1400	F2F
R5	70	M	15	P-12	1050	Skype
Q1	63	F	23	P-12	800	Tel
Q2	63	F	10	P-12	1100	F2F
Q3	61	F	12	P-12	1200	Tel

There are 39 participants in total. 15 are female.

4.8.4 School type

The schools range from Early Learning (EL), Preparatory (P), Kindergarten (K) or Reception (R), for students before 5 years of age, up to Year 9 or Year 12.

4.8.5 Confidentiality

Due to the roles and positions of these independent school principals the need to provide confidentiality is vital and imperative. As there are 420 in total in the cohort of AHISA members across Australia and 40% of these are female, when adding the information of school type, gender of principal and size of school, the findings must be presented carefully to increase inability to identify specific individuals. Responses are completely de-identified as some information, combined with transcript excerpts could potentially identify the participant principal. Quotations are not attributed to individual participants and pronoun references are not used to further protect the confidentiality of the independent school principals.

4.8.6 Large number of participants in the study

The email requesting voluntary participation was sent to all members of AHISA and 74 principals of the total 420 principals responded. This was 18% of the total cohort. After the process of sending Consent Forms and receiving returned and signed Consent Forms, there were 39 respondents who volunteered in a short time frame. Due to this large response there was a moral imperative to maintain their confidentiality and to accept their participation and enable them to unburden themselves of this information they were keen to share. This comprehensive range of independent school principals enabled authentic discoveries to be made.

4.8.7 The interview process

A semi-structured interview set of questions was compiled (See Appendix 4). These relate to the socio-ecological wellbeing framework. These were printed as paper copies for the researcher's use only. The "interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 111). It allowed the ideas to be captured in one sitting (Polit & Beck, 2016). The semi-structured approach allowed the participants involved to shape the dynamic that evolved during the interview and the participants were able to ask questions in a more flexible manner (Mertens, 2005; Minichiello, Madison, Hays, & Parmenter, 2004). This kept the data collection method qualitative, aiming to gain the experiences of the principals and understand their emotions, perceptions, beliefs, thoughts and strategies for coping.

The semi-structured nature of these interviews was imperative as "how an interviewee responds to a question will often shape the following question asked by the researcher" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 199). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) support this unstructured format to enable flexibility for the interviewee.

In the interviews, principals were able to give detailed viewpoints, analysing and clarifying reasoning and justifying the position of the perspective given from the lived experience. Interviews have many advantages in qualitative research. Sproull (2002) notes that an interview:

elicits information directly from people. Allows opportunity for probing: finding out why people feel or respond the way they do. Allows opportunity to clarify information as it is given. Allows opportunity to explain complex information. Allows opportunity to clarify previously collected data (pp. 162-165).

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed the principals to ruminate and articulate their confirmed thoughts and beliefs as well as unexplored opinions and observations.

4.8.8 Informed consent

Informed Consent (Appendix 3) was received prior to all interviews. This documentation was kept safe and secure. Email copies of Information and Consent Forms were forwarded to the researcher's personal email and filed in a separate folder.

4.8.9 The location of the interviews

As recorded in Table 1 the interviews took place at the school site for current principals. This enabled the principal to feel comfortable and relaxed (Silverman, 2010). Retired and resigned principals chose the location of our meeting, usually a café local to their home. An option taken by some principals, was to have the interview by Skype (Seitz, 2016). It was ensured that a stable internet connection, quiet room, paying attention to facial expressions, slowing down speech and being open to repeating answers and questions were acceptable. Some interviews were by telephone (Creswell, 2014). The flexibility and convenience offered to the participant was advantageous (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014).

Generally, interviews in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane were conducted face to face. Interviews in other capital cities and regional areas of Australia were conducted by Skype or phone.

4.8.10 Before the interview

An initial introductory set of five questions orienting the participant to the issue was emailed to the principal in the week before the interview to allow time for reflection. These questions were:

1. What does wellbeing mean to you?
2. How do you define wellbeing?
3. How do you prioritise your wellbeing?
4. Why do you think you need to prioritise your wellbeing?
5. How has your perspective about your wellbeing changed over time?

4.8.11 During the interview

Features of the researcher's interview style were indicating positive, receptive, interpersonal engagement (Denscombe, 2010), employing active listening skills, and giving pause time for thoughts to be gathered. In a supportive voice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), clarifying questions were asked to elicit further depth of thinking, such as "What makes you say that?" and "What are some of your reasons for this?"

The data were audio recorded with a digital voice recorder and transcribed. The audio recording captured "a good deal of the interviewee's intonation, voice quality, hesitations, self-corrections, asides and so on" (Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 201). These one-to-one interviews involved the researcher and the participant only. Demographic data were gained at the conclusion of the interview when a relationship and rapport had been established.

4.8.12 Field notes

Brief field notes were taken during the interview as eye contact was maintained for a maximum amount of the interview time. These notes were hastily written on the interview sheet. Field notes were composed of a description of the setting and the participant, the emotional tone, any issues or challenges, insights and reflections (Lofland, 2006).

4.8.13 After the interview

Immediately after the interview general descriptions of the people (male, female, experienced, newly appointed), place (regional, suburban, city) and the culture (welcoming, warm, formal) of each school were audio recorded to accompany the data (field notes). Reflections of the researcher's personal experience, reactions, thoughts, opinions, intellectual responses were written, including a general description of the tone and culture of the school as it was perceived and experienced. This enabled the meaning and the content of the interview to be more complete (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). These were then printed and the paper sheet copies were kept in a locked file.

4.8.14 Transcription of the interviews

Immediately after each session the data were transcribed, considering that "for more psychological or sociological research questions, however, where linguistic exchange is a medium for studying certain contents, exaggerated standards of exactness in transcriptions are justified only in exceptional cases" (Flick, 2009, p. 300).

4.9 How was the data explicated and interpreted?

All copies of the transcripts were printed. These paper copies were used for reading and rereading and also for highlighting and scribbling notes as rereading occurred. Each transcript was read at least eight times. From this first reading a set of categories was developed, from the frequency of occurrence. These initially numbered 35. After four more re-readings of the transcripts these 35 categories were expanded to create minor themes. For example, in these data, the category of spiritual wellbeing was expanded into four minor themes:

- a belief in God
- regular prayer
- attendance at chapel or church
- participating in regular spiritual activity.

These different thematic meanings demonstrated the seeking of the essence or the eidos of the notion of spiritual wellbeing, perceived and elucidated by the language of these participant principals. The themes were not intended to be exhaustive of a full meaning of the notion of spiritual wellbeing for these participants.

4.10 A theme in relation to phenomenological research

Hermeneutic phenomenology uses interpretive analysis to segment the data and these segments are categorized (Tesch, 1990). This categorization produces themes that are collections of words, sentences or phrases regarding a common concept, such as 'dealing with many deaths in schools'. This is a systematic process allowing for the themes to emerge and change (van Manen, 2007). Van Manen (2006) explains that the theme is the experience of focus. It is a simplification. It is not objective but is intransitive. It is a way of capturing the phenomenon in an attempt to understand and describe an aspect or perspective of the

lived experience. It is important to realize that the "theme is always a reduction of a notion. No thematic formulation can completely unlock the deep meaning, the full mystery, the enigmatic aspects of the experiential meaning of a notion" (van Manen, 2006, p. 88). The theme emerges from our desire to make sense. "Grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of seeing meaning" (van Manen, 2006, p. 79). For example, the following quote from a male retired principal participant referred to management of a critical incident in a school involving a death (a theme used in this research). His perception of his ingrained responsibility to be authentic and genuine, partnered with consideration of the reputation of the school. He was mindful of dissecting the truth that could be publicly delivered whilst avoiding the truth that would damage the reputation of the independent school. *"I can take you right back to my roots. I've been brought up in a very Christian environment, so I always go back to basic principles. You know, what is the principle attached to this incident? What is the most appropriate response? I guess looking at it really simply, what's the Christlike response here? How do I maintain everybody's dignity? How do I say something which is constructive? How do I maintain the reputation of the school? How do I not be a politician, and give an honest answer without giving sometimes the truth which you can't give"* (retired, male).

4.11 Conducting a thematic analysis

Returning to the semi-structured question sheet allows confirmation that the areas of interest, exploration and inquiry are comprehensively covered in each interview. The researcher becomes very familiar with the wording used by individuals. There are particular and frequent phrases describing experiences that amazed and entranced. The details that are said in such clear and explicit descriptions are fascinating. Common themes that are recurring in participant responses to the same question

arise. For example when questioning about friends, principals would generally make reference to their limited time to share with others. This theme is added to the initial list. These themes are the "structures of experience" (van Manen, 2006, p. 79). Recurring similar perceptions in response to the semi-structured questions are highlighted.

NVivo coding enables further analysis and formalization of the repetition of the categories, themes and sub-themes that are emerging. This creates some quantitative data as to the number of times certain phrases or references recur. Initial focus is on the concepts of the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, discussed in Chapter 3. Looking at each of these concepts enables awareness of emerging categories. For example, the initial categories for a socio-ecological concept of place are:

- A place that is on site,
- Places that are away from school,
- The beach hut,
- Overseas travel.

For a category such as social wellbeing, the dominant themes emerging initially are:

- Debriefing with partner on a daily basis,
- Spending time with friends,
- Spending time with family,
- Spending time with network colleagues,
- Relationships with parents at school,
- Relationships with staff,
- Relationships with students.

Close examination of the categories is followed by focus on seeking common and contrasting themes and sub-themes within each. This is

the first concrete step in the data analysis process. Some responses are outliers and are grouped under the heading “outliers”.

Following this, a close inspection of the themes in each category enables interpretive understanding of that particular impact. This involves looking closely at the use of language, to describe situations like a critical incident and its impact on the principal’s wellbeing. The process involves alternating between the transcript and an interpretation of that text to indicate the middle space or the essence in terms of a phenomenological attitude. This involves a variation between looking at small detailed pictures and the bigger picture. This is followed by the realisation that presenting the data needs to be done in terms of three global groupings. Much reflection and contemplation is required to arrive at the final three global groupings. These three global groupings are:

- The import of location (place),
- Lived experience in the workplace,
- Lived experience in personal situations.

These are discussed in detail in Chapter 5. The global groups are then separated into their individual themes for further reduction, critical analysis and discussion in Chapter 6. This distillation enables a richer, deeper phenomenological meaning to be revealed from the three global categories. Regarding the lived experience in the work place, an example of this distillation is the detailed in-depth participant (current principal, female) account of her mental wellbeing threatened by her attempted suicide. Participants reflect on deeply personal details and experiences, explaining the meaning in terms of perceived extenuating causes. The participants construct their meaning from their lived experience through the language and stories they share. This study’s analysis enables deep understanding and interpretation of the perceptions and meanings they share. Following this is a return to the

research questions and close examination of the stories that comprise the responses. The researcher interprets the language to create meaningful understanding of the lived experiences of these principals. Every reading of their stories results in more clarity concerning their personal understandings, perceptions and values. Each principal is unique. However the global groupings and themes generated show similarity.

One very strong phenomenological essence is the existential purpose of being a principal. To believe in the ability to implement and exert change and improvement is the fundamental core of many responses providing data that are deeply descriptive, rich and informatively insightful.

To make phenomenological sense of the lived experiences of principals and their wellbeing this interpretive analysis requires deep reflection on the transcript readings and the perceived meanings of wellbeing for these independent school principals. The meanings of wellbeing are further elucidated through the middle space, by implication of the actions, strategies and tools enabled to achieve wellbeing. These are also shadowed by the processes that inhibit wellbeing. Both these perspectives clarify and shine a light upon that middle space as referred to by Heidegger (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014; Heidegger, 2003).

4.12 Other phenomenological studies in education

Similar studies in education use phenomenology to capture perceptions and beliefs. Fennell (1999) uses a phenomenological methodology to investigate the concept of power as utilised by four female principals: empowerment, traditional power, negative power, positive power and gender and power. The three interviews lead with a general discussion of the participants' experiences with leadership in the school, followed

by unstructured probing questions to reveal details about the experiences. The interview transcripts are then examined through the lenses of power with, power through and power over. The resulting findings are examples of how power is enacted in traditional organisational settings.

Frick (2009) uses this methodology to capture the intrapersonal moral conflict for ethical decision making by educational leaders. The main focus is a description through interviews to capture the participant's beliefs, experiences, interpretations and perspectives. This current study provides interpretations and perspectives of a principal's wellbeing in a specific context: the independent school.

The phenomenological approach is commonly used in the education sector to capture subjects' beliefs, perspectives, experiences and interpretations (Brown, Hughes, Keppell, Hard, & Smith, 2015; Cummings, Sills-Busio, Barker, & Dobbins, 2015; Field, Lauzon, & Meldrum, 2016)². This is further evidence of the relevance and congruous use of the phenomenological methodology to this thesis in which the personal viewpoints from lived experiences are captured, from a group of independent school principals, regarding their perspectives and knowledge of wellbeing and its inhibitors and enablers.

4.13 Criticisms and defence of phenomenology

This current research requires the illumination of the deep understandings and perceptions of wellbeing held by the participant principals. It provides information about the nuances, beliefs and feelings regarding achievement of wellbeing for these independent

² Aysun & Seda, 2012; De Vries & Albon, 2012; Giorgi, 2012; Jhagroo, 2015; Joseph, 2015; Kabilan, 2013; Koopman, 2015; Salmona, Partlo, Kaczynski, & Leonard, 2015; Schulz & Rubel, 2011; Sum & Shi, 2016; Zur & Eisikovits, 2011.

school principals. Phenomenology is deemed appropriate and fulfils this required purpose. There exist many claims that the concept of subjective awareness and the resulting data are unscientific, based on consciousness and feelings, and are unreliable (Moran, 2000). However strong arguments exist that the true significance and value of phenomenology is that it is the only way to deeply understand and portray the experiences and understandings of people (Barnacle, 2001; Giorgi, 2010; van Manen, 2007). Van Manen (1997) stresses that interpretive hermeneutic phenomenology allows the lived experience generated into personal understanding, to be described through the language process. This is achieved in the current research.

4.14 Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis

NVivo coding is used to further formalize the repetition of the categories and themes that are emerging. This enables the creation of some quantitative data as to the number of times certain phrases or references recur, adding to inter-reliability of the interpretation of the phenomenon.

The caution is noted that NVivo “cannot do the hard work of data analysis, which requires certain intellectual and creative skills that, to date, only the analyst can bring to the enterprise” (Lofland, 2006, p. 204). The resulting detailed knowledge of the themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) allows use of the tool of the socio-ecological wellbeing theoretical framework to lucidly convey the findings.

4.15 Ethics and ethical conduct

Ethics approval is received from Human Research Ethics Committee at Southern Cross University (ECN-16-108) (See Appendix 1).

Ethical behaviour is required at every stage of the data collection process. These principals share “the secret business” of being in the role with the researcher so mutual respect is shown. The researcher is observant of human interests at every stage (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Confidentiality is paramount. During the interviews no mention is made of any previous schools visited, or colleagues’ names or their opinions or thoughts. Literal quotes from the transcripts are very important in this thesis. Care is taken to remove any references to locale or events or use pronouns that may give information as to the participant or the school.

All identities remain confidential as explicitly stated and pledged in the Information Form sent to participants prior to the interview. All data are kept confidential, protecting the identities of the participants and the locations of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Macfarlane, 2009), locked in a filing cabinet with one access key. Electronic copies of documents are sent to the researcher’s personal email and then forwarded to a file folder.

The guidelines suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) are followed:

- Honour your informants’ privacy
- Treat your participants with respect and honesty
- Make the conditions of agreement clear and stick to it
- Tell the truth when you write the analysis and discussion
- Protect the identity of the participant
- Tell them how long the interview will be and adhere to the timeline.

Each principal is aware that the researcher is a past immediate principal of an independent school, and government schools over the past immediate ten years and a former member of AHISA. The researcher is at all times aware of the requirement for high standards of behaviour,

professional demeanour, courteous manner and stringent and rigorous confidentiality to be of foremost importance.

4.16 Replication of the process

The steps of the research process are specified by the researcher in a daily electronic journal to ensure dependability and the opportunity for checking. The researcher ensures confirmability by detailed description of research methods and a retrievable data bank for access by other researchers. All data, daily organisational timetables, paperwork and recordings are available for auditing by other researchers. An audit trail describes the research steps taken from start to reporting of findings in a transparent manner because “declaring that qualitative analysis was done, or stating that categories emerged when the material had been read by one or more persons, is not sufficient to explain how and why patterns were noticed...the reader needs to know the principles and choices underlying pattern recognition and category foundation” (Malterud, 2001, p. 486). In the research, the narrative of the research process, recorded in the electronic daily journal, clearly articulates the individual nuances of the researcher’s thoughts and responses.

With regards to replicating the process, the ability of the researcher to develop rapport with each principal is unique and not able to be replicated. Regarding transferability, the contention is that the findings are useful to other principals in similar situations.

4.17 Member checking of transcripts

Each transcript is checked with the interviewee for accuracy because “researchers and evaluators can learn a great deal about the accuracy, completeness, fairness, and perceived validity of their data analysis by having the people described in that analysis react to what is described

and concluded” (Patton, 2015, p. 668). A year after the initial interviews a convenient sample of six principals are contacted by telephone to check that the initial findings are ringing true, as a strategy for ensuring internal validity through member checking (Lofland, 2006) or respondent validation where feedback is sought on the emerging findings from some of the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The participants are able to recognise their experience in the data and they are able to suggest amendments to enable increased accuracy and authenticity. This is completed as it is very important to eliminate bias. Maxwell (2013) cites that “this is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed” (pp. 126-127).

4.18 Triangulation

A return to the interviewee for confirmation of the transcripts (respondent validation) ensures “triangulation focuses on the validation of the findings in terms of their accuracy and authenticity...the corroboration of findings” (Denscombe, 2010). Triangulation of data is achieved through the repeated number of interviews of principals, that is, the sample number of 39. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) confirm, it is:

a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation. But acknowledging that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable, triangulation serves also to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case is being seen (p.454).

This view is confirmed by Flick (2014) and Silverman (2010). Denzin (1989) recommends the study of the same phenomenon at different times and with different persons at different places. The resulting convergence of perspectives from participants “can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). In this research, the findings come from interviews with independent school principals currently appointed, interviews with retired independent school principals, interviews with independent school principals who have resigned, participants from schools across Australia (different locations), transcript checking by participants after interviews and respondent validity checking on emerging trends in the data by confirmation with a convenient sample of participants.

4.19 Rigour and Trustworthiness

Rigorous methods and the credibility of the researcher are essential to ensure credibility of the research. Patton (2015) states that the trustworthiness of the data is directly linked to the trustworthiness of the data collector. The resulting interpretations of the findings result from the language of the descriptions of the lives of the participants, their lived experiences. The accuracy of the interpretations is checked with six participants to confirm that the emerging findings are accurate and clear.

In this research, trustworthiness and credibility criteria are met as “the key players are picked out precisely because they are specialists, experts, highly experienced and their testimony carries with it a high degree of credibility” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 348). Trustworthiness is enhanced because of the multiple perspectives of the principals, through the details of the critical analysis process, with interview transcripts provided and checked, and the thematic analysis explained in detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.20 Summary

In this chapter, the methodology, data collection and data analysis techniques are discussed. This research study and an interpretation of the interview transcripts to identify recurrent categories, themes and sub-themes result in the identification of inhibitors and enablers to wellbeing of principals in the independent sector of education in Australia. The introduction and the literature review identified the paucity of literature regarding this topic (Robbins, 2013). Any previous research conducted suggests large areas for further investigation (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Dadaczynski & Paulus, 2015).

The following chapter relates the findings of the data accumulation from the semi-structured interviews with the 39 independent school principals who participated in this research.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

“Going beyond the immediacy of the moment, because if you’re consumed by it, it will kill you” (Quote from male current principal participant).

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the findings of the study, the lived experiences of the participants and the learning experiences derived from time in the role of independent school principal and provides responses to the research questions.

The socio-ecological wellbeing framework is the tool that comprehensively covers all the relevant themes for discussion. It can be viewed as the picture on a jigsaw. To allow easy access for the reader this jigsaw has been separated into individual tiles. These tiles have been placed in a pathway. This allows the findings to unfold in a manner that is context specific. The lived experiences are presented in three sections: at work, the personal situation and the location (place). The responses to the research questions are provided under the headings of physical, social, spiritual, emotional and cognitive wellbeing enablers as these are the dimensions of the definition of wellbeing used in this current research study (see Chapter 3). Each section explores the impacts of the individual factors. The principals speak for themselves and articulate their own ideas and perceptions so their words as directly quoted are written in italics. Each new paragraph indicates a different speaker.

5.2 Lived experiences of independent school principals

Independent school principals' lived experiences occur in the work place, in personal situations and in specific locations. The following discussion focuses on the impacts in each of these in turn.

5.3 The workplace

The following themes identified through sequential rereading of the transcripts and using NVivo are discussed:

- Relationships with the teaching staff
- Relationships with the executive team
- The school board and the board chair
- Teacher performance
- Organisational routines
- Expectations
- Parents
- Living on the school site
- Size of the job and time consumed for effective performance
- Critical incidents

5.3.1 Teaching staff

Relationships range across a spectrum from formal and professional to personal and informal. Relationships can be both positive and negative.

Nineteen out of 39 principals (49%) in this study report that they cannot have personal relationships or friendship with staff members due to the future possibility of having to make important and hard decisions about these staff. Decisions such as termination of employment and performance management are examples. Difficulties with these issues are evidenced by:

Sometimes when you've got to go through restructures, if you've got friends who are a part of all that, then there's just no good way to go. (current, male)

One of my leadership team has pulled back in a relationship from one of the people who reports to him because he feels that down the track he might be compromised. Then he looked at me and he said, "God I can't imagine what it's like for you," and I said, "Yes. I can't have close relationships with many people because I'm their boss and it's not appropriate." (current, male)

The reality is that I'll always be their boss and if crunch came to crunch, their friendship would come second. (current, female)

It's, I think, very unhealthy and risky for a head to have favourites or be making friends with particular people, because almost inevitably, somewhere down the track, you will get the payout time. (current, male)

A contrasting viewpoint is presented by this principal:

I'm not saying they're all my bosom buddies and when the pressure's on will they be there? Maybe not, but at the same time I think I'm actually quite good at talking with people without letting them think that that means they've got some special advantage. (current, male)

And a humorous, but serious response is:

By Christmas time, when they have their Christmas party at some pub and they say, "Are you coming," I feel like saying, "I can't wait to see the back of you. I'm not going drinking with you. I've had enough." I think to be fair, that's really, really important. (current, female)

Levels of acknowledgement that the job is felt to be isolating and lonely are expressed:

So many principals always say that it's very isolating and they can't trust anyone, because they never know whether they're going to have to fire the person. (current, male)

So the friends of principals are often outside of school and owing to time constraints of the role, opportunities to meet occur infrequently, but the value is believed to remain high, particularly if the friend is also a principal. This is because they share common daily challenges, trials and tribulations of the role as principal, and shared honest discussion and confidential support is enabled.

5.3.2 Relationships with the executive team

There is frequent mention of professional formal relationships with the senior executive team by 21 out of 39 (54%) independent school principals in this present study. Trust is felt to be important as is the ability to share the load through collaborative discussion. The bias evident in the quotes is towards professional relationships, as shared here:

It is very much about trust, and you've got that trust in your senior team. There's always different levels of trust. (current, male)

I've got a great team around me, and sometimes just having a one-on-one with different colleagues... That will give you the space and time to just vent, off-load or whatever you want to call it. (current, male)

I apologize for how idiotic it sounds, but I work hard on making people fanatically loyal to me. (current, male)

That senior leadership team. They're the people I work with most closely, see every day. Knowing that we're on the same page and working to the same purpose is really critical to make me feel personally supported and feeling meaningful in what's being done. (current, male)

Get a couple of people around you that you really trust, that can share the load. I don't mean by share the responsibility, but share the emotional load with you. (retired, female)

The principal's relationships with staff and executive team members are seen to be professional and the locus is the school and its purpose but the relationships are much more finely nuanced. They clearly are not personal, egalitarian friendships. The relationship is one of boss and employee and is hierarchical.

5.3.3 The school board and the board chair

The voices of 17 out of 39 (44%) principals in this present study suggest that significant effort is to be put into the professional relationship with the board chair:

Your board chair. That's a very special relationship, and if it doesn't work, it will percolate through the school. (current, male)

You need to have a good relationship with the chair and an open relationship with the chair. I was fortunate when I came here the chair changed as well. The previous chair, he'd have driven me insane. The current guy is a lawyer, is really well considered. He understands the difference between governance and management. He gets to find out all

the things that go well and gets to find out all the things that go badly so there's no surprise. If I'm offered a job or asked to apply, I tell him so that he knows and that works well. (current, male)

I'm acutely aware of who they'll like completely [for a position on the board] and determine who's on the board. I'm very conscious of having whatever impact I can to maximize what I believe to be the best chances of me having a supportive board. (current, male)

These principals point out that it is wise to be mindful that the relationship is one of employer and employee:

I think it's a real risk to forget that the board pay your salary. (current, male)

I've made a mistake, probably, with the board. Where the chair of the board was overstepping the mark a little bit and I said as much and I sort of regret it now. Because, I actually want the board to be critical. (current, male)

I don't put anything to a board I'm not comfortable with. If I'm asked to prepare something, the relationship with my chair is crucial and I actually ring board members first when necessary. For example, Friday, I spent the whole afternoon ringing five board members to shore up what I needed to do to make sure that when I get there it goes through. I know where my support is. I know where the outliers are. It's not up to them to work with me. It's up to me to work with them. (current, female)

The importance of the board chair showing pastoral care for the wellbeing of the principal and being the advocate in tricky situations and discussions is expressed here:

She'd take me to lunch, she'd answer email, text messages...I think she saw things that were happening at that time she didn't really like so, she really looked after me. She did the same to me really as she did with others, had some tricky times and she just stuck by the principal. (current, female)

If there was tension between me and the board chairman or the board, that had a huge bearing on my sense of wellbeing. (current, male)

The policy stated that if they [the parents] weren't happy with the headmaster's response they could go to the board chairman and then it also states that if they're not happy with the board chairman's response they can go to the archbishop, and so that sort of thing really used to get to me... (retired, male)

Difficulties are perceived to occur when the chair is not supportive of the principal or when the board members do not follow due process regarding their role, which is to be strategic and not management related, as suggested here:

They've always got to have the big picture. They always have to support the head. That's got to be their default position. You've got to earn that support but you can't do this job if you don't ... I can't imagine doing this job if I didn't know that every member of the board supported me, or if they slightly wavered the chair would jump in and whack them over the head. (current, male)

Within the first month of my being appointed, I had moved on a staff member. I didn't understand at the time that there were huge eruptions at council about that. This person was very well connected and had pulled whatever strings she needed to pull. It appears that the council

chair at the time really had to go in very strong to defend me or protect me. (current, female)

The chair...he tried to help me and he disciplined the board. (current, male)

As the independent school principal is recruited and employed by the board, the selection process would imply that the chosen candidate has the desired capability and is strategically aligned with the school vision. However, with change of board members and change of chair, this alignment may alter. These comments support the importance of knowing the board members who are supportive of the principal:

But I guess it stuck in with me about the potential vagaries of councils, and the need to be clear in what you're doing, and that from time to time, and hopefully not too often, you have to choose something to die in the ditch over. (current, female)

You work out those board members who you naturally gel with and therefore will become your advocates later down the line. (current, male)

An induction program or handover for the principal would be beneficial as the lack of provision of this is seen to be an inhibitor to leadership, as expressed here:

We don't have a hand over and sort of say "Look, here's some of the things that you would benefit by knowing". You get given a gig, and if you're fresh up, you're fresh up. (current, male)

If there was a kind of hand over package that we could develop as a profession. Even like a checklist of certain kinds of issues for the potential to emerge and who might be the kind of reference points in

that process, that would be enormously beneficial. Because everybody does it in their own way when these things just come out of nowhere. (current, male)

Too many heads get in positions that they're poorly equipped for and poorly prepared. (current, male)

Insist that the outgoing principal give me the time to go through the entire staff list and profile the staff for me. (current, female)

This experienced principal affirms that a shared, collaborative relationship between principal and chair is desirable but also states that it is unusual to have a chair that is clearly aware of the specific, mandated role of the board.

A head would ring up to discuss a problem they were having. I could almost say "Stop there, I'll tell you the rest of the story", which was almost always "I've got this member of the board whose child hasn't been made music captain". If you've got a really good chair, you talk to the chair about that and it doesn't happen. The chair reminds them what the role of the board is or if they dare bring it up in a meeting, the chair steps in and says, "Hang on. This is operational. This has got nothing to do with us." That's so unusual to get a good chair like that. (retired, male)

Independent school principals are responsible for the wellbeing of all staff and students and the parent body. There is no delegated body to care for the wellbeing of the principal. Three out of 39 (8%) principals comment that the value of accountability is in the domain of the board or board chair. This is confirmed in the following principals' comments:

It should be a responsibility for boards or councils of schools to look at their principal and say, "Well, how is he or she going?" (current, male)

I find it an interesting thing. The head is responsible for the wellbeing of everyone in the place including members of the board, but there's really only one person who is charged with the wellbeing of the head and that's the chair. (current, male)

Nineteen out of 39 (49%) principals in this research comment positively about remuneration and discussions regarding this with the chair or board, as exemplified here:

They just upped my salary, by \$30,000 and... they want me to spend \$10,000 on sabbatical leave, and all sorts of things. In that space I'm very affirmed. However, yes, there is a stress associated with that, with making sure that you're valued. (current, male)

Although sometimes these are negative discussions regarding the remuneration of the principal, as expressed here:

I was able to use the AHISA salary remuneration guide and point out that I was in fact in the bottom 25% of similar sorts of schools. I remember at the end of the year I only had in my [contract] CPI increase. I came along, and it was stressful because I had done all the comparisons and I said, "Look, I appreciate very much in your remunerating me well but I can't accept that when I have had a demonstrable impact on the college in my first year that I should receive the lowest increase of anyone in the college." (current, male)

A principal puzzled by his contract comments:

There has been a huge amount of work done here, and a huge amount of stress. I found that interesting when they [the board] said that, in lieu of my bonus, I could have a coach. (current, female)

As this principal suggests, the discussion about remuneration can be awkward:

I kind of go in with my eyes shut...so it's a bit like a conversation where everyone shuffles their feet slightly awkwardly and then agrees. (current, male)

Another occasion of angst is reported to occur when:

The board, people that I thought would care for me more, were more worried about the reputation of the school. (current, male)

So a principal responds by thinking,

This is the job. They pay you very nicely. If you don't like it, that's fine. There are choices. Work out a way around it. If working a way around it means you have to be a bit Machiavellian, or you have to suck it up and do what they want, whatever it is, then I think that's what you've got to do. (current, female)

The board would benefit from pedagogical knowledge:

Given the complexity of the council, that you're not dealing with educators, so what you would do in a corporate world, you don't do in a community world. (current, male)

Or Australian Institute of Company Directors training would be beneficial:

Wanting to make comments about staff, well, that's not their role. They are not realizing operational from management. (current, male)

The relationship between the principal and the board may be perceived to be extremely negative when decisions made by the board lead to significant detriment for the principal, as expressed here:

I tried to kill myself and very nearly did. I will never forgive them [the board] for that. (current, female)

This example relates to a source of conflict regarding an implied personal and powerful relationship between the board chair and a school staff member. It was suggested that the board was possibly led by the board chair to terminate the contract of the principal.

It is clear that there are both perceived negative and positive aspects in the dynamic. However, the relationship between the independent school principal and the board chair and the board is believed to be crucial for the continuing wellbeing of the principal and the continuing success of the school as a whole.

5.3.4 Organisational routines

Organisational routines and setting boundaries that are seen to enable wellbeing are evident from the following statements:

I keep the evenings to myself, but start very early in the morning. I'm on the job very early at home, and I have an organizational mantra that I have a zero inbox. That is a disciplined organizational habit that I keep my inbox at zero. (current, male)

I won't read an email that's more than on the screen. I will not read attachments. (current, female)

And similarly:

I never check my email after 7 o'clock at night. (current, male)

I told my then assistant "You will not put any meetings in my diary before 8:00am on any day unless you ask me and unless I think it's an emergency it won't be happening". I won't be meeting people or putting events on weekends unless there's absolutely no other way to do it. (current, female)

A readjustment of attitude to the import of the role is felt to be an enabler for wellbeing. The following interview response captures this:

I've got to realize, at the end of the day I'm not running the universe. Someone else is. I can only do what I can do. I can do my best in my situation. I think what I've learned to do, because I used to beat myself up terribly if something went wrong. I'd be, "Oh, I'm hopeless," and blah blah blah...a bit of a perfectionistic streak. I've turned that into, "Okay, so that's happened. What can I learn from it?" sort of attitude. (current, male)

The value (and humour) of siphoning off time to spend away from the office is articulated by this principal:

I'll tell you a funny story. As part of my review process, the chair said to me, "You've got to go home. You've got to get out of the office and not be here until 6:30 every night," type of thing, which I was. I said, "Okay, I'll do that. Every Wednesday I will actually take my son home because that's the day that they don't have sport." I walked out of the office at

about quarter to four, a board member's coming in to pick up his child and he said, "Oh, having an early mark are we?" The chair was furious when I told him the story. (current, male)

Reflecting on the requirement to be present at all school activities, one principal learned a trick from a colleague, demonstrating the ability to arrive, be seen and then, not seen:

I said, "Oh, Jim, it's nice of you to come along to the game." He said, "Yeah, but it's not for long. Watch this." He walked around the oval, making eye contact with parents as he walked, then got to these bushes, and he just disappeared. (current, male)

5.3.5 Teacher performance

Poor teacher performance is articulated as a significant inhibitor by 26 out of 39 (67%) principals in this present research study, as indicated here:

The ones that I always find really difficult are issues where you have to talk to staff about their performance, because I'm sort of a people person. I find that stuff quite distressing when I have to do stuff like that. For me, having to discipline a teacher, whilst I know I have to do it and I will do it, I always take it quite personally. (current, female)

It's an insoluble problem and that can really irritate me and disproportionately affect my wellbeing. It just niggles away. The heart of that is that I'm very bad with disharmony. (current, male)

That, in particular, is a big stressor because if anybody likes doing it they're a sociopath. You've got to deal with it and you've got to deal with it empathetically and you've got to deal with it the right way. I don't

know what other people do, but I find those situations quite stressful in terms of you use a lot of emotional energy in terms of dealing with it. (current, male)

As soon as they take sick leave, then the bullying complaint comes, then I've had to be investigated for it, then I had to be interviewed. My staff had to be interviewed, then I've been cleared, and it's happened twice. It's been revolting. I think those situations are hideous. (current, female)

Poor performing teaching staff can be an issue that the principal ignores for the first year in the role as they may have advice from colleagues to observe firstly before bringing in change to a school. However, this does not alter the poor performance of teaching staff and principals are aware that incoming parent complaints will continue to arise. When the principal acts by putting the teacher on a formal documented program of performance management and improvement, it is common for the teacher to instigate a complaint of bullying or intimidation as a response. Union activity and support may be sought by the teacher. Thus ignoring or prevaricating the poor performance of teachers does not remove the stressor, as explained here:

Dealing with staff. That is by far the most difficult thing that I do on what seems to be a regular basis. Dealing with low performing staff who have been here for a long time, who nobody has dealt with and I put my hand up but I haven't dealt with them for eight years. Yeah, it's the last thing I think of at night and it's the first thing I wake up to in the morning. (current, male)

If you see Baghdad, bomb it, because...you don't always see it again. When you see it, if you hesitate, because you go, "Oh no, they'll do it again, or whatever." If you don't seize that opportunity, it may not come again for two or three or four years. It's given me a clarity that every

time I allow poor performance to go past, it's affecting hundreds of children whose parents are paying good money to be here. I guess I wish I'd known and wish I'd had the confidence to act on poor performers earlier. (current, female)

Having the moral courage to respond and act swiftly also has consequences, as this principal reports:

My first year, I had to fire eight people, redundancies, and that poisoned my relationship with the staff for ten years. There always were staff who just would not accept that that had to happen. It was profoundly stressful. (current, male)

The following comments support the view that prior to these conversations about poor performance with staff members, much preparation is involved:

It was most likely to end in termination. That wasn't pleasant. I didn't sit back thinking, "Oh my God, I'm as calm as a cucumber." I had all my ducks in a row. I'd sought advice. (current, female)

And the lingering and long lasting perceived negative impact of terminating staff is confirmed in the following comments:

Sacking people always makes you lie awake at night practising the conversation. I know, it's a completely fruitless waste of time but I never learned not to worry. (resigned, female)

There would always be people issues. I think I learned that any non-person issue, so whether it was the building or the finances or particular policy or whatever, you can work your way around those things. But the

things that stayed on your mind would be the people issues: the students or the staff issues. (retired, female)

I still wonder if I've really coped with it because three or four times a year I won't sleep for a night because I'll just be thinking about that still. So I don't know that it's ever been fully resolved in my own mind. (retired, male)

Principals have the responsibility to ensure excellent employees for the teaching role and the process of termination or management of poor performing teachers and staff is part of their role. Despite it being part of the role statement, it is found in this research to be a major inhibitor to the principal's wellbeing.

5.3.6 Expectations

The expectations to be met by a principal come from the school staff, the school board or council, the parents and the community. Common representative comments reflect the demands:

The sabbatarian principle for wellbeing has not been possible to maintain, and that's because it's a huge school with very demanding parents. Not demanding in an ugly sense, but they expect me as the leader to be at all events... I'm very much there in role and at the end of the service parents, staff, and school council members come up to me to talk about school. There's no real escape. (current, male)

These comments support the view that the expectations and responsibilities have grown:

It's my perception that the expectation and burden on principals is greater than it was when I started ten years ago. Certainly my

awareness of it. Maybe it's like those quadrants where you are unconsciously incompetent then become consciously competent. Maybe part of it's that, because I'd like to think I have a little bit more wisdom than I had ten years ago when I started out as a principal, but certainly the need to maintain wellbeing survived. (current, male)

I certainly think that the financial pressures of the job, feeling that you're not solely responsible, but you're close to being solely responsible for the viability of the community and of the business, and the financial pressures that exist on families now, that certainly is the thing I worry about the most. Will we meet budget this year? What if we don't? What if ten students walk out the door for whatever reason? I'll say that that is by far the greatest stress and challenge to my wellbeing. Am I going to be able to manage this business operation into the future? (current, male)

I've got the valedictory dinner on Wednesday night. I've got an academic meeting tonight. There's an opening of an art exhibition on Friday night here. The one or two nights this week I can go early, I do. I think that's a priority. I think that's important. I'm not so good at coming in late after a late night. You can, as principal, say, "Look, I'll be in by 9:00am. I'll be in by 9:30am." Even when I try and do that, the old habits arise. You still get up and you still think, "Oh, I'd better do it," because I think being a role model is important. (current, female)

"You will have to be all things to all people at all times." I thought, "Oh gosh, that's a bit much." Actually, it's quite true, because people look to you and expect an answer, or that you will listen, or that you will turn up to something and support them. It's just a very full-on job. People ask, "Do you like it?" I say, "Most moments, most days." (current, female)

Many principals present the eulogy at funerals or present to the community after a critical incident or death. One comments about the personal aftermath of this:

I see myself as having a role to play in supporting those who are closely involved and needing some support although certainly I find myself getting caught up when we have something like a funeral service for a student. I get teary, no matter how much I think I'm going to try not to. I think it's an empathy with the parents and the other siblings more than anything else, and of course a deep regret for a child who has not had the chance to live a longer life. I often think about it while I'm driving home or driving to somewhere, or going to sport on a weekend. That stuff seems to float around in my head a bit, and occasionally I have a bad night's sleep where I'm awake at two in the morning or something and it is a bit hard to get it out of your head then, if it's something that's serious. (current, male)

Ensuring the reputation of the school is maintained in the media is another perceived expectation affirmed by this principal's comment:

You're in that leadership role. You have got the weight of the whole organization on your shoulders. And so for me, it was about controlling and making sure the response and the reputation of the school was still maintained and that we got the right stuff in the press, and that we wouldn't over react and get it in the paper too much, but we reacted enough to... You're so driven by that, that I think you don't actually worry too much about yourself when you're engaged in it. (retired, female)

The voice of the principal as a professional in the local community is well respected and keenly listened to by community members. A result is expressed that *"I try not to talk to anyone really. That's been*

probably one of the biggest learnings. Just keeping my mouth shut and learning to be far more poker face.” (current, female)

You go out for dinner and the restaurant’s owned by parents in the school, who want to talk to you about their child. It was just horrendous. (current, male)

This response is more likely to be evident in a small community or country town, and less prevalent in a city based school. The resulting impact on the principal is felt to be inhibiting to wellbeing as these expectations are relentless and continuing. There is no respite.

5.3.7 Parents

Parents of students are important stakeholders in a school community. Many parents feel they have significant ownership and responsibility to provide feedback to the school principal due to their payment of school fees to the independent school. Parents are believed to be an inhibitor to the wellbeing of the independent school principal in the following ways, as mentioned by 21 out of 39 (54%) principals in this research study, because:

The aggression that I'm sometimes on the receiving end of. You'd be familiar with a ten o'clock email that's a thousand words long, giving you a free character assessment and so forth. I'm not a great fan of those. Sometimes it's just unreasonableness. (current, male)

Crazy parents. I'll have two crazy parents a year. (current, male)

I don't especially like people saying they're going to sue. I wouldn't say it cheers me particularly, although I did have an incident about three

years ago with a parent who was a barrister who said he was going to personally destroy me. (current, male)

These parent complaints are events that are felt to blindsides the principal as they cannot be anticipated, as explained here:

I suppose the one is the parent who, I think, gets all fired up at some issue, often not in the fullness of knowledge...the blast that may come to you or your staff members. It's taking a step back and having a think about life and a think about the issue at hand. (current, male)

The families of the school, very demanding with high expectations and a sense of entitlement. (current, male)

I think the most difficult, well there's really only one and that's conflict and conflict resolution. If you're looking for the three top stressors on principals then they're conflict with parents, conflict with staff and conflict with the board; it all comes down in the end to conflict. That's the thing that is the big stressor and that stops you sleeping at night and gets the adrenaline flowing before you see the people. That was the real source of stress. (retired, male)

Or another area out of direct control is the financial state of the parents, as noted here:

The parents that write you and say I've had a health issue, financial issue, and can't pay fees. Can you support me through it for another eight years? (current, female)

The ones that are really tricky are the ones that have not thought ... who before the child's even here, so between orientation and even

starting, turn up, and say, "Just wanted to let you know I can't afford the fees." (current, female)

The following typical quotes frankly illuminate the financial debts of parents and the parents' determination that a religiously affiliated body, such as an independent school, with large school fees, should supply compassion regarding parents' inability to pay fees. This is another perceived stress for the independent school principal and a reason for guarded behaviour with parents.

When you've got to ask kids to leave the school for whatever reason. The parents who simply don't understand or appreciate that you need to discipline their kids. We have a lot of parents as debtors, and unfortunately we do have to ask people to leave the school from time to time. I guess from a pastoral sense, though, it is totally "you're irresponsible to allow people to continue to rack up a debt." We will try every means we can to get that money back, even if it takes us 20 years. We work with families to work out payment plans. We can't put everybody on a bursary, but people seem to think you can. That's always really difficult. But probably only a very small percentage, I'd say even 10% of people say, "That's not fair. Aren't you pastoral, because you're an Anglican school, and you're asking us to pay money?" Do people have conversations with electricity companies or mobile phone companies? No, they don't. But they send their kids here, and then expect not to pay any money, and get upset when you chase them. (current, female)

The time involved in dealing with these issues adds to the inhibiting factor, as philosophically reflected upon in these remarks:

I'm happy to take their ranty telephone call, their angry emails to a point, so that we can then drill down and actually say, "Well, this is

actually the problem, and either we can resolve it, or actually it's at home, or it's just one of those things." The parent who rants because they're in debt. It's one of those things and I can become quite philosophical about that, and therefore I can put on a persona of being quite...a listening persona and quite compassionate persona. I might in my head be thinking, "Would you just get on with it? I've got another job to do." (current, male)

I was always able to, when I left the school, even in the middle of a critical incident, keep myself slightly removed. The really big issues where you're having an argument, a really serious argument. The parent and they're criticizing you and all that sort of stuff. You know that people aren't agreeing with what you're doing and become abusive in some sense. I always told my staff "It's not about you. The job is about the job. It's about the children. It's about that. Just remember it's never about you." (retired, female)

A global view of the issue is offered:

I think we've got expectation inflation from parents...a very slow abdication of a generation of parents towards schools. I think they're not expecting us to educate their children. They're expecting us to raise them. We've got to get back to this idea that it takes a village to build a child. The chief of the village is the parents, not school. It's a partnership. (current, male)

And a culminating view as to the believed inhibitor:

I'm not saying it's easy. It's really one of the reasons I gave it up in the end because it never gets easy. It just ceases to be challenging. (resigned, female)

Parents, the angry, mad, sad and bad, are felt to have a significant inhibiting affect on the independent school principals in this research study.

5.3.8 Living on the school site

Eight out of 39 (21%) principals interviewed experienced the inhibiting factors involved with living on the school site, as occurred here:

I'm really on high alert with the boarders, so I never really relax. Last year I didn't have a deputy for the year. This year I do. That's meant that there are nights where I can have a glass of wine knowing that she's around. (current, female)

I remember I had a landline next to my bed which was a direct line to the boarding house so I felt that it could ring at any time in the night. (resigned, female)

The school was absolutely my life... The school really consumed me. (retired, male)

This principal has a different view:

I live at school but my community respect that privacy. I've been disturbed at home once in my time over 14 years here. That actually helps, because there's a very powerful culture of the parent body supporting the school. (current, male)

The inhibiting factor of location at the school as one's home, reflects the socio-ecological theme of place as an impact on principals' wellbeing. Eight out of 39 (21%) principals mention it as an adverse

impact. Five out of 39 (13%) principals were of the opposite opinion and found it convenient and financially advantageous.

5.3.9 The workload and the time consumed to complete it effectively

The role of the independent school principal is all encompassing for the continued daily successful functioning of the independent school. All decisions are the final purview of the leader. 27 out of 39 (69%) principals in this research commented on the inhibiting nature of the extensive size of the workload and required time commitments, evidenced by:

It would just be the busyness of the job, really. It would be things that come up on the weekend where, there may be an issue to do with staff, parents, the community. You'd think, well, actually school's now over. But actually, it's seven days a week because you're going to be that contact point. There's just that relentlessness of the job. (current, male)

I doubt there's been a day this year where I haven't been working weekends. I don't mind doing an hour, two or three, but too often it's like six or eight hours. (current, male)

The other pressure is that at certain points, you become resentful of the chaotic hours that a principal has to work, and that creates an emotional pressure. (current, male)

The job eats up my life before I know it. (current, male)

Personal wellbeing is not top of mind as the voices of these principals acknowledge:

No, the day was a long day. I didn't get finished until about 11 o'clock at night because of seven hours of finance committee meeting. So you just go and get exhausted and get up the next day. (current, male)

Performing arts is huge. Sport is huge. Information technology is huge. So I would be here most nights at school. Saturday Sport, and in winter season sports start at 7:30am and finish usually about 6pm. I'm not there for the whole day but I'm there for much of it, particularly when rugby's at home because rugby, as you know, is king. Then on Sunday I'm in the cathedral with our choristers. (current, male)

Put succinctly:

It's a big workload. (current, male)

Additional frustrations regarding the lack of time emanate:

A lot of committee meetings; days when the planned day gets blown to shreds, and so you finish the day thinking, "Well, I had a quite important thing I was looking forward to working on today, and I haven't touched it. Haven't even thought about it." I find that frustrating. (current, male)

Basically there is a perceived need for attention to the principal's wellbeing because:

It is sitting in the back of my mind that I'm not sure I can steam ahead at this pace forever. (current, male)

Don't be precious. It's a job. You've got these multiple accountabilities. You've got to be across a lot of things. You have to look after yourself, and if you don't put yourself first, then I think there's a bad ending in sight. (current, male)

I don't think there's anything that you necessarily can do to overcome that or erase it. It's a matter of how you manage it. (retired, male)

Such comments are not isolated to one or two principals but are the views of 27 out of 39 (69%) participants. They acknowledge that:

I think in a principal's job, you realize that you never catch up. For example, you never say, "Right, that's today's work done. The desk is clear. There's nothing left for tomorrow." You've got to learn to let that go, and there will always be things waiting... It's just an incredibly full on and busy thing. (current, female)

And concern is confirmed in the following principals' comments:

The things that impact on your wellbeing can be the accumulative effects of long hours. I've identified the fact that it's a danger point where you spend a weekend recovering so you can do the following week... We often feed the troops first and eat last. The job is becoming more and more complex, more and more accountable. (current, male)

I didn't have many interests outside of the school. The school was absolutely my life. We lived on the property. My children had gone right through there. The school really consumed me. I didn't take breaks as well as I ought to have done. A real symptom I think of when you're out of kilter a bit is that I actually felt more relaxed at school than when I was away from school, because I was thinking about it more then when I was away, than when I was there. I don't think that's very healthy. (retired, male)

The job is all-absorbing. That's both a danger but it's also one of the great joys, that it's an immensely satisfying job even though it's also

unbelievably challenging. I think it's how you define the job. I think people do define it as "I have to know everything all the time" and that's just not achievable. I think how you define what the task is, is really critical, because if you set yourself an impossible task you're going to fail. (resigned, female)

Eight out of 39 (21%) principals in this study convey the further exacerbated demands felt by the principal who lives on site at the school:

Just the sheer length of the day. Very often I'd look at my appointments for the day, they'd start ... Sometimes if we had an early finance meeting, it would start at seven in the morning and I'd still be there at nine o'clock at night, ten o'clock sometimes. And two of the schools I was at were boarding schools. So for those ten weeks of every term you'd feel like you are absolutely on-call for 24 hours a day. So you feel completely wedded to the job. (resigned, female)

The following interview responses capture the feeling of exhaustion that builds up:

The length of the day, the complexity of, okay, one-minute you've got a very difficult parent interview and then the next minute you're talking to Year 12 students. So you've got to get your mind around everything very quickly. That's demanding, and that can make you feel quite tired. Just really tired. It's not in itself stressful, but it's very tiring. And I think when you feel really tired then difficult things that do crop up are more stressful. (resigned, female)

Looking at the things you can change, I mean we often tend to think as principals, our lives are governed by the calendar. Most weeks you have at least three nights where you've got meetings and don't get home to

see your family. On Saturday you've got to go and watch sport, or an orchestra or play rehearsal or visit a camp or something else. But also, some of those things you can't do until you've built up the credits at your school and you build them up by running your wellbeing down by working too hard, by being at everything, by being the first person there, by being the last person away. (retired, male)

The lack of time, size of the workload and the all-encompassing nature of the job are perceived to be significant inhibitors to the wellbeing of these principals.

5.3.10 Critical incidents

The data have shown that an area felt to be of high importance and affect is the treatment and management of critical incidents in a school. Critical incidents are those that affect the safety and welfare of students in a school. Critical incidents are sudden and unexpected incidents or series of events causing trauma in the school community. These might be, for example, medical emergencies, the death of a student or parent or staff member, perhaps on the school site, a lockdown in a school, gunfire on site, a bomb threat, an event that requires the attention of the police, an event that requires the school council or school board to be informed, or an event that may attract media attention. These events are perceived to seriously affect and impact on the wellbeing of the independent school principal.

Thirteen out of 39 (33%) independent school principals in this study have had experience with the death of a student. 10% of the participants have had many such incidents, more than ten in number, as expressed here:

I was in aboriginal communities where we had multiple suicides. (current, male)

One principal recalls the need to “put on a brave face” to conceal the true levels of tension and stress in the following manner:

They're often beyond your control. I often think of the head master trying to walk deliberately slowly towards the burning boarding house looking as if he's in control. (current, male)

Kids die and all sorts of things. Look, I think I feel the anxiety highly, not necessarily at the time. I can maintain a very calm exterior and a very cool and clinical way of dealing with a critical incident that gives confidence to staff, but I also know at what cost. The cost is my own acute anxiety. I know I'm going to pay for it later. (current, female)

And another pays thus:

I know the physical response. I did everything well, but I had a mouth full of ulcers for six weeks. (current, male)

And another pays thus:

Palpitations, sleep deprivation, high anxiety, migraines, whatever. I know that will come. I can hold the adrenalin long enough to get through that. (current, female)

Another principal recounts his experience of student deaths in schools:

I'm in the appalling position of being seen as the expert on school death. I've had 27 kids or staff die in 26 years of principalship. (current, male)

The principals recount the enablers during these critical incident situations and how they have developed strategies to ensure their continued positive wellbeing. The value of these strategies and enablers is confirmed in the following principals' comments:

I kind of tend to first go into prioritizing mode. What really needs to be done now. Who needs it and what do I need to do step-by-step. I try and step it out in my own head first. Then go to someone else to go "Okay this has happened". Whether it's the business manager or the board chair and go "This is what's happened. This is what I'm thinking. This is how I want to step it out. This is the next step I think we need to take. This is the help I'm going to need". (current, female)

I'm not the sort of person who beats himself up any time there's an issue. I would beat myself up, I guess to some extent, if we didn't prepare for that well or we didn't handle that well, or we didn't acquit ourselves well in the circumstance. (current, male)

Whilst a critical incident is stressful and demanding it is important to be able to be calm and removed from the emotion of the event so one is able to deal effectively and immediately with it, as these principals report:

If an issue arose that was stressing me, I know that what I have to do is I have to take, not time out, but half an hour, an hour out of it and just try and forget about the issue and then come back to it. I feel that's a sort of mechanism that I've developed for dealing with issues, that's really helped me. (retired, male)

I'm really calm in situations like that. Really calm. I'm very thoughtful. I think what keeps me sane and well ultimately is that I will talk about

how I'm feeling. I will talk about what I'm concerned about so I externalize that in those situations. (current, female)

I might walk laps of the oval until the head's cleared again and I'm able to face the situation without being choked up. (current, male)

The importance of the procedures and policies around dealing with critical incidents is emphasized as they enable a consistent, organised and measured response, as indicated:

The first thing I'd do is I'd ask myself, "Have we done everything preventatively, and are we doing everything procedurally that can deal with the situation the best way possible?" If the answer is yes then I have to let it go. I think the tendency for school leaders is to take full responsibility for everything to a point where it becomes potentially quite a toxic reaction, and I know that our policies and procedures are really good, but I know that they won't prevent absolutely anything from happening. I think it's how we respond to a serious situation that really determines my overall emotional wellbeing around it to be honest. I can't prevent things from happening exclusively. We can have the best risk management processes in place. We can have the best team in place, but still someone could have a serious accident or something like that. (current, male)

The use of a partner or a friend as a sounding board and a debriefing tool is mentioned:

Funny, in the past it was a couple of beers. These days, I now talk it through with my partner. I might go and do a fitness class. I might take some time out to reflect on what has happened, and how I might handle it differently or better, or what else I can do. (current, male)

Controlling one's reaction and self-counselling is a strategy, as supported by this principal:

It's sort of saying, the only reason you got upset is you allowed yourself to get upset. The other person didn't cause that. You caused that by your reaction. It's turning it around and not blaming someone else saying they're causing it. It's actually not true. You're causing it yourself because of the way you react to something. (current, female)

I think you've got to say, "This is part of the job." It's not perfect all the time. No job is. Nobody has a perfect life job. Not any principal. Not any CEO or other person. There are going to always be obstacles. It's like if you don't like it, get out of the kitchen. There's a reality about that in our job. (current, female)

Basically there is a perceived need for training and preparation to deal with these critical incidents from a wellbeing perspective rather than just from a procedural and policy perspective. This principal recalls his military training prior to his entry into education and the role of principal. Such military training has stood him in good stead:

I am pretty well-trained... I was in the military for quite a while. I actually handle it quite well. It is something that I do very well. I know that it's in my repertoire. After the event it's about taking time to myself. I just go into a quiet spot and look after myself after the incident. I'm actually not stressed by critical incidents. That's something that I do very well... When I was in the military, I did a lot of training for critical incident management, deaths and something. It kind of covered it all. (current, male)

The value of being calm and adhering to a prepared script is related here:

I'd just take myself out of things for a little bit and sort of breathe through it. Then, I'd always write down in order, dot point, what I was going to do. Difficult conversations on the phone, as well, I'd always dot point down what I was going to say, and keep the other person ... There must be many times where I've had people screaming at me. I've had the phone... I've thought, "What was the last dot point I was on? Oh, I'm on to this one." Just, I know what you're saying. I'm sticking to the script. (resigned, female)

And reflecting if the incident is ever truly deleted from one's memory bank, these principals offer:

A major one that happened five years into my principalship. I don't think I've ever got rid of the knot. Two nights ago I didn't sleep as I was laying awake still thinking about it and that happened 27 years ago. (retired, male)

I think the thing about it is, there are always going to be sad things in life, and my belief is, that until you've experienced tragedy, you haven't really lived. Because I think everybody will experience tragedy in one way or the other, and some have it worse and more often than others. But it's overcoming that and making the most of that that I think's really important. (retired, female)

The data strongly show that dealing with critical incidents is believed to have a major impact on independent school principals' wellbeing. The strategies employed are varied. Further formal training would be beneficial, prior to taking on the role of principal. Principals experience nil, some, more, or many critical incidents, depending on random factors and chance. In this study, there is no relationship between time

in the role of principal and the number of critical incidents dealt with. Critical incidents are random and related to chance.

5.4 The personal situation

The socio-ecological wellbeing framework contains the concepts of lived experiences and learning experiences. These experiences result from time in the role as principal and subsequent facilitation of those experiences through reflection. The reflection turns the lived experience into a learning experience. Each principal has a pathway in education before becoming principal. On this metaphorical pathway, concepts and strategies are evolved that are personally well-suited, practised and adopted as support structures. So each participant independent school principal has a repertoire of definitions and ideas already constructed and these are tested and refined with daily practice. These are actioned in each relevant arising circumstance and are honed and revised. Socio-ecologically, these are their lived and learning experiences.

The following themes in the personal situation are identified and discussed:

- Definition of wellbeing
- Prioritisation of wellbeing
- Relationship with partner or spouse
- Friendships
- Physical wellbeing enablers
- Social wellbeing enablers
- Spiritual wellbeing enablers
- Emotional wellbeing enablers
- Cognitive wellbeing enablers
- Vocational choice

5.4.1 Independent school principals' definitions of wellbeing

The definition of wellbeing for this research determined in Chapter Three is also the definition of wellbeing given by 24 out of 39 (62%) principals, who included having the factors of physical, spiritual, emotional, cognitive and social wellbeing in balance. The remaining 15 out of 39 (38%) principals added some but not all of these factors to their personal definition. The importance of this balance is expressed here:

It's anything which infringes on your ability to do your job. So it's your physical wellbeing, your mental wellbeing, your spiritual wellbeing, whatever. It's not just things within the school. It's how well your relationship is with your family and your health. It's a whole range of things. But it's basically anything that infringes on your ability to do a job well and do it over a sustained period of time. (retired, male)

Wellbeing involves the whole gamut of social, emotional, spiritual and physical wellness. It's about being resilient and having clarity of purpose. A centeredness, a grounding and experiencing a love, courage and a deep joy of life. A dancing towards the future with hope. That kind of an image for me. (current, male)

Getting sufficient regular rest and sleep. Being able to switch off from work demands. Finding a sense of connection to the world around me through family, other people, nature, buildings, arts: it's beauty, awesomeness, wonderment. Wellbeing is feeling ready to get up and do my job, but also that I can switch off from it. Being able to feel calm and to relax, both at work and away. (current, male)

Sometimes I compare it to holding a tightrope, or having a rubber band that's stretching, or various stages of tension, but I think it is very much about balance. If I'm achieving wellbeing, I believe there's balance across all aspects of my life. (current, male)

Another principal refers to the balance required as an analogy for making a cake:

You have a responsibility to lead your boys and girls, your staff, your parents and your alumni and the wider community. You can't escape it. If you're going into the oven, it's going to be hot, and you will come out with a beautifully baked cake if you're well balanced and you don't cross over on those lines. (retired, male)

An alternative view hinting at an inhibitor, the difficulty of achieving wellbeing due to time constraints, is offered by a very experienced principal:

A positive sense of being well and being at peace in oneself and able to later flourish in their life. In other words it's a contradiction in terms of principalship because there's no time to do that. There's a gap between the theory and of course practical application because we talk to students and staff about their wellbeing, but we don't have time to foster our own. That's just the norm. (current, male)

Wellbeing is resilience, as one principal reflects:

Real wellbeing, I think, is being able to know that you have the competence and capacity to deal with the good things and the not so good things. (current, male)

A contrasting view is contained in the following quote, displaying a reference to spiritual and mental wellbeing:

Wellbeing to me means respect for self, appreciation of self, and forgiveness of self. I see sometimes that you can blame yourself for an outcome or blame yourself for an event that didn't pan out the way you thought it would be and I think you need to forgive yourself. You need to allow yourself that freedom to not have an outcome that you would have hoped for. (retired, male)

5.4.2 Prioritisation of wellbeing by independent school principals

Despite principals having a sound knowledge of the definition of wellbeing and being able to articulate that, there is wide discrepancy in their actual levels of prioritisation of their wellbeing. 24 out of 39 (62%) principals in this study do not prioritise their wellbeing. Their responses range across:

- never having done so,
- unable to due to the size of the role,
- unable to due to the time constraints of the role and
- knowing they should prioritise their wellbeing but not doing so.

These responses are indicative of both making a personal choice and being inhibited from making a choice due to the role.

The following comments from different principals capture this:

Don't prioritise wellbeing highly enough. It is too easy and likely to get swamped by work demands which tend to be relentless. I need to prioritise my wellbeing to live longer and to have a balanced life. My perspective has changed. I am more aware of the importance of wellbeing, but not being particularly successful in achieving it; over

committed to work responsibilities which I take very seriously. I feel the pressure of many other people wishing to depend upon me, find me as someone to blame (fairly or unfairly) for their problems; frustration accumulates due to the great difficulty of making time for the high-level and reflective thinking that the job deserves to be done properly- that leads to weariness of long working days and frequent intrusions into so-called leisure time for self and family. (current, male)

I came to a conclusion after a number of years that I was never going to make it, and that was because of my predispositions. One is that some of us, in fact I think most of us as heads want to be really successful and the demands of the job are such that to be really successful you have to work long hours, and tied up in that for me was this abiding thought that if someone emails me, they deserve an answer the same day they emailed me. It really comes down to the work ethic, what you believe is important. How respectful you are of others, and the worth of others, I think, was a driver for me, so I put in the long hours. In that sense really I failed I think because I just believe in the worth of other people and that they need to be acknowledged and dignified and supported. (retired, male)

I think it's much more important to prioritize your wellbeing than principals are ever told. I don't do it well, because you really can't and do the job. (current, female)

Fifteen out of 39 (38%) principals in this study believe they do prioritise their wellbeing and 13 out of these 15 (87%) did so after an event that was a tipping point for them, as affirmed in these comments:

It was more a growing awareness that I couldn't keep burning the midnight oil. I couldn't keep running myself ragged. It almost became a family joke that I'd get to the school holidays and I would just collapse

with a massive viral respiratory illness for a week, because that was my body's way of going, "Enough's enough. You're just stopping." I developed the idea of coming in for a landing as I went towards holidays. Instead of just falling out of the sky, which was my habit, I think, "Well, how do I actually plan towards having a break so I don't end up absolutely exhausted and then being no good for anyone, during what should have been family time, rest time, recuperation time." I think I learned the hard way. (current, male)

Went to a doctor about three years ago with severe lower back pain thinking, "Oh, I'm probably going to need surgery." He says, "No, you just need to go to the gym three times a week." Again, trying to be proactive rather than reactive, trying to prevent problems rather than waiting for them to turn up, then you go, "Gee, I'd better do something about this." (current, male)

It got to the stage where it became hard to do your job because you seem to be tired and generally listless. It's just, you had too many things coming across your desk, and finding it just too hard to deal with. I can't do it all. I thought, "Well, actually what's wrong here, is actually how fit and well I am." (current, male)

Realizing that I was doing some things very badly in terms of neglecting family, neglecting my own health and seeing that these had an impact on how well I could do the job and my stamina if you like. It's partly the recognition that you're not looking after your wellbeing and it's starting to have impact on various aspects of your life and work. (retired, male)

There are many mentions of lack of sleep and rest time and the absence of mental health as experienced here:

I've been having trouble sleeping the last three nights in a row, or three of the last four nights. That's due probably to not enough exercise due to the demand of the job, and it sort of snowballs where you haven't slept enough, so then you're not sleeping again. (current, male)

I had a severe bout of depression eight years ago... I saw a psychiatrist and had to be medicated and had a term and a half off work. (current, male)

There're a whole range of things I've discovered over the years and I've had in practice for a long time. I wind down before going to bed with something I learnt probably 14 to 15 years ago. That was on doctor's advice because I went through 18 months to two years of very serious depression. I kept going to work, but I was in a very unhealthy state mentally. The doctor wanted me to take a term off and put me on anti-depressants. I wouldn't do either of those. And he worked with me to change my lifestyle, to... make me a lot better. (current, male)

It is evident that principals are aware of the pressing need to prioritise wellbeing but for some, the inhibitors to do so preclude them.

5.4.3 Relationship with partner or spouse

Twenty-three out of 39 (59%) independent school principals in this study debrief with their partner or spouse each day. The following comments support the view that it is important to be able to share and confide with a trusted person:

My husband's very good to talk things through with. I guess he's been pretty extraordinary. He's not my counsellor but he's a pretty good sounding board. He knows how to listen, which is really lovely, and he's not judgemental. He also is really good at saying, "Actually, maybe what

you did then..." He's a good devil's advocate sometimes too. If I come home with a one-sided view he'll say, "Hang on a minute. Let's have a look from this point of view." That's really helpful. (current, female)

Sharing with my wife is, dare I say it, as essential to me as sharing through prayer. (current, male)

Talking to my wife, yeah, we can do debrief and I can vent and can share. She is a teacher as well so she knows education. (current, male)

Two contrasting attitudes are displayed in the following quotes, despite the presence for both of a daily debrief with their partner:

Bring your partner along for the journey, but at the same time don't leave them hanging. How does that sound? I might deal with something at work, tell my wife about it, and she's still fretting about it two days later and I've already dealt with it. (current, male)

I went home on Friday knowing that I was going to come in today and have to dismiss someone and didn't ruin the weekend for her. I'll probably tell her tonight, when I get home, that it's done. (current, male)

It is felt to be so important to have a trusted person to confide in, but as this principal states, sometimes reiterating the day's events can prolong the misery:

I'm not a great one to go home and talk about everything that's happened at school. Certainly I will talk about the day. It's a small part of that evening's conversation, otherwise, again, you get caught into school being all-absorbing. (current, male)

When you get home at the end of the day I mostly didn't want to talk. I wanted to sit quietly with a glass of wine and just chat about things that had nothing to do with work. (resigned, female)

Thirteen out of 39 (33%) independent school principals in this study do not debrief with their partner; reasons varied from being in the same small town and wishing to be sure no knowledge is shared, not wanting to relive the day, spending time with children, or the partner being employed in the same school, or not wanting to think about school anymore, as these responses indicate:

I don't want to then go home and burden. I don't even want to think about it anymore. She wants to know because she wants to try to help me. I think she's become adept at knowing when I don't want the help. It doesn't help me to talk about it. If I want to talk about it, I'll talk about it. If I don't want to talk about it then I certainly don't want to do it in terms just because she feels she's trying to help me. (current, male)

If she doesn't know something, when she's being pressured by someone for information, she can quite honestly stare at them and say, "I've got no idea what you're talking about." (current, male)

The ability to debrief with a partner or spouse or have them understand when debriefing is not helpful is perceived to be of great import to the wellbeing of most of the principals in this research study.

5.4.4 Friendships

Twenty-three out of 39 (59%) independent school principals in this study value relationships with friends outside of school very highly. Affirming comments are:

I'm going to try and get up to Queensland where we've got a whole network of friends... They don't care about work. (current, female)

It is really, really important to keep as many of those pre-principalship friends as you can. I know a number of my friends and colleagues have a book club that they've been going to for 20 years, and nobody in that book club has got anything to do with education, and they knew you before you were the principal. (current, female)

Despite knowing the importance of having social relationships for positive mental health, the demands of the role are sometimes believed to preclude this, as shown here:

I have a huge number of friends, but my own ability to service the friendship with time means that many of them are really towards being acquaintances, and that's a casualty of the job in terms of lack of time. I don't see them very often. (current, male)

And similarly:

I've got a lot of people who I would describe as long-term friends, and I hardly ever see them. (current, male)

There are perceived difficulties with having friends on staff, particularly in small regional towns where the usual way to meet is through school, as noted here:

I think if you've got children and you send them to a school that isn't yours it's probably possible to meet people through your children in the way that people seem to meet people through their children. Not sending your children to your school would always be controversial. (resigned, female)

Independent school principals in large capital cities are aware of the competitive nature of their schools regarding the seeking of enrolments and this is perceived to be an inhibitor to forming strong friendships with local colleagues. Trust is an important issue. When enrolment numbers may determine the prosperity of your school and impact on the relationship with the board, it is difficult to confide readily. This is mentioned by three out of 39 (8%) principals as explained here.

She and I meet at least once a term, and we just never stop talking. We can answer each other's questions honestly, because we're not competitors. (current, female)

A few of us got together for lunch and because, we all think about the same things, it's easy. What are you going to do about this staff member and how do you get rid of some? So, that's fun but, there is a point where you can't say too much more. So, there's positives when you share the same problems and there's the same obsessions almost but, the other side of it is you have to keep that barrier up. They're probably the only friends I've got down here but, they're also competitor schools. (current, female)

Basically there is a need for:

A non-judgemental friend to whom you can tell your worst nightmares, who has been in the trenches with you, drank too much red wine with you, and knows your warts only too well. When that person is also a head, well, you've got it made in the shade! (current, male)

So having colleagues to whom you can confide in times of difficulty is believed to be important, as said here:

Networking, having those networks of the people outside that you know you can call on and ask those questions of is really good. (current, female)

Good separate collegial relationships with heads. That's really important because there's often lots of things you've got to do for yourself because you can't talk to staff about them. (current, male)

And importantly, to:

Have somebody that you can freely and confidentially speak with. Then make sure that that's matched up with some values that you'll always return to in times of stress, trouble and challenges to your wellbeing. (current, male)

Because:

It's amazing how much you learn from others just in terms of: I'm facing this problem. This is what I've done about it. (retired, male)

5.4.5 Physical wellbeing enablers

As a result of experience that has been learned in the role of principal, which continues daily to grow, independent school principals have strategies they employ to enable their wellbeing. Twenty-eight out of 39 (72%) participants in this research point out the importance of physical exercise. Principals are aware of the need for active, physical routines to enable their physical health, as in the following representative comments:

I do 13,000 steps a day, and I'm really diligent about it. I start my day with a bit of 30 minute walk, 35. I don't do an hour or two hours. I

consciously make sure I move around the school during the day, clocking up the steps, and by the end of the day if I haven't got to my target goals, then I do another walk, or I get a wander around town, or park a half a kilometre from the grocery shop. (current, male)

I now exercise at least four to five times a week. I hardly ever drink anymore. (current, male)

I go to the gym; I have a fitness personal trainer twice a week. (resigned, female)

I would walk for normally an hour in the morning and half an hour at night. In this last month it has been half an hour and half an hour, and I will do that walk even if I've got a... like last night I finished a function at school at 8:30 or 9:00pm. Even though it was 9:00pm, I got home, spoke to my family for ten minutes and then took the dogs for a walk. (current, male)

An unusual enabler is "Forest Bathing", as explained here:

My wife and I walk a long way quite fast and don't talk to each other. We didn't have a name for this, but the Japanese talk about something called "forest bathing". We both find that spending time in wilderness or semi-wilderness is just... it centres us and it calms us, as individuals and as a couple. We make time each holiday to go here, to walk in the hinterland, when we're overseas, to go up into the high hills, when we're in England, to go up on the high... It's always up on the hills, because you don't find many people there. (current, male)

For two principals out of 39 (5%), the interruptions of the day cause them to lose traction with their daily commitment to the exercise routine as this response indicates:

On and off exercise, but I hate exercise so I'd do it and then something would happen to interrupt the schedule and then I wouldn't do it again for quite a long time, six months or so exercise on and off. (resigned, female)

I have a timetable. If you, like I, have a mindset that says, "Just make it a priority." Like many others, I've struggled in that area to just keep it on an even keel. (current, male)

The attention to regular rest and sleep is oft mentioned:

So sleep's always been really important to me. So I don't deliberately go without sleep because there's a fair bit of concern from the chairman of the board and sometimes my board members about the fact that I might be in the office at 4am or occasionally late at night. But it's because I can't sleep, not because I'm refusing to. (current, male)

And this principal looks more globally at the benefit of physical exercise as a distraction and aid to wellbeing:

I just think it's essential because you're in a different place mentally. Not so much about the physical stuff. I don't know whether you run, or walk, or whatever, swim, it doesn't matter. Your head is elsewhere, and when it's elsewhere you're doing something else rather than that which can consume you. (current, male)

These principals report that caring for wellbeing is a personal responsibility:

I try to practise what I preach. One of the things I learned very early on is that in a principal's position, no-one will actually look out for you.

People will say good things, but no-one will make sure you're okay. If you don't do that yourself, you're in trouble. (current, female)

I came to the view when we moved here to the school that there was no point in doing any exercise whatsoever, given the pressures of the job, unless it was done in conjunction with walking to and from work. We bought a place which is three kilometres away and I walk to and from most days. I walk briskly, carrying a backpack, so that's a workout. (current, male)

And one principal comments that to enable wellbeing:

I take prescription drugs. (current, female)

The importance of a routine is emphasized here:

I remember a time last year actually, where I was under enormous stress with a few huge things going on, and I'd just finished a... Well, I actually just finished a half-marathon. It was about those next three or four months after that when I didn't exercise very much at all, and unsurprisingly, also my wellbeing suffered as a result. (current, male)

Knowing the importance of regular exercise and paying attention to it can be difficult, as experienced here:

I like walking on my own and I like swimming in the ocean so I can do it on my own time, but I usually put it off because there's no pressure. There's no one pushing me to. One of the pressures is that you just don't get enough exercise, and it's really depressing reading things about wellbeing, because then you just think that you're not getting enough exercise. (current, male)

I find it, in the middle of a Melbourne winter in the dark, increasingly difficult to get up and do some exercise. I think it's a lot easier at 9:30 in the morning to go for a walk or a run or something. (current, female)

Ten out of 39 (26%) principals in this research tell of their attention to diet, as suggested here:

We grow our own vegetables; I have a little herb garden. (resigned, female)

I'm very, very particular about eating, only eating non-processed foods, eating natural foods, that kind of stuff. I have so many beliefs that that affects how you perform as well. (current, female)

I eat very well. I find if I don't eat well then I don't feel well at all. That's really important to me... is what I eat. (current, female)

There is an explicit awareness that the fuel for the body needs to be quality, focusing on salads, vegetables and protein, as shown here:

You can't expect your body to run well on junk food. I don't smoke, occasionally drink wine, but not very often. It's not a religious conviction. It's more just, you eat the right stuff and your body will be better as a result. (current, male)

He says eat light at night, for example, which we do, so we've had quite a change. We've always eaten well, but we're completely looking differently at what we eat now, when, and so on in the day, so more protein at the start of the day. (current, male)

I refuse to forget lunch. And that's about maintaining your energy levels throughout the afternoon. Because if I didn't eat lunch, I would just run out of puff. (current, male)

Reference to alcohol consumption is mentioned here:

I'm a regular small drinker. I wouldn't drink every day, but I'd probably drink four days out of seven. If I have a beer before dinner, I don't have a glass of wine. If I have a glass of wine, I don't have a beer. If I don't have a beer or a glass of wine, I might have a whisky. It's most unusual for me to drink very much. (retired, male)

Along with attention to diet, five out of 39 (13%) principals indicate special cooking routines, important to their wellbeing, as these report:

I just aimlessly wander up and down the aisles, and I come home, and I unpack my gear, and get my casual clothes on. Into the kitchen I go, and I spend time in there getting everything ready for ever, so I get rid of that knot, if you like, or those anxieties or pressures in that absolute release, that meticulous way that I try and get rid of whatever's bothering me, and I can park it. (current, male)

If I'm cooking a meal, I might put some music on and enjoy a nice glass of wine while I'm doing that too. (current, male)

I actually love to cook. One of the things that I do like to do if I can is to go home after work and cook. To me I see it as my creative outlet, because I'm very science-based and very organized. But I have an outlet in cooking to be honest, which is really strange but I love it. (current, female)

Comments about diet and exercise are not isolated to one or two principals but are the views of 28 out of 39 (72%) participants:

I've got this thing. It's called the fourth space, and I have this routine. Again, I'm not a woman or something, but I do cook all the meals at home. So I'm chief chef, and we eat really well, and so each meal at night is like a real feast. I leave here and go by the grocery shop. All right, I don't shop for a week or anything like that. I shop each afternoon. My wife and I, we check in about 2:30pm, three, "What would you like for dinner? What are you feeling?" There's a little grocery list coming through now. We have a little chat, "I wouldn't mind some... We need to have some salads, or whatever. I wouldn't mind a curry or whatever." We do a quick grocery list. We exchange it, and then I actually go to the grocery shop, and I park about half a kilometre from the grocery shop, and I walk. I walk around the block or whatever before I go into the grocery. (current, male)

The physical wellbeing processes are seen to be a release for the principals, both from the pressures and stresses of the day and also as a source of solace and health to enable their leadership role.

5.4.6 Social wellbeing enablers

Relationships with friends outside of school, partner or spouse and with executive teaching staff have been expanded earlier in this chapter. They are believed to be one of the dominant enablers to a principal's wellbeing. Social relationships are important as they are part of the purpose of educating our youth, as these reflections explain:

That's part of who I am. So being able to do that in the school, being able to go out and be upbeat, and be optimistic, be friendly and do all

those things around the school actually enhances my own wellbeing as well. (current, female)

That's a very relational job and I enjoy that kind of environment anyway. (current, male)

It's the right thing to do to make the world a better place by creating or assisting in the evolution of young people who can go out into the world and make a difference. But more importantly, feel good about themselves, feel confident that they are well people, that they've got skills and abilities and experiences to share, and that they're valuable people within the world context. (current, female)

An adverse opinion is shared by these two principals:

I don't socialize. These jobs, being a principal, you have to socialize. Years of doing that and having to walk into a room full of people who you may or may not know and be welcoming and interested and create conversation. I've spoken to a lot of other principals about that. Unless you're particularly gregarious, most of us actually don't progress any social life beyond the work life. Most psychologists would say you need to have friends. No. I don't need to have friends. It's quite a shift over a period of time that you move in that direction, I think. (current, female)

...didn't have a social network and neither did I because when you're a principal really all you do is work. The only people I saw really were other principals or staff or parents. I'm not a believer in making friends with parents and so I did become friendly in a way that has survived me leaving with a couple of the senior leadership team but when you're in your fifties you've pretty much made the friends that you want. It wasn't like people were looking for new friendships. (resigned, female)

So there are outliers who appear not to require friends and relationships. However, in each of these cases, the partner or spouse provides significant support as the major confidant, daily debriefing with the principal. Essentially, every principal felt there is a social support network in one form or another to enable wellbeing.

5.4.7 Spiritual wellbeing enablers

Belief in God, attending church or chapel, praying or having a spiritual routine are seen as enablers to wellbeing evidenced in the interview responses of eight out of 39 (21%) principals. The value of spiritual belief is confirmed in the following principals' comments:

I need to draw wisdom and patience and strength from God, so that's the whole spiritual wellbeing side of things. (current, male)

As a person of faith, it has that extra dimension that the responsibility that I have as a principal in a Catholic school, where for many of these girls and many of the staff the only connection with church that they have is through this school. That is very sustaining for me also as someone who really is very serious about her faith. (current, female)

I discovered God in my early thirties. I was raised in a Christian home but got to the end of Sunday School and disappeared out of church. Got back to it when I had my own family. (current, male)

Advice regarding the importance of maintenance of spiritual belief is shared by these principals:

If you're a church-goer, you keep going to church. You don't get so busy that you let that go. (current, male)

I think if you've got a spiritual bent, that's something you've got to look after. But if you don't, you've got to find a way of nurturing that sense of awe and transcendence, because actually you do want to roll out of bed in the morning saying, "This is fantastic." (current, male)

Similarly, prayer is seen as a source of spiritual wellbeing:

Prayer is also important to me and as a spiritual man it centres me. (current, male)

In terms of spiritual wellbeing, I make an effort every morning to get up and spend time in prayer and Bible reading. I think that's a really important start to my day. Kind of sets a barometer for the day, so to speak. 40 minutes. Sometimes I cheat and get up after half an hour. No, it's just an important thing, I think as a Christian, particularly the leader of a Christian organization. I have to be able to walk the walk and talk the talk, and if I'm not spiritually renewing myself then it's a bit hard to expect that I'm going to be leading a Christian organization with any sort of integrity and energy. (current, male)

Attendance at church or chapel provides a space for reflection or solace, as this principal reflects:

I didn't have a lot of relationships with people in the congregation, although other than the old girls who just loved the fact that I worshiped in the cathedral. It was just that time out and just that time to sit and be grateful, and to be peaceful. (retired, female)

And using the tool of prayer as a resource to reflect and problem solve, this positive comment is offered:

I'm not a great pray-er as in sitting down and praying explicitly. But I'm thinking God-like, Christian-like things all the time and to me that kind of dialogue is how I go about praying. I find I get a bit old fashioned and clichéd if I start to pray. I find I can process much more intellectually and rationally if I don't go into that mode, and I feel like I'm therefore in tune with God, but it's much more authentic for me. (retired, male)

The following interview response captures the value of prayer after a critical incident:

I actually went into my office for a period of time and prayed, which for me, is spending just time in silence. (current, male)

A routine for prayer is shared by this principal:

So I have a prayer stool sort of thing. You see it at Quaker houses and so on. That's good for sort of having the back straight. So I use that... It's better if it's early. You know, I've been doing it for 25 years maybe now, so I've got a little bit of a pattern around just coming to a stillness and silence. Letting thoughts go. Sometimes, I will use a mantra or I'll use the psalms or whatever mechanism it is. It's all designed just to still the mind. (current, male)

This principal has regular meetings with the school chaplain:

I meet with my chaplain once a week. It's to do Bible study and prayer together. It's highly confidential. He asks me what I want to pray for. I'm actually pretty open about that. (current, male)

Informal use of a mantra is indicated by this principal:

It's a mantra. There's a mantra if you want to call it that, a verse that I say that I speak to. Just being mindful of giving that problem up to higher beings than myself as well. Then just trying to let that go and usually it's something that I will do before I go to bed, before I go to sleep, so that can be worked on in my sleep really. Usually the next morning I will wake up and there will be either a word, a phrase, a thought that I wake up with that really guides me. (current, female)

For one principal, there is no engagement in formal religious belief:

People in the United Church think I'm a great guy. But I don't believe in God. I do believe in young people having an exposure to religious concepts. I think that following religious concepts in the way you live is good. I just can't believe, honestly. (retired, male)

The voices in this study suggest that a spiritual belief is an enabler to wellbeing. There is no prescriptive form of this belief indicated from this current research though.

However, in contrast, one principal explains that:

We had a board of 14, of which something like eight were from churches. They were the most un-Christian people I've ever met. When we needed them to be compassionate and caring, they just ran. They ran, so I don't like the church as an institution at all, even though I grew up in Anglican faith, and my parents are still strong [believers], and I still believe in faith and that, but the church as an institution is diabolical. I wish I had known they were that bad. (current, male)

An inhibitor to wellbeing may be the behaviour of the church appointed members of the board if it is a religiously affiliated school.

5.4.8 Emotional wellbeing enablers

Catering for emotional wellbeing is believed to be effective through a range of strategies: having a mentor or a coach, writing a journal or diary, using a network of colleagues such as AHISA and developing a mental attitude of self-protection. This attitude is portrayed in this comment:

I've got a history of putting everybody else's needs ahead of my own, if that makes sense. At one level, that kind of goes well with the job, but in the sense of looking after a community, that said, I think just in a mental health context I really found myself... I don't know if diminishing is the right term, but feeling increasingly dysfunctional, and not really knowing why. Now, I'm more mindful of giving myself permission to be selfish, and in the context of surf lifesaving, if you can't help or rescue yourself then you can't help others. I think I've also come to the conclusion that if I'd been my best self, then it's not about me rescuing, helping everybody else. Take a surf lifesaver approach. Nurture, which is different from protect and guard. Nurture your own wellbeing, as a priority. I'm not doing anything you wouldn't already know... I've learned the type of leadership that is likely to experience the greatest self-injury or difficulty is where there's an absence of vulnerability or realization of how easy it is for us to become fractured as human beings, because of the stressors associated with our role. (current, male)

This principal's emotional wellbeing is nurtured after dealing with victims of sexual abuse because:

In bringing support to victims, and in getting them to rebuild relationships with fractured family and stuff, is one of the most rewarding things you can ever do. To sit with them across a table as they're baring their soul, telling you things that they would either only

tell in a court or never tell anyone is an enormously privileged place to be. (current, male)

Created by the honour and privilege of such a trusted position, awareness of an inner strength is alerted here:

I think many of us are driven by a sense that we are towers of strength and we will just keep going, and we do that because a lot of others ride on us... You need to draw on the inner strength in order to do that. I'm not sure where it comes from half the time, because you just do it. I don't think there's any wellspring that you dive into. It's just what you do. I'm sure when you get off the bus...as I've done occasionally, during sabbatical and stuff like that, you see the world differently. You think, why would you ever go back to it? What an enormous honour. (current, male)

The choice to be emotionally resilient is a strategy cited by this participant:

Developing an ability to not take things personally is really important. To be able to separate that, to think no...that was work. (current, male)

To be optimistic and alter your view is an enabler, articulated here:

You have a choice in how you view life. The lens through which you choose to view things, to me is very important, and you do have a choice. (current, male)

This principal took quite a different view:

I think I was probably case hardened by my early life experience, so that in some respects many of the things I've dealt with as a principal, a lot

of that's possibly why I've been able to cope with that without it basically affecting my wellbeing. I do not find it lonely at the top. I think this is because of life experience – I have no brothers and sisters and did not get on with my parents, so I am used to my own company and counsel. (current, male)

Enabling behaviour is to separate oneself emotionally from the situation, particularly in the case of student death:

I try not to get too personalised with it. I see myself as having a role to play in supporting those who are closely involved and needing some support although certainly I find myself getting caught up when we have something like a funeral service for a student. (current, male)

And perceived successful strategies for emotional wellbeing are:

I think it's very important to build into your life outings that you enjoy. I'll go and watch a rugby game or a cricket match. (current, male)

My work makes me well. There are moments in my work that I wish didn't happen but as I said I'm a very optimistic person and I love to learn. Given that I have this approach, that I'd rather laugh when things are at their worst, that enables me to keep my life moving forward. (current, female)

A need to build a broader life is a strategy. The following interview response captures the need not to be solely defined by the role of principal:

One thing I realized when I first started out are things I'd overhear, or be part of the conversations where a lot of principals really, I felt, had a real martyr syndrome. It was almost a badge of honour they wore to see

*who worked the most hours, and I just thought it was pretty foolish. I know that really, a principal can't just work a 40-hour week and hang up their boots and say, "Well, I'm done." It's also not very smart to kill yourself in the process. You need a circuit breaker. So whether your circuit breaker is, you know, travel at the holidays, and you commit to that, or whether it is your family, or whether it is exercise, or whether it is reading, or whether it's yoga or... Whatever it is, you need something that defines you apart from "I am a principal, and that is all I am."
(current, male)*

Seventeen out of 39 (44%) participant principals use network meetings such as AHISA to support their emotional wellbeing, as a common representative comment shows:

*I do have a good network. I'm good friends with a couple of other beginning principals and we meet every two or four weeks and debrief over a drink or whatever. I've also got a good network who have been principals for 15, 20 years, or whatever, so when there is a tricky thing which I'm not quite sure what to do, I have a network of people to give a call.
(current, male)*

The perceived reason for the significant emphasis on the emotional support of a network is trust and confidentiality, as told here:

*But all of us have people, fellow principals, or other educators that we know we can trust because nothing would ever leave their lips in terms of the conversation we've had.
(resigned, female)*

The ability to section off worries and the stressful parts of the day, to regroup and refresh as an enabler to wellbeing is often mentioned. One principal shares his experience of this reassurance:

I've always been very lucky to be able to switch off. There are very few times in those sixteen years where I haven't been able to focus on whatever I wanted to do, or the enjoyment of the family, that sort of thing, and not be absorbed with whatever the issue at hand may be. That, I know, has been a great bonus to me. Also, I think being very positive in the outlook, the glass is literally half full approach, has always been my approach to life. Those sorts of things have made life a little easier. I think when the stressful times do come on, those sorts of strategies are particularly important. Stop, and take a deep breath sort of thing, but also do what you would normally do. If you can get away with it, don't get sucked into 24/7 on the issue at hand. (current, male)

Or similarly:

I've got a very simple thing that I do. I cross a bridge that goes over water on my way home. What I try to do is leave the worries of the day on that side of the bridge and I pick them up when I go back the next morning. (current, male)

This principal reflects on his evolution of current practice to enable wellbeing, after discussion with his clinical psychologist:

Got an injury, stopped running, put more time into work, stopped the morning run that I'd done for 20-something years. Put on weight. I look back now and it's an absolute no-brainer. I would never miss a morning walk. So I started running again, lost the weight. He talked about the wind-down at night. I'd always sort of gone home to be with the kids and then you put the kids to bed and then would work again. And he said "Stay at work till 6 o'clock and go home and relax after dealing with the kids." I stopped doing school work after dinner and did it in the early morning. So major change in the way I'd ever operated. (current, male)

Four out of 39 (10%) principals in this research cite the use of a clinical psychologist for counsel in a period of mental illness or depression, as elicited here:

My depression was set off by what the psychologist or psychiatrist called a tsunami of events. (current, male)

I only speak to my guy twice a term usually. There was only one occasion when I felt like I needed to speak to him really urgently, and I arranged a meeting two days after I asked for it because I wasn't feeling in the best place mentally. So I arranged that meeting pretty urgently... I've been an alcoholic for two years and, you know, I'm trying to get on top of that. Just... I'm still recovering. (current, female)

I should have taken some time off last year. I think I would have done less damage to a lot of people. (current, male)

Eleven out of 39 (28%) independent school principals in this study keep a journal or diary for reflective writing about their day or week:

To be actively reflective, whether it be like keeping a journal or taking notes or just pondering life on your way home from work, whatever it looks like to you, I think that has been really, really helpful to remind myself that there might be challenges, but I am making some headway, or I am being effective in some areas of my role. (current, male)

Eleven out of 39 (28%) participant principals have a coach or mentor as these principals point out:

I spoke with a coach as well, independently of my wife, and the coach identified, the coach asked me, "So what are you missing?" I said, "I never get outside." He said, "Well, why not?" That set the train of

thinking, which got me to think about why going outside is so significant for me, what I meant by outside, which was not just going into the quad. (current, male)

As a person I'm invested in that space, having time with a Clinical Psych to really do a self-evaluation. I'm a much more connected person now, internally, which just makes me more present with others. So that's better. (current, male)

He gave me strategies. He taught me to find the areas in my life that were... He used the analogy that if a ballet dancer is going through a difficult move, and that move is putting them off balance, the first thing they do is reach for the barre. He helped me to discover the sorts of mechanisms in my life that were the barre that I could lean on until I was strong. (current, male)

Part of wellbeing is not only being able to look after yourself physically and mentally, but also being able to reflect and talk to different people in different areas, both within the profession and outside the profession. Reinforcing the value of a colleague, mentor or coach to whom one can talk and confide, this principal states:

"No, only me knows this, and it's confidential and I can't talk to anybody." But there were many times where I look back and I thought I wish I had just picked the phone up. That it would have helped. (resigned, female)

And singing out loud is therapeutic as a wind-down as this response indicates:

Actually one of the things that I do which significantly helps my wellbeing is I deliberately bought a house half an hour from school,

which means I have a half hour drive home from school where I play inappropriate music very loudly. It's a downloading time. I find that playing bands that swear a lot really helps. (current, male)

Gratitude is evident in this principal's response:

I always remind myself just how lucky I am to be in the profession, how much I want to be a principal. I'm always really patient about what I do. I just love it. No other way to say it. My strategies are to take a deep breath, know that I am making a difference and having confidence in my abilities. Just remaining positive and staying people-centred keeps me grounded. (current, male)

5.4.9 Cognitive wellbeing enablers

Recognising the value of intellectual succour, five out of 39 (13%) independent school principals continue study in formal courses or in informal organisational discussion forums. Two such examples are:

I've continued in post grad study, but it's a twin edged sword. I was doing lectures at night time from 6:00pm, or 5:30ish through to 9:30pm, 10:00pm. Coming back to the intellectual health, I did intentionally engage in that space, and it needed to be more than a TED Talk scenario. For me, academic study was a bit of a twin edged sword. It kind of satisfied this hunger that I had, but at the same time there was an element of escapism because it meant I didn't then turn attention to other areas. (current, male)

Being a member of the CEO institute, and getting outside the box, away from school people, and actually realising there was a whole world out there, and a lot of interesting and worthwhile things to consider that could be suitably adapted to a school context, and be of real value. More

and more I've become unconvinced that schools are so different that you can't compare them with any other kind of organisation, and therefore you've got nothing to learn from other sorts of places. (current, male)

And attending conferences for intellectual stimulation is exemplified here:

I used to look for conferences that would help me run a business better and look for ways of developing. (resigned, female)

Other cognitive enablers are believed to be hobbies and reading for pleasure or for knowledge development:

I do pursue a few hobbies, which are certainly about wellbeing. I'm a cricket devotee. I love maritime history. I love jazz. I love politics and reading about politics. The amount of time I get to do any of those things is very small, but even just a few minutes here or there helps. (current, male)

I'm learning German by myself. I can do artwork and I like crafty things. I've got my garden to tend to. My family. Making sure that they have time in my life as well is very important. (current, female)

The shared background of being active learners is continued by principals as it is believed to be part of their ongoing cognitive health.

5.4.10 Vocational choice

The vocational choice of the independent school principals in this research is commonly centred on a desire to enact improvement and change in schools. When asking principals the reasons for them taking on the role, it is evident that a key intrinsic factor is their perception of

the ability to effect change in schools. This is both practical and altruistic. 19 out of 39 (49%) principals explain that this is the reason for their chosen career path which is evidently challenging, stimulating, impactful and prestigious. The following three principals explain this:

I was of the belief that we could exercise most change in a sense of having the autonomy to research, to understand, to become familiar with trends in education, which is a dynamically changing field. Then being in a position to implement that change in a systematic kind of way. (current, male)

The reason I got into education from the outset was to influence the way that children and young people experience learning. My view was that I should try to be as aspirational as possible and I think that I was always very clear in my mind that I would like to progress through to a point of true influence. I think that in an independent school the principal is hugely influential to that experience and can make quite significant changes. (current, female)

I think there's an imperative for all of us that, whichever school we're leading, that you want to leave it a better place because you've been a part of it. (current, male)

The responses of independent school principals in this research endorse the great joy and pleasure they derive from spending time in the classroom with students and watching the progress of students in the school. The principals have witnessed the growth, trials and determination of these students and “*your heart sings when you see these gorgeous students who graduate. You’ve known them for five or six years and you’ve known the triumphs and the tragedies.*” (current, female)

Six of the participants (15%) had been relieving principals and so proceeded to apply for the role after establishing confidence in their ability as this comment elucidates:

The previous principal became unwell and so I acted in the role and realized that I really liked the role and that I had certainly the capacity. I thought I'd probably be quite good at it. When the job was officially advertised I applied for it and was successful. (resigned, female)

Six of the participants (15%) in the study saw others do it and decided they should attempt to do so as well, as they had the required skill set:

The school that I went to, I felt had really bad teachers. But also I'd seen some really bad principals and thought, "I could do better than that." It was a really important job, so I thought straight away, "Why don't I do that?" (current, female)

I'll put my hat in the ring and maybe I'll get an interview and if I get an interview that would be really fantastic. (current, female)

When you're a deputy principal, you actually realize, "Hey, I can be a principal. I can do this." I guess that's how I became a principal. (current, female)

Thirteen of the participants (33%) make clear that they had not planned to become a principal. They applied for the role as a pathway step, seeking the next challenge:

I think if you've got the right skill set and the right interest level, you figure, "I will do the next step," because you're probably intrinsically motivated. (current, female)

In my career it's always been, "What's the next challenge?" So you get to a point where you've been given a senior position and you develop it. You grow it. You change it. (current, male)

I became a principal because it seemed like a logical thing to do when you're a deputy principal. (current, female)

Twenty-six out of 39 (67%) principals in this research admit that they just went for the job. These principals reveal an inherent self-belief and confidence that they are equipped for the role and thus apply:

When the other deputy said to me that she was throwing her hat in the ring, I thought, "I just arrived at this school. If she becomes principal I'm going to have to leave, because we're so different. I'd better throw my hat in the ring." That's how I became a principal. (current, male)

When a job came up, I applied for it, giving the thought process of I should enter one of these processes and see what it's like and, to my surprise, they offered me the position. (current, male)

The responsibility of the classroom teacher extends to the achievements of a class group. This practice becomes so rewarding and fulfilling that teachers often extended it to improving a team of teachers through becoming an assistant principal and leading a team. For many, this evolved to the desire to enact wider influence and so it is that these participants applied to become principal. Their motivation was a desire to improve student learning; initially, for one student at a time and later for a whole school of individual students as influence widens. So, as this principal explains, it is:

a combination of accident and design. I never imagined I'd be a principal. I always imagined I'd be a classroom teacher. I enjoyed the

classroom very much and found it very fulfilling and rewarding. Eventually I came to the conclusion that I was doing a Head of Department's work, and he was being paid. It was an instance, a fairly gross example of that, where often we in the staff room wouldn't see him on some days, and we assumed he was at school and going to teach his classes, but we didn't actually know. In terms of looking after the staff and maintaining discipline amongst the faculty, and so forth, as the senior person there, I was doing it all. I thought I may as well go for this too,

because the respondent:

was inspired by good examples of senior leaders I saw, so that it seemed desirable to emulate them. I felt that I learned some significant skills from them. In other ways, I was appalled by senior examples who were just dreadful. I thought, I can do a lot better than these guys. Maybe I should put my hand up if I think it's important, and if I think I can do better than them. (current, male)

In contrast, one principal honestly admits that the aspiration never occurred:

The interesting thing to me is that I've never ever ever aspired to principalship. I'd been in leadership for years and years and years, but it hadn't even crossed my mind that I'd be a principal. (current, female)

Subsequently, she applied to become principal after working in the Middle East and being impressed with the strength of women in schools, so returned to Australia and became principal.

In summary, the majority of participants show that the pathway to the role of principal derives from a belief in a desire to enact positive change, influence and improvement in schools.

5.5 Location (place)

Twenty-seven out of 39 (69%) participants comment on the importance of place as an enabler for their wellbeing. This category is reflected in the socio-ecological wellbeing framework. The following themes regarding place are identified and discussed:

- At work
- Away from school
- Far away or overseas

5.5.1 At work

A principal has the option to choose the location of the office, as referred to by this participant:

I've made my office a place of refuge as well. It is not as accessible as it always has been, so I can go to my office, just sit down- I put a couch in there- and I can do some reading, or I can just still myself and put a note on the door. (current, male)

As principals were also classroom teachers in the past, place can also be the return to the classroom or a location where students are present, as shown by this principal:

I changed the timetable this year so I teach a class. So me going into a science class to teach is sometimes, on a pressure day, the highlight of my day and that gives me wellbeing. It puts me back in the here and now. Gives me presence of mind and I can see myself sometimes walking

back from class to my office with a smile on my face having just engaged at that curriculum level with the kids. Teaching grounds me I guess. (current, male)

The importance of being elsewhere is described by 27 out of 39 (69%) participants, as affirmed by these principals' comments:

Finding time away from work, whether that's with family, hobbies, interests, and really having that break, and not taking your phone with you, and not thinking, do I need to check all of the time. (current, male)

Or a local place that can provide convenient and accessible respite as this response indicates:

I used to take myself off to a health retreat once a year or something to recharge batteries and really sort of immerse myself in doing some yoga and things like that. (resigned, female)

If you're going off to the conference, people know you're going to the conference but they don't know how long it is. Go two days early, come back two days late and spend that time with your wife and your family doing something that's totally unrelated to the school... If you're going up to visit the grade six camp, don't rush up and back in the one day. Drive up slowly, stay at the best bed and breakfast you can find within 100 kilometres of it, charge it to the school and then go and visit the kids. So, it was doing things like that that meant you spent more time nurturing your family relationships. (retired, male)

As this principal aptly describes it,

It's just got to be the serenity of being elsewhere. (current, male)

5.5.2 Being away from school

The importance of place being a venue that is special and away from school often refers to a holiday home or a beach shack that is approximately an hour's drive from the school site. One principal negotiates with her chair of council as follows:

I said to her, "There's no point giving me more holidays. I've already got too many. What I would like to do is work from my place in the country and mind my grandson every Friday." Drive down and I'll do phone and email on and off, but not take meetings and then I'll spend the weekend there. She was very happy with that so I've been trialling that this semester. I'm usually not here on a Friday, unless there's something so annoyingly pressing on the Friday night or the Saturday that I have to be here for, which is really annoying. I've found that actually fabulous because I live where I work, so I live in this building. (current, female)

Another participant values a place like a beach retreat:

I did feel fatigue, but we've got a holiday house down at the coast, and I surf, and I love it. I only have a big body board these days. I can't get up on my knees and feet anymore, but I've always loved surfing, not through the winter so much. We'd go to the house, but I wouldn't always get in the water. It's a bit cold. The full body surf, full wet suit and all that. I used to call it my bolt hole. I used to so look forward to going. (resigned, female)

Outdoor places are mentioned often as sources of retreat:

I was missing being in forests or up on hills. I was missing bird watching, which from childhood has been an on/off obsession of mine. But what I identified is the reason I liked bird watching was it gave me a

*reason for going somewhere where no one else was and walking around.
(current, male)*

A clever approach is to create a rule around the use of that special place, determining when and how access will occur, such as:

*We had a 12 hour rule. If we could be there for more than 12 hours, we'd go, one hour's drive. I might have a function Friday night, finish at 10:00pm. We'd drive to the shack, and I might have to come back for a function Saturday night or a function on Sunday. We'll go to church on Sunday, whatever, but we would spend that break time at the shack, and that was really important. We do that every second weekend.
(retired, female)*

5.5.3 Far away or overseas

The importance of place can also be a reference to the importance of taking holidays, particularly overseas or significantly distant from the school site. The following examples make this clear:

When I go on a break, I really take a break. It's that whole learning how to come in to land, rather than falling out of the sky. Ten, fifteen years ago, I'd have two weeks of holidays, but a week of them I'd spend in bed because I just would have collapsed from exhaustion. I only really had one week anyway. Now, I kind of pace myself as I'm heading towards the end of a break. I know I'm having a week off, so the week before, which is usually the first week of the school holidays, I go, "All right, I'm going to do some important, not urgent things that I've put aside because they were too hard to get to during term time," spend some time on that, and basically I've learned by the time I get to my week off, I'm ready for a week's break. I'm not spending that week going, "Oh, I'm so exhausted,

I'm not going to get to do anything because I'm going to be flat on my back for a week." (current, male)

Proportion is, when you get the breaks, you use them. By that I mean, what are the other interests that one has? Is it reading? Is it fishing? Is it rock climbing? I don't know what it is. For example, I had a break a while ago, a sort of sabbatical. We walked the Camino in Spain. That's a good thing to do, because you're in another place. (current, male)

It doesn't have to be extravagant. The extravagant thing is the travel. Being away and being able to switch off. (current, male)

I take good holidays. I do two personal international trips a year, and I love planning those trips, and while I still answer emails and do whatever I need when I'm away, I love those trips. That's a hobby in that sense. (current, female)

When we do take holidays, and I do take my four weeks a year now, we'll often go overseas for a period of time, just to get away. We'll do something physical like a great walk in New Zealand or something like that. I've had to come to the view that work-life balance is not a relevant concept for me in the traditional sense, and so I have to regard what I'm doing as a vocation and mission, much like a monk in a monastery or something like that. It makes no sense otherwise, and so I have to be nourished and rewarded for what I'm doing for me to be sustainable. (current, male)

Over the course of my contract, I've negotiated the current situation where I've got six weeks' leave. I've got a week's reading leave. I will say to my chairman, "I'm going away down the coast. I'm taking stuff I need to read for work," because I do find that you don't often get that extended digestive mental/intellectual time. (current, male)

Take your holidays, for God's sake don't bank them. I think too many heads do. I'll talk to colleagues who say, "Oh, I couldn't take much... I've banked up all these holidays." I just think that's ridiculous. (current, female)

The wellbeing of the principal is felt to be aided by a respite or retreat from face to face interactions, particularly on the school site. These retreats are local or overseas holidays, the important factor being geographical distance from the school location.

The strategies discussed are shared by 17 out of 39 (44%) of the principals and are not isolated to one or two participants. The strategies are honed, practised and are a wisdom to be utilised.

5.6 Explicit responses to the current research questions

The prime objective of this research is to determine the enablers and inhibitors to the wellbeing of the independent school principal. In this chapter the data generate explicit responses to the research objectives:

1. What are the inhibitors to wellbeing for the independent school principal?
2. What are the enablers for wellbeing of the independent school principal?
3. What strategies do independent school principals use to manage their wellbeing?

5.6.1 Research question 1: What are the inhibitors to wellbeing for the independent school principal?

The negative impacts and inhibitors on the independent school principal's wellbeing are thematically analysed as:

- The size of the position and the time consumed to complete it effectively
- Poor teacher performance and the need to performance manage staff
- Parents
- The expectations of the school board, staff, parents and the community
- Living on the school site

5.6.2 Research question 2: What are the enablers for wellbeing of the independent school principal?

The definition of wellbeing used for this research, discussed in the literature review Chapter 2, has five dimensions. The enablers for the wellbeing of the independent school principal are portrayed in these following five dimensions:

- Physical
- Social
- Spiritual
- Emotional
- Cognitive.

Each of these dimensions is reflected in the interview answers of the principals. The individual solutions and strategies perceived to enable wellbeing are detailed in the following research question response.

5.6.3 Research question 3: What strategies do independent school principals use to manage their wellbeing?

The strategies follow from the enablers as listed previously.

Physical strategies:

- Exercise regularly
- Walk daily
- Personal trainer for a regular scheduled meeting
- Walking meetings at school
- Establish a routine and adhere to it
- Attend to nutritious diet
- Regular meals

Social strategies:

- Debrief with your partner
- Phone a friend
- Network and meet with principal colleagues
- Attend conferences, such as AHISA
- Join a book club
- Attend organised meetings outside of the school
- Spend time with students

Spiritual strategies:

- Prayer
- Attend chapel or church
- Mantra

Emotional strategies:

- Hire a mentor
- Hire a coach
- Write a daily journal or diary
- Record “good stories”
- Network with colleagues at AHISA

- Develop a positive optimistic attitude
- Choose to be emotionally resilient
- Do things you enjoy

Cognitive strategies:

- Formal education
- Academic courses
- Join a CEO institute
- Attend conferences
- Hobbies
- Reading for pleasure
- Be an active learner

5.7 Summary

This chapter presents the resulting data from analysis of the interview transcripts after using rereading of the transcripts and NVivo coding. This allows the dominant themes to emerge reflecting the socio-ecological wellbeing framework. The data are presented via the significance of lived experiences occurring at work, in personal situations and at various locations. Personal learning experiences derived from time in the role as principal are thematically explored. Relationships that strongly impact on the wellbeing of the independent school principal are those of the school board, family, particularly spouse or partner, friends, teaching staff and the executive leadership team. Responses to the research questions are listed.

In the next chapter these data are discussed, critically analysed and synthesised, allowing conclusions and future directions to emerge.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

“My husband and I had lunch every Sunday because that meant that we had at least one meal together a week. It's that whole ‘leave a list of which nights you'll be home for dinner’ so that he at least has some sense of where you are.” (Quote from female current principal participant)

6.1 Introduction

A principal in a government or systemic Catholic school has the support of a governing educational system to address, for example, legal, financial, maintenance and building development issues. Some systemic schools operate within a group such as the Anglican Schools Corporation, Uniting Church Schools, Christian Schools Australia. These offer systemic support and backup. This is not the case for the independent school principal whose school board is established in common and statute law with a school constitution. The totality of responsibilities usually rests with the independent school principal who needs to be informed to exercise this autonomy in a correct and accountable manner. To be fully informed in a constant and thorough manner takes time. The role is vast and demanding on personal, professional and physical resources. There are member organisations, such as Australian Independent Schools (AIS) who offer support to these schools, but do not take authority and ownership of decisions made by the independent school principal.

In this chapter the dominant themes are used to generate responses to the research questions. The argument for this research and the application of the tool of the theoretical framework are explained. A

discussion of the responses to the research questions follows under key categories, themes and sub-themes.

As in the previous chapter, direct quotes from independent school principals are presented in italics.

6.2 The argument for this research

Riley's survey (2017) of principal wellbeing is the most recent contemporary one, given that it is replicated annually. However, as mentioned in the literature review, the participants incorporate others as well as principals. This current qualitative phenomenological study is much more finely nuanced to show the interpersonal meanings from conversations that are not available from a multiple-choice survey or questionnaire. It is highly valuable to be informed of the subtlety and nuances of the principals' opinions, lived experiences and beliefs and this is the contribution of my study. Talking to the independent school principals enabled a sense of the background context. The individual situations and social contexts are revealed, thus adding richness and texture to data from previous quantitative studies. In this current study these are self-perception, self-report data and are able to be interpreted with a lens of wellbeing; they are not actual evidence of each individual principal's wellbeing.

Riley (2014b) notes that "very little research has directly addressed the cost of being an effective school leader" (p. 194). Existing research is mainly concerned with government systemic schools (not independent schools) internationally (not in Australia) and with the impact the leader has on staff culture and how to improve the wellbeing of the school's stakeholders (teachers and students in particular).

Currently there is a deficit in the literature that would allow a comparative analysis, as this approach with this Australian group of subjects has not been accessed previously. Therefore the results of this research are new and fresh. Acknowledgement is made that the sample participants may constitute a limitation due to a possible inordinate interest in wellbeing. Their views expressed may be excessive due to their lived experience.

6.3 The tool of the socio-ecological wellbeing framework

Socio-ecological theories of development supply a useful lens through which the perceptions of wellbeing of independent school principals can be explored. As discussed in chapter 3, Bronfenbrenner developed a systems theory that covers the interactions and transactions of people in different contexts.

The microsystem is the immediate context that the individual is surrounded by. The microsystem consists of those contacts that are directly experienced by the individual. In this study these are the school and its board, teachers and parents.

The mesosystem describes the relationships between two or more microsystems. For example, in this study, the school board influences the principal who manages the school staff.

The exosystem is comprised of social settings that are external to the individual but which impact on the individual. The exosystem refers to environments that affect individuals but in which there is no direct participation. For example, in this study, if parents are unemployed or earning a meagre salary this may cause stress. The parents' employment status and salaries impact their eagerness for their children

to attend an independent school, resulting in some parents beseeching the school for bursary support or fee-free attendance for their child.

The macrosystem covers the institutions common to this group of principals. In this study, examples are the networking opportunities provided by the organisations AIS and AHISA. Looking at the roles and relationships of the individuals in these contexts gives us a clear pathway to explore how the principals make sense of their cultural circumstances and how their perceptions impact on their thinking and resulting behaviour.

The chronosystem refers to the events and transitions occurring over an individual's life. An example of this is the principal who had been brought up in a very Christian and religious family. His behaviour when a death of a student occurred at his school, was to be truthful, genuine and authentic. However his responsibility to the school board made him temper his public comments to ensure the reputation of the school was maintained.

The socio-ecological wellbeing framework includes the factors of place, lived experiences, learning experiences and participation, for example, in community and networks of professional groups. These are particularly relevant to the educational context in which this current research is placed.

As explained in Chapter 4, the phenomenological orientation of this research enables the perception of the lived experiences of the independent school principals to be revealed. In this chapter the argument is shaped by the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, as explained in Chapter 3. This is a logical way to frame the discussion to understand the implications of the data. It is lucid and reflects the context of the study and acknowledges the theoretical wellbeing

framework. Discussion of the interdependence of the mesosystem and microsystem, involving partner debriefing, staff, parents at the school, the school board and professional colleagues reveals the underlying psychology of the position of principal, its feelings of responsibility and empowerment and its ability to create feelings of personal guilt.

In this chapter I explore the importance of place for this connection to community to be enabled or disabled. Discussion of experiential learning (lived experience creating learning experience) follows. Connecting to community and participation in networks are aspects of advocacy on the part of the principal. The following Table 2 shows the themes and sub-themes for the discussion. The terms used for the themes and sub-themes in my analysis arose from grouping the prevalent related impacts together and using terminology for these groups that reflects the socio-ecological wellbeing framework.

TABLE 2: THEMES AND SUB-THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

THEME	SUB-THEME
INTERDEPENDENCE	Partner/spouse support Friendships Stakeholders in the school community
LIVED EXPERIENCE	Trust Colleagues
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING	Termination of staff employment contracts The school board Critical incidents Workload
PLACE	Holidays and away Reflection Onsite Church and chapel
CONNECTING TO COMMUNITY	
RESPONSIBILITY AND EMPOWERMENT	
AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE	The school board Coach and mentor Organisational routines Technology Journals/diaries
ADVOCACY	Relationship with the school board and the board chair Skill set of the board members

6.4 Interdependence

This section explores the relationships of independent school principals, derived from the data. This section is an explicit link to the socio-ecological wellbeing framework which guides analysis of the data.

Specifically, this section of discussion focuses on the underlying layer of the Bronfenbrenner ecological systems theory in which there are reciprocal relationships between the microsystem and mesosystem and the independent school principal at the centre. Like all relationships the range of experiences varies in depth, familiarity and formality. The relationships are intentionally formal and professional with the members of the executive team, parents, staff, students and some colleagues. The relationships are believed to be informal and personal with one's partner, some selected friends and colleagues. From the results, three key themes arose. These are:

- Partner/spouse support
- Friendships
- Stakeholders in the school community

The relationship with partner or spouse is believed to be highly significant for continued wellbeing of the principal. It is clear that 23 out of 39 (59%) principals debrief daily with their partner or spouse. The principal feels that it is an opportunity to be honest, display anxieties and failures, authentically expressing feelings that may be concealed during the day at the workplace, due to the desire to portray an image of competence. The importance of such stable relationships is supported by Yamaguchi's study (2014). The principal feels that students, teachers, parents and staff want the principal to be courageous, knowledgeable and wise regarding all situations so he/she is able to competently respond. This is the perceived aura of the leadership position, particularly in schools, where the student client is powerless to intervene in most situations. This perceived aura and implicit respect for the principal has been developed by all parents and staff in their own early years of schooling. Every person has attended school in some format in Australia and that personal experience reinforces the importance of the school leader. Whilst the views and opinions of staff are sought in a collaborative team environment, the

final decision is always made by the principal who will deal with any resulting critical negative feedback from stakeholders. Extrapolating from the data, this is why the majority of independent school principals report the importance of daily debriefing with a partner. They perceive it as an opportunity to defuse and unburden the details of the day's lived experience. These findings about the importance of connecting with another person, or partner, confirm other studies showing positive relationships lead to increased wellbeing, enabling people to flourish at work (Roffey, 2013, 2016, 2017). In this current research, these previous findings are extended. This is valuable because there is a dearth of research about how principals deal with everyday demands and the strategies they use (Dadaczynski & Paulus, 2015). This current research contributes a new way of thinking about this topic.

None of the principals in this study were without a life partner or significant other. This brings to light the question of how principals without a partner deal with the onerous day, indicating a valuable area for further research.

Thirteen out of 39 (33%) principals do not debrief daily with their partner. This minority of principals who believe that it is unwise to debrief with their partner report that the day was difficult enough to live through the first time so debriefing and revising the details again repeats the stress. Also two of these principals report that their partner is employed on the same school site so the intent of not debriefing is to ensure the partner is not approached for 'inside information' and is not placed in an awkward position regarding any decision made by the principal that may be contentious. Two out of 39 (5%) principals report that the reason they choose not to confide is also to feel they have ensured confidentiality of issues. Two principals out of 39 (5%) believe their partner may continue to worry about an issue shared. If the partner again mentions the issue, the issue is so far in the past of the principal's

mind, that to again discuss the incident causes anxiety for the principal. The implication of this is that, generally, the principal believes he/she learns to avoid sharing views and anecdotes of the day. Thus whilst partners are useful for debriefing, there are limitations to this sharing.

The findings in this study imply that friendships are believed to be important to wellbeing, concurring with other studies that emphasise this importance for teacher wellbeing (Carr, 2017). However, additionally and in contrast, this current study extends and details that, for independent school principals, relationships with friends are believed to vary in their ability to support or disable wellbeing. The concept of friendship is sometimes felt to be inhibited and restrained and becomes an inhibitor to wellbeing. In normal day-to-day living, individuals choose friends whose values and morals match theirs. In schools, for principals, they may meet staff members whose values and morals match theirs and the principal may have to choose to not become a friend because of the relationship and its inherent imbalance of power. The perceptions and understandings of the other person are altered because of the 'boss' – staff divide. This perception inhibits how one behaves in this power relationship for both sides. All relationships are fraught and this complication and added hierarchical level is felt by the principals to be confining and shepherds relationships away from rather than toward friendship.

Nineteen out of 39 (49%) principals feel strongly that they are unable to develop friendships with members of staff. The principals believe that there may be events or incidents that require them to make difficult and hard decisions and a relationship of friendship would hamper their neutral voice. The principal may need to terminate the employment of a staff member and the principal perceives a relationship of friendship muddies the process which must be fair and just, without favour.

A further implication from the data is that the social context of government schools compared to independent schools may differentially affect the school climate. In an Australian government school the sensitive contract of employment is handled by the government system, but in an independent school, employment contracts are offered by the principal. This hierarchical relationship between awardee and awarder implies the possibility of tainting a relationship for better or worse, dependant on renewal or termination of contract. It implies that school connectedness and social-emotional safety of employment are immediately linked to the relationship developed with the principal of an independent school. Derived from the data, this current research shows an intentional, formal, professional relationship with staff emanates from the Australian independent school principal as a form of self-protection believed to stabilise future possible interactions. This supports and extends the finding of Craft, Combs, Malveaux, and Lopez (2016) regarding assistant principals.

Principals believe that privacy issues, confidentiality and discretion prohibit discussion of school issues in the outside public arena. This forces friendships to occur in areas unrelated to school practice. Thirteen out of 39 (33%) principals report having long-time friendships that they encourage by travelling interstate to visit with their previous educational colleagues or school day friends during holidays. Thirteen out of 39 (33%) principals believe it is important to retain the pre-principalship friends who knew them prior to their promotion because they feel these friendships were formed authentically and genuinely, not seeking favour or influence. They feel that they can share truthful horror stories about the principal role and these stories will be kept in confidence and also the humour in each situation will be understood. The meaning derived from the data is that they think that the humour

and belly laughing is a common palatable way of responding to the stressor.

Two out of 39 (5%) principals cite the repeated bullying complaints against the principal that come from teaching staff when the teachers are criticised or corrected. Sharing these stories with trusted colleagues is another format of debriefing but with the added bonus of the confidante being an insider who has shared a similar lived experience. The principal's public response to any other school member (leadership team or school board) about a formal complaint, is serious, grave and respectful, but to a trusted colleague, the principal feels able to share feelings of humour and amusement at the repetition of an incident such as this. A professional colleague can share at a deep and authentic level. This friendship group membership with colleagues profoundly impacts mental and physical health, increasing wellbeing, as shown in Jetten, Haslam and Haslam's study (2012). The meaning derived is that networking with fellow principals creates a sense of belonging as their chatter provides a reassurance that they are not invincible because they all endure the common trials of the role. This indicates the strong reliance on fellow explorers across the landscape of bullying and injustice towards the leader, supporting Riley's study (2017). The research literature focuses on the bullying between lower hierarchical levels in school systems (teachers, staff and students) (Gourneau, 2012; Rigby, 2014; Riley, 2012; Skinner, Babinski & Gifford, 2014; Slee, 2017; Rosen, DeOrnellas & Scott, 2017). There are policies and procedures in every independent school for anti-bullying, required by school government authorities, but there are no documented policies or procedures evidenced in any of the participating principals' schools, which concern the bullying of principals by the school board or staff, parents and students. The principals believe that this omission is not because such bullying does not occur. Other findings (Riley, 2017) regarding parents' bullying of the principal are confirmed in my current

research. However, in an independent school, this bullying of the principal is an area that is intentionally concealed because of the concept of reputation of the independent school and the implied core belief in principled behaviour. This current research extends knowledge of this occurrence of bullying to the independent school context. The implication from this current research is that currently there is nil response regarding policies and procedures for complaint resolution that are created and applied specifically for principals of independent schools. This is an area that potentially may be responded to by AISNSW and AHISA.

Twelve out of 39 (31%) principals believe that social friendships are important for mental health. However, they feel that they don't have the time to maintain them. Many principals think that as time is precious and limited, time spent with family is paramount. Family relationships are a positive impact. Two out of 39 (5%) principals report having lots of grandchildren with whom they enjoy spending time. Fourteen out of 39 (36%) principals spend time, play or read to their own children as a daily priority. For principals, friendships need to be easy to sustain. Frequency of contact is rare so real and true friends will understand and if they are colleagues in the role, this is usually correct. Social media have a role in maintenance of friendships. Generally, friends keep in touch with events in their friends' lives through Facebook. However, independent school principals are advised by AIS and AHISA not to have Facebook accounts. It is perceived as unprofessional and unwise. Thus many principals feel that friendships are further hampered in their updates and knowledge of current events of those who they believe are supportive confidantes. This further clarifies the belief that travelling to the location of pre-principalship friends in holiday periods is of such high value and emotional support.

Six out of 39 (15%) independent school principals believe they can develop local friendships through a book club or social group with members who are not connected to the school community. Findings by Greenaway et al. (2015) endorse the identification with a social group and also reflect how it enhances personal wellbeing. In the capital cities and suburbs, principals report that this is possible, due to being able to avoid stakeholders of the independent school of which they are the principal. However, if in a small regional centre, there are limitations because school parents may attend the book club and the principal then needs to be cautious regarding views shared. This gives an indication of the beliefs and perceptions of independent school principals and the unintentional socio-ecological limits placed on the establishment of genuine friendships.

Principals often feel it is beneficial to conceal their day job from new acquaintances. This avoids parent-teacher conversations about the new friends' children and their progress at school, allowing normal social chit-chat without intent to seek opinions, guidance or educational advice from the principal, whose views are highly valued. One principal out of 39 was forced to avoid the best restaurant in his local area as it was owned by a parent at the school and this parent sought to discuss school issues whenever the principal patronised his restaurant.

There is no relief from the topic of school and all related issues, especially for the independent school principals in small regional centres. They feel their voice and opinion is regarded as wise, professional and informed so anecdotes and informal unguarded jokes are rarely forthcoming from them in case they are misheard or misquoted. They believe their professionalism in the public arena must be constant. The study by Jetten, Haslam and Haslam (2012) stated that membership of social groups builds social capital and increases self-esteem. The principals already have social capital and generally, high

self-esteem. But in the confining social landscape of their locale, these relationships are impeded by the principal's public status, depriving the principal of the opportunity to create supportive friendships clearly outside the arena of the school community. As children and their parents are a large part of any community, the isolation for the independent school principal is believed to be relentless and all surrounding, regardless of locale. The meaning of these data is that regardless of intention to form friendships that may support wellbeing, the principal feels unable to act upon this knowledge to improve personal wellbeing. He/she is powerless to act.

Parents and students and their interrelationships are all around. The emotional importance of events involving family members enables parents to have the courage and sometimes, social ineptitude, to approach the principal, regardless of timing or venue, to discuss issues that affect their family members. There is no assessment of appropriateness. The principal is vulnerable and feels he or she must behave in a proper and respectful manner at all times. The parent's purpose is all pervasive and all powerful. This means the restrictions in attending social groups are believed to be unavoidable and the avenue of the book club or social group becomes unattractive. Choice is felt to be limited.

Extending the findings on friendships and interrelationships the current research data suggest that friendships with parents of students at the school are believed to be difficult, ill-advised and may be of short-term duration. Four out of 39 (10%) principals perceive that a relationship is seemingly formed and nurtured by parents of a student to ensure the principal is supportive of their child. Once the principal can no longer exert any influence in the life of the child, the relationship ceases. The relationships with parents at school are seen to be ephemeral and transient, based on influence and convenience. This is not the norm of

relationship building in general society. In this study, principals believed this to be the norm for relationships with parents at school. This is felt to be another inhibitor to wellbeing. Extrapolating this finding, this ultimately limits the social group of the independent school principals for later life. In one's working life one usually makes the friendships and contacts that sustain your wellbeing into retirement, but that opportunity is lost for independent school principals to some degree because of limited time available to make friendships and also due to the motives of others for creating the friendships. The principals believe that the role is more important than the friendships. Their moral purpose overrides this personal consideration.

Twenty-one principals (54%) out of thirty-nine principals in this research cite their belief that some parents, the angry, mad, sad and bad, are a source of stress. The qualitative data in this current research extends the quantitative statistics in Riley's research (2014b) by providing detailed perceptions that angry parents and expectations of parents are significant inhibitors to wellbeing. Principals report that parents may take out their frustrations on the leader of the school and invade the principal's space and time with an expectation that their child's needs are paramount and deserve immediate attention. The principals believe parent complaints are an inexorable challenge of the role. These data mean that whilst the principal is listening to the complaint from the parent, the principal is waiting to hear the actual action the parent wants. This will enable the principal to move on to the decision for the action or move to a negotiated resolution for a resulting action. This is because the previously lived experiences of the principals have usually involved the common repetitive issues and parent complaints: the parent's child being bullied, a decision by a teacher being unfavourable for the parent's child, the child missing out in a student election process, a suspension given to a student innocent of the accusation. This discovered meaning eludes statistical quantitative studies. It is

deduced from descriptive data about the feelings, perceptions and beliefs of the principals in this current research.

Interestingly, relationships with students are rarely explicitly mentioned and perceived as a direct source of wellbeing. Three out of 39 (8%) principals explicitly refer to interactions with students as being positive for wellbeing. The principal is required to be highly visible in the leadership position and aims to be more than a figurehead, but time is poor due to size of workload so the time spent with individual students and classes is limited.

6.5 Lived experience

Discussion of lived experience specifically links to the socio-ecological wellbeing framework. Lived experience is part of the overlying layer in this newly created framework and contributes to the social ecology that enables the reader to know more about the principal. In this research 21 out of 39 (54%) principals report that they seek to develop trust, a basic foundational requirement in any organisational practice, with the senior executive team or leadership team (Drysdale et al., 2014; Pont, 2014) as these people are the staff members with whom the principal believes he/she can sometimes confide and seek advice. In their lived experience, if this trust is broken, it is irreparable and isolating.

6.5.1 The development of trust

The aspect of isolation confirms O'Connor's study (2006) that this is a negative aspect of the role but these current research findings suggest that feelings of ability and inability to trust in the leadership team specifically impact on the wellbeing of the principal and may deepen feelings of isolation. This is a finding of great relevance because in the school environment there is no other team that is close to the principal

and aware of the detail of the daily grind for the principal. Each team member has a personal, limited perspective of the role from their viewpoint, but these team members are the closest available to observe the principal in his role. Thus mutual trust is felt to be of the highest value.

The principals face the same inhibitors and that is their commonality. Facing a common inhibitor can create a relationship. 17 out of 39 (44%) principals in this study believe the importance of meeting with trusted colleagues at conferences such as AHISA enables them to network and chat honestly and unguardedly about problems that they know they all share. It enables a common ground with a trusted colleague. The principal feels that he/she is not alone in the problems and trials of each day. In these friendships, like is attracted to like. They are all aware of the problems and challenges in their school life. However, this relationship is constrained by the awareness that the principals are sometimes competitors for enrolments in their schools if they are in the same geographical area. For example, one principal reports meeting with a group of colleagues after the formal part of a conference day concluded, giving the opportunity to share intimate school issues. But caution arose to debrief and unload because some of those present were principals of competing independent schools in close proximity. They could potentially be actual competitors for school enrolment numbers. The implication is that this occurrence is rare in larger capital cities and suburban areas where distance usually separates the independent schools and their enrolment drawing areas.

Principals believe sharing with fellow independent school principals is a significant enabler. This supports the research of Leithwood and Azah (2016) and Riley (2017) extending the data with additional evidence that discussion of challenges and issues shared and solutions is believed to be of great emotional benefit for the wellbeing of this cohort. Sixteen

out of 39 (41%) principals stress that this feels to be very important succour and enables each to again feel they are the individual they were before they became an independent school principal.

Trust is developed through lived experience. Understandings and representations of experiences and perceptions create the beliefs of the principals. These experiences have created the principals' unique perceptions of knowledge. The insider's perspective is revealed. Acknowledging the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, the lived experiences of these principals lead to the development of skills and strategies to enable their wellbeing.

6.6 Experiential learning

In the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, developing experience and expertise in dealing with various issues is referred to as experiential learning. Experience is facilitated through reflection and consequently learning may occur, turning mere experience into learning experiential education. Experiential learning is part of the overlying layer of the socio-ecological wellbeing framework. The data imply that there are responsibilities arising from the thematic analysis that are managed and dealt with effectively by the principal. This is due to developed cyclic learning experiences occurring during current and past professional employment.

An area that 26 out of 39 (67%) principals perceive as difficult to navigate is the termination of staff employment contracts. This affirms O'Connor's study (2006). In government and systemic schools, recruitment and employment is the domain of the system but in independent schools, employment and termination is the purview of the principal, usually with the administrative support of a school Human Resources Department. A specific area of potential difficulty occurs

when there is a previous ongoing relationship between the board chair or board members and the staff member the principal seeks to terminate, and the termination may be unsupported by the board. Thus these situations, in some instances, lead to the resignation of the principal or non-renewal of contract of employment for the principal as the board supports the continued employment of the staff member in question. These leaders are individuals. Their strong beliefs and values benefit the role. Thus the role is enabled and advantaged by their individualistic approach. When this approach is suppressed and questioned by the board, it becomes an inhibitor for the principal in that the personal fulfilment gained by the principal is degraded by the lack of value and respect for the principal's direction and decision-making shown by an unsupportive board.

The three principals (8%) reporting this event, unanimously feel that the impact on the principal of forced resignation from the role can be exceptionally damaging to self-esteem and confidence and one principal commented that the event *"had cauterized something inside me"* (current, female). Another principal disclosed the personal suicide attempt that resulted from that principal's employment termination due to a staffing issue saying *"I tried to kill myself and very nearly did. I will never forgive them [the board] for that"* (current, female). She believes her worldview is damaged as a result of her lived experience. She articulates that she cannot feel and respond with passion to her career choice as she did before the termination. She feels constantly in a perilous employment situation due to her negative learning experience. This is a new way of thinking about the data showing principals' depression about the role.

The findings of Riley (2017) show that 10% of the participants in his study have thoughts of self-harm or quality of life scores below the mean score for principals and executive in general. The Lutheran

Principals Australia study (2013) shows eight of the 58 (14%) participant principals are frequently depressed about their job. This current qualitative research extends and elaborates on the quantitative data and shows the gradations of mental illness suffered by principals of independent schools. Four of the 39 (10%) principals revealed their personal experiences with depression and responses including use of a clinical psychologist. The detail in this current research paints a specific and explicit response to the illness. These principals were particularly strong advocates of this research, articulating their personal private perceptions.

An existing strong relationship with the board chair is believed to be essential because, as one principal points out, termination of staff employment contracts can poison the principal's relationships with teaching staff or with the board. It is relevant to note the reports of six out of 39 (15%) principals who believe the relationship with the board chair is strong and this has been verbally endorsed by the board chair. However, 17 out of 39 (44%) principals believe that the relationship needs constant monitoring and daily explicit attention. It is a case of always being in a position where the principal believes all is well but there may be unknown grievance about to occur. The relationship between independent school principal and the board chair is hierarchical. The implication is that the principal always feels one decision away from termination, as one principal explicitly declared. The data in this research show that the principals feel the jeopardy of this situation. This does not occur in government schools in Australia, where termination can be a lengthy process requiring proof and documentation of support for improvement being provided to the principal of the government school. This is not so in an independent school, where decisions affecting continuing employment of the principal are made by the board, led by the board chair. This results in principals feeling the responsibility to ensure the board chair is in

agreement with the principal for every decision as the board chair does not want 'any surprises', a common refrain from the principals. This explains why 17 out of 39 (44%) principals put effort into the relationship with the board chair and 11 out of 39 (28%) principals state they put effort into the relationship with the board members.

One principal quoted *"If you see Baghdad, bomb it"* (current, female). This refers to taking immediate action regarding the termination of poorly performing teachers. This can be perceived as a dichotomy for some principals. Often advice from colleagues at AHISA is to wait a year or so before implementing change and improvements in a school. This enables natural attrition to remove some staff, allows recruitment of new staff loyal to their employer and perhaps leads to a change in culture of the school, particularly if members of the school staff are resistant to change. However during this hiatus period, complaints from parents regarding staff performance continue to arrive. If change is required in the staff composition, the principal believes he/she has the choice to wait or act. This situation of waiting is perceived as both a job challenge and a negative impact because the moral imperative of the principal is to improve academic performance of students. This may result in a perceived culture of blame and guilt. The parents blame the school and the principal for poor teacher quality. The principal may feel guilt because of his/her inaction due to factors relating to the board.

If the principal acts, the principal believes the board may not support this because of prior relationships forged with staff members. A staff member may have been the class teacher of a board member's child. The board member may believe the teacher to be an excellent practitioner. The principal may not agree with this perception. The board may say they seek improvement in academic results and quality of teachers and change, but perhaps not want to change the very elements required to achieve this. Many such instances occur. This

reveals the constant soupcon of uncertainty felt by the principal. The principal may feel the requirement for increased accountability to and surveillance from the school board. This may result in feelings of increased pressure on the principal. This study's data show that the main inhibitor 26 out of 39 (67%) principals perceive for their wellbeing involves teacher performance. The findings imply that this performance is also a challenge of the role. Discussions involving termination of contract or performance management are felt to be repetitive, stressful and often unpleasant. 26 out of 39 (67%) principals comment that they believe this is the subject that they would most like to avoid yet realize that it is their responsibility. Principals comment that they feel it is easy to ignore the issue of poor teacher performance but essential to address it for the improvement of the school's academic achievement.

These findings support the statistical results from the 2017 Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing Survey (Riley, 2017) and the survey results by Lutheran Principals Australia (2013). This current research provides a new perspective to think about the topic and elucidates the degree of angst and the complexity of the issues surrounding dismissal of staff (such as union activity cited by three principals, allegations of bullying cited by two principals). This is valuable and augments the existing statistical data. My research study shows the gradations of principals' perceptions and degree of detailed beliefs involving the school board and board chair in addressing poor teacher performance. 26 out of 39 (67%) principals cite management of teacher dismissal and teacher performance as a significant inhibitor to wellbeing. It is an area that is believed to be part of the employment contract and job description managed by the independent school principal. However, established interrelationships in the school community can be supported by the board and board members despite the principal believing he/she is acting on current information and in

terms of the employment contract. The principal can feel blindsided by some responses of the board and board chair.

The discussion of current issues of concern, such as termination of teacher contracts, usually occurs during a weekly or fortnightly meeting between principal and the board chair. More commonly these are weekly meetings. The principal believes this is an opportunity to establish trust between board chair and principal. As discussed this trust may be ephemeral and influenced by issues that have been historically established outside of the knowledge of the principal.

Research dealing with response after a school-based critical incident is often related to policy and response procedures (Kerr, 2016). A critical incident in a school and its community is believed to be a job challenge and can also be felt as a negative impact. Training in critical incidents and how to deal with them and the psychological aftermath would be beneficial. Principals receive training regarding policies and procedures, but believe the emotional and personal aftermath is not supported in any way. This research finds that each individual principal navigates this to personal requirements and responds with what is perceived will help. Dealing with critical incidents is an area that reinforces the importance of reflection for the principal, after the highly emotional incident has concluded. This supports Notman's study (2012). Reflection by the principal is believed to be an enabler identified by the principals. Five principals out of 39 (13%) take time to think and visit a place for isolation and reflection. One principal sobs. Five principals section off the incident in their mind and do not revisit it. The psychological impact of these responses may take time to become evident.

A surprising finding in this current research is that critical incidents may be perceived positively or negatively by the principal. A positive outcome is the level of respect the principal perceives is personally

received from the school community after his/her successful management of an incident. The principal may feel increased self-esteem after navigating a difficult incident. Principals believe they are expected to control themselves and the situation and to respond rationally (Tarrant, 2011).

Negative results are the impact on the wellbeing of the principal: the long lasting trauma involved, sleeplessness, depression and possible need for prescription drugs, as these current findings evidence. One current principal mildly states that she "*takes prescription drugs*" to deal with the stress, migraines, palpitations and sleepless nights. She believes that she is effectively dealing with the situation. She thinks she is masking and ignoring the effects. Her indoctrinated western world response is to 'take a pill'. She feels she is making a decision to ignore the incident. The actual educated response would be to look at the stressor and find a sustainable response, as noted in the coping literature and research, that suits and is effective for her. This would be sustainable in the long term.

The relationship between mind/gut/body is clear for the principal who finds that his body responds to a stressful critical incident, a student death, with a "*mouthful of ulcers*" that lasts for six weeks after his effective response to the community and staff. This principal believes he is suffering the after effects and he believes this to be a normal part of the job. The mind/body connection is obvious. He reports his visit to the local general practitioner for a salve for his mouth. This is a non-productive short term coping mechanism. These data clearly show that there is need for a sustainable and effective solution that is part of the training process for principals. This training is not required for policy and procedures following a critical incident or a heightened stress situation, but is for the emotional and psychological toll of these events that are common and inevitable when managing many human

individuals on a site and having ultimate responsibility for the duty of care of them. Research into the emotional consequences for the principal of being in *loco parentis* and how to effectively deal with emotionally charged situations through systematic preparation programs is a future direction, supporting other findings (Harris et al., 2013; Woolfolk Hoy, 2013) and confirmed here as a further clear indication of the perceived emotional toll that is apparent in my research. Knowledge and direction of strategies to minimise the mental turmoil are required. This is important and relevant to current practice of CEOs of companies and to leaders of other organisations, as the issues of critical incidents, unions and allegations of bullying are ubiquitous in organisational practice.

Twenty seven out of 39 (69%) principals lament the time consumed and the size of the role, both felt to be a job challenge and a negative impact. This supports other findings focusing on workload (Billot, 2002; Buckingham, 2004; Collard, 2003; Criswell, 2008; Friedman, 1997; Liming, 1999). From this current research data we derive additional meanings of workload severely impacting on the ability to service and maintain friendships discussed by 12 out of 39 (31%) principals. Eight out of 39 (21%) principals note that both novice and veteran principals struggle with leaving work matters behind at work because of their perception that the load is overwhelming and never ending. The principals feel they wish they had known that the job would consume their life. These are inhibitors.

However, without exception the principals then add the belief that they would have done it anyway. Added comments show the belief that it is an honour and a privilege to do the job and serve the school and its community. In contrast, the self-fulfilment received is perceived as an enabler.

This analysis draws together coverage of the multi-dimensional aspects of wellbeing discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2). The analysis gives reference to the factors in the definition of wellbeing used for this study (emotional, cognitive, social, spiritual and physical) and further explores broad comprehensive factors in studies by Charlemagne-Badel, Lee, Butler & Fraser (2014) and Stein and Sadana (2015).

6.7 Place

Place in the socio-ecological wellbeing framework refers to the principal's sense of attachment to specific locations. These locations may have physical realities and imaginative realities for the independent school principal. Place may be part of the principal's sense of identity. A significant enabler is believed to be the opportunity for time away from school, explicitly reflecting place and location as part of the overlying layer of the socio-ecological wellbeing framework. This research reveals the practical applications and lived experience of how that time away is utilised. 27 out of 39 (69%) principals spoke of requiring a mental space for their reflection and the belief that this space needs to be away from the school site because this enables their thoughts to be on other issues and enables distractions from the school-related issues that may consume them. One principal recommends having an office that is in a location difficult for parents and staff to find. This enables him to take time out when difficult decisions are required or when the stress load of the day is too heavy. He puts a sign on the door, takes a half hour or hour to sit and reflect on the issue at hand. Eight out of 39 (21%) principals believe respite is enabled by walking to a local café for a coffee, a break and free time to observe the world and be distracted from the intensity of the role within the school grounds. The belief is that this practice restores and renews one's worldview and restabilises one's attitudes if there has been turmoil or psychological pressure during the working day.

The natural environment positively influences mood and enables recovery from stress. Time in nature, forest bathing, is strongly felt by one principal to aid the remedy of negative states of mind like anxiety and depression. This finding adds rich detail, applied specifically to a principal of an independent school, to the findings of others (Keniger, Gaston, Irvine, & Fuller, 2013; Mayer, Frantz, Bruehlman-Senecal, & Dolliver, 2008; Tyrväinen et al., 2014; White, Pahl, Ashbullby, Herbert, & Depledge, 2013).

Reflection by the principals is believed to be crucial for mental health and nature provides a place to enable clear perception as “most certainly it is through our senses that we engage with the world and particularly make our relationships with nature and the elements...the very fluidity of movement ‘through’ nature brings forth continuously changing perceptions and awareness” (Humberstone, 2011, p. 497). This is particularly emphasized by the principal who uses body board surfing as a source of time for her reflection and renewal, where her cognitive processes are suspended from the topic of school. Other studies support the use of recreational activities and reflection (Zawadzki et al., 2015) but the data in this current research highlight that the use of locations away from the school site are essential for reflection and renewal to improve emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing for this particular cohort of independent school principals.

These current research findings additionally indicate that the aspects of social relationships and emotional wellbeing are further seen to be hampered for eight out of 39 (21%) principals who live on-site at the school in a regional location. The school operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with boarding students on site so “*It never closes down*” (*current, male*). Peril is believed to exist in the form of the school phone located beside the principal’s bed head, ready to ring at any time with

the news of a critical incident or event. Reality confirms this belief. The principals feel always on alert, constantly anticipating an interruption to sleep, and believing this to be an inhibitor for physical and emotional wellbeing. The implication is that the principals are unable to move away from the site for which they are totally responsible. They are on alert, present and in professional mode at all times.

The findings detailing the enabling factor of routines and rituals regarding time away are highly significant and supported by other findings (Zawadzki et al., 2015). In this study, findings reveal that the use of a local beach shack, holiday place, bushland area or local park is perceived by 27 out of 39 (69%) principals to be an enabler. It is time away. It is space. It is a place away from school. Principals seek holiday periods that are overseas so the culture and environment are significantly different from their day-to-day practice. This appears to be almost mandatory as a period for their reflection and distance from the intense thinking involved daily in deep problem solving of many issues. This finding means the principals use place as a practical tool and extends the information about the requirement for solitude and its use as a reliever of stress for increased physical, emotional, spiritual and cognitive wellbeing. Further depth is derived from the disclosure of feelings of guilt felt by one principal for taking time out and the concurrent psychological self-prevention of accessing this respite caused by the ownership of total responsibility to the school and its events which have no cessation or relief for the principal of an independent school. The buck stops with the principal. Another principal feels guilt when he leaves school early to attend an event in which his child is participating. A current board member observed the principal departing and made a comment about taking an 'early mark'. This principal was fortunate to have a board chair who was very supportive of the principal and who subsequently berated the board member for the comment. These data show that the principal feels

expected to be first on site in the morning and last to leave, as is expected of the CEO in many corporate workplaces. The implied meaning is that it is appropriate and correct to feel guilt if the leader departs earlier than colleagues and subordinates in the workplace. This conception of guilt is built up by years of professional practice in schools, firstly as a class teacher, when constant attendance through the day is a requirement. The teacher arrives before students to prepare lessons for the day. The teacher remains at school after students depart, in order to prepare for the following day. So this means that the principal normalises constant attendance required as the leader thus creating feelings of guilt when away from the school site. Despite believing in the importance of prioritising wellbeing, these principals feel commitment to the workload and demonstrate attendance at the school site constantly to model this commitment. There is no shirking of this perceived responsibility. There is often pride in the belief that their workload is so onerous. One principal specifically called this workload lamented by colleagues as a perceived “*badge of honour they wore to see who worked the most hours.*” He refused to believe in it as such.

This demand for presenteeism on the school site is unlike most corporate roles where technology can enable communication and there are opportunities to work from one’s home. Because students attend school, there is a demand for presenteeism that is constant, especially for the leader. These findings suggest that the ability to be away from the place of school and the importance of location is perceived to be a significant enabler for the emotional and physical wellbeing of independent school principals.

In this research eight out of 39 (21%) principals mention the advantage of having strong belief in God or attending the place of church and chapel weekly, sometimes as an enabler for spiritual and emotional wellbeing. If the school is affiliated with a religious body or is a

Christian school, the principal is usually expected by the school board to attend weekly chapel or church service. However three principals do add that the time is used to reflect and to think of alternative things than school issues. It is the peacefulness and serenity of the church or chapel environment that gives them peace and time for quiet. Two of the principals note that there is an implication that the time is to be used for prayer, but in reality, the principals are using the time for personal solace and to empty one's head of thoughts.

Independent school principals often relocate to another state for employment. Often the principals talk of the feelings of isolation and loneliness of being the leader in the school, when in a different location or Australian state. For independent school principals, this perception of loneliness is exacerbated as they do not have an established colleague base in each new area. In Australian government and systemic schools there is always another local government school principal with whom to share and network. Independent school principals do not believe they have this luxury due often to competition for student enrolments. Five out of 39 (13%) principals felt loneliness and articulated that they wanted more friends. One current principal confirmed the feeling of loneliness by explaining that upon moving from one state, where she had established friends outside of school, to another distant state in Australia, she had replaced the existing friendships with "*manicures and pedicures.*" The anonymity of the day spa staff enabled her to chat easily to these new friends, the manicurist and spa staff, without them being aware of her professional title.

Six out of 39 (15%) principals feel they have no friends at school whilst 3 out of 39 (7%) principals feel they have lots of friends at school. 23 out of 39 (59%) have friends outside of school. This majority of principals have intentionally made this decision to avoid difficulty with staff relationships.

6.8 Connecting to community

As a category in the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, participation refers to the ability to connect with the community of the environment in which one is placed. For principals in this study, this is the locale where the school resides and their home base. The socio-ecological wellbeing framework guides this analysis centring on the interactions with community members being a facilitating change-agent and interactions within various impacting structures. The principals' choices for friendships in the local community are believed to be limited. The partners of the principals feel it is difficult to establish genuine friendships as their title as partner of the principal defines their role and purpose. This is perceived by others to create an accompanying aura of the partner's ability to influence the principal. One principal also felt that employment opportunities for his spouse were limited. The partner felt unhappy with limited choice for friendships especially as the independent school was one of few educational choices in the regional area for parents. Therefore the imputed power of the partner of the principal is believed to be currency in the small community.

Two principals believe that opportunity for public discussion of community issues is limited and consequently the principals feel wary and loath to have any contentious views shared in case they are misquoted, misheard or miscommunicated. This perceived social prominence leads to an emotional and social reticence on the part of the principal and family. This is another finding as the perceived limitation of the opportunity for the principal to find supportive mental health strategies through social relationships locally is an inhibitor to wellbeing.

6.9 Responsibility and empowerment

Using the socio-ecological wellbeing framework to analyse the data, the ability to be a change agent facilitating positive improvements refers to agency and participation. When asking principals their reason for taking on the role, it is evident that a key intrinsic factor is their belief in their ability to effect change in schools, as cited by 19 out of 39 (49%) principals. Acknowledging the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, the power to change, improve and manage one's environment and the elements therein, is evidence of the empowerment of principals and the enactment of their responsibility as leader. In this sense, independent school principals have power of agency and belief in themselves that they can be effective change managers. They position themselves to be in control of their professional world. This is both practical and altruistic. Many principals mention that this belief is the reason for their chosen career path.

Responding to the sentence starter "I wish I had known that..." 20 out of 39 (52%) principals completed it with "the all consuming nature of the role" and immediately added that they feel they would do it anyway. Only one principal replied that she felt she would never be a principal if she had the choice again. This was because of the mental hurt caused by her unanticipated dismissal by the school board. To challenge a dismissal is rare as the perception of this principal is that this would damage her future employment in independent schools. She felt it to be advantageous to resign and retreat.

Principals know that they should prioritize wellbeing. They have the responsibility. They have the power to organise their day. Their awareness level is believed to be high. However their ability to commit to a routine to enable wellbeing is perceived to be limited. They often cite the lack of time and the demanding level of the job which impacts

on their perceived ability to prioritize wellbeing, so ultimately they do not. The data tell that 27 out of 39 (69%) principals feel they are subject to a variety of demands during the school day that prevent them from completing their tasks and challenges within the working day. This echoes the work of Lunau, Bambra, Eikemo, van der Wel, & Dragano (2014), studying work-life balance in European welfare states, finding that poor wellbeing results from poor work-life balance.

Thirteen out of 39 (13%) principals do feel they prioritize their wellbeing. This has occurred after a tipping point or an event that created significant impact on their mental or physical health. The causes of the tipping points range across the following:

- A student ran away from school and a formal search was required by authorities. The principal learnt that she cannot help people if she is not calm and well. Having a coach made her realise that the event was not her fault.
- A principal became aware of the need for a stress release and thus a perspective change as to how he prioritised the events in his day. He was more aware of the importance of wellbeing.
- A principal was getting really pulled down by the stresses and tiredness and realised things were not in balance. She was not convinced she really loved what she was doing.
- A principal realised that *"it never gets easy. It just ceases to be challenging."*
- A principal simply stated *"I want to laugh."*
- A principal was saddened that the job *"does make you harder"* and you grow a thick skin and *"that's not necessarily a bad thing but it's...something to regret."*
- *"I just really want to get a life."*

These comments allude to a realisation by these individuals that their personality is altered by the role. They want to laugh. They want to seek pleasure rather than challenge all the time. They want to be light

hearted and carefree. The comments imply that the role has burdened them with stress and this has resulted in a different demeanour than their natural disposition would display. These current findings therefore recognise the requirement for active prevention of disregard for prioritisation of wellbeing and application of the strategies to enact wellbeing.

Twenty-eight out of 39 (72%) principals believe in the importance of regular physical exercise for wellbeing. The responsibility to respond is theirs. Personal willpower is key to this. Nine out of 39 (23%) principals believe their empowerment to do so is limited because it is difficult to program into their daily schedule but they make a determined effort. The perceived importance of diet is cited by 10 out of 39 (26%) principals as is the use of cooking routines or rituals to prepare healthy meals for physical strength. Five out of 39 (13%) principals perceive these routines to be a respite and use the preparation time for reflection. This subtlety about the use of cooking preparation as a perceived strategy for stress release is a refinement evidenced with this group of Australian principals. It provides an unanticipated aspect believed to provide increased wellbeing.

6.10 Autonomy and independence

The principal has autonomy and independence over school management and administration. The school board has autonomy and independence regarding the management of the principal. This current thematic analysis has shown that this interaction is mired in power exchanges dependent on the relationship established between the two protagonists and its longevity which is also impacted by unseen and unintended factors and impacts. This supports the findings of Leggett et al. (2016).

Fourteen out of 39 (36%) principals confirm that boards and board chairs need more knowledge about their specific role and would benefit from knowledge about pedagogy so that the educational implications of decisions are more deeply understood. Previous studies have found that boards have challenges regarding the skill sets of members (Taylor et al., 1996) and understanding of their role (Gray et al., 2013). This impacts on effective performance (Leggett et al., 2016).

Nine out of 39 (23%) principals report that the board chair is believed to be highly important as the arbiter of discussion topics at board meetings. For example, often board meetings may become focused on management issues. This is the purview of the principal, listed in the position description. The board is there to provide strategic direction and the vision for the school. This is an area of disquiet for the principal. The principal is loath to publicly, at a board meeting, state that the issues being discussed are not appropriate for the board meeting. The principal relies on the knowledge and power of the chair. Fifteen out of 39 (38%) principals maintain this knowledge is lacking. These current research findings show that this is an area of aggravation and adverse affect for the principals. It is a positive affect if the board chair knows to discipline the board members if they err because the principal feels that it is not his/her purview and it would be overstepping the mark to do so. This finding has not come up previously in research in the independent sector. Its relevance and impact is widespread for all corporate boards and members.

The current findings reveal that five out of 39 (13%) principals feel disappointed that the board has set no key performance indicators for the principal to achieve. Some boards have directed that these are for the principal to create. The data indicate an unease is often experienced by the principal due to the perceived lack of professionalism of the school board. In contrast, two principals feel pleased that there is no

formal requirement for key performance indicators as measurement of the principal's success in implementing change or improvement in the school. A recommendation of this current research is that board chairs and board members acquire training in company direction, personal liability and the legal responsibilities of board membership. This may avoid litigation and improve board professional practice. As a result this may impact positively on the wellbeing of the principal.

The role of the school board is to create the mission and vision of the school and guide its programs and strategic direction (McCormick et al., 2006). The belief thus arises that responsibility for the wellbeing of the principal is perceived by the principal to reside with the board chair and the board. The school-based responsibilities cannot be actioned without a healthy principal, so this responsibility to evaluate and ensure the wellbeing of the principal is believed by principals to be the domain of the school board, particularly the board chair. One principal believes the board chair is not effective in supporting her wellbeing. The board chair invites her to lunch, sends emails when information is sought, but the topic of wellbeing never arises. All discussion is based on school and its administration. Another principal is rarely contacted by the board chair. She believes the board chair is more concerned and involved in her own corporate life and has taken the role of board chair in this prestigious school as a strategic move for her corporate career. Only one principal in this sample was given a complimentary spa day by the board chair after her successful handling of a very stressful critical incident in the school. Other than this, no principal reported any explicit or implicit care offered for wellbeing. This is a significant finding because the reconciliation of this need to care for the wellbeing of the principal is not enacted in any way evidenced in these interview data from these independent school principals. This may have ramifications for the legal workplace safety provided to the independent school principal under the employment contract.

In the educational sector, a coach is a professional person, hired and paid, who teaches a client to achieve a specific professional goal with advice, guidance and training. In this study a clinical psychologist or psychologist is also included under this definition as it is paid employment. Clinical supervision is a professional supervisory relationship from trained personnel outside the organisation and workplace. In contrast, a mentor leads from previous experience as a trusted adviser and guide. In this current research, eleven out of 39 (28%) principals have a coach or mentor. Three out of 39 (8%) principals receive the formal, board-driven appointment of a coach as part of the employment contract with the board. These principals believe the reason is to enable the capacity and wellbeing of the principal to be perceived to be attended to. This is a form of alleviation of duty for the board.

Emotional wellbeing is believed to be supported by having a coach or mentor for 21 out of 39 (54%) principals. This need concurs with Reiss' (2015) observation of the need for leadership coaching in education. Moen's (2012) research also shows the improvement in relationships as a result of coaching of the executive leader. Tooth, Higgs and Armstrong (2008) and Armstrong (2007) report on the effectiveness of coaching for executive leaders, with which this study concurs. Other studies show that coaching for leaders is important for improving their practice in schools on an ongoing basis (Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014; Wise & Jacobo, 2010) and this study confirms this. However, this study's results in the educational independent school sector, suggest the provision of the coach, paid for by the external school board, is sometimes tacitly felt to be inferring a need for this support for emotional wellbeing of the principal. It is regarded negatively by two out of 39 (5%) principals, one because the cost is taken from her remuneration, and the other because she does not want a coach.

In three cases these coaches are part of the employment contract. Eight principals would value the opportunity to have the coach provided by the board as the principals already consider a coach as a necessary requirement. It is valuable for the principals to share confidences. These current findings extend other studies that show

the extraordinary value of asking reflective questions that stretch and challenge people to think differently and outside the assumptions of their everyday organisational culture and social milieu. When people are given a 'safe' space away from the politics and confining routines of their everyday work life, they can reflect and be challenged to see themselves and others in new and transformative ways (Roffey, 2012a, p. 223).

The use of a coach as a sounding board and to talk about problems that cannot be shared with anyone else was a finding of Armstrong (2012) and in this study the principals believe they do share deeper, personal, private issues with a coach or mentor. Four principals out of 39 (10%) have honestly and candidly discussed their personal mental health issues, mental breakdown, feelings of depression and burnout. These phases were identified by the board and supported with the provision of a clinical psychologist, or were diagnosed and managed privately by the principal. Due to confidentiality issues, the principals feel the provision of this support is valued. Only one principal in this current research felt suspicious of the reason for the board insisting she continue and maintain a coach after her first year of appointment to the role. She felt upset as the funding for the coach was a mandatory withdrawal from her salary package. She felt conscripted to conform. Whether this belief was partnered with feelings of offence at the lack of personal volition is unclear. What is clear in this current research data set is the positive feeling of support for the provision of a coach or mentor to enable the

emotional and psychological wellbeing of the principal for 21 out of 39 (54%) principals.

Organisational routines are another aspect that the principal has responsibility and autonomy to control. Technology often creates an interruption that is constant and intrusive, preventing time for reflection and renewal. Constant email and the use of smart phones enable the principal to be available 24 hours per day and the assumption and expectation is that this will be so. This is a job challenge and has negative impact on wellbeing. The findings suggest that principals adopt organisational routines such as turning the phone and email off at 6pm daily, cited by two out of 39 (5%) principals, and not reading attachments and screens longer than that visible, cited by one principal, to enable their wellbeing.

Five out of 39 (13%) principals keep journals or diaries and use these to record, reread and reflect on the good events in their daily role. This supports Carr's (2017) findings about reflective journals and teacher wellbeing and the value of journals (Seaward, 2016). The findings detail the relief principals feel when downloading the confidential challenges navigated during the school day. Their ability to share in informal conversation is impossible as the private issues involving students' and parents' welfare dictate discretion. Therefore the principal may diarise or journal entry without ever sharing the writing. Two principals feel clearer about contentious issues after committing the problem to paper. It is clear that this process contributes to emotional wellbeing for the principal.

6.11 Advocacy

Another aspect of the category of agency for effecting change in the socio-ecological wellbeing framework is the power of advocacy. This

power is revealed through the framework, enabling analysis of the principal's voice to guide, direct or mandate in relevant issues. The independent school principal has responsibility for advocacy for staff and school practice. Relationship with the school board is one of employer and employee. The existence of this hierarchy elevates the board chair above the principal. Yet the principal is often reminded by the board chair that the board chair 'wants no surprises'. My study has found that the school board is significant in its impact and there are times when the board is of great advantage and support and a fierce advocate for the principal and wellbeing of the principal, as cited by 26 out of 39 (67%) principals. This occurs when the board supports a decision made by the principal that the community perceives as contentious or incorrect. The board also may show support and loyalty to the principal regarding the annual review of principal performance and remuneration. One board chair sends the principal to a luxurious spa retreat in the school holidays, after a critical incident, purposefully labelling it as for her continued wellbeing. The school pays for this retreat. In contrast there are times when the board chair and school board hamper and constrain the wellbeing of the independent school principal, as cited by 26 out of 39 (67%) principals. They may be publicly unsupportive of the principal's decisions. This may create a deep level of disenchantment which may affect sustainability in the role. The board may be questioning the competence of the principal in the role. This may be inferred by the principal to extend to questioning his/her honesty and integrity. This may have deep ramifications and effect on the relationship of trust with the board. What the board views as good, challenging, growth-producing advice may be viewed negatively by the principal. This finding confirms the quantitative findings of the Lutheran Principals Australia survey (2013). There are implications of this finding for school boards as currently there is little research that illuminates this relationship and the principals feel very aware that there are

inhibitors and restraints on how the principal behaves and speaks in this power relationship. Teys (2017) notes these restraints and argues that:

The principal of an independent school in Australia is accountable to the (local) board of governors for the school's operation, akin to the chief executive in the corporate world. This produces a set of non-negotiable and extensive responsibilities, and a complex set of relationships that require nurture and management, and exacerbate the role of the Head (Tey, 2017, p. 28).

Principals recognise the need to put significant effort into the relationship with the board and the board chair. This is because "the expectation now and into the future is that the principal is also CEO, answerable to the school board, and with overall accountability for the organisation" (Tey, 2017, p. 28). If the relationship is strong and positive, the principal feels happy.

The purpose of this positive healthy relationship from the principal's perspective is to seek to have board members on side with decisions the principal makes. If there is a change in the board membership, this can create a shift in the perceived level of advocacy support for the principal. This may be negative in nature. This is an area independent school principals believe can create concern and angst because all relationships are fraught but this relationship, if it becomes unfavourable, may ultimately result in termination of employment for the principal. One principal believes that there is always one decision between her and unemployment. This implies that if the board takes exception to a principal's decision or process or behaviour, they have the latitude to terminate the principal's employment. Often this termination is enacted as resignation by the principal, as this is perceived to be in a more palatable format of information to be shared with the community.

Principals feel highly and constantly aware that the board is their employer and also feel that the relationship with regards to remuneration can be impacted by extraneous events. Nineteen out of 39 (49%) principals' comments about salary or remuneration are positive in that the principals feel they are well remunerated. If the board chair is from the corporate world, the principals feel the issue of remuneration is just and fairly dealt with, as in, "*the Deputy Chair who is a businessman has said, 'If we were in the corporate world, we would be giving him shares in the company'*" (current, male). One principal states that his remuneration is appropriate for a CEO managing a sixty million dollar business as is his independent school. All the members of the board of his school are CEOs in Australia's largest companies.

Alternatively, 11 out of 39 (28%) principals' comments are negative regarding remuneration received. The principals feel that the discussion about remuneration is difficult to have, onerous to prepare for, and ultimately the board does not truly understand the size and demands of the role and the principal believes that remuneration is inadequate so remuneration becomes a stressor.

Eleven out of 39 (28%) principals believe that the levels of knowledge and commitment of board members vary because "*they don't see the daily grind. They don't understand the pressure and they do nothing to help*" (current, female). Because of the relationship of hierarchy, favouring the school board chair, the principal feels he cannot politically point this out. What is appropriate in a corporate world, reflected by behaviour of board members who are senior executives or CEOs in the corporate world, is often believed to be different in robustness and rigour to that from the local community world. This is the significant and distinctive difference in schools' practice compared to corporate practice. The clients are children so emotional aspects are always

present and take prevalence. The relationships with parents include emotive decision-making. Impartiality is often discarded. Socio-ecologically, place in the community world is profoundly impactful.

Principals feel that the process for recruitment and selection of board members varies substantially. Riley (2014b) notes this difficulty surrounds “the outsider who thinks he or she understands how schools work through having once been a student and is therefore able to offer expert advice” (p. 193). In small regional schools, there is often a dearth of volunteers. This has unintended consequences. Sometimes, principals feel that ill-informed board members hamper strategic direction and vision for the school. But because of the structure of the hierarchy, deference is paid to the board by the principal, sometimes involving strategic non-disclosure by the principal. This is seen as necessary by some principals who rate the quality of educational knowledge of the board members as low and therefore believe that it is strategic to neglect to provide information to the board about some issues about which they have little knowledge to contribute.

6.12 Summary

In this chapter, the argument for this current research and how the tool of the socio-ecological wellbeing framework is shown to be a lens methodologically to scaffold discussion and analysis of the findings has been reviewed. Utilising the socio-ecological wellbeing framework to explore data regarding wellbeing in the education sector is a contribution to new knowledge. The socio-ecological wellbeing framework works to reveal the perceptions and beliefs regarding the wellbeing of the independent school principals in this research study, and ratifies the framework’s use in an educational context. Further the socio-ecological wellbeing framework allows the themes and sub-themes

that emerged from the findings to be discussed in detail and in a coherent, lucid and logical manner.

The important aspects of the role of the board as an impact on principals' wellbeing, the importance of the principal's relationships with partner, friends and teaching staff and the need for spending time away from the role were explored.

The next chapter explores the conclusions, recommendations and the directions for future research. It details the suggested improvements and considerations for individuals, school boards, policy makers, those who employ these principals and the professional organisations and associations that liaise with the independent school principals across Australia.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“I always remind myself just how lucky I am to be in the profession, how much I want to be a principal. I’m always really patient about what I do. I just love it. No other way to say it. My strategies are to take a deep breath, know that I am making a difference and having confidence in my abilities. Just remaining positive and staying people centred keeps me grounded.” (Quote from current male principal participant)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with a summary of the research and then discusses the recommendations that arise from this study.

The recommendations are divided into the following four sections:

- Recommendations for individuals
- Recommendations for school boards or councils
- Recommendations for professional organisations or associations
- Recommendations for policy makers.

The limitations of the research are described and the chapter culminates with concluding thoughts.

7.2 Summary of the research

This interpretive phenomenological study was designed to explore independent school principals’ wellbeing by determining the enablers and inhibitors to leadership. The research was qualitative to enable understanding of lived experiences of the principals and the impact of

location and place (Merriam, 1998), the context in which the phenomena are experienced (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

There were 39 participants across Australia and the semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face, by Skype or by telephone. It is acknowledged that the respondents (9% of all member principals of Australian Heads of Independent Schools Australia) may not be truly representative and their perceptions may be skewed. This thesis argues that nonetheless these findings are significant, and likely to represent the experiences of others who did not choose to participate. It is also argued that the validity of this data, even for 9%, indicates important needs that are applicable across the sector.

The data analysis of the interview transcripts utilised rereading of the transcripts and NVivo coding. The socio-ecological wellbeing framework scaffolded and guided the data analysis. The framework contains the factors of relationships, lived experience, learning experience, place, agency and participation. Each of these factors contained themes guiding the coding and categorising of data. The sub-themes emerged from the dominant impacts in each thematic area.

The significance of principals' lived experiences occurred at work, in personal situations and at various locations. The findings indicated that relationships that strongly impact on the wellbeing of the independent school principal are those with the school board, family, particularly spouse or partner, friends, teaching staff and the executive leadership team.

An enabler helps a principal feel well and complete the role well. Therefore inhibitors are those that hinder the principals in fulfilling their role effectively. The negative impacts on the independent school

principal's wellbeing and inhibitors to leadership were in the following themes:

- Poor teacher performance and the need to performance manage staff
- The size of the job and the time consumed to complete it effectively
- Parents
- The expectations
- Living on the school site

The importance of relationships as the driving enabler to an independent school principal's wellbeing is clear. The contrary nature of the board in being both enabling and inhibiting also emerged from the findings.

The use of the socio-ecological wellbeing framework makes sense of the principals' experiences and meaning making, using a wellbeing lens to do so. This is my contribution to the current research in the educational field.

7.3 Recommendations

Table 3 below summarises the recommendations from this research. The detailed explanation of these follows.

TABLE 3: Summary of Recommendations

Individuals	Utilise strategies to enable wellbeing	Utilise strategies to avoid inhibitors to wellbeing	Personal response is personal responsibility	Improve process to ensure support of peers
School Boards/ Councils	Education sought	Responsibility is acknowledged	Documentation required	Accountability is required. Formal handover provided to all incoming principals
Professional Organisations and Associations: AISNSW, AHISA, ISQ, AICD	Partnerships activated with one voice to influence relevant bodies	Professional development provided	Educational knowledge increased	Collegial network opportunities created and provided
Policy Makers: ASC, CECNSW, QCEC, CSA, AACS	Intentional partnerships actively mandate support for wellbeing of the principal	Responsibility acknowledged formally in all documents	Ongoing and updated survey of school board accordance with requirements to support wellbeing of the principal	Collegial network opportunities created and provided

7.3.1 Recommendations for individuals

After the analysis of the data looking through the lens of wellbeing and its definition comprising the elements of social, spiritual, emotional, cognitive and physical wellbeing, the following recommendations are made for independent school principals:

1. Actively use strategies to enhance and enable wellbeing
2. Consistently reflect on the level of personal wellbeing
3. Develop a personal routine
4. Pay disciplined adherence to the routine
5. Debrief daily to a spouse or friend
6. Continue to nurture relationships and prioritise relationships
7. Reflect on practice
8. Recharge through time away
9. Utilise strategies to avoid inhibitors, such as organisational routines
10. Acknowledge that individual wellbeing is one's personal responsibility
11. Act on that knowledge. This must be done by the principal; it cannot be delegated. Take responsibility for one's own personal wellbeing.
12. Support peers actively through network opportunities, informal meetings and peer mentoring. Actively seek to inquire after a colleague's wellbeing, offer counsel and seek feedback to monitor and ensure wellness.

All these are the responsibility of the individual. They are not tasks that may be delegated. Time for attention to wellbeing needs to be formally scheduled into the calendar of the principal so that these recommendations are supported and so that principals may enact them.

7.3.2 Recommendations for boards and councils

These recommendations arose from separating the data relating to the school board and council. The perceptions of the principals led to the following strong desirables to enhance the supportive role of the school board and its members. Minimising risk to the wellbeing of the principal and increasing accountability for the wellbeing of the independent school principal, enhances effective leadership.

1. Education

It is suggested that the chair of the board or council attend formal training or education in the specific role of the school board, legal responsibilities and ramifications, effective business communication and team leadership. Completion of AICD Company Directors' Course is recommended.

2. Responsibility

The individual board members require training regarding their responsibility and role statement. Currently there is no mandatory requirement for this. This action needs to be acknowledged as a formal responsibility or perhaps requirement prior to board membership. Board members need to be advised of their role for strategic management and vision of the school to avoid trespassing into day-to-day management and administration of the school. Responsibility for such advice is the role of the board chair.

Increase trust in the decision making of the principal who has been intentionally recruited for the strategic purpose and achievement of the school's vision. Interrogate any decision for termination of the contract of the principal to ensure it is a sound decision, unaffected by personal issues.

It has been concerning over the last 18 months or so to see some school boards adopt what appears to be an increasingly common corporate practice: to address the imperative to adapt and innovate by replacing the CEO. But, as we know, a change of Head is not a guarantee of change in the body. It takes time to grow and embed cultures of professional learning and to create learning communities (Spiller, 2017).

If termination of the contract of employment of the principal is enacted by the board, as part of the exit strategy in the contract, build in a requirement for provision, by the board, of access to counselling services for the principal. This is a sign of pastoral care and an indicator of a sophisticated and improved culture. This would lead to an increased reputation as the school of choice for principals.

3. Documentation

The board or council is recommended to share with the principal, formal written documentation evidencing the board's attention to the wellbeing of the independent school principal and the steps and strategies that have been employed. This should be part of the negotiated employment contract. A reference to the success or limitation of the strategies should be required as part of the annual review process. Future planning should be evidenced as a result of the assessment process. This may become a differentiator indicated in the selection process showing the school of choice for the independent school principal. The school that cares may become a desirable destination. This models best practice for all stakeholders and society in general. The recommendation is to remove the rhetoric and create best practice.

4. Accountability

The school board or council is accountable to the principal regarding evidence of specific support structures to target wellbeing. Just as the

board is responsible for the financial health of the school, under the management of the principal, the school board should be responsible for the wellbeing of the principal by providing opportunities for pursuit of wellbeing as a mandatory component in a contractual package.

While for many schools excellent handover practices and processes are in place, there are some where they are not and this data has shown that this has a detrimental impact. This gap must be redressed. A formal handover and induction program for the incoming principal should be provided in all schools. This may be in the format of a handover from the previous principal, or an induction process led by the board chair. The principal should have ample time and opportunity to ensure knowledge of the culture of the school and if there is a suitable match. In terms of philosophical approach and courage to enact improvements, the board has to be explicit and consistent in its support of the incoming principal if the board has sought a leader who will master a change of direction, vision or improvement in the school. As the current research evidence shows, some principals are sought to improve school practice and because the board is confronted by the actual process, board support may be withdrawn. Principals should feel supported because the complexity of the role and increased scrutiny causes stress owing to public accountability. The principal's decision to change staff members may lead to criticism and negative feedback from parents. The principal may feel pressured to justify decisions to a new community even though the board has sought improvement and change in teacher quality. The board should acknowledge this with action to support the principal.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be negotiated collaboratively with the principal and used as a measure of success and performance.

These recommendations should be voluntary initially before they become common practice. After a successful introduction, boards and councils should include these as part of mandated processes required by their constitution.

7.3.3 Recommendations for Professional Organisations and Associations (AISNSW, AHISA, ISQ, AICD)

1. Partnerships

The organisations that govern and advise the independent schools in each state should join to create explicit collaborative partnerships to ensure access for all independent school principals across Australia to the training and documentation proposed for responsibility for the principal's wellbeing and accountability purposes. They need to speak with a united voice about the importance of wellbeing of principals because these issues are common to all principals and their wellbeing ultimately impacts students' learning conditions.

A practical application of collegiality would perhaps be exemplified in reciprocal sharing by AISNSW and AHISA of scaffolds and templates for documentation, regarding principal wellbeing, in principals' employment contracts and collaboratively creating these.

For example, AICD could offer targeted training in company corporate governance to principals and boards of schools specifically. These training courses will also lead to network opportunities with board members of other schools.

2. Professional Development

The organisations governing and advising independent schools in each state should offer specific professional development to school boards and councils enabling improved corporate knowledge and pedagogical

knowledge. Knowledge of legal ramifications of school board and council membership should be prioritised. Awareness raising will lead to increased demand for professional development, as currently many boards are ad hoc and informal in their own board recruitment practice.

3. Education

Improvement in the quality and delivery of services and professional development offered is suggested for current providers, such as AISNSW. This is exemplified in the current offering to boards about corporate governance by AISNSW. It is currently a four hour workshop briefing delivered by Powerpoint and in lecture/discussion format. This would benefit from improvement because a more current and engaging delivery method, including tailored questions and responses relevant to the individual school and its culture and challenges, would receive more avid attention.

School boards and councils would benefit from training and the opportunity to be informed of the findings of this thesis particularly regarding the sometimes positive and sometimes negative affect of the board on the wellbeing of the independent school principal. This knowledge may surprise them. Currently though, some boards do not know what they do not know. My recommendation is to change this state of affairs.

Professional training for every independent school principal in psychological support for the principal after engaging in the management and resolution of critical incidents in their schools is suggested. Other professions, for example, social work, give debriefing and professional support after highly emotional situations occur. Formal training in how to cope with emotionally charged situations (as loco parentis) with a systematic preparation program would be useful as indicated by the findings. Without this formal training into the emotional

aspects of the leadership role, principals are required to action responses in highly volatile situations whilst professionally uninformed yet well intentioned.

4. Collegial networks

The findings indicate that AHISA, AISNSW, ISQ should be more proactive, encouraging and facilitating network opportunities in small cluster groups on a regular basis. The data in this study show that this sense of community sharing with peers is important emotional support for the principal's wellbeing. Currently there are state meetings and the annual national conference for members. The findings show the reluctance of principals from competing schools to share. Thus a solution is to create small clusters of voluntary participants for professional collegial support. Starting with a single motivated participant, these groups may form. The ability to review a potential list of members is required. Augmentation of this with retired, former and experienced principals ("Phone a friend") may assist.

7.3.4 Recommendations for Policy makers (ASC, CECNSW, QCEC, CSA, AACS)

The following organisations serve their member schools through policy making and effective communication, representing the member schools in the Australian national political space:

- Anglican Schools Corporation (ASC)
- Catholic Education Commission NSW (CECNSW)
- Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC)
- Christian Schools Australia (CSA)
- Australian Association of Christian Schools (AACS)

1. Partnerships

To inform those responsible for employing principals in these schools, these organisations are advised to collaborate to create policy to ensure accountability for the ongoing wellbeing of the principal.

2. Formal documentation proposed for responsibility and accountability purposes

A united voice about the importance of wellbeing of independent school principals would have a significant impact. Creating scaffolds whether individually or collegially, may support the creation of improved conditions. It would be helpful for requirements regarding wellbeing to be formally noted in employment contracts for principals of independent schools.

3. Annual auditing of documentation

Establishing policy regarding assessing and reporting will benefit improvement and document levels of the principal's wellbeing. This will provide increased accountability for achieving positive wellbeing. It will minimise risk of poor wellbeing of the principal.

4. Establish collegial networks

The data shows the high value of networking with colleagues for principal wellbeing. Collegial networks should be established that transcend religious boundaries to ensure the goal of improved principal leadership due to improved wellbeing, creating improved school and educational outcomes across Australian schools. As a united voice these organisations are powerful to effect change and improvement.

7.4 Limitations

This research was limited by several factors. Because the researcher is a past-immediate principal of an independent school and a member of AHISA, there were occasions where the participant principal interviewed

was a colleague known professionally or personally to the researcher. This had the added benefit of encouraging trust and truth in responses but later led to the participant seeking further confirmation that the results and findings would be de-identified and anonymous. The principals were keen to be reassured that no-one would identify them from the transcripts. No details relating to the demographics pair with the quotes from each source in order to limit the chance of recognition of the source. On some occasions a reader may seek to know if the principal quoted has been in the role for a long or short time, or is leader of a small or large school. As previously noted these opportunities for detail are unavailable.

The sample was not selected as representative but was the result of personal choice to participate. Thus there is the possibility that this group may be disenchanted or disillusioned, but the results of the research are still valid. It is likely that other principals who did not participate share the same or similar perceptions and the validity of this data indicates important needs that are applicable across all independent school principals.

The researcher's personal bias and personal experiences may impose a limitation on the analysis. Further to this point, Cope (2004) explains that if replicating studies it is necessary to remember that:

the open explorative nature of data collection and the interpretative nature of data analysis mean that the intricacies of the method applied by different researchers will not be the same. Data analysis, in particular, involves a researcher constituting some relationship with the data. A researcher's unique background is an essential part of this relationship (p. 9).

Thus the relationship between the researcher and the participants has both positive and negative aspects.

In describing the findings of the research the themes chosen are not the only themes that could be used. The interpretation of the researcher, using the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, led to those particular themes to be identified.

The data collection is confined to one in-depth semi-structured interview of one hour's duration. The analysis and interpretation derives from the member-checked transcript. The meaning and experiences expressed during the interview may not be consistent at all times. That is to say, the expression and the interpretation by the principal may vary.

7.5 Significance of the study

This study provides a number of important insights based on the findings. They have immediate, specific and broad relevance for application and contribution to knowledge of organisations that are composed of principals as members, such as AISNSW, AHISA, ISQ and national and international educational bodies. The findings are also of immediate relevance to AICD and school boards and councils. The study contributes knowledge to the gap in support for the wellbeing of independent school principals by identifying the enablers and inhibitors to wellbeing and identifying strategies that are effective. These are authentic and current for a sample that represents 9% of current member principals of AHISA and are likely to be applicable to the rest of the cohort.

This study contributes timely and useful perspectives to the field of wellbeing of leaders in schools. Whilst there have been quantitative studies of Australian Principal Occupational Health, Safety and Wellbeing (Riley, 2017), the researcher believes that this study is the first study to attempt to illuminate Australian independent school principals' lived

experience of wellbeing, with close attention to the principles of phenomenology. From this perspective the research is significant in contribution of the personal insights of 39 independent school principals into their way of perceiving and understanding wellbeing, prioritising wellbeing, enabling wellbeing and the strategies used for doing so. Hearing the voices of the principals enables learning and understanding about their everyday experiences. We are reminded of the deeper purpose of their vocational choice: to bring improvement and change to schools and educational practices in Australia.

The significantly important aspects of the findings are:

- The role of the board as an impact on the wellbeing of the independent school principal
- The role of relationships with partner, friends, teaching staff
- The need for explicit time away from the role

This research provides insights which make clear how to support the wellbeing of the leader in educational and other organisations, signposting further research directions.

The theoretical socio-ecological wellbeing framework is a contribution to knowledge that works well with this group in the educational context. It has the capacity to be utilised effectively in other studies within the educational or CEO context.

7.6 Educational implications and applications

When discussing independent school principals in Australia, Degenhardt (2015) notes that to ensure improved schools and education in Australia, our leaders need to be operating at optimum performance for this demanding role. This may be enabled by utilising the findings from

this research and actively responding. These findings may be applied to senior management positions of responsibility and leadership in corporate organisations as the effects of these leadership roles on health, relationships and longevity are negative. A similar study of high earners across varied professions and in multi-national corporations in the United States (Hewlett and Luce, 2006) echoes these current findings.

The current findings are useful as an aid for the education of school boards and board chairs. This is part of the high standards in due diligence required as the responsibility and duty of school board members. The current research adds to findings of a small study with 8 school boards of independent schools in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (Krishnan, Barnett, McCormick, & Newcombe, 2016). Board chairs deriving further depth of knowledge regarding the importance of the professional relationship with the principal is beneficial. This adds to findings of a small study of ten school boards of low fee Anglican schools in Australia (Leggett et al., 2016). Educational organisations and systems may utilise the findings to educate members as part of their core mission.

7.7 Future directions

Additional research is recommended to further develop and verify the findings of this research.

1. Inquiry into the possible link between student wellbeing and principal wellbeing would be worthwhile. This is because existing research into the school socio-ecological environment regarding the relationships between students and teachers, between students in classes, students feeling safe and happy and included in school life has shown a clear link between these factors and wellbeing outcomes for students.

2. There were 39 participants in this study. This study focussed on the wellbeing of independent school principals across Australia. It is likely that the recommendations would also apply to principals in government and systemic schools such as Steiner and Catholic. Thus the research could be replicated with principals of government schools or systemic schools to confirm and/or expand upon the present findings.
3. The field may benefit from a qualitative study with increased and representative participant number.
4. The research sought responses through interviews with independent school principals. The experiences and perspective of spouses are unknown. Interviews with spouses using the same methodology would allow the data to be triangulated.
5. The data could be sought from specific geographic locations (city, rural, island) and comparisons between groups established.
6. Research into how technology can assist wellbeing of principals would be pertinent.
7. Further study in depth as to the enabling affect of a deep faith on wellbeing, through a comparison of non-religious and religious groups, would be insightful.
8. Further studies exploring the effects on school success of the wellbeing of the leader would be useful. Does principal wellbeing influence student academic achievement and school performance? This current research offers a more intimate and nuanced appreciation of the role of the independent school principal and its affect on principal wellbeing. Finding the ways in which the wellbeing of the principal impacts on the success of the school would behove all schools and boards.
9. It is hoped that the socio-ecological wellbeing framework, a contribution to knowledge, will provide a useful starting point for other researchers in the field. Additional research could focus on different participant samples such as CEOs, university vice-

chancellors, senior heads of government organisations and be extended to the context of other countries.

10. It is clear from the interviews that the demanding, challenging and complex role is a motivating force for the principals, enabling them to embrace the role. This is one of the “paradoxes in the principalship” (Caldwell, 2006, p. 129). The principals mention the overwhelming nature of the role and the size of the workload and some question their ability to sustain this. Further research into this specific nexus would be valuable.
11. Collection of data from school boards and councils as to their concept of wellbeing of school principals and the concept of their expectations of the principal and their perception of the importance of wellbeing of the principal would be beneficial.

7.8 Concluding thoughts

The study’s findings reinforce the effectiveness of enablers such as relationships with partner and friends, learning experiences and subsequent reflection and renewal using time away from the location. It is clear that the wellbeing of the independent school principal is under stress and tension due to varied factors.

Despite all the excessive job challenges and problems, there is a sense of vocation that helps sustain these principals such that they would do it anyway *“because every day brings something different. That is both its inherent challenge and its reward”* (current, male). As a result of this research and the dissemination of findings it is hoped that actions are taken that may alleviate the inhibiting impacts on the wellbeing of independent school principals. If the enabling responses and strategies are not employed, nothing will change. The autonomy of the independent school principal in regard to improving and adjusting personal wellbeing level is absolute. The school board has a significant

impact that has the potential to be positive if the wellbeing of the independent school principal is valued.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethics approval ECN-16-108

SCU HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCU HREC)

NOTIFICATION

Expedited Application Approval

To: Professor Faye McCallum, Associate Professor Amy Cutter-Mackenzie and Ann Gillian Anstee

From: Professor Bill Boyd
Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

Project name: Independent school principals' wellbeing: Exploration of enablers and inhibitors to leadership

Approval Date: 2nd May 2016

Approval Number: ECN-16-108

Expiry Date: 01st May 2019

Dear Faye, Amy and Gillian,

Thank you for the expedited ethics application received 26th April 2016. This was considered by the Chair of the HREC Professor Bill Boyd and is found to be of merit, low risk and meeting *the Statement* principles.

I am pleased to advise you that ethics approval has been granted for this research project. Please note the ethics approval number above.

Your responsibilities under this approval are as follows:

1. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will report to the SCH HREC annually in the specified format and notify HREC when the project is completed
2. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will immediately notify the SCU HREC, on the appropriate form, of any change in protocol.
3. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the SCU HREC if the project is discontinued at a participating site before the expected completion date, with reasons provided.
4. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the SCU HREC of any plan to extend the duration of the project past the approval period listed above and will submit any associated required documentation
5. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will immediately report anything that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project on the Adverse Events form.

Researchers conducting a study in a country other than Australia, need to be aware of any protocols for that country and ensure that they are followed ethically and with appropriate cultural sensitivity.

Should you have any queries about the SCU HREC's consideration of your project please contact ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au. The SCU HREC Terms of Reference, membership and standard forms are available from http://scu.edu.au/research/index.php/dds?cat_id=1225#cat1225.

SCU HREC wishes you every success in your research.

Kind Regards,

Production Note:

Signature removed prior to publication.

per

Prof. Bill Boyd

Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee

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Appendix 2

Initial email seeking participants from AHISA

From: Beth Blackwood [mailto: Beth.Blackwood@ahisa.edu.au]

Sent: Tuesday, 13 September 2016 3:23 PM

To: headnet@ahisa.org.au

Cc: Gillian Anstee <Gillian.Anstee@scu.edu.au>

Subject: Principal Well-being.

Dear Members,

Please see below a request from a former member to be part of her PHD thesis research on Principal well-being.

I need your assistance to participate in two short interviews about your wellbeing.

Your ongoing well-being is vital for you and your school. We need to find out the factors and strategies that Australian Independent School Principals use to maintain their workload and enable their continued wellbeing.

This research is limited to AHISA Independent School Principals. Your information will be kept confidential and is anonymous. However, the cumulative data from this study may be shared with AHISA. Individuals will not be identified.

Please reply to indicate your willingness to participate in this study. I will be respectful of your valuable time and endeavour to work around your commitments.

The interviews can take place in person at a venue of your choice; at your school; by phone or by Skype.

Please email gillian.anstee@scu.edu.au Just type the word "Yes"

I will respond to your email with further information. My mobile number is [REDACTED]

This research has the approval of Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee. Number: ECN-16-108.

Gillian Anstee
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The Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia

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Appendix 3

Information sheet and consent form

INFORMATION SHEET

Research project: “Independent school principals’ wellbeing: Exploration of enablers and inhibitors to leadership.”

My name is Gillian Anstee and I am conducting this research as part of my PhD in the School of Education at Southern Cross University (Gold Coast, Australia).

Here is some general information about the research project. Once you have read the information, please complete the consent form on the next page.

What is this research?

The aim of this research is to explore independent school principals’ strategies to manage their role and to ensure their wellbeing in the leadership role.

This research is considered to be low risk. Please be assured that the interview will exclusively be used for the purpose of my PhD research and I will not be asking you to disclose any personal or classified information.

All participants’ information will remain anonymous throughout the report and only non-traceable data will be presented in the thesis and other publications.

In addition, all collected data (including recordings of the interview if you give your consent) will be kept in a secure location for 7 years and classified into general categories during analysis so your anonymity is ensured.

As a participant, what do I need to do?

Your participation is voluntary and you can leave the interview at any time if you do not wish to proceed. Should you agree to participate in this research project, you will be interviewed twice. The interviews will approximately take 60 minutes.

To make the process as convenient as possible for you, you can choose the location for the interview. A telephone or Zoom interview is also available.

The interview will also be recorded to aid the analysis but this will only be done if you consent (please also refer to consent form on the next page). As stated above your anonymity is imperative and no personal details that could identify you as a participant (including the position you hold) will be disclosed.

Participants may be sent a transcript of the interview and asked to validate the accuracy. The time and effort for participants will be kept to an absolute minimum.

Publishing of results

The results of this research may be published for academic purposes (e.g. peer-reviewed academic journals or presented at conferences). Most importantly, however, the collected data will be used for the researcher's PhD thesis, which will also be publicly available upon completion.

Your consent

Enclosed with this information sheet is a consent form for you to complete if you decide to volunteer to participate in this research. Your participation is voluntary.

Inquiries

Below are the contact details for any inquiries you may have:

Principal investigator Gillian Anstee

Position PhD Candidate

School Southern Cross School of Education

Phone Number [REDACTED]

Email gillian.anstee@scu.edu.au

Supervisor Professor Faye McCallum

Position Professor at Southern Cross School of Education

Phone Number [REDACTED]

Email faye.mccallum@scu.edu.au

Getting feedback about this research project

If you wish to receive a summary of this research, please indicate on the consent form on the next page and it can be emailed to you.

Ethics approval and complaints

This research has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Southern Cross University. The approval number is ECN-16-108.

If you have concerns about the ethical conduct of this research you can write to:

The Ethics Complaints Officer

Southern Cross University

PO Box 157

Lismore NSW 2480

Email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

CONSENT FORM

The Consent Form is given to and retained by the Southern Cross University researcher for their records. The Information Sheet is kept by the participant. The participant may request a copy of their consent form.

Title of research project: Independent school principals' wellbeing: Exploration of enablers and inhibitors to leadership

Name of researcher: Gillian Anstee

Tick the box that applies, sign and date and give to the researcher

I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above.
Yes No

I understand the information about my participation in the research project, which has been provided to me by the researcher. Yes No

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher. Yes No

I agree to allow the interview to be audio-taped Yes No

I agree to make myself available for further follow-up questions by email or telephone (if required). Yes No

I agree to make myself available to validate accuracy of written interview transcripts. Yes No

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I understand that I can cease my participation at any time. Yes No

I understand that my participation in this research will be treated with confidentiality. Yes No

I understand that any information that may identify me will be de-identified at the time of analysis of any data. Yes No

I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed or published. Yes No

I understand that all information gathered in this research will be kept confidentially for 7 years at the University. Yes No

I am aware that I can contact the researcher at any time with any queries. Their contact details are provided to me. Yes No

I understand that this research project has been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee Yes No

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature:

Date: _____

Please tick here and provide your email or mail address below if you wish to receive feedback about the research _____

Best regards

Gillian Anstee

Southern Cross University

gillian.anstee@scu.edu.au

APPENDIX 4

Semi-structured interview questions

A. LIVED EXPERIENCES.

THESE QUESTIONS WERE SENT WITH THE INITIAL EMAIL CONTACT AS QUESTIONS TO BE REFLECTED UPON PRIOR TO INTERVIEW.

What does wellbeing mean to you?

How do you define wellbeing?

How do you prioritise your wellbeing?

Why do you think you need to prioritise your wellbeing?

How has your perspective about your wellbeing changed over time?

AT INTERVIEW

Why did you become a teacher and now principal? Please tell me about your journey.

Answers to questions provided for reflection prior to interview.

B. LEARNING EXPERIENCES

What wellbeing strategies do you use?

What wellbeing strategies do you use to maintain wellbeing?

What enables your wellbeing? Your top 3

Do/does they/it work?

How often do you use these enablers? (Establish frequency)

What is the magnitude of the enabler out of 10? (Establish magnitude)

What happens when they/it don't/doesn't work?

Are these effective?

How often?

What do you do if they are not?

C. AGENCY AND PARTICIPATION

Has the management of your wellbeing fluctuated?

Why?

What did you do?

Was there a tipping point for change in your wellbeing?

What factors positively influence your wellbeing?

How?

What factors negatively influence your wellbeing?

How?

When? (at specific times?)

Are there triggers that set this off?

When you feel a mounting anxiety what do you do?

Does it work?

D. PLACE

Have you experienced a critical incident that has impacted on your wellbeing in the workplace?

Would you like to tell me about it?

How did it impact your wellbeing?

Did you change anything as a result of this?

E. CONCLUDING QUESTIONS

What advice do you have for newly-appointed principals regarding their wellbeing?

How could you have made it better for yourself?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about your wellbeing as an educational leader?

Finish this sentence starter. I wish I had known that...

F. DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE QUESTIONS

Gender

Age (in range)

Family? Spouse? Children?

Years in the role

Size of school

Location of school

Type of school? P-12 / 7-12 / P-6

Anglican/Lutheran/Independent

How long have you been in the profession?

Have you been the principal of previous schools?

How many?

Which?

Independent? / Government?

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