

**Institute of Education
University of London**

***‘There is a lot to be learnt’*: Assistant Principals’
Perceptions of their Professional Learning Experiences
and Learning Needs in their Role as Middle Leaders in
Irish Post-Primary Schools.**

Eileen O’Connor

January 2008

**Submitted to the Institute of Education, University of London, in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the award of the Doctor in Education (EdD).**

DECLARATION AND WORD COUNT

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Word count (exclusive of appendices, list of references and bibliographies but including glossary, diagrams and tables): 44,975 words.

Eileen O'Connor.....

Eileen O'Connor

January 2008.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research could not have been undertaken without the support and encouragement of many people. In particular, I wish to thank the Assistant Principals who participated in the study for their generosity of time. I am indebted to the Management Committee and the staff of the Drumcondra Education Centre for their support and for affording me the time and space, especially in the past year, to focus on completing the thesis.

A special word of appreciation is due to my supervisor, Anne Gold, who travelled with me on this five-year learning journey. Her academic wisdom and constant motivational support were invaluable and helped to keep me focused and coherent making this personal learning experience both stimulating and rewarding. I am also appreciative of the support and insights of Dr. Marianne Coleman who read the manuscript. I am grateful to colleagues Dr. Anne Lodge and Leonie Warren for their insights and comments, to Aidan O'Connor and Mary Norris for proof reading the final draft and to Grainne Haughney for her assistance in organising the final report.

I was privileged to be part of an EdD cohort who provided many laughs and relaxing moments over the five years. A special thank you to Roz and Helen who have become dear friends and treasured soulmates.

Writing an EdD while working fulltime is an onerous task. I especially wish to acknowledge the love, support and forbearance of my children, Dermot and Deirdre. A sincere thank you also to all my extended family and friends.

I am indebted to Norman Wiseman, a very best friend, for providing a much needed balance in my life while completing this work.

Finally, I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my beloved parents, Jim McDermott and Maggie Vaugh, who encouraged me to believe in myself and gave me a love of learning.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

REFLECTIVE STATEMENT.....	7
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES.....	12
GLOSSARY.....	13
ABSTRACT.....	14

CHAPTER ONE. Rationale and Context

1. Introduction.....	15
2. The Irish Education Context.....	17
3. Post-Primary School Structures	18
Voluntary Schools	
Vocational Schools	
Community and Comprehensive Schools	
4. Assistant Principals – A Historical Perspective	21
5. Assistant Principals’ Professional Learning.....	23
6. My Personal Perspective	26
7. Thesis Structure	27

CHAPTER TWO. Review of Relevant Literature

1. Introduction.....	29
2. Professionalism in Education – A Shifting Concept?	29
3. What is Learning?.....	31
Behaviourist and Constructivist Learning Theories	
4. Adults as Learners – A Process	33
Transformational Learning	
Experiential Learning	
Formal and Informal Learning	
A Learning Culture	
Barriers to Learning	
5. Middle Leaders’ Learning	41
A Professional Role	
A Professional Knowledge Base.....	
Facilitating the Learner	
6. Research Questions.....	45
7. Conclusion	46

CHAPTER THREE. Research Methodology and Methods

1. Introduction	48
2. An Issue of Methodology	48
A Theoretical Base	

Qualitative Research Methodology	
3. Research Methods	50
Semi-Structured Interviews	
The Research Diary	
The Researcher in the Study	
4. The Research Process	52
The Pilot Phase	
The Study Sample	
The Interviews	
Analysis	
5. Ethical Issues	58
6. Research Limitations	59
7. Conclusion	61

CHAPTER FOUR. Data Chapter - School Culture and APs' Learning

1. Introduction	64
2. A Supportive School Culture?	64
Learning in a Culture of Mistrust	
The Significance of Team in APs' Learning	
Learning in Public	
Role Conflict	
3. School Leadership and APs' Learning	76
Senior Management's Support	
Inhibiting APs' Professional Learning	
Lost Learning Opportunities	
Enabling APs' Professional Learning	
4. Micro-politics and APs' Learning	81
5. Conclusion	76

CHAPTER FIVE. Data Chapter - The Emotional Dynamics of APs' Learning

1. Introduction	85
2. Emotional Beginnings	86
Learning to Cope with a Knowledge Deficit	
Learning in a Shifting 'Zone of Authority'	
3. Learning to work with 'Difficult' Adults	91
Learning to Work with Colleagues	
Learning to Work with Senior Management	
Learning to Work with Parents	
4. Learning about Oneself	97
Learning and Personal Cost	
5. Conclusion	98

CHAPTER SIX. Data Chapter - Assistant Principals' Best Ways of Learning

1. Introduction	101
------------------------------	------------

2. Learning in the Workplace	101
Learning by Doing	
Learning Over Time	
3. Formal and Informal Learning	105
Taking the Formal Route	
Informal Learning	
Positive Learning Experiences	
4. Perceived Barriers to APs' Learning	112
Little Opportunity to Reflect	
Family Commitments	
Financial and Social Issues	
5. Conclusion	115

CHAPTER 7. Conclusion - Looking to the Future: Taking the Learning Forward

1. Introduction.....	117
2. The Current Reality of APs' Learning	117
An Individual Experience	
An Inhibiting School Culture	
An Emotional Response	
Continuing Professional Development	
3. Implications for APs' Professional Learning.....	121
The Importance of Self-knowledge	
A Holistic Approach to addressing APs' Learning Needs	
A Model for Professional Learning	
4. Recommendations for Action.....	125
5. Research Recommendations	128
6. A Last Word and the Dissemination of Findings.....	130
Bibliography	132

Appendices

Appendix 1: Legislative Acts.....	145
Appendix 2: Interview Schedule	146
Appendix 3: Letter of Invitation.....	148
Appendix 4: Interview Acceptance Form	149
Appendix 5: Respondent's Profile.....	150

Reflective Statement

Introduction

As a composite experience, my learning journey over the past five years has been very challenging but also enjoyable and affirming. In this statement, which builds on the reflection for the IFS, I wish to explore and explicate what for me were key learning experiences and how these have connected with and impacted upon my professional knowledge and practice.

An Evolving Professional Research Focus

Having trained as a post-primary teacher, I worked for 26 years in post-primary schools, both as a teacher and subsequently as a Senior Manager. Completing an M.Sc. in Education Management in Trinity College, Dublin in the mid 1990s introduced me to the joy of being an adult student and highlighted the importance of engaging in professional and academic discourse about one's professional practice.

I commenced the EdD programme at IOE in response to a perceived professional learning need. As a member of a 4-member national team, seconded from school, and charged with the research, development and delivery of the first ever Irish leadership development programme for newly-appointed school principals, I believed that, as my professional role involved the professional development of school leaders, I should lead by example and demonstrate a personal commitment to continuous professional learning. I also believed that it was essential to my role to be informed of current research and thinking in the area of school leadership development. Therefore, the focus of my research in the initial stages of the EdD was exploring aspects of post-primary school leadership in Ireland. This is reflected in the assignments completed during the first 2 years of the EdD where I examined issues such as Irish school leaders' professionalism, the affective dimension of the school leadership role and the role of school principals as lead-learners in their schools.

I was appointed Director of an Education Centre during the 2nd year of the EdD programme. This shift in my professional role had implications for my research perspective. The Centre is responsible for providing and overseeing the continuous professional development of whole school communities, which includes 350 schools, primary and post-primary, on the north side of Dublin city. Therefore I now had to be more aware of and engage more fully with whole-

school leadership issues. It was also important to build professional links with the local education community which the Centre serves. This is reflected in the research undertaken for the IFS and this Thesis. Working on the IFS enabled me to connect with post-primary school principals and to build closer links with that school sector which traditionally had remained aloof from the work of the Centre. The subject of the thesis emerged from and is an expansion of the IFS study. I was interested in exploring the much contested issue of middle leadership in Irish post-primary schools. I believed that this would assist the work of the Centre and also inform evolving policy re CPD provision in this area of professional learning.

Learning to Learn

The combination of the taught programme, MOE1 and MOE2, the specialist assignment, the IFS and the final Thesis has provided me with a rich, multifaceted and cumulative learning experience. I found the first module, the *Foundations of Professionalism* very challenging. I initially experienced great difficulty in engaging with issues of professionalism and also in critiquing the literature. The concept of the ‘extended professional’ and the call for ‘a democratic professionalism’ in education and how this has impacted on the day-to-day life of today’s principal led me to want to explore the affective dimension of the leadership role. This therefore became the focus of the two MOE assignments. What I found truly fascinating in the thesis, my final piece of work, is that the issues of professionalism and the affective dimension of leadership learning re-emerged as significant. It is as if my learning had come full circle. I found myself revisiting the literature on these issues with confidence and renewed interest.

The exploration and coming to an understanding of the epistemological concepts of positivism and constructivism as a basis for informing and underpinning educational research in MOE1 was a new learning area for me. I also found the formulation of a research proposal and the narrowing of the research question quite a challenge. The taught aspect of this module which incorporated workshops, discussion and debate with tutors and EdD colleagues on different methodologies and also inherent ethical issues were extremely helpful in assisting me in coming to terms with all of this new learning. The exercise of writing a research proposal provided an excellent base from which to progress to MOE2.

This first piece of research provided many challenges in that it made real many of the hypothetical issues discussed in MOE1. I had to grapple with the reality of being known to the research respondents and the risks of bias. There were also important ethical issues of

confidentiality and anonymity in what is realistically a small education community. Practical decisions on how to make sense of 35, 000 words of transcripts in a 5000 word assignment and the discipline required in having to leave out more than one could include was a worthwhile learning experience and a necessary training for both the IFS and the Thesis. What was particularly significant about this piece of qualitative research was that it afforded me an opportunity to build professional links with schools associated with the Centre. This commenced a relationship that has developed and deepened throughout the rest of the EdD research. I was affirmed and motivated by having the MOE2 paper published in the IOE journal *Educate*. Furthermore, I acquired a greater understanding of the importance of planning, time management and reference keeping, all of which were essential when I commenced work on the IFS and the Thesis.

My specialist assignment examined the issue of the principal as lead-learner in the school and explored issues relating to the school as a learning community, the knowledge base required for school leaders' development and the induction of 'beginning ' principals. The IFS study was an investigation into the relationship between the Education Centre and post-primary schools with particular focus on the CPD provision for middle leaders. The study linked my professional role with my academic area of interest.

The Thesis

Due to my learning on the taught programme and the IFS, on commencing the Thesis I had a much better grasp of the issues, challenges and requirements involved in designing, executing and reporting academic research. As stated earlier the research focus for the Thesis evolved from the IFS study. The main literature foci in my studies so far had been on aspects of school leadership and leadership development. I felt, however, that there was a gap in my thinking and understanding with regard to teacher/adult learning in the school context. Therefore, reflecting on an area of research for the thesis I decided to expand my learning and literature base and to explore with middle leaders their perceptions of their learning and their learning needs.

I found the learning involved in a new literature area of adult learning demanding but exciting. The very broad literature terrain was difficult to navigate but I eventually focussed on literature which supported me in defining areas I wished to explore with Middle Leaders in post-primary schools. Overall the literature exposed me to thinking about teacher professional

development in a new light - it shifted my focus from the 'what' (should be delivered) to the 'why' and the 'how'? It challenged me, as a provider and influencer of policy, to explore my professional practice and to examine how teachers' learning needs can best be addressed in the context in which I work.

Writing a thesis is challenging and I had an extra pressure, due to personal and financial constraints, that I wanted to complete it within the year. As I was not in a position to take extended leave from work I realized that the only way to complete the writing was by total immersion. I described the experience to my tutor as a strange form of madness - having moments of great insight and of despair, while still enjoying the challenge and feeling passionate about the topic!. This was the most difficult time of the five years. It involved feeling isolated, exposed and open to failure. The shared learning and mutual support of the group which provided a buzz and an external motivation was no longer available. It was the point at which one might feel overwhelmed and give up and where self-direction, self-motivation and emotional and intellectual autonomy are tested. One has to learn to search deep for what Valerie Hall (1996) terms '*resilience*' - the need to stick with or come back to the task when the going gets tough (p.162).

The EdD is both a process and an end product. The process for me has been my learning journey. It has informed my academic and professional growth. It has assisted me in becoming much more reflective and analytical in my writing. The five years of study have given me an interest in academic research which I know will continue to inform my practice into the future. I have also become more reflective in terms of my practice. The experience has broadened my thinking and understanding of organisations as sites of learning and has influenced my work within my own organisation. I am now more aware of my role as leader in terms of work culture and in facilitating and empowering both professional and administrative staff in the Centre to learn and grow.

I set out on this final part of the learning journey with the desire to inform middle leaders' professional development in Ireland both in terms of policy and practice. To this end, I am pleased that both LDS and the National University (Maynooth) have expressed an interest in these research findings with a view to informing their approach to supporting middle leaders' learning in the future. The findings have informed the work of the Education Centre also in that we will now approach middle leaders professional learning provision from a whole-school perspective as well as that of the individual learner. Furthermore, I am excited that, in

collaboration with LDS, the first ever two-day nationally funded pilot training initiative for middle leaders in Irish post-primary schools was held in the Centre in November 2007 and in early 2008. It is expected that this will inform and underpin a nationwide policy and training initiative in the future. What is particularly professionally rewarding is that the schools and Assistant Principals who participated in my research for the IFS and the Thesis have elected to participate in and are enthusiastic about the initiative. This is significant for the Centre in that middle leaders in post-primary schools are now engaging with the learning opportunities it provides. It is a small beginning but a very positive signal for the future.

Looking to the Future

The past five years have been a time of worthwhile professional and personal discovery. Pursuing EdD studies while working full time can seem daunting and at times almost impossible. It requires discipline, courage, time management and organizational skills. Most of all it requires a high motivation and a will to succeed. What helped me through the darkest hours was the support of EdD tutors and colleagues, my interest and belief in my research and also the desire as a professional to make a difference with regard to school leadership development in Ireland both in terms of policy and practice.

I have one last hurdle - the 'viva'. I look forward to discussing and defending my research and to building on my learning into the future.

List of Tables and Figures

	Page
Figures	
1.1 The Irish Post-Primary School Structure	p.19
1.2 The Management Structure in Irish Post-Primary Schools	p.22
Tables	
3.1 Interviewee and School Profiles	p. 61

Glossary

Department of Education and Science (DES)

The Department of Education and Science is a government department charged with overseeing all areas and aspects of education in the Irish Republic.

Leadership Development for Schools (LDS)

The Leadership Development for Schools initiative was set up in 2001. It is a national project charged with the development of a comprehensive programme of training and development for principals, deputy principals and others involved in school management and educational leadership in first and second level schools. It is funded by the DES.

Misneach

Misneach is an LDS programme of induction for first-time Principals in primary and post-primary schools. It is designed to prepare and support principals in effectively leading their schools in their first two years in the position. Misneach is the Gaelic word for 'courage'.

Second Level Support Services (SLSS)

The Second Level Support Service is a national initiative which was established in 2001. Its remit is to promote coordination and coherence in the provision of professional support to teachers in second level schools. It is funded by the DES.

The Teaching Council

The Teaching Council was established on a statutory basis in March 2006 to promote teaching as a profession at primary and post-primary levels, to promote the professional development of teachers and to regulate standards in the profession.

Education Centres

Education Centres, of which there are 21 nationwide, are statutory bodies which provide the infrastructure for the delivery of DES in-career development programmes for teachers and the wider school community. Their remit also includes meeting local identified teacher and school community needs.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Assistant Principals' perceptions of their professional learning and learning experiences as Middle Leaders in Irish Post-primary schools. The purpose of the study is to gain insights into and an understanding of the key enablers and inhibitors of Assistant Principals' learning, an area hitherto ignored in the Irish education research context. The study aims to contribute to the qualitative knowledge base on Assistant Principals' learning and to inform Irish discourse and policy with regard to the continuing professional development of this group of educators in Irish post-primary schools.

The literature called upon is found within the fields of teacher professionalism, adult learning, and continuing professional development. It serves the dual purpose of shaping the data generated in the study and of providing a theoretical lens through which data are interrogated. Using qualitative methodology, the empirical investigation is based on semi-structured interviews with 21 Assistant Principals, incorporating the range of Irish post-primary schools, both religious and state run, both genders and a range of experience in the role.

With regard to this area of professional learning, the findings are significant in that they have disrupted a prevailing silence and have made overt issues hitherto neglected in the Irish education context. They pose a range of challenges to our understanding of the complexity of Assistant Principals' learning. They highlight that Assistant Principals' learning is haphazard, time-poor, emotionally charged and neglected both by themselves and the system. The roles of school culture, school leadership and emotions emerge as significant variables which impact on Assistant Principals' learning.

The outcomes of the study are challenging for Assistant Principals as professional learners, for their school communities as enablers and supporters of their learning and for those charged locally and nationally with overseeing and developing a learning agenda for middle leadership in Irish post-primary schools.

Chapter 1. Rationale and Context

1. Introduction

The purpose of this research study is to gain insights into and an understanding of how Assistant Principals, as middle leaders in Irish post-primary schools, perceive their professional learning experiences and learning needs. The study also aims to explore how they are facilitated in their learning and to examine the potential barriers to their learning. The position of Assistant Principal in Irish post-primary schools is relatively new, replacing what was previously known as an “A” post, and came into being following the restructuring of in-school management in 1998 (see Figure 1.2, p.22).

The motivation to undertake this specific piece of research emanates from a recently completed Institution Focussed Study (O’Connor, 2005) in which I explored post-primary school leaders’ perceptions of the professional development needs of Assistant Principals (APs) in their schools. The findings indicated a dearth of learning opportunities for this group of school professionals and a need for research into their learning. As the study precluded the voices of APs, I believed there was a need to examine *with* individual Assistant Principals how they themselves perceive their professional learning and to lend their unique and individual contribution to the emerging discourse. I want to know if Assistant Principals see themselves as learners, what they feel they have to learn as middle leaders, how they believe their experiences impact on their learning and what enables or inhibits their learning in their role. The premise upon which this study is based is that learning as a preparation for life has been displaced by:

‘...learning as an essential strategy for successful negotiation of the life course as the conditions in which we live and work are subject to ever more rapid change...’ (Harrison et al., 2002, p.1).

Consequently whatever their particular roles or responsibilities in school, no teacher or school leader is exempt from the demand to be a learner (Claxton, 1996). Furthermore, what it is that professionals need to learn is being contested and is undergoing profound change (ibid).

Emergent thinking on school leadership emphasises that the authority to lead need not be located in the person of the leader but can be dispersed within the school (Day et al., 2000). Current international trends and research findings indicate the emergence of the importance of

middle leaders in schools (Adey, 2000, Turner, 2000). Writing on middle leadership in the English context, Turner (2006) suggests that:

‘..It is vital that a more sophisticated conception of the learning undertaken by subject leaders is developed if the training and preparation of the next generation of subject leaders is to be effective in the 21st century..’ (p.433).

Issues of leadership and management are no longer the exclusive preserve of the most senior staff in schools and the need for strong professional middle leadership is incontestable. While the building of a strong, vibrant middle leadership system is critical to the ongoing improvement of the work of schools, it is also an essential building block in the realisation of a future cohort of competent, confident and courageous senior leaders in schools (O’Connor, 2005).

Research indicates that very few middle leaders appear to have received any management or leadership training in the English context (Busher et al., 1999, Turner, 2006). The national provision of in-career development for Irish post-primary APs operates on an intuitive basis with no definite learning strategy or philosophical base (Sugrue, 2002). There is an awareness also that much of the current provision falls short of what is required or is unequal to the task (Ibid, p.312). The ongoing expansion of the work of the Irish national leadership in education project ‘Leadership Development for Schools’ (LDS) (see Glossary) signals the imminent provision of development programmes for APs in schools. This development coupled with the recent establishment of an Irish Teaching Council, which is charged with the regulation of teacher professionalism and professional development, brings into sharp focus the need for local context-based research into the learning perceptions and needs of Assistant Principals both to inform and underpin national professional development discourse and initiatives.

Consequently, the findings of this, albeit small scale research, have particular professional relevance in the rapidly evolving Irish education context. It is intended that they will contribute to the current educational leadership knowledge base on the learning needs of this cohort of education professionals. They will inform the work of all agencies involved in teacher professional development in devising professional learning opportunities for this group of post-primary educators. The research findings will also help focus and direct the professional development provision of the Education Centre, of which I am Director, in meeting the learning needs of this particular group. Finally and more importantly, it is hoped

that the research will assist Assistant Principals themselves in reflecting on their current experiences and in understanding themselves as professional learners with a view to experiencing enhanced success in their challenging role.

2. The Irish Education Context

With a view to providing insights into Irish post-primary education and to painting a meaningful backdrop to the context in which this research study is situated, this section highlights recent Irish education and social change. It introduces the different post-primary school strands and outlines the historical growth of middle management structures within the sector. It comments on current national professional development policy and learning provision for Assistant Principals in post-primary schools. It also addresses my professional background and explains why engaging in this study is of significance to me both as a professional learner and also in the context of my work as the Director of an Education Centre (see Glossary) in Dublin.

Profound cultural and social changes have taken place in Ireland in the past twenty years. In recent decades, Ireland has moved swiftly from a traditional rural society to one which is modern, liberal, cosmopolitan, multi-cultural and individualistic (O'Connor, 2002). The school as a microcosm of society has not escaped in this maelstrom of rapid change with consequent implications for the work of teachers and managers in terms of the change in their relationship with the wider community to include social issues, changing expectations and changing student profile and student needs. Societal changes in recent decades include: decline in school-going population, religious decline, laicisation of schools, changing family patterns and a booming economy.

The past three decades have seen an unprecedented series of changes at all levels of education in Ireland (Granville, 2005). The general educational issues which have impacted on schools and school leadership include: the decline of religious in leadership positions in schools generally, the feminisation of the teaching profession, the rationalisation and amalgamation of schools and an increase in school size, a range of curriculum innovation, changes in the management structures of schools, a wealth of educational legislation (see Appendix 1), an increased workload for school leaders and teachers with a further complexity in their role. Looking specifically at the post-primary school sector, some of its strong and traditional features, which existed prior to the 1970s, have completely disappeared. These include: the prevalence of members of religious orders in the principalship of post-primary schools and the

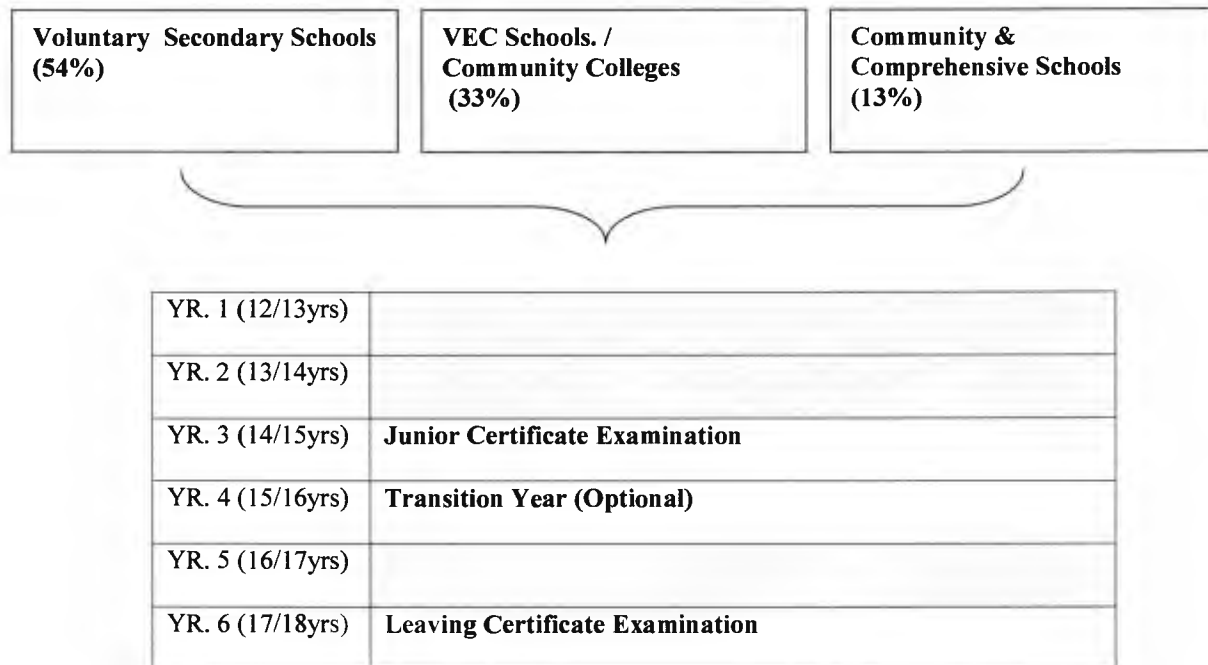
many religious among the ranks of teachers (Hogan and Williams, 1997). The most significant legislative development impacting on school leadership policy is the Education Act, 1998. Previously, educational policy in Ireland was characterised by a lack of legislation and an over reliance on Department of Education and Science administrative circulars. With a view to creating more accountability, legal and public, and more democracy in the education system, this recent legislation outlines the duties, responsibilities and accountability of the various players and gives key stakeholders a say in the governance and management of schools (Boland, 2002). It has resulted in mandatory Boards of Management (to include parent and teacher representation) for all schools. A more important and significant innovation in terms of the subject of this study was the mandatory introduction of school middle-management structures.

The changes in leadership and management responsibility and accountability levels, as outlined above, have been matched by a raft of curricular and programme innovations. The past two decades have seen major expansion in the choice of programmes on offer to students at post-primary school level and also the introduction of new syllabi for a range of subjects. The consequent increased workload for schools and school management has impacted significantly on school management structures and has resulted in increased delegation and a sharing of the responsibility and accountability for whole school issues between Senior Management and Assistant Principals. Increasingly, Assistant Principals are recognised as crucial to a school's success due to their ability to take on a wider organisational perspective and their potential to be agents of organisational change (Earley and Bubb, 2004).

3. Post-Primary School Structures

Grace (1995) emphasises that 'there can be no fundamental appreciation of contemporary issues in education unless they are placed and analysed in a "socio-historical" context' (p.3). In exploring APs' learning it is important to examine the school situations and contexts in which this learning takes place. The Irish post-primary school system, serving students from ages 12 to 18, has been conditioned by socio-historical and cultural systems. It comprises three parallel state-funded school systems (see Figure 1.1, p.19), each operating independently of each other and each with its own unique historical, social and cultural base (O'Connor, 2005). Insights into the historical and structural complexities of the Irish education system are detailed in Coolahan (1981).

Figure 1.1 The Irish Post-primary School Structure



‘Voluntary’ Secondary Schools

Of the 742 post-primary schools nationwide, 403 (54% of total) are ‘voluntary’ secondary schools. These are privately owned and managed, some dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries. The term ‘voluntary’ focuses on the essentially private character of these schools, it also expresses the manner of their institution, in that they came about not as a result of state action but rather as an outcome of the ‘voluntary’ action of religious orders who taught in and administered the schools (Diggins, 1990). The trustees of most of these schools are religious communities or boards of governors. State capital funding for voluntary secondary schools has been provided since the early 1960s and current funding from the State is in the form of teachers’ salaries and a capitation grant based on the number of pupils enrolled. Since the 1970s, due to falling numbers of those entering religious orders, the reduction of religious involvement in education has led to school amalgamations in some areas and school closures in others. Furthermore, the subsequent transfer of the day-to-day control to lay people has resulted in radical change in the in-school management and leadership of these schools. The vast majority of these schools do not charge tuition fees to students. However, within this category of schools there are approximately 50 privately run fee-paying mostly denominational schools, all of whom are in receipt of reduced state funding.

Vocational Schools

The Vocational school sector comprises 247 (33% of the total) vocational schools and community colleges, the second largest group of post-primary schools nationwide. These are administered by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) which were set up in every county and county borough (30 in all) following the 1930 Vocational Education Act. Vocational Education Committees consist largely of democratically elected representatives of the local community and each VEC appoints a Chief Executive Officer and staff to oversee and manage the various educational activities carried out by the VEC including activities carried out in the vocational schools and community colleges. Schools under the auspices of the VEC also have Boards of Management. Historically these schools were funded by local rates and national taxes. They are currently fully State funded. There are 'education market' issues that face Irish schools which are quite similar to those described by Ball et al.(1995) in the UK, in that there is a similar 'dumping' of the less desirable students in particular school sectors. It is this sector which accounts for a disproportionate level of what are labelled 'disadvantaged schools'.

Community and Comprehensive Schools

The introduction of free education in the late 1960s saw the development of the State-run Comprehensive schools in the early 1970s. These new schools, modelled on the English comprehensive, heralded the emergence in Irish education of what Gerwitz et al. (1995) identify as a 'social service' form of professionalism in which professional experts were trusted to work in the best interests of everyone and the resources were made available by the State to help them to do so. The Department of Education and Science decided that from 1974 onwards no more comprehensive schools would be built. The Community school can be seen as a development of the comprehensive school concept (Coolahan, 1981). Currently there are 8 comprehensive and eighty-three community schools (13% of the total) nationwide. These schools are state funded and are managed by Boards of Management of differing compositions.

All three sectors, as described above, are relevant to this study. The sample of research respondents (see Table 3.1, Ch. 3, p.61) is drawn from a selection of schools in each of the sectors.

4. Assistant Principals – A Historical Perspective

The OECD Review (1991) on Irish education observed that

‘the lack of a middle/leadership structure in schools is a significant weakness in the organisation of schools and their capacity to innovate, develop and respond speedily to emerging challenges’ (p.84).

It commented:

‘..In a situation where schools should be equipped to cope with new demands, it is regrettable that an effective middle management capability scarcely exists. This is a need that should be addressed..’(p.108).

In the 1990s under the government National Development Plan: *Programme for Competitiveness at Work* (PCW), in an attempt to share responsibilities for school leadership and management more equally between principals and colleagues, a new in-school management structure was agreed across the sectors as part of a national wage agreement (Sugrue, 2002, p.317). It involved the payment of a 28 per cent increase on the allowance to post-holders in return for written contracts and the duties as outlined in Circular 3/98 issued by the Department of Education and Science. It stated that:

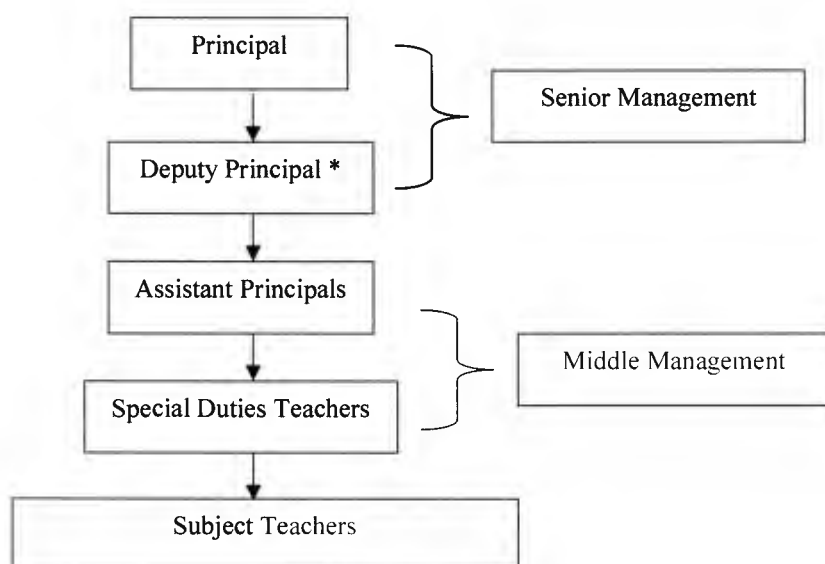
‘...Grade A post holders may be appointed to the new grade of **Assistant-Principal** (my emphasis) ...provided that they are prepared in accordance with their contracts, to undertake the duties and responsibilities of the grade assigned to them...’ (par. 3 (c)).

Currently Assistant Principals have a variety of names and functions across the post-primary sector. These include: Year Heads, Heads of Departments, Programme Co-ordinators, Special Education Needs Co-ordinators, Home-School Liaison Co-ordinators, to name the most common. However, a systematic approach to the continuous professional development of teachers undertaking these new roles has yet to be researched or introduced and as yet there has not been an official DES evaluation of this innovation and its impact on the management of schools. Indeed in some schools, teachers are taking on these roles (both officially and unofficially) without having formal AP posts.

To better understand Assistant Principals’ learning and their perceptions of same, I think it is important to outline where they are situated in the school management structure (see Figure 1.2, p.22) and also the historical perspective of their role. The official management structure in post-primary schools includes a senior management team: Principal and Deputy

Principal(s), depending on the size of the school and a middle management team: Assistant Principals and Special Duties Teachers. The Assistant Principal, whose learning is the focus of this study, is by title recognised as a middle leader with specific responsibility for whole-school issues. Assistant Principals assist the Principal and Deputy Principal in managing aspects of the school. Ashton (2002) suggests that as employees take on managerial responsibilities, their roles are broadened, demanding that new skills and competences are to be learned (p.23).

Figure 1.2 The Management Structure in Irish Post-Primary Schools



** A second Deputy may be appointed in a school of 1000 students or over*

A second middle management tier is made up of Special Duties Teachers whose role is less onerous in terms of responsibility, accountability and time commitment and consists in the main of repetitive administrative or practical duties, in some instances working as an assistant to an AP.

For historical reasons, the post-primary middle management structure has developed differently, in terms of the criteria of appointment and perception of the role, in the different sectors. It is based primarily on seniority or length of service in the Voluntary Secondary (religious) schools but in both the Community/Comprehensive and Vocational sectors the critical factors for appointment to Assistant Principal positions are candidate suitability and the needs of the school. To better understand the current position of the Assistant Principal in

Irish post-primary ‘voluntary’ schools, it is important to be aware of the historical role of the lay teacher in the religious sector. Referring to the lay teacher, O’Connor (1968) states that:

‘His responsibility ends at the classroom door. He is consulted with, of course, because he may have something to offer, but he is never part of the decision making. If he wants authority, that he may innovate, experiment, he must go elsewhere (p.25).

Consequently, compared to the Community and Vocational sectors, the management structures and the professionalisation of school management and leadership (Grace, 1995) of the ‘voluntary’ schools, where until recent decades many duties were carried out by religious, did not develop. In practice the ‘voluntary’ secondary schools developed a consensus style of middle management largely based on a voluntary code rather than on contractual duties. To date, there is a continuing tension between the teachers’ view that posts are a reward for seniority and past service to the school and the later view of national policy that they are the basis of a middle management structure. In the Community, Comprehensive and Vocational sectors, where only a few religious were involved, the post structure developed generally into a more easily recognisable management structure. A further issue is that, in the Irish system, opportunities for mobility and promotion within and across the different post-primary sectors only applies with regard to the Senior Management positions of Principal and Deputy Principal. For all other staff levels, including APs, moving to another school/sector results automatically in the loss of all seniority built up to date and also the loss of currently held promotional posts. Consequently, once one has secured a position in a school there is little inclination to move and the majority of APs are promoted to that position in the school in which they first started to teach. In this study, I will be interested in examining the impact of this lack of mobility on their learning. Most APs in the Community and Comprehensive and VEC schools are given a reduced timetable. The traditional 22 class contact hours are reduced to 18 in recognition of the extra duties taken on. However, as this is at the behest of the school principal, it does not apply uniformly across the sectors.

5. Assistant Principals’ Professional Learning

Educational policy makers and practitioners worldwide are facing major challenges as education systems develop from predominantly bureaucratic, hierarchical models to those which give greater emphasis to school based management and where leaders share decision-making responsibilities with colleagues (O’Connor, 2005). Consequently, ongoing professional learning and development is crucial both in school and out of school. Its importance cannot be underestimated, especially during recent times when there have been

increased demands throughout the world on teachers' expertise and growing expectations for their achievements within enhanced accountability frameworks (Earley and Bubb, 2004). However, research indicates that until recently very few middle leaders appear to have received any management or leadership training (Busher et al., 1999). In their research on the preparation for the role of Head of Departments in the English context, Glover et al. (1998) found that a large number of middle managers have grown into their roles and argue that such ad hoc arrangements

‘..may not be adequate for the changing demands being placed on themthese people need structured opportunities to reflect upon their role..’ (p.290).

Similarly, in the Irish context, while the issue of continuous professional development for school principals and deputies has been addressed, to date there is no research and, at the time of writing this research, as yet no planned national initiative to address Assistant Principals' learning.

Providing opportunities for teacher learning in Ireland has in general been preoccupied with facilitating curriculum reform, supporting organisational change and with easing senior management concerns (Halton, 2004). Furthermore the idea of teacher 'learning on the job' is not widely accepted in Ireland (Leonard and Hough, 1997, p.88) where the traditional school culture views teachers not as learners of their profession but as persons who have completed the learning skills necessary to teach. What is apparent is the need for the notion of professional learning to be theorised, disseminated, understood and embedded in the Irish education culture.

Furthermore, in terms of the learning process, teachers need to become actively involved in their own personal and professional development and the learning process needs to shift from being provider-driven to being more participant-led (O'Connor, 2005). The establishment in Ireland of the Teaching Council under the terms of the Teaching Council Act (2001) further underpins the current notion of the importance of teacher professionalism in the Irish context and the need to encourage teachers to embrace the notion of being proactive and central to the process of their professional learning. I concur with Sugrue (2002) who comments that while the infrastructure for teacher professional learning in Ireland has improved significantly, with the ongoing development of a network of Education Centres and while funding has increased exponentially, it is more difficult to point to particular policy documents which demonstrate

that progress has been made in the vital area of providing a more comprehensive, coherent and sophisticated approach to continuing professional development (ibid, p.314).

Earley and Bubb (2004) observe that professional learning today needs to be seen as a process to enhance life-long learning by assisting teachers to respond to ever changing situations and to exercise judgement in informed and creative ways (p.14). While the OECD (1991) review of Irish education does not employ the term 'lifelong learning', it does recognise that the concept of in-service education addresses the total teaching career in all its variety perhaps extending over four decades (Sugrue and Ui Thuama, 1997, p.56). Furthermore, in the Report on the National Education Convention, Coolahan (1994) commented that:

‘...in the context of wide-scale curricular reforms, very changed participation patterns and new roles for schools, a *sine qua non* is provision for in-career development for teachers’ ...’(p.135).

Building on the deliberations of the National Education Convention, the White Paper on Education (GoI, 1995) recognised that current professional development in the Irish context is ‘fragmented’ and suffers because ‘teacher participation is voluntary’ and course content is ‘provider driven’ (Sugrue, 2002, p.314). The White Paper also espoused the view that there should be a variety of forms of in-service teacher education and that the focus of such courses should be more broadly based, embracing both the personal and professional needs of the teachers as well as those of the school system. Shifting the emphasis to a more personal and holistic form of development will not be an easy task but it’s a necessary one if the vision of a learning society and lifelong learning is to be realised (Halton, 2004).

With specific reference to Assistant Principals’ formal learning opportunities in the Irish context, as outlined earlier, there is as yet no formal national programme to address the continuing professional development needs of this group. The national development programme for school leadership, the Leadership Development for Schools Project (LDS), since its inception in 2002, has developed induction and support programmes for Senior Management teams but has yet to formally address the learning needs of Assistant Principals. Consequently, Assistant Principals wishing to engage in formal learning opportunities have available a limited and urban-focussed range of University Masters and Diploma programmes in School Leadership/Management and elective 2/3 day courses offered by the Second Level Support Service (SLSS), a national curriculum and professional support service for post-primary teachers.

This chapter to this point provides an Irish education backdrop for research into APs' professional learning. The picture emerging reveals a complex and changing context and a dearth of formal learning provision. It poses the question as to how APs learn and address their learning needs? As a local programme provider charged with the continuing professional development of the APs in seventy local post-primary schools, the issue for me is how APs can be best assisted in their learning in the changing context in which they find themselves. It is intended that this study of what they think about their professional learning and learning experiences will go some way to meet the challenge of highlighting their learning difficulties and meeting their learning needs.

6. My Professional Perspective

I outline here my own journey in terms of my professional learning both to establish my professional learning history and to explain my personal interest in the topic as a way of bringing together my professional, theoretical and personal perspectives.

Prior to my current position as Director of a Teacher Education Centre, I was privileged to spend most of my teaching life, over twenty-one years, working initially as a teacher and subsequently as an "A" post holder and as Deputy Principal in a large progressive post-primary state school in an urban area of Dublin. I had first hand experience of learning *in situ* and this experience awakened my interest in teacher learning and specifically the learning challenges presented to those appointed to new management positions. It was this challenging role and the quest for answers that led me in the mid 1990s to study for a University Masters of Science Degree in Education Management. Those two years of part-time study were hugely significant to my professional learning. I found them to be most affirming and an important confidence builder. They provided insights into and an understanding of education management issues over a broad spectrum. It was interesting to compare and contrast my informal in-school practical learning experiences with education management theory. Also the experience provided me with a network of supportive colleagues outside the day-to-day job. In the late 1990s I became involved with the Equality Unit in the Department of Education and Science (DES) and the Institute of Education, University of London, in designing and delivering a leadership development programme for women as part of an EU SOCRATES Programme: International Programme for Women into Educational Management (IPWEM). While I did not set out to look specifically at gender in this study, it emerges as an issue at different points in this research story. At the outset I was conscious of the importance of

gender balance in relation to interview respondents. The findings also highlight gender issues and differences with regard to respondents' perceptions and experiences of their learning which are addressed in Chapters 4-6.

In 2001, when the DES initiated a national programme to support school leaders, Leadership Development for Schools (LDS), I was seconded from school as part of a national team of four professionals to research, design and oversee the delivery of the 'Misneach' programme to first-time school leaders (see Glossary, p.13). The challenges presented in this new role prompted my entry to the EdD programme at the IOE. Subsequently I was appointed Director of Drumcondra Education Centre where I have worked for the last four years. My background and experience to-date has confirmed for me the importance of ongoing professional learning throughout one's career especially in relation to the successful negotiation of one's appointment to management positions in education.

7. Thesis Structure

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 has set the scene. It outlines the rationale for and the purpose of the study, including an overview of the Irish education context and in particular how Assistant Principals are situated in that context. It also outlines my professional background and my interest in the research topic.

Chapter 2 offers a review of relevant literature under a number of headings. It serves the dual purpose of shaping the data generated in the study and also providing a theoretical lens through which the data are interrogated (Sugrue, 2002). Three sets of theories: teacher professionalism, adult learning and middle leaders' professional development are explored. Throughout the study I have applied literature from other education contexts to the Irish situation. The chapter is divided into three sections: Professionals as Learners, What is Learning and Middle Leaders' Learning. Section one gives consideration to the literature on professionalism. This provides a backdrop for interrogating the other two bodies of literature. Section two explores the literature on adult learning. This helped me extend my thinking with regard to educational management theory and learning theories which are relevant in the context of APs as learners. Because of the relevance of continuing professional development in APs' learning journey, section three gives consideration to this extensive body of literature. However, given the breadth and range of this literature, for the purposes of this study the exploration is confined to learning about leadership. However, I wish to point out that not all

the theory and literature interrogated for the study is included in this chapter. As new issues emerged in the analysis, it was necessary that I revisit the literature and weave theoretical underpinnings, not identified here, into the findings' chapters. Reflecting Wolcott (1990) who argues that his students should 'draw upon the literature selectively and appropriately as needed in the telling of their story'(p.17), in this study apposite literature is introduced, reviewed and critiqued at relevant points throughout.

Chapter 3 gives an account of the research methodology, that is the main epistemological assumptions implicit in the research. The approach involves the qualitative interpretive technique of semi-structured interviews. The chapter also outlines the research chronology and process, the procedures of implementation of the methodology and the analysis of the empirical component of the research. Reference is also made to the specific ethical issues and dilemmas that arise for me, the researcher conducting research, where I may be known to respondents and where I have a clear and known role in the hierarchy of education in Ireland.

Chapters 4 - 6 present the findings in terms of emerging categories and themes which are developed and discussed with supporting evidence from the data. Chapter 4 focuses on the impact of the school context and culture on APs' learning. Chapter 5 outlines the emotionality of APs' learning. Chapter 6 examines APs' perceptions of themselves as learners, their learning needs and their perceived barriers to their learning. The voices of the research participants are heard throughout so that the reader may glimpse and experience the force of their perceptions.

Chapter 7 considers the findings in relation to the study's research questions and the theoretical framework considered in Chapter 2. It sets out the current reality of APs' learning and the implications for their professional growth. The role of school culture, school leadership and emotions emerge as significant variables impacting on Assistant Principals' learning. The outcomes of the study underpin the importance of self-knowledge in the role of middle leader and also the importance of an inter-related approach to addressing Assistant Principals' professional learning. The chapter highlights the significance of the outcomes in terms of their contribution to the field of middle leadership development. The possibilities for further action and future research are considered. Finally the professional significance of the work, both for the researcher and those working in the area of middle leadership development, is considered.

Chapter 2. Literature Review - Professionals as Learners

1. Introduction

Three sets of theories are relevant to this study: teacher professionalism, adult learning and middle leaders' learning and professional development. These collections of literature, connected but distinct, helped me clarify my research questions. In this chapter, I explore initially literature associated with teacher professionalism. I examine current thinking on this issue and how it informs and underpins the notion of professionals as learners. The second section in the chapter provides some answers to the question *what is learning?* It explores some of the dominant thinking in relation to adult learning in order to provide a background and a context for examining issues relating to Assistant Principals' learning. This section also considers potential barriers to learning. The third and final section examines literature with regard to middle leaders' learning and professional development. It identifies what I believe are gaps in the research literature. The chapter concludes with the research questions that underpin the study and a summary of the research argument.

2. Professionalism in Education – A Shifting Concept

The discourse and practice of professionalism in education is inextricably bound to the changes in the social, political and cultural system of the wider society (O'Connor, 2003). Pressure on schools by social, economic and educational interest groups to conform, reform and perform has heightened awareness on a global scale of the need for a radical shift in thinking on what constitutes professionalism in education (Bottery, 1996, Whitty, 2000). Certainly, the notion of professionalism clearly defined as autonomous, concretised in terms of knowledge and responsibility, with the professional working in a confined and restricted way, is under scrutiny. Downie (1990) suggested that the professional self is not given but is continually negotiated. Similarly, Bottery (1996) asserted that 'professionalism is a shifting rather than a concrete phenomenon' (p.191). Sachs (2001) described the future professional as knowing, acting and communicating, realising a fragile professionalism day in-day out (p.193).

Barnett (1997) contributed further to this debate in expressing his concerns of 'professional life being reduced to professional work...its critical edge being reduced to problem solving in bounded professional situations' (p.135). He urged the need to extend the notion of the professional beyond 'an unduly restricted set of ideas based on competence and expertise - the

one who gets on with the work in hand' (p.132). This echoes Hoyle's (1994) distinction between the restricted and the extended professional. He described the restricted professional as one who has a high level of skill and specialist expertise and who embraces technical rationality with reduced discretion. The extended professional has a broader range of knowledge, which Eraut (1994) refers to as 'process knowledge', that involves making discretionary judgements within conditions of unavoidable and perpetual uncertainty, the hallmark of the modern day professional (Whitty, 2000).

Hargreaves (1994) defines the emergence of a 'new professionalism' associated with greater pride and self-confidence, which involves a movement away from the traditional professional authority towards new forms of relationship with colleagues, students and parents. This idea of the modern professional 'as a stakeholder in a societal exercise rather than being an instrument of managerial strategy' (p.190) is also advanced by Bottery (1996) who urges for a change in the conception of professionals and their conception of their function. Like Barnett (1997) he asserts 'the need for professionalism to be reinterpreted in modern life' (p.143) and for professionals to project the value of their profession in a shared context with the wider community.

Writing in the context of school restructuring in Australia, Sachs (2000) argued the need for an activist professional. She outlined five core principles which underpin the fundamentals of a proactive and responsible approach to professionalism: learning, participation, collaboration, co-operation and activism. She asserts that these values specify what it means to be a socially responsible and active professional for the new millennium. Therefore a desirable direction for school leader professionalism in the new millennium embraces a continuous development of knowledge and skill, the cultivation of judgement, and acceptance of a client-centred ethic (Whitty, 2000, p. 291).

One of the hallmarks of being identified as a professional and a core value of professionalism is to continue learning and improvement of practice throughout a career (Sachs, 2000, Earley and Bubb, 2004). This is one of the paradoxes of teacher professionalism for as Fullan (1993) notes we are not a learning profession. While student learning is a goal, often the continuing learning of teachers is overlooked. This has significant implications for the professionalism of Assistant Principals as they seek to define their role, responsibility and knowledge base against the current shifting Irish education landscape (see Ch. 1). Furthermore, if teachers and

other staff are not seen as continuous learners by the school itself, how can they engage their students in any meaningful pursuit of learning (Early and Bubb, 2004)?

Therefore, the notion of the Assistant Principal as an extended, active, and learning professional poses an important question as to how APs learn and what it is they need to know today in order to successfully execute their role? The next two sections will explore relevant literature with a view to answering these questions.

3. What is Learning?

It is a truism that the foundations of professionalism are provided by knowledge (Barnett, 1997). Discussions about professional knowledge and learning tend to be based on a dichotomy between theoretical knowledge that is codified in books and taught and examined on courses and practical knowledge that is acquired 'on the job' (Eraut, 1994). The traditionally held view of professional knowledge involves applying a body of expert knowledge to known situations in order to produce rational solutions to problems. However, while knowledge is a necessary ingredient of practice, Eraut (1994) asserts that simply mastering a syllabus of received knowledge makes a surprisingly low contribution to increased professional effectiveness.

Furthermore, the complexity of learning is underpinned by ontological and epistemological questions which address issues such as whether knowledge exists 'out there' to be known and understood and deposited into the mind through a process of learning described by Freire (1972) as a 'banking system' (p.46)? Or is learning an internal process involving the creation of knowledge in the mind, constrained by and in the context of interacting with the world (Hendry, 1996)? Behaviourist and constructivist learning theories relate to these questions.

Behaviourist and Constructivist Learning Theories

A behaviourist theory of learning depends on the objectivist or positivist view that reality exists external to humans and that the world can be knowable using empirical methods of observation and experiment (Crotty, 1998). It sees learning as something that happens inside the brain, separated from the experience and the context of the learning situation (Merriam, 2001). The theory is based on the perspective that knowledge is unchanging and transitive and once learned is then easily transported from the particular learning situation to different contexts (Hansman, 2001). It perceives learners as having deficiencies or needs and who are

taught until mastery is achieved. Knowledge is broken down into component parts or skills. Learners are passive, in need of external motivation and affected by reinforcement (Fosnot, 2005). However, the role of experience in learning is not addressed in behaviourist theory. To further understand this, I now examine constructivist theory.

Constructivism has a long history portraying learners as independent constructors of their own knowledge with varying capacity or confidence to rely on their own constructions (Fenwick, 2000). The constructivist approach to learning is fundamentally non-positivist and focuses on concept development and deep understanding rather than skills and behaviours as the goal of instruction (Fosnot, 2005). It rests on the conclusion that knowledge is not an existing reality 'out there' to be discovered but is created from interpretations and reinterpretations in light of new experiences (Mezirow, 1994a). It describes knowledge as temporary, developmental, non-objective, internally constructed and socially and culturally mediated (Fosnot, 2005). Some general principles re learning derived from constructivism include:

- Learning is not a result of development, learning is development. It requires invention and re-organisation on the part of the learner
- Disequilibrium facilitates learning. Errors need to be perceived as a result of learners' conceptions and therefore not minimised nor avoided
- Reflective abstraction is the driving force of learning
- Dialogue within a community engenders further thinking (Fosnot, 2005, p.29).

The constructivist view considers the individual a primary actor in the process of knowledge construction and considers understanding as largely a conscious, rational process. Implied in all this is that we as human beings have no access to an objective reality since we are constructing our version of it whilst at the same time transforming it and ourselves (ibid, p.23). Fenwick (2000), however, contends that this view does not attend to internal resistances in the learning process, the active '*ignore-ances*' that are as important in shaping our engagement in experience as attraction to particular objects of knowledge. Furthermore, within the constructivist domain, context is considered important but separate, with the learner fundamentally autonomous from his/her surroundings.

Consequently, social relations of power exercised through language or cultural purposes are not theorised as part of knowledge construction (ibid). Socio-cultural learning models posit the view that learning is not something that happens or is just inside the head but instead is shaped by the context, culture and tools in the learning situation. The implication is that Assistant Principals should expect their learning not only to include knowledge and skills to fulfil their role but also issues relating to values, people skills and self-knowledge.

4. Adults as Learners - A Process

Assistant Principals' professional learning obviously lies within the realm of adult learning. The question of how adults learn has occupied the attention of scholars and practitioners since the founding of adult education as a professional field of practice in the 1920s (Merriam, 2001). Knowles (1989) proposed a set of principles of adult learning - andragogy - which he describes as - the art and science of helping adults learn - in contrast to pedagogy, the art and science of helping children learn. It is a reaction to the traditional teaching which places the learner in the position of responding to what the teacher provides. Boud (1985) contended that this thinking has had the most impact on the mainstream of adult education theory. It placed the unique goals/needs of the learner as central to the process and took account of the necessary supportive interpersonal climate for learning (p. 225).

Fundamental elements derived from the key aspects of andragogy are that effective learning is an active rather than a passive process and that professional learning cannot succeed if teachers, as reflective practitioners and learners, are passive recipients instead of active participants. Central to the discourse on andragogy is the notion that engagement by teachers in exploration, action and reflection is critical to their learning. It means that the exploration of new ideas, skills and bodies of knowledge does not take place in a vacuum but are set within the learners' past, present and future experiences and are mediated by prior experience, values and beliefs. This thinking is particularly relevant to this study which aims to focus on Assistant Principals' perceptions of their learning and the impact of their experiences on their professional growth as adult learners.

Transformational Learning

In an attempt to provide an appropriate framework for adult learning, Mezirow (1994b) constructed 'an abstract theoretical model of adult learning' (p.243). This model of transformational theory or perspective transformation theory posits critical reflection by the learner as central to the learning process, in that critical reflection as an adult leads to the transformation of meaning structures. Baumgartner (2001) suggests that much of what we know is additive in nature, 'we add on to what we already know,' (p.16), and that transformational learning emphasises 'how we know' and transforms the way we see ourselves and our world. Considering the social nature of schooling and education, transformation theories of learning are significant to this study.

Key characteristics of andragogy and transformational learning are self-directed learning and critical reflection. Self-directed learning indicates a degree of control by the learner over what is learnt and how learning takes place. Critical thinking appears to have three parts: accessing new ideas or information, checking against prior knowledge and honing through discourse with others. Garrison (1992) contested that the learner could not create new knowledge through self-reflection alone without verification by interaction with others and by lived experience. He argued that self-directed learning and critical thinking required an integrative theory on the grounds that:

‘...to be a critical thinker, one needs to be self-directed, and conversely to be a self-directed learner, one needs to be a critical thinker...’ (p.145).

Central to this is a critical aspect of adult learning involving self-awareness and self-monitoring, which Eraut (1994) refers to as ‘control knowledge’ - the need for the learner to learn and know about himself/herself. In this study I will be interested to see APs’ awareness of how and what they learn about themselves.

Experiential Learning

The dominant conception of learning in our culture is that learning involves the explicit acquisition of externalised codified knowledge. The learning of practical knowledge is little studied, little discussed and little valued (Eraut, 1994, p.33). Though analysis of such activities as problem-solving, decision-making and communication can be found in books, such codified knowledge is clearly different in kind from that experience-derived know-how which professionals intuitively use (Ibid., p.42).

The term experiential learning is often used both to distinguish ongoing meaning-making from theoretical knowledge and non-directed informal life experience from formal education (Fenwick, 2000). The literature on experiential learning emphasises its integrative nature and the centrality of being and doing when it comes to learning as adults (Boud and Griffin, 1987, Knowles, 1989). Boud et al. (1993) identified five important propositions about learning from experience:

- ‘Experience is the foundation of and the stimulus for learning ‘ (p.8)
- ‘Learners actively construct their experience’ (p.10)
- ‘Learning is a holistic experience ‘ (p.12)
- ‘Learning is socially and emotionally constructed’ (p.13)

- ‘Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs’ (p.14).

Experiential learning has therefore many similar points of reference with constructivism and andragogy as outlined above. One of the most influential exponents of experiential learning was Kolb (1984). He drew particularly on the thinking of the 20th century Russian psychologist Vygotsky who based his work on the concept that all human activities take place in a cultural context with many levels of interactions, shared beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, structured relationships and symbol systems (Hansman, 2001). In the model developed by Kolb, learning is presented as a process of constructing knowledge rather than in terms of learning outcomes. It implies that learning may be facilitated through the learner engaging in a continuing cycle of sequential activities, of experiencing, reflecting, conceptualising and experimenting.

Such learning could form part of an Assistant Principal’s work. A problem might be encountered, instinctively solved, reflected on later and the experience carried forward to be used if similar situations recur. Kolb (1984) described the experiential learning process as ‘holistic’ and ‘integrative’ combining ‘experience, perception, cognition and behaviour’ (p.21). He stated that learning should be ‘emergent through accommodation and assimilation’ (p.26), as professionals assimilate new information to their existing frameworks, neglecting those aspects that do not fit and periodically adjusting or accommodating those frameworks the better to fit their newly acquired knowledge (Eraut, 1994). In this study I will be interested in exploring Assistant Principals’ perceptions and interpretations of how experience influences and assists them in their learning.

Human learning is a complex process which is not fully understood (Merriam, 2001). It is clear that much of the learning in which adults engage requires considerable effort on the part of the learners, not just in receiving new ideas but in assimilating them, adjusting their behaviour in the light of them and taking many different kinds of action. Of great importance in this is the way in which learners process the experiences they have: the ways in which they reflect (Boud et al. 1985). The importance of reflection is highlighted in the literature on adult learning (Boud and Griffin, 1987, Fenwick, 2000). Boud et al. (1985) define reflection in the context of learning as:

‘...A generic term for those intellectual and affective activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences in order to lead to new understandings and appreciations...’ (p.19).

Theorists contend that reflection is an essential tool for successfully handling the fluid, dynamic and complex nature of practice (Schön, 1991). A significant body of theory and critique has developed to debate just how reflection-on-experience unfolds in different contexts to create knowledge (Fenwick, 2000). Schön (1996) highlights two types of learning:

- Reflection in action - where practitioners make spontaneous adjustments to their practice on a 'knowing in action' or 'feel' for the situation
- Reflection on action - a more deliberate form of reflection, which after the event may focus on the action itself or its outcomes.

He emphasises the value of reflection in raising awareness of tacit knowledge and transforming 'knowing in action' to 'knowledge in action'. Professionals continually learn on the job because their work entails engagement in a succession of cases, problems or projects which they have to learn about. This case-specific learning however may not contribute a great deal to their professional knowledge base unless the case is regarded as special rather than routine and time is set aside to deliberate upon its significance. Polanyi (1967) invented the term 'tacit knowledge' to describe that which we know but cannot tell. Eraut (1994) claims that such unorganised experiential knowledge gets drawn upon without people even realising that they are using it. It is built into people's habits, procedures, decision making and ways of thinking, without ever being scrutinised or brought under control. Thus people are partly controlled by their 'unknown' knowledge. (Ibid, p.75)

Boud et al. (1987) outlined three major elements of the reflective process: returning to the experience, attending to feelings and re-evaluating the experience. The adoption of a reflective approach is a choice and is one which can be associated with a '*deep approach*' to learning (Ibid). They describe the deep learning approach as one which

'...Involves an integration of formal learning with personal experience, the formation of relationships between parts of knowledge and a search for meaning...' (p.24).

This contrasts sharply with a 'surface approach' which tends to focus on memorisation of facts, the treatment of tasks as unrelated and an attitude of un-reflectiveness'(ibid). Boud et al. (1985) comment that the skill of experiential learning in which people tend to be the most deficient is reflection. In this study, I will be interested in exploring whether Assistant Principals are aware of or refer to reflection as a key element in their learning process.

Formal and Informal Learning

Marsick and Watkins (2001) describe formal learning as typically institutionally sponsored, classroom based and highly structured. They contend that informal and incidental learning is at the heart of adult education because of its learner-centred focus and the lessons that can be learned from life experience - that learning grows out of everyday encounters while living and working in a given context. They distinguish between informal and incidental learning. Informal learning is usually intentional but not highly structured. Examples include self-directed learning, networking, mentoring and coaching. When people learn incidentally, their learning may be taken for granted, tacit or unconscious. Examples include hidden culture, learning by mistakes, or unsystematic process of trial and error. Turner's (2000) research, in the English education context, points to the importance of the informal learning of subject leaders in the workplace. In this study it will be important to assess how Assistant Principals value formal and informal learning and what elements and processes underpin informal learning in their schools.

A Learning Culture

The idea of social context as central to learning has gained importance in discussions of learning in adulthood (Hansman, 2001). Learning in context is paying attention to the interaction and intersection among people, tools and culture within a learning situation. This 'situative' stance maintains that learning is rooted in the situation in which a person participates (ibid).

The core idea of situated cognition is that learning is inherently social by nature. Knowing and learning are defined as engaging in changing processes of human activity in a particular community. Lave and Wenger (1991) concluded that the real world context where there are social relationships and tools make the best learning environments. They argue that individuals learn as they participate by interacting with the community (with its history, assumptions, and cultural values, rules and patterns of relationships), the tools at hand (including objects, technology, languages and images) and the moments activity (its purposes, norms and practical challenges). Knowledge emerges as a result of these elements intertwining. Thus, knowing is interminably inventive and entwined with doing (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

The literature on schools suggests that the two main influential factors affecting teacher learning and professional development at school level are school culture and leadership (Day, 1999). Schein (1985) defines school culture as

‘...the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of our organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic ‘taken-for-granted’ fashion an organization’s view of itself and its environment...’(p.6).

It is characterised by the ways values, beliefs, prejudices and behaviour are played out within the micro political processes of school life (Day, 2004). I concur with McLaughlin (1993) who stresses the importance of viewing the school as a ‘workplace community’, not only as a physical setting and a formal organization, but also as a ‘social and psychological setting in which teachers and school leaders construct a sense of practice, of professional efficacy and professional community’ (p.99). She combines the rational elements of school structures and processes with the more intangible and emotional but significant aspects of how people are with each other. Thus examining school culture, seen as a dynamic and changing phenomenon, implies an analysis of the meanings, values and attitudes of those working in a given context as well as the ways in which these are conveyed and understood. I believe that this relational and in some respects subliminal aspect of organisational life has a significant impact on the learning environment.

The literature emphasises that the leadership of the principal is highly significant in shaping school culture (Schein, 1985, Day, 1999). Stoll and Fink (1996) argue that leadership is about communicating invitational messages to individuals and groups with whom principals interact, messages which inform followers that they are able, responsible and worthwhile (p.109). This requires a leader who is optimistic, respects others, trusts others and acts with intentionality to build a collegial and collaborative school culture focussed on learning. Indeed Barth (1990) views the principal as the ‘lead learner’, with the potential to act as ‘a catalyst assisting teacher growth’(p.50).

Billet (2002) argues that the quality of learning is premised on the workplaces’ participatory practices which shape and distribute the activities and support the workplace affordance for workers. Cultural and political processes underpin these workplace affordances. Participatory practices are reciprocally constructed because individuals elect how to engage in and learn from what workplaces afford them. Contextual factors which enable learning include the

availability of appropriate resources, willingness and motivation to learn and the emotional capacity to take on new capabilities in the middle of what could be a stressful challenge (Marsick and Watkins, 2001). However, as Billet (2002) comments, workplace 'affordances' only represent one side of the reciprocal process in participation and learning. Individuals' agency also mediates engagement with activities and what is learned through participation (p.29).

Critics have pointed out that not all learning in communities is laudable (Fenwick, 2000). Some of the limitations of context based learning include learning that is inappropriate, the contested nature of work practice inhibiting individuals' access to activities and guidance required for rich learning, and difficulties of learning knowledge not readily available in the workplace (Billet, 2002). Fenwick (2000) suggests that the problem with some situated views is their lack of attention to inevitable power relations circulating in human culture systems. She argues that situated perspectives seem silent on the issue of resistance in communities in which learning tools and activities may be unfair or dysfunctional. Furthermore learning in communities may not afford learners the opportunity to reflect on situations or realities that exist outside of their particular communities and therefore may not enable them to recognise and reflect critically on their own biases or negative institutional or professional practices.

Relations between individuals' interests and the values of the workplace practice are a central mediating factor in determining their engagement in work practice and the kinds of learning that arise. Ashton's (2002) research reinforces the problematic nature of learning at work. He reports that learning is influenced by the manner in which senior management structure tasks for individual progression, the extent of the managers' knowledge of how to support the learning process and the workers' relationship with the manager (p.29/30). Consequently, learning solely through participation in everyday work activities may not be a sufficient basis for adapting to the changing demands and requirements of work throughout working lives (ibid).

In light of the above discussion, questions which emerge include: is the workplace and the activities that take place there structured to allow access to knowledge? Does the social and political context influence how and why people learn? In view of the varied cultural and historical base of Irish post-primary schools as outlined in Chapter 1, in this study I wish to explore Assistant Principals' perceptions of how context/culture issues impact on their

learning and does the function of the school as ‘an educative organisation’ (Gold and Evans, 1998) apply as equally to them as to the students in their care.

Barriers to Learning

Barriers to learning have been the focus of much research and comment (Boud et al., 1993, Merriam, 2001). Claxton (1996) contends that to be a ‘good learner’

‘...one must be ready and willing to learn, be alive to the opportunities that present themselves for pursuing valued goals and free from any internal blocks and barriers that inhibit one from learning when it is appropriate to do so...’ (p.7).

Learning for adult professional learners is impeded in a variety of subtle and personal ways. Learning is frequently and undeniably a stressful business and the risks of learning being subverted are clearly present, if emotional and personal issues are not addressed. Loss of control and loss of face is still experienced as a significant hazard of the learning adventure. McMahon (1996) suggests that areas of concern for those appointed to senior management posts include the management of change, the management of people and respondents’ own self management. Barriers to learning include: an inability to admit to learning needs for fear that it would be perceived as weakness, as well as stress and overwork and a difficulty in identifying priorities (ibid). Consequently one of the ways in which professionals can ease the fear of inadequacy is by tactical underachievement, choosing (usually unconsciously) to operate well within their limits and forcing managers or more experienced colleagues to take on those responsibilities which feel threatening (Claxton, 1996, p.12).

Literature on adult learning emphasises the importance of emotions in the learning process (Boud et al. 1985, Claxton, 1996). Boud et al. (1985) suggest that most research on learning has not sufficiently respected the unique perspective of the learner and has not taken into account the affective (p.38). They argue that personally significant and meaningful learning is fundamentally grounded in and derived from the learner’s emotional and imaginative connection with the self and with the broader social world and that the process of meaning making is essentially imaginative and extra rational rather than merely reflective and rational. Even though emotions and feelings are a significant source of learning, they can also at times be a barrier (Ibid, 1985). Negative feelings particularly about oneself can form major barriers towards learning. They can distort perceptions, lead to false interpretations of events and can undermine the will to persist. Positive feelings and emotions can greatly enhance the learning process, they can keep the learner on the task and can provide a stimulus for new learning

(Billet, 2000). Indeed, the ability to protect oneself from that which is too threatening or to disengage when the investment of time and effort becomes disproportionate to the potential value of the understanding or skill to be acquired, is as valuable a component of the overall survival strategy, as is the ability to learn (Claxton, 1996). This resonates with Hall (1996) when she talks about the need for ‘resilience’ and Bandura’s (1997) ‘self-efficacy’ – the ability to bounce back from learning difficulties or disappointments and to maintain equilibrium, focus and a commitment to the learning process. Reporting on his research on middle leaders in the English education system, Turner (2006) argues that those with a strong sense of self-efficacy regard challenges as things to be overcome. They regard setbacks as springboards for new opportunities. Thus they will be likely to recover quickly from failure and setbacks. Conversely those with a weak sense of self-efficacy may find themselves dwelling on their own personal deficiencies and may lose faith in the ability to cope (p.431). In this study, I am interested in examining what Assistant Principals perceive as potential contextual and emotional barriers to their learning and how their learning is shaped by their responses to these experiences/events.

Having so far considered teacher professionalism, adult learning processes and inherent challenges for Assistant Principals, the next section explores Assistant Principals’ professional knowledge base: what it is they need to know in order to execute successfully their professional role particularly in the shifting Irish education context.

5. Middle Leaders’ Learning

A Professional Role

As the increasing complexity of school management has made it difficult for all tasks to be undertaken by principals and their deputies (Wise and Bush, 1999), middle leaders have assumed a more significant role in schools. They are increasingly seen as ‘crucial to a school’s success’ and as ‘key brokers within organisations’ where they have ‘a pivotal role through their ability to control and influence the flow of information’ (Earley & Bubb, 2004, p.162) between staff and senior management. Consequently, their perceptions and understanding of their role and how they function ‘in the middle’ is significant in that it informs and impacts on what it is they need to learn and know as professionals.

The literature highlights a range of tensions with regard to their role and the inherent dilemmas and difficulties in aspiring to fulfil varied and conflicting demands. Middle leaders

occupy what Siskin (1993) called a 'hermaphroditic role', that is neither fully teacher nor fully administrator yet operating as a conduit for all the tensions in the relationship between the two (Brown et al. 2000). They operate at the interface between different levels and sources of influence and change within the school.

Wise (1999) found that middle managers in schools had to contend with conflicting views of their role from their senior managers and school staff which leads to role conflict, where the differing roles the individual is being asked to fill are not compatible. Glover et al. (1998) argued that many do not see themselves as leaders but as people with multiple jobs and tasks which include the management of personal tensions as well as professional demands (p.282). Bennett et al. (2003) highlight middle leaders reluctance to become involved in the wider whole-school context and also their resistance to having a management role with regard to colleagues' work or performance. These tensions are exacerbated by the fact that many middle managers are time poor, are much preoccupied or distracted by routine administration and crisis management and have little time for strategic thinking:

They are 'busy' people...little time was found for planning, evaluating, reflecting or observing' (Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989, p.220).

The issue of time is also echoed by Wise and Bush (1999) in their study of academic middle leaders in UK secondary schools where they argue that the

'...limited 'management time' is wholly inadequate to fulfil all the diverse tasks which now form part of ...a middle leader's role (p.194) .

The middle leaders in their study also emphasised that their first responsibility was to the students rather than to management and that time and effort used in administration and management is time taken from teaching and learning. However, Bullock (1988) found in a single school case study that middle managers were under pressure to perform in front of colleagues and that the more task-centred duties were considered of greater importance 'because day-to-day administration work, if ignored, would be quickly observed by other staff' (p.100). In this study I will be interested in exploring if and how any of these tensions are significant to Assistant Principals' learning.

A Professional Knowledge Base

In proposing Eraut's (1994) typology of six categories of knowledge for school leaders as a useful source to illuminate middle leaders' professional knowledge, Turner (2006) suggests that effective middle leaders need knowledge of people (people skills), situational knowledge (knowing the working context), knowledge of educational practice (knowing one's subject), conceptual knowledge (theories or concepts used to analyse issues and problems), process knowledge (know-how) and control knowledge (an awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses). In addition, Kotter (1996) claims that leadership learning is sustained through the development of five mental habits. These include risk-taking or a willingness to push oneself outside the comfort zones, humble self-reflection or an honest assessment of success or failure, the solicitation of opinions or an aggressive collection of information and ideas from others (p.183). The exercise of professional learning therefore involves the process of applying personal knowledge (often informed by codified knowledge) to a unique set of circumstances while taking into account 'a range of implications and conflicting perspectives' (Glatter and Kydd, 2003, p.239). Writers such as Goleman (2002) and Kotter (1996) highlight self-awareness and self-learning as an essential path to improved leadership practice. Goleman (2002) suggests that:

'...The crux of leadership development that works is self-directed learning: intentionally developing or strengthening an aspect of who you are and who you want to be, or both...' (p.107).

Similarly, Eraut (2000) holds that leaders aspire to what he calls 'a maturity of judgement' and that this results in meaningful learning. He suggests that leadership maturity is neither purely analytic nor purely intuitive but involves the ability to reflect upon issues in order to explore how others might perceive them and how they might impact on the future (Walker and Dimmock, 2006). Therefore, professional learning has to be much more than increasing technical efficiency. As Day (1999) comments:

'... It is a process .. by which teachers ... acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice...' (p.4).

This thinking mirrors the key elements of constructivist theory and andragogy as outlined above. It highlights the centrality of human issues in educational leadership and echoes Schön (1991) who suggested that the most important areas of professional learning lie beyond the

conventional boundaries of professional competence. This perspective of the professional as a capable, learning individual with a commitment towards self-improvement and development, and an evolving professional knowledge-base provides a challenge to Irish Assistant Principals and their commitment to their professional learning.

Facilitating the Learning

The discussion so far on professional learning would suggest the need for a broad interpretation of what is meant by continuing professional development for school leaders. Writing in 1995, Fullan claimed that teacher professional development had been miscast:

‘..By being treated as a discrete entity outside the regular job, its effectiveness has been severely limited..’(p.264).

Key elements of leaders’ professional learning are encapsulated by Bredeson (2003) in his proposed general themes for professional development. He suggests that professional development is about learning; professional development is work; professional development is a journey not a credential; student learning, professional development and organisational mission are intimately related; and professional development is about people not programmes. Waters (1998) describes it as ‘the development that can occur when teachers are construed first and foremost as people, and is predicted on the premise that people are always much more than the roles they play’ (p.30). Perhaps the single most important feature of CPD is to encourage and promote a commitment on the part of the individual to professional growth and development that carries on ‘throughout their professional careers’ (Gold and Evans, 1998) and contributes to the professional activity of the organisation - the delivery of teaching and learning (ibid, p.57).

Good professional learning builds new learning on top of what has already occurred and facilitates professionals in synthesising and taking control of what they already know and can do as well as to help them learn new things (Murphy, 2002). It is essential therefore that we begin to pay particular attention to the ways in which all those involved in school leadership roles learn in the context of their hectic daily practice. I concur with Earley and Bubb (2004) who suggest that professional development is an aspect of personal development and wherever possible, the two should interact and complement each other. The former is mainly about occupational role development whereas personal development is about the development of the person and involves changes in self-knowledge and self-awareness.

In a 15-country international comparative study into development programmes for school leaders, Huber (2003) found that effective programmes focussed on long-term development not just on-the-job training and actively involved participants through stressing the central role of collaboration (so that collaborative networks continue beyond the bounds of the programme). He also emphasised the importance of relating the learning opportunities to school context, finding a balance between theory and practice and involving trainers and facilitators with appropriate backgrounds. In a recently published review of school leadership development, Hallinger and Snidvongs (2005) recommend that leadership learning must engage actively with the real problems leaders face in schools and that the learning of new knowledge and skills calls for flexibility combining on-site coaching and networks of professional support. Similarly Glatter (1991) suggested that school leadership development be ‘closely related to actual work and functioning of the school ...be extended over a considerable period of time ..foster a “team development” approach and make considerable use of experience-based methods, rather than simply relying on formal courses’ (p.226). Like Weindling (2004), Glatter also called for programmes to provide scope for reflective learning and focus on concrete situations and application of learning in collaboration with colleagues (Walker and Dimmock, 2006).

For the purposes of this study, I will use the term *continuing professional development* to encompass all ongoing formal and informal learning, echoing Fullan (1995) who defined it as ‘the sum total of formal and informal learning pursued and experienced by the teacher in a compelling learning environment under conditions of complexity and change’(p.265). I see it as a life-long process of education, training, learning and support activities in either work-place or external settings, that enables individuals to develop their professional knowledge, skills and values so that they can educate their students more effectively (based on Bolam and McMahon, 2003).

6. Research Questions

Bennett et al. (2003) comment that research on middle leaders in England reports mainly on small scale, free standing case studies or ‘snapshot’ surveys and focus mostly on the role and purpose of middle leaders in post-primary schools (p.3). It concerns itself with what can contribute to an effective secondary school subject department (Earley and Fletcher-Campbell, 1989, Harris et al., 2003, Turner 2000, 2003, 2006.) Equally, in the Irish context, existing small scale studies - McGeady (1999), McDonagh (1998), Asofo (1996), Naughton

(1994) - are mainly school/situation case-specific and refer mostly to middle leaders' role definition, performance, duties and responsibilities.

If, as I argue above, professional learning is as much about people as their competences, then it is clear that there is a place in the Irish context for research on APs' learning and their perceptions of themselves as learners. While there is a growing recognition of the crucial importance of lifelong learning in education (OECD, 2002), there is no research on the implicit professional learning experiences of those working as Assistant Principals in Irish post-primary schools. This research study is therefore an attempt to fill a gap in current research, to commence a discourse and add to the knowledge base on the issue of Assistant Principals' learning, with a view to assisting their ongoing professional development. The questions underpinning this study are:

What are Assistant Principals' perceptions of how they learn?
What are their perceptions of their professional learning experiences and learning needs?

In researching the individual learning experiences of Assistant Principals, I want to know if they see themselves as learners, what they feel they have to learn as middle leaders, how they believe their experiences impact on their learning, what inhibits their learning in their role and how their learning needs can best be addressed.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to situate the study within a theoretical framework and to examine theoretical concepts which inform and underpin its research element. The context, as outlined in chapter one, together with the issues highlighted above relating to teacher professionalism, adult learning and a professional knowledge base provides collective lens through which data for the study are both collected and analysed.

My examination of research available on the subject of APs and their roles in the Irish context has led me to conclude that while small scale research on the APs' role definition as an administrator exists, the personal story of APs as professional learners is ignored. This research study is designed to add to the knowledge of the educational management of schools by investigating APs' perceptions of how they learn. It is expected that this line of inquiry will provide some suggestions for informing APs' professional learning and for managing the most intractable problems of practice which they face. In the next chapter I outline the

methodology and research methods I consider best suited to address the research questions which underpin this study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Methods

1. Introduction

I set out to devise a research process that best served the purpose of this study and that helped to provide answers to my research questions (Crotty, 1998, p.216). This chapter outlines and discusses the theoretical framework within which the research is conducted and which I believe best supports the research topic and the questions posed in Chapter 2. The research design is presented and the methodology for data collection and analysis of the empirical component of the research are discussed. Ethical issues and inherent limitations associated with the study are also addressed.

2. An Issue of Methodology?

A Theoretical Base

Crotty (1998) describes a theoretical perspective as ‘the philosophical stance lying behind a methodology’ (p.7). Epistemological considerations loom large in considerations of a research strategy. These revolve around the desirability of employing a natural science mode (positivism) versus interpretivism. The central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated, efforts are made to get inside the mind of the person and to understand from within (Morrison, 2002).

How to best access each Assistant Principal’s unique understanding of their perceptions of their learning and their learning needs and to maintain the focus of the research questions was a key element in determining the philosophical stance and the ontological position taken for this study. Greenfield (1999) posits the view that we know little about how school leaders make sense of their world and argues the need for research strategies ‘of the soft variety’. It is that epistemological stance to ‘get close and go deep’ and to investigate ‘from the inside’ through a process of empathetic understanding (Cohen and Mannion, 1994) which informs and underpins this research and dictates the use of a qualitative rather than a scientific or positivistic approach (Robson, 2002). Following Erickson (1986) who claims that the conceptions in qualitative research are revealed during data analysis, no defined hypothesis is tested in the study.

Ontological considerations concerning objectivism versus constructionism also constitute important dimensions in the research strategy for this study. The objectivist position implies that social phenomena confront us as external facts that are beyond our reach or influence (Bryman, 2004). Constructionism, however, asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors, that they are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision. I believe that an interpretivist perspective within the constructivist family is particularly relevant when dealing with perceptions and offers the best opportunity to arrive at the reality behind the research questions posed in this study.

Qualitative Research Methodology

Cohen and Mannion (1994) define research methods as the range of approaches, techniques and procedures used to gather data in educational research. The style or methodology used depends on a number of factors, including the type of data required, the purpose for which the data will be used, the size of the population and whether the research is quantitative or qualitative. In the 'qualitative vs quantitative' methods debate, it is important to be aware of Bryman's (2004) assertion that there does not seem to be any obvious reason why qualitative research cannot be used to test theories in the manner typically associated with the model of the quantitative research processor or to deny that 'much quantitative research shares a concern for subjects' interpretations which is supposed to be the province of the qualitative researcher' (p.172-173). I am aware that the research instrument in this instance will be very important as an enabling mechanism to allow each Assistant Principal to tell his/her story. Quantitative data is suitable when attempting to establish concrete facts. However, the nuances and ambiguities of learning based on tacit knowledge, the nature of social interactions between individuals and the culture of the working environment are unlikely to be appropriately described by quantitative data. Therefore, for this study I chose a qualitative methodology emphasising meanings, experiences and descriptions and producing insights not generally available. The research questions and the issues subsumed within them led me to define an appropriate methodology as one that took account of phenomenological perspectives, description and interpretation. The actual analytical process was close to Blaikie's (1993) abductive research strategy - theory, data analysis and data generation being produced dialectically.

3. Research Methods

Semi-structured Interviews

Ribbins (2007) points out that it is only by listening to people's voices that one really finds out what it is like to be and to work in schools. Kvale (1996) contends that interviews are particularly suited for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world (p.105). He describes the qualitative research interview as a 'construction site for knowledge':

'...an interview is literally an inter view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest...' (p.14).

This method enables the interviewer and respondent to get close and go deep for a more authentic and complete understanding of the topic under discussion. Writing on the cathartic role of interviewing in relation to footballers wives, Ortiz (2001) contends that in doing qualitative research, we are naturally concerned with 'how the fieldwork process is defined and experienced by those we study and what they gain from participating in qualitative studies' (p.192). This is particularly true with regard to this study where the emotional dimension of their learning emerged as significant for APs (see p.85).

Also the face-to-face interview offers the possibility of modifying one's line of enquiry, following up interesting responses and investigating underlying motives in a way that postal and other self-administered questionnaires cannot (Robson, 2002). This form of enquiry requires careful control of the interview and may be more difficult to analyse than structured interviews (ibid). However, this can be partially overcome by the prior preparation of an interview schedule (Appendix 2) with suggested follow-up prompts or probes. The interview schedule can be developmental, as emerging issues not hitherto addressed arise which may then be included in subsequent interviews. Hague (1993, p.23) cites other advantages of the in-depth interview as providing:

- Better explanations – body language can be seen and noted and a deeper understanding of the validity of responses can be gained.
- Depth – interest can be personally maintained during a long interview, encouragement given, confidence can be more easily satisfied and boredom recognized.

- Greater accuracy - there is more time for the respondent to reflect and consider.

The Research Diary

Early in the research process I decided to keep a diary as an 'aide memoire' (Bryman, 2004) of activities undertaken and also as a document to record my reflections and insights as the interviewing process unfolded. I found it an effective way of recording progress, problems and worries and for thinking through what to do next (Robson, 2002). It also afforded me a space to reflect on issues emerging from the interview conversations. I recorded my reflections as soon as possible after each interview. Sometimes this was in the car having just finished an interview. On other occasions I used quiet time at home in the evening to review and make sense of the events of the day. At the writing up stage of the study, I found the diary entries rich and invaluable when reflecting on and accounting for the different stages of the research process. I also used them as data in illuminating and supporting my theorising of emerging issues and themes re Assistant Principals' learning (see Chapters 4-6).

The Researcher in the Study

Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) contend that

‘..Once we abandon the idea that the social character of research can be ‘standardised out’ or avoided by becoming ‘a fly on the wall’ or ‘full participant’, the role of the researcher as active participant in the research process becomes clear. He or she is the research instrument par excellence.’(p.19).

I believe this to be particularly true in the context of a professional doctorate where one is researching in an area of one's own professional experience. A researcher cannot be neutral, objective or detached from the knowledge and evidence they are generating. Ezzy (2002) suggests that ‘the personal experience of the researcher is an integral part of the research process’ (p.153). Cohen et al (2007) comment that reflexivity refers to the way in which all accounts of social settings – descriptions, analyses, criticisms etc - and the social settings occasioning them are interdependent (p.23). Mason (2004) argues that qualitative research should involve self-scrutiny by the researcher or ‘*active reflexivity*’ (p.7). It requires the ability to examine oneself and acknowledge one's self-location in the process at hand. As such, ‘knowledge’ from a reflexive position is always a reflection of the researcher's location in time and social space (Bryman, 2004). Therefore, qualitative researchers should take stock of their actions and their role in the research process and subject these to the same radical scrutiny as the rest of the data (ibid). They should acknowledge and disclose their own selves

in the research, seeking to understand their part in or influence on the research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983).

Personal experience typically shapes the definition of the research problem and the method used to collect and analyse the data. Personal experience is also a source of data about the research problem (Ezzy, 2002, p.153). As referred to in Chapter 1, I worked as an Assistant Principal myself for a number of years in a challenging post-primary school context. I am therefore aware that I bring my own personal and professional experience, knowledge, insights and understanding about Assistant Principals' learning to the context of this research study. Consequently, in some instances respondents' experiences may resonate with my own and there may be times when I will be less objective and interpret their experiences through my own knowledge of and insights into their situations.

4. The Research Process

The Pilot Phase

The interview schedule (Appendix 2) consisted of open-ended questions. The questions were directed and influenced by issues emerging in the literature (see Ch.2). The piloting of the schedule afforded me the opportunity to assess its form and content, to identify gaps and refine questions, to practice my interviewing technique and to modify the overall execution of the interviews. I conducted 3 pilot interviews. The three respondents were known to me. I explained my area of research interest to them and invited them to participate. All were interested in the topic of their learning and were eager to become involved. I got their permission in advance to tape the interviews. The topic guide was not given to respondents before the interview. This was because I wanted to get 'gut' reactions and I was prepared to give respondents time to reflect while answering. Despite respondents' expressed interest in the research study, I still approached the interviews with caution and concern. I was not sure how the topic of 'learning' would be received or whether respondents might feel threatened and exposed during the interview. For this reason the questions moved from the specific to the general, so to ease respondents into the topic. The pilot interviews were intended to test

- The appropriateness of the questions
- Respondents' reactions to the topic
- Whether the interview schedule, as constructed, would work satisfactorily.

The interviews constituted a valuable learning experience for me, proving beyond doubt that interviews should take place away from distractions - such as a small child wandering in and out of the room – when an interview took place in a respondent's home. I took no notes and focussed on the respondents. Of course this meant that I was subsequently relying on the tape. All the more reason to check for sound and pace at the beginning of each interview! The first pilot respondent spoke with a very low voice and subsequently, I found the interview difficult to transcribe. The interview schedule worked well and respondents were comfortable with all elements of it. Respondents reported that they were happy with the questions and seemed to enjoy reflecting on their individual learning story. The questions proved sufficiently challenging for respondents to have to pause and reflect. Respondents warmed to the topic and the time flew as the conversation flowed.

I transcribed the three pilot interviews myself. This allowed me to see myself in action, a somewhat painful learning experience! I became aware of the need to refrain from cutting respondents off and to give them time to reflect. I noted that issues or topics relating to respondents' perceptions of their learning, to which I had not given previous consideration, such as school culture, school leadership and respondents' emotional responses to these were dominant in their reflections. I noted that if these were replicated in the main cohort of interviews, it would have implications for how I structured the research findings chapters. I was happy to proceed using the initial interview schedule in the main study. I also decided that, due to the richness of the pilot interviews, I would include them as part of the research data.

The Study Sample

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) argue that many qualitative researchers employ purposive and not random, sampling methods, 'they seek out groups, settings and individuals where the processes being studied are most likely to occur' (p.202). For this study I used a combination of judgement (Malhotra and Birks, 2003) and snowball sampling (Bryman, 2004). This is a form of convenience sampling in which the population elements are purposely selected on the judgement of the researcher (ibid) and where I made initial contact with a small group of people who were relevant to the research topic and then used these to establish contact with others (Bryman, 2004). In an attempt to give breadth and depth to the study, the sample of 21 Assistant Principals interviewed, which includes the three pilot interviews, incorporates the

range of Irish post-primary schools, religious and state run, both genders and a range of experience in the role (see Table 3.1, p.61).

The research process in this study can best be described as iterative. It had three distinct stages: a pilot phase and two separate stages of interviewing. The first stage of ten interviews was carried out May/June 2006 before the Summer recess and the second batch in September/October at the start of the Autumn 2006 term. The rationale for this was that I knew it would be difficult to find all the respondents in the May/June period. At that time schools are busy with end of year events and teachers are tired. I also saw the benefit of using an initial analysis of the first ten interviews to inform the second half of the process in the Autumn.

Early in May 2006, I wrote individual invitations (see Appendix 3) to Assistant Principals in five Dublin schools, approximately 25 potential respondents, explaining my research and asking them to contact me if they were interested in participating in the research project. The letter was not written on Centre headed notepaper. I introduced myself and my research topic and invited responses from those interested in becoming involved (see Appendix 4). I was both disappointed and concerned with only *one* response, from a female Assistant Principal. I decided that this might be due to end of year pressure and fatigue and also to the fact that they could not identify with me in person. Maybe it would have been better to have visited the schools, introduced myself and spoken in person about the research project to the Assistant Principals. I also wondered if the prospect of discussing their learning with a stranger might have been intimidating to them. Consequently I had to rethink my strategy in order to reach respondents who would be interested in talking to me. I turned my attention to a group of middle leaders who were attending a national in-service in the Education Centre in mid-May and another group who were participating, in early June, in an LDS focus group on issues for middle leaders. I approached the facilitator of each group, introduced myself and asked to speak briefly to the in-service participants about my research area. I asked that anyone interested in being interviewed would leave their name, contact phone number and school address with the facilitator and I would write to them in due course. Both of these groups, a mixture of Assistant Principals from urban and rural contexts, responded very positively to my invitation to participate in the research. Reflecting on the contrast between this and the response to my first attempt at securing interviews, I believe that the personal interface I had with potential respondents was important. They had seen me in person and had heard an

explanation of the research area. Also as they were pro-active in attending elective in-service, they may have felt more open about discussing their learning. I was also delighted that the sample provided a representative gender break-down: 12 female and 9 male respondents (See Table 3.1).

The Interviews

Eight interviews were conducted in May/June 2006. Respondents were offered a venue of their choice and the interviews were conducted wherever was most convenient for them. Some chose to be interviewed in school, some in the Education Centre of which I am Director, and 3 respondents, elected to participate in telephone interviews. Due to personal difficulties one of the participants agreed interview was subsequently postponed until the Autumn term. Interviews were of 30–45 minutes duration and conducted in private, on a one-to-one basis or by phone. As with the pilot interviews respondents' permission re the use of the tape recorder was sought in writing in advance of the interview. The interviews were taped and subsequently transcribed. The advantage of the recorded interview is that the data can be studied much more thoroughly than would be the case if the data were limited to notes taken during the interview. Also I appreciated being able to re-listen to the complete interview at different stages in the analysis process.

The 3 phone interviews, mentioned above, were conducted in May/June. These were with respondents from rural locations who chose this manner of interview so as to avoid having to travel to Dublin at what is a very busy time in schools. This echoes Robson (2002) who cites the major advantage of phone interviews as 'the lower cost in terms of time, effort and money' (p.282). Respondents indicated a time when they wished to be contacted. By their choice, they were interviewed at their homes. For convenience I rang from my office where I could have the phone on speaker and, with respondents' permission, recorded the interviews in full. I was concerned about this format of interviewing as I had never done it before and I wondered whether the lack of a personal contact would inhibit respondents' answers and the discussion? I was pleasantly surprised with the outcome. In a research diary entry, June 26th, I reflected that the phone interviews 'went very well'. Respondents didn't seem affected by the lack of face-to-face contact and spoke with openness and ease. However, a distinct disadvantage was my lack of control over the interview environment. One male respondent was repeatedly interrupted by a small child who did not appreciate the lack of access to her father and made it known quite vociferously!

I transcribed the three pilot interviews and five of the eight interviews in the first phase of the research myself. This was beneficial to me in that I was immersed in the data and was able to reflect on what was being said as I transcribed. I saw it as a preliminary form of data analysis (Cohen et al., 2007).

It emerged in the first phase of interviews that those who had pursued post-graduate studies were more confident in reflecting on and speaking about their learning (Research Diary, June 26th, 2006). The second group of interviews, ten in total, were conducted in September/October 2006. Similar to the first group, they involved a range of Assistant Principals representing both genders and the different post-primary school types, urban and rural. Again, as with the earlier cohort, these respondents were sourced through informal contacts and word of mouth and also through participation in an Autumn programme for Middle Leaders which was being hosted in the Centre.

As a busy professional I was not in a position to devote the time required to transcribe all the interview tapes myself. However, I was financially supported by the Centre in sourcing an outside professional transcriber for those interviews in the 2nd phase. I also had the help of the organisation's secretarial services for aspects of the work, the transcription of some of the interviews in the first phase and the final presentation/compilation of the report (Robson, 2002). I am aware of the issue of confidentiality with regard to this decision and outline how I dealt with it in the discussion of ethical issues pertaining to this study (see p. 58). I transcribed the last two tapes myself. I decided to include the three pilot interviews in the main body of the research as they were very informative, showed deep reflection and were rich in their perceptions of the issues being examined. I also included one Special Duties teacher (see Chapter 1). This was because she was very keen to speak to me and her role/duties, that of year head, were equivalent to that of many of the Assistant Principals included in the sample. Once the interviews were completed, I wrote to all the participants thanking them for their time and advising them that I would contact them to share the findings with them when the research was complete.

Analysis

The analysis of qualitative research data is not a separate activity which is undertaken at the end of a project. The aim is to build a logical chain of evidence and to make conceptual and theoretical coherence. An iterative and persistent part of the research process (Watling, 2002), the analysis begins during the collection of data. The analysis of this study followed a free interplay of techniques incorporating the stages outlined by Watling (2002) and Miles and Huberman (1994) to include:

- Defining and identifying data
- Collecting and storing the data
- Data reduction and coding informed by the structures of the interview guide
- Identifying and clustering emerging concepts, themes and issues
- Comparing and contrasting these against each other and with the literature search
- Reporting and writing up the findings.

The analysis of the data is usually the most time consuming part of the interview study (Kvale, 1996). I chose not to use NVIVO for this small scale research study. I believe that listening to the tapes and reading the transcripts - a 'hands-on' approach - is critical in this type of study where differing perceptions and nuances both in terms of respondent statements and language are important to the overall in-depth analysis required. I also felt very confident in the use of my PC to store, retrieve and assist in analysing the data.

Initially I colour-coded the transcripts on my PC. This greatly facilitated the thematic clustering of participants' quotes later in the process. I then used a combination of listening to and reading the interviews to get an overall impression of key emerging issues representing unifying or contrary ideas or topics that had been discussed in the literature review and were also touched on at various times and under different headings during the interviews. Having read the transcripts a number of times, I noted the patterns and themes emerging. I then clustered and counted their occurrence across all the transcripts to identify those dominant in the data. The next stage involved making comparisons and contrasts and noting relations between the different variables (Miles and Huberman, 1994, Robson, 2002). Some themes were subsumed into others. For example, the issue of meetings became part of the discussion on micro-politics. Another less dominant theme, the importance of reading as a support to APs' learning, was abandoned because it was not mentioned by enough respondents. I divided the dominant and related sub themes into three findings chapters (Ch.4-6), where I will explore them in the light of my research questions and the issues highlighted earlier in the

literature review. School Culture emerged as a significant variable with regard to enabling or inhibiting APs' professional learning (Chapter 4). This dominant theme became a backdrop for the other two data chapters relating respectively to the emotional dimension of respondents' learning (Chapter 5) and their perceptions of how they best learn (Chapter 6).

5. Ethical Issues

I am conscious of a number of inherent ethical issues with regard to this study. The British Educational Research Association (BERA), in their published ethical guidelines (BERA, 2004) for researchers, suggest that all educational research should be conducted with an ethic of respect for:

- The Person
 - Knowledge
 - Democratic Values
 - The Quality of Educational Research
 - Academic Freedom
- (2004, p.4).

A dilemma for the researcher is balancing respect for the dignity and privacy of those people who are the subjects of research and the pursuit of truth (Coleman and Briggs, 2002). In this research study the particular concern is for the respondents (Assistant Principals) involved. The respondents' rights begin with gaining their 'informed consent' to participate in the study and a research process which is structured to protect privacy and anonymity (Cohen et al., 2007). Due to the small number of APs interviewed and the possibility that they or their schools might be identified and also the sensitivity around discussing their school experiences, it was essential that I took all possible steps to ensure confidentiality and anonymity with regard to the respondents and the research findings. This was particularly true in relation to the transcribing of the taped interviews. In order to mask the identity of the interviewees to the Centre and outside transcribers I labelled the tapes alphabetically as opposed to naming respondents. The following steps were taken with a view to protecting respondents and to minimising the risks to them:

- Confidentiality was respected and individual respondents and their current schools are not named in the study.
- Respondents were informed in advance of the purpose and process of the research and their involvement in it.
- Respondents were afforded the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

- Respondents were made fully aware of the proposed uses of the study findings and were required to give consent to the findings being reported to the university and to the wider educational community.

The power relationship between the researcher and the respondent is also an important ethical issue in the research process. I discussed earlier my awareness of my role as the researcher in the study. I am also aware that due to my previous work with the Leadership Development for Schools' national initiative that I would be known to some of the respondents. This, and the fact that, as Director of an Education Centre, I would be perceived to be in a public position in Irish education, could be disconcerting for them. It was therefore essential that from the outset I attempted to put respondents at their ease and establish a rapport and a relationship of trust with them both prior to and during the research process.

As Centre Director, I was granted official agreement and support from Management Committee to proceed with the research. I am aware, however, of the need to inform Committee of the progress of the study. This is done in the Director's report to Committee which focuses on issues learned rather than individuals involved.

6. Research Limitations

One of the main advantages of using in-depth interviews is that they provide a rich data. However, with a small sample as is indicated for this study, the findings are not as generalisable, in a statistical sense, as in a large survey. Reliability demonstrates that the operations of a study – such as the data collection procedures – can be repeated with the same results (Yin, 1994). The goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study (ibid). Research interviews are in practice riddled with numerous pitfalls for the unwary but are a fruitful source of information when handled skilfully (Wragg, 2002). As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) comment, the interview is not a neutral tool, for the interviewer creates the reality of the interview situation. As the researcher in this process, my main priority was to establish truth around the research questions I was addressing. There is also the reality that respondents can only report their perceptions and perspectives, and hence the situation about which they speak can only be understood from the standpoint of their personal bias. However, in this research study that particular concern is perhaps less as it is very much the personal awareness and bias of the respondent which is of interest to me in the answering of the research questions posed.

The concept of *internal* validity is used to judge whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon it is intended to describe (Bush, 2002). The main potential source of invalidity in interviews is bias. Cohen and Mannion (1994) suggest that the sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent and the substantive content of the questions (p.282). Walizer and Weiner (1978) comment that one can never be certain that interviewer bias has been totally eliminated from any particular piece of research which relies on the interview for data collection. Semi-structured interviews assume greater diversity in both the design and use of the research instrument and in the nature of responses from participants. This may limit reliability while enhancing validity.

External validity refers to the extent to which the findings may be generalised to the wider population which the sample represents. Cohen et al. (2007) define external validity as:

‘...The degree to which the results can be generalised to the wider population, cases or situations...’ (p.109).

This is a difficult concept to realise in qualitative research since as LeCompte and Goetz (1982) recognise, it is impossible to ‘freeze’ a social situation and the circumstances of an initial study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) express unease about the simple application of reliability and validity standards to qualitative research in that the criteria presuppose that a single absolute account of social reality is feasible (Bryman, 2004). They propose that it is necessary to specify terms and ways of establishing and assessing the quality of qualitative research that provide alternatives to reliability and validity, important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research for the quantitative researcher. They propose two primary criteria for assessing a qualitative study: trustworthiness and authenticity. Maxwell (1992) suggests that ‘understanding’ is a more suitable term than ‘validity’ in qualitative research. As we researchers are part of the world we are researching, we cannot be completely objective about that. Therefore other peoples’ perspectives are equally valid as our own and our task is to uncover and understand them. Validity then attaches to accounts, not to data or methods (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). I believe that authenticity may be an elusive target but it is an important objective for educational management researchers (Bush, 2002). While there is no perfect truth, a focus by the researcher on reliability and validity should contribute to an acceptable level of authenticity sufficient to satisfy the researcher and the reader that the study is meaningful and worthwhile (ibid).

7. Conclusion

This chapter outlines the rationale behind the methodology for the research and the methods chosen. It also describes the chronology and process of the research and contains a discussion of methodological issues. The methodology chosen is qualitative to take account of the epistemological interpretations of knowledge relating to the work and the learning of this group of education professionals. Qualitative research and qualitative data analysis involves working out how the things that people do make sense from their perspective (Ezzy, 2002, p.xii). Therefore qualitative methodology best suits this study of Assistant Principals' personal perceptions and reflections on their learning and learning experiences.

I explained how I prepared the research instrument, selected respondents and managed the process. Managing the process included a pilot study, communication with the Assistant Principals, the way interviews were conducted and the use I made of the transcripts and the research diary. Ethical considerations, the way respondents' confidentiality would be protected and the limitations of the study are also discussed. The findings from the study will be presented in the data Chapters 4-6.

Table 3.1 Interviewee and School Profiles.

Respondent	Gender	Age	Years as AP	School Sector/type/location	AP Role	Post graduate studies
F1CS	Female	51-65	16	Community School Co-Ed (Suburb)	Co-ordinator of Leaving Certificate Applied (Adults and Teenagers)	Yes
F2CS	Female	36-50	11	Community School Co-Ed (Suburb)	Year Head	Yes
M1VS	Male	51-65	8	Voluntary Secondary / Single Sex (F) (City)	Geography and Sports Co-ordinator.	Yes
F3VS	Female	51-65	18	Voluntary Secondary / Single Sex (F)(Suburb)	Home Economics and Whole School Plan Co-ordinator	No

M2VS	Male	51-65	15	Voluntary Secondary / Single Sex (F) (City)	Year Head	Yes
F4CC	Female	36-50	12	VEC Community College Co-Ed (City)	School Timetable and Work Placement Co-ordinator	Yes
*M3CS	Male	36-50	9	Community School Co-Ed (Rural)	Primary School Liaison/Transition Year and Student Council Co-ordinator.	No
*M4CS	Male	36-50	4	Comprehensive Co-Ed (Rural)	Timetable /Co-ordinator of Transition Year	Yes
*F5CS	Female	36-50	3	Comprehensive Co-Ed (Rural)	Year Head	No
F5VS	Female	20-35	5	Voluntary Secondary Single Sex (F) (Suburb)	Year Head (SD)*	No
F6VS	Female	36-50	12	Voluntary secondary Single Sex (F) (Suburb)	Head of Arts/Student Events	No
F7CS	Female	51-65	15	Community Co-ed (Suburb)	Year Head /Co-ordinator CPSE and RSE	No
M5CS	Male	36-50	8	Community Co-ed (Suburb)	Home School Liaison (formerly Year Head)	No
F8CS	Female	36-50	19	Community Co-ed (Suburb)	Examinations Secretary (formerly Year Head)	Yes
M6VS	Male	51-65	8	Voluntary Secondary (Fee paying), Single Sex (M) (City)	Education Resources Co-ordinator / Admissions Officer	Yes
F9CC	Female	51-65	4	Community College, VEC Co-ed (Suburb)	Year Head (formerly LCA co-ordinator)	No

M7VS	Male	36-50	14	Secondary (Fee paying) Single Sex (M) (Rural)	School Books Rental Scheme/ Year Head	No
M8CC	Male	51-65	15	Community College VEC, Co-ed (Rural)	Year Head /School Books Rental Scheme	No
F10CC	Female	51-65	9	Community College VEC, Co-ed (Rural)	Year Head	No
M9CS	Male	51-65	4	Community and Comprehensi ve l Co-ed (Suburb)	Year Head	Yes
F11CS	Female	36-50	10	Community Co-ed, (Suburb)	Year Head	No

LEGEND:

Schools:

CS: Community and Comprehensive School

VS: Voluntary Secondary School

CC: VEC School, Community College,

F = Female

M = Male

*** Phone Interview**

Table Summary

		AGE			SCHOOL TYPE		
Respondents		20-35	36-50	51-65	Vol.Sec.	VEC.	C&C
Male	9	0	4	5	4	4	1
Female	12	1	6	5	3	6	3
Total	21	1	10	10	7	10	4

Chapter 4. School Culture and APs' Learning

1. Introduction

This research explores how Assistant Principals, as middle leaders in Irish post-primary schools perceive their learning experiences and learning needs. The findings and their discussion need to be considered in the context of what is a modest, though I believe significant exploratory study. The interrelationship of issues means that some arbitrary divisions had to be imposed and some discussions are relevant at more than one point in the text. I have used a representative sample of respondents' statements to show the richness of the data, to illustrate and support the ideas emerging from the discussions and to allow APs' voices to be heard. The conversations encourage the respondents to reflect upon and analyse their learning, making the implicit explicit.

The importance of social context and school culture to learning is considered in the literature review (see Ch. 2). In this study the significance of school culture to their learning was referred to by a majority of respondents. Attendant themes such as professional identity, school leadership and micro-politics also emerged as significant in APs' reflections. These issues and their impact on APs' learning and learning experiences are considered in this chapter.

2. A Supportive School Culture?

15 out of the 21 respondents cited the importance of school culture in relation to their learning, '*culture is hugely important as to how you learn*' (F2CS). They expressed an awareness of whether it affords them positive learning opportunities or inhibits their professional learning and development:

'...If the school or your place of work is not a place you want to be then you are not going to make the effort, you are not going to take the same interest ...' (F5CS).

The tradition in Irish education of working alone is highlighted by a respondent who comments:

'...In Ireland we are inclined to be very private... I think that most people plough their own furrow when it comes to their own job...'(F10CC).

Reflecting on the reason why a collaborative supportive culture does not exist among APs in her school even though they all worked together over many years, one AP suggests

'...I think it's alien to the Irish nature.... we all know one another a long time you know, even the most newly appointed APs year heads are in the school 20 years! So it's not from not knowing one another long enough...'(F2CS).

However, the changing culture of Irish post-primary organisational structures is in respondents' comments. Although Schein (1985) points out that the purpose of culture is to conserve rather than to change, the findings suggest that there is an awareness and a recognition of ongoing change and improvement being driven by factors both from within and outside the school.

'...There is a much better sense of team work now than there would have been 10 years ago and I think its to do with the changing culture in the school...'(F2CS).

Positive interpersonal relationships within collaborative cultures enhance adult learning (Marsick and Watkins, 1990). 7 respondents who experience a positive working environment emphasise the importance of a collaborative culture and 'sharing' among colleagues as critical to their learning and development:

'...The school culture is open ...there is always someone to learn from...'(F6VS).

'...I suppose an openness in culture makes other people's experience accessible...'(F2CS).

Respondents indicate an awareness of the importance of a supportive culture to their learning. The indication of a recent cultural shift in Irish schools from working alone towards a more collaborative approach with collegial support is perceived as significant. However this is not the experience of all respondents and the next section explores the data in relation to the impact of a negative culture on their learning.

Learning in a Culture of Mistrust

The findings indicate that 8 of the 21 respondents experience a lack of collegial and cultural support: *'some people wouldn't particularly have wanted to be helpful'* (F2CS). Argyris (1987) argued that learning and professional development in the workplace is dependent on a certain richness of environment that allows people to take risks, to experiment and feel safe to display their authentic self. Bottery (2003) suggests that lack of mutual trust is a contributor

to a culture of unhappiness and that when colleagues fail to trust it results in anger, lowered self-esteem, powerlessness and a deep dislike of those who show distrust (p.199). An AP presenting to staff for the first time, on behalf of management, on a DES requirement describes how lack of trust impacted on her where colleagues questioned her ability and authority to deliver:

'...It upset me .. I was doing it to the best of my ability ...they were just afraid ..maybe to trust in me ..'(F1CS).

The damaging impact of such a lack of trust on relationships is evident in her learning with regard to handling a particular colleague in the future:

'..I think I am doubly cautious when I deal with her now..' (F3VS).

A culture of mistrust and a consequent undermining of those who show enthusiasm for learning and trying new ideas is evident in APs' comments. A respondent suggests that her enthusiasm for education and her interest in learning *'is not reflected in a lot of staffrooms'* (F9CS) and is eroded by colleagues who may feel threatened by her. In her experience unsupportive colleagues would ask *"what are you doing that for?"* and she comments that those who take risks and who try out new ideas - *'new things'* - are *'shot down'* by colleagues. The situation is further exacerbated by respondents inability to articulate their learning needs and the lack of affordance in schools for respondents to admit to weakness or lack of *'know-how'*:

'...I think what's very important and which we don't have in huge quantities yet, is an openness to say, 'I don't know what to do when.. or about what...'(F2CS).

As lack of knowledge and learning needs are not addressed in a positive way, they cannot be used constructively to build on one's learning. This finding concurs with Fenwick (2000) who suggests that relations between individuals' interests and the values of the workplace practice are a central mediating factor in determining their engagement in work practice and the kinds of learning that arise. Similarly Flores (2004), in her study on new teachers' learning, found that unsupportive working relationships amongst staff coupled with ineffective leadership lead to the emergence of idiosyncratic coping strategies and, therefore, to an isolated and individual process of learning (p.313). In contrast, teachers who work in schools in which collaboration, information and support are key characteristics reveal more positive attitudes toward teaching and feel more committed to their own professional learning.

The data suggest that contextual and cultural issues are significant in relation to APs' learning. Although there are indications of a move towards collaborative structures and modes of learning for APs, the dominant culture as experienced by a significant number of candidates is one of individualism and isolation (see Ch.2) where there is a lack of support and where risk-taking and new ideas are questioned and undermined.

The Significance of 'Team' in APs' Learning

As a form of shared or distributed leadership, teams tend to be viewed as a response to work intensification (Gronn, 2000) and as a vehicle for organising work (West-Burnham, 2000). Consequently in the changing Irish post-primary education context (see Ch. 1), the emergence of middle management teams has become more relevant. West-Burnham (2000) argues that much of our learning is social. It takes place through articulation, explanation, questioning, modelling and responding and that 'these processes are much more likely to be effective if they take place in a socially sophisticated environment – a team' (p.143). However this learning is predicated upon an enabling culture of openness and candour where 'relationships are comfortable and relaxed and where the culture is supportive' (p.146).

The findings suggest that APs' learning is at the same time individual and social. The data highlight a tension and a dichotomy between respondents' sense of working alone and also being part of a team. While respondents felt isolated '*you are very much on your own, very much so*' (F3VS), they were also aware of the importance of the support of colleagues. One respondent described his situation as ...'*alone and yet ...learning through working with others*' (M4CS). All respondents were conscious of the importance of 'team', of the learning involved in discussing issues with colleagues, of linking with the wisdom of those with longer experience and also the emotional and psychological support of not feeling isolated. The breadth and depth of learning from others, '*the importance of the cumulative knowledge of the team*' (F6VS), including their mistakes, was highlighted in this comment:

'..I would be interested especially in what people have experienced, what difficulties they have experienced and how they have managed it; even if they have managed it badly..' (M6VS).

One of the ways in which teams work together in schools is through a series of formal meetings. The data in this study underpin the significance of school organisational structures, in particular team meetings, in enabling or disabling APs' learning. However, in discussing

organisational arrangements for APs, one must be mindful of the relative newness of this feature of school management life in the Irish context. Some schools, particularly those in the voluntary secondary system, may only have initiated middle leadership structures and team meetings within the last decade, since the Education Act in 1998 (see Ch.1). The experience of having team meetings as opposed to having none is expressed by a respondent who reflects:

'...Back then you were very much on your own...in the last 4 to 5 years we have AP meetings where everyone can feel supported...' (F4CC).

Another reflects how the change in school organizational structures has impacted on her accessibility to others learning:

'...In the beginning it was very haphazard and we were kind of really left to our own devices and we were learning as we went along ...but in the last two years now it has been much more organised and we have regular meetings...' (F11CC).

In this study a minority of respondents referred to meeting as a middle management team as a positive learning experience:

'...You are working in a team ...that is the secret to the success of the whole idea of APs in a school...' (F5CS).

Describing how she learns one respondent comments:

'..It's the team ..talking to the other teachers ...keep track of what is happening with other individualsit is really that we all put our information together...' (F1CS).

Another comments similarly:

'...you learn in meetings with other post holders....we discuss problems that arise and then when a new problem presents itself we look at that and deal with it and then we'd learn from that.' (M3CS).

The richness of 'team' learning and also the significance of this for whole-school learning was highlighted by this respondent:

'...we all discuss issues and agree an appropriate response ...so the school is evolving in the learning..' (F4CC).

However, a key finding in this study is that a majority of respondents, 11 of the 21, indicate a prevalence of a culture of individualism (Hargreaves, 1994) where isolation and privatism are

a common experience and where teams 'are often teams in name only' (West-Burnham, 2000, p.156). The ineffectiveness of what Hargreaves describes as 'contrived collegiality' is also evident where although 'collaborative' structures - APs' meetings or team meetings - are in place for APs to meet and work as a group, they are not utilised sufficiently or effectively. A respondent described the lack of effectiveness of a structured or formal Monday morning meeting which is squeezed into the part of the week when everyone *'is really busy..people don't come or even come late and the meeting is cancelled regularly..'* (F2CS). She reflects on the reality for her which is that there are *'lots of islands but no team'* and this kind of environment is more conducive to survival than to learning *'you don't learn in that environment, you survive'* (Ibid). Other respondents echo the same sentiments:

'...We don't come together often enough as a team...' (F10CC).

and

'...They are not held regularly enough in our school to be properly efficient...' (F2CS).

'...We do have AP meetings but I wouldn't feel enough...' (F8CS).

She reflects in November, three months into the school year:

'...We have had no meeting since we came back and we won't have one now because it has been cancelled. So that means the first term of the new year is gone ...' (Ibid).

APs express a need for teams as a means of connecting with colleagues, sharing experiences and information and using each other as sounding boards. However it emerges that for a majority of respondents, meetings are seen as token, ineffective and a means of contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1993). They are rushed, infrequent, at times poorly attended and often cancelled. They can be an optical illusion on the timetable: they are scheduled but they don't happen. The evidence suggests that for the majority of the APs in this study, a middle management team exists in name but does not provide the support, the learning affordance or the learning stimulus that it should and that they need. These findings echo those of Wise (2000) who in her research into the role of middle managers in secondary schools in England, found that in many departments the meetings were abandoned. As in these findings, this left team members feeling isolated and working alone. While the evidence so far indicates that there is a learning deficit for APs with regard to team status and team support, the data also suggests that the status of APs' role in the overall school context is a significant factor in their learning and professional growth. The next section will explore this aspect of school culture and its impact on APs' learning.

Learning in Public

Busher (2005) contends that work-related self-identities are central to middle leaders' work (p.137). Their development takes place in social, cultural, policy and personal contexts. Beijaard (1995) argues that teachers' perceptions of their professional identity 'affect their efficacy and professional development' (p.750). The findings in this study suggest that APs' professional identities are complex and contested, produced in a rich and complex set of relations of practice (Sachs, 2001). Furthermore it emerges that how APs are perceived and how they perceive themselves as professionals is of considerable significance in relation to their ongoing professional learning.

The influence of different traditions on the growth and development of management structures in Irish post-primary schools (see Ch.1) is significant in respondents' reflections. They suggest a wide-ranging disparity of opinion and conception both in and across schools and sectors with regard to their role and professional self-image: *'there is a huge difference in expectations of the role in the different schools'* (M2VS). These differences in the perception of the role has an impact on the range and depth of APs' individual learning. Commenting on the breadth of her role as opposed to that of APs in other schools a respondent in a Community school reflects:

'...Each school is different. Here, I know we have a huge amount of freedom with our posts, whereas in other schools they don't take on what we take on here. They wouldn't be in charge of interviewing parents and suspensions...' (F8CS).

The satisfaction of experiencing the *'bigger learning stage (F4CC)'* is evident in the comment by a respondent who works in a VEC school where APs substitute for the Senior Management Team in their absence. She describes her learning and professional growth at handling this challenge:

'...Substituting for the Principal and Deputy Principal when absent ... a great learning experience ...challenging ...constant learning because you again are making decisions organising classes, looking after teachers ...' (ibid).

In contrast, a respondent in a 'voluntary' school lays the blame for her narrow role at the feet of senior management and the hierarchical management structure:

'...The Principal does not see you as a manager...there is a pecking order in the school...' (F7VS).

She suggests that in other sectors there is greater flexibility and delegation of authority with regard to AP responsibilities:

'...The strings of management are released downwards more in the C and C and vocational sectors...' (ibid).

The significance of this for APs learning is exemplified in another 'voluntary secondary' respondent's comment. Speaking of colleagues in the C and C and VEC sectors he suggests:

'...Generally their roles would be much more difficult, and much more is demanded of them...' (M2VS).

Significant to this study is the perception of the role of AP which varies across sectors and indeed between schools within sectors and the emerging link between that perception and the breadth and depth of in-school learning experiences to which an AP is exposed. The varied learning opportunities and experiences afforded APs in the Irish post-primary school are due in no small way to the ongoing contested issue of 'role' and the confusion surrounding the status of the AP across the variety of schools within the post-primary sector (see Ch. 1). As indicated above this has significant consequences for each individual's professional and personal growth and learning. The fact that the potential for broader management experience and a greater depth of involvement in whole school issues in some sectors is perceived as 'more difficult' and 'more demanding' than in others signals the varied and widely different learning experiences of APs across the system. It can be extrapolated that the narrower the perception of the professional role, the narrower the learning experience afforded to the AP.

Role Conflict

The conflict surrounding the role of AP (see Ch. 2) emerges in this study as being due to a lack of clarity by them, senior management and staff as to their authority with regard to colleagues and also their lack of a sense of '*ownership of leadership within the team*' (F9CS). Speaking about the confusion among her *Year Head* colleagues a respondent commented

'...There are some Year Heads who feel they have no responsibility towards their colleagues at all and there are others who over take the role of authority...' (ibid).

She put this down to history and precedence in schools where prior to 1998 the role '*wasn't considered a leadership role*' (ibid). There are 3 male respondents in the study who concur with this view. One 'voluntary' secondary school respondent, who does not see himself as having any function in relation to the management of colleagues and contests the issue of the existence of a middle leadership tier:

'...I don't think there is Middle Management in 2nd level (Voluntary schools), it's a name that's been pulled out of a hat, there is management and there are teachers...a management function would be where you might have authority over other staff members, that sort of stuff, like in a hierarchy of management. You don't have that as a post holder...'(M2VS).

He does not see himself in a management role and is in a post specifically as a result of the seniority system. A respondent in a VEC Community College comments similarly:

'...I don't feel myself in a management position. I am very interested in my subject area and I am not desperately interested in being a manager...'(M8CC).

This concurs with the literature (see Ch. 2) and mirrors the comments of Busher (2005) who found that middle leaders did not locate themselves as part of the management echelon of the school, identifying themselves instead with the teachers. He found that they did not refer to themselves as managers. More significant however in the Irish context, is that it is a manifestation of resistance to change and to embracing and learning a broader role among certain APs who are promoted on a seniority basis. However, while this is still the reality in some schools, the evidence suggests that it is changing. The majority of APs interviewed in this study do see themselves as middle leaders with a responsibility to their colleagues and for whole school issues:

'...You are a leader if you are an assistant principal, you are managing people and things ...'(F4CC).

'...As an assistant principal no matter what area you are in, you are a leader...'(F5CS).

Generally respondents are conscious of the importance of having a vision of themselves in the role:

'...I think you have a vision of yourself and how you see your self in the role ...unless you have that its very hard to project yourself into the role in an appropriate way...'(F2CS).

They also emphasise the impact of role models on their professional development, learning from what they see others do and then deciding what to adopt and what not to emulate if appropriate:

'...You pick up your skills from what you see others doing ...and then you develop your own ...'(F1CS).

'...I think learning is picking up ways that other people do things because you are taking on a certain role in a school, you haven't done it before, you have to learn from other people...'(F10CC).

One respondent commented on coming to terms with this and how she first experienced this sense of being 'different':

'...The question they often ask you at an interview is 'would you see yourself as different from the rest of the staff?...and you actually don't know ...you kind of think no you won't...but then you kind of do ..because if you are given a class off to attend an APs meeting and you walk in as a group after the meeting ..the rest of them are looking at you ..you are different ...you are being set apart...' (F4CC).

The learning involved in dealing with the different status is something which some APs do more easily and are more comfortable with than others and one respondent suggested that it is a tacit instinct:

'...Some were better at it than others ... if you had the natural instinct to be able to make that step with the colleagues...' (F9CS).

It is also dependent upon how APs interpret their role, whether they see themselves in a supportive role with colleagues or in a 'them and us' scenario. Reflecting on this one respondent commented:

'...I think feeling comfortable in the shoes, there has to be some way of recognising that it is not just the position that gives you that and taking on a new role of leader isn't a negative thing, it is actually a supportive role. Whereas I think that some people get into difficulties because they see a leadership role as being that they are on another side of a fence to people...' (F9CS).

She felt that this was partly due to the lack of explanation of her authority on the part of Senior Management:

'...I think maybe dealing with the other teachers .. And not really knowing where my authority stopped.... it wasn't terribly well explained...' (ibid).

Furthermore there is evidence of a tension with regard to older members of staff who are less prepared than new younger staff to accept the authority of a colleague. Reflecting on this one respondent commented:

'...I think within the younger staff that they come in and they are introduced to the Year Heads and they seem to see them as being different but within colleagues that are there already and have

grown up with it ..., that you have no sense of; if you like authority over them, if that is the right word?... '(F9CS).

This mirrors the findings of Busher (2005) who, albeit in the English education context, suggests that although middle leaders visibly occupied promoted posts of some seniority in their schools, older staff members continued to perceive middle leaders as one of themselves, not part of the management hierarchy.

The findings suggest that for the respondents who embrace a broader definition of the role, their work enhances their professional identity, learning and growth in that it enables them to see beyond the confines of their own and classroom needs:

'...You get to see the bigger picture ...you can see the problems that lead to the problems... '(F6VS).

Their experience enables them to see themselves as *catalysts for change* (see Ch. 2). Describing how she initiated a professional development event for her colleagues one respondent comments:

'...I do feel now that as a senior teacher you can grasp the nettle and decide yourself and say I think the school really needs it... '(F2CS).

Respondents also reflect on learning to take responsibility for whole school issues. They see their professional role as supporting school culture and structures:

'...I am one of the most senior members of staff here and I value what we have so much that I actively work to ensure that we keep up our structures, keep the team work and the camaraderie that we have... '(F1CS).

Another respondent sees herself as having responsibility for ensuring a consistent approach across the school with regard to problems and issues. Reflecting on the school behaviour policy she comments:

'...The whole school needs to come together on problems like that ...the current year heads are constantly saying that they need consistency ... '(F4CC).

However not all respondents feel they are supported by AP colleagues in adopting this whole-school approach. Frustration at the lack of a common approach is highlighted by one respondent who comments:

'...How do you get somebody to see the ownership of the school, to actually see the needs outside of their own little classroom... to see the effect on the rest of the school?... '(F9CS).

The lack of any induction, mentoring or support, as outlined in Chapter 1, hinders APs' learning in relation to accepting that they are now in a whole-school leadership/management position which is taken seriously by both the school and education authorities:

'...If there had been training I would immediately have felt that we are part of management and it would have created an atmosphere that you are in a management position now and that you should take it seriously ... '(M3CS).

The findings also suggest that there is a 'ceiling' on the learning and professional growth of those wishing to continue to grow in the AP role. Some respondents seem to reach a level where they are frustrated by the lack of challenges and a sense of that *'there is nowhere to go'* (M3CS). It reflects the lack of movement in the system generally and also signals a culture of 'stagnation' in the Irish context. APs comment:

'...I kind of felt this year that I was getting into a rut ..I just need to move on ..I need to do something new ...I cannot go any further in this school ... the question is do I want to stay here doing what I am constantly doing... '(F4CC).

'...I would love to see my job expanded in some way I would love new challenges ... '(M3CS))

Learning to adjust to a new professional role is a complex process. The lack of consistency and the divergence in expectation across the system and between schools with regard to 'who and what' is an AP, and therefore how APs are 'located' in their school context, has significant implications for their learning. The findings suggest that the learning afforded to APs varies significantly across the system. It is dependent to some extent on unique school cultures which range along a spectrum from that of compliance and conformity to one of autonomy and agency. Tensions regarding self-concept, others' expectations and acceptance, and taking a 'bigger picture' school perspective are played out in each AP's unique contextual day-to-day learning experience.

The findings highlight the importance of a positive professional self-image in enabling respondents' development of agency and learning. They outline the complex dynamics of status and relationships as APs struggle to learn their role. Furthermore, some APs experience extreme frustration at their perceived ceiling on their learning. In attempting to unravel the complex issue that is APs' learning, the findings so far point to the need to examine APs'

perceptions of other key emerging aspects of school culture - school leadership and micro-politics. It is to this discussion that the study now turns.

3. School Leadership and APs' learning

The literature suggests that school leadership is key in the development of professional learning cultures in schools, where teachers, as well as students, continue to learn and develop. Bredeson and Johansson (2000) contend that one of the primary tasks of school principals is to create and maintain positive and healthy teaching and learning environments for everyone in the school, including the professional staff (p.386). Similarly, Day (2004) argues that responsibility for the professional learning culture of the school is at the centre of the cultural and educative leadership role.

Senior Management's Support

In this study, the significance of school leadership to APs learning emerges as a recurring theme throughout the data. In their reflections, all respondents underscore the importance of school leadership with regard to the management of school culture:

'...I do believe that in a successful school everything runs from the top.. the agenda, the rhythm...the culture of the school is set from the top..' (M4CS).

A respondent specifically highlights the principal's role in facilitating a culture for learning:

'...The principal and the deputy principal and maybe senior staff's attitude to learning determines the attitude to learning in the school. It is all down to the culture and the set up of the school and the leadership...' (M4CS).

15 respondents speak positively about their experiences with regard to principals' support for their learning and development. Respondents' reflections suggest that the supportive role of the principal is vital to their learning in a number of ways. This includes accessibility, giving support where hard decisions are required, providing a listening ear, being receptive to APs' experiences and insights with regard to school issues and policy direction and facilitating professional development both in school and attendance at off-site events. In terms of accessibility respondents comment on the importance of meeting with the Principal both individually and as a group. One respondent reflects on the importance of regular contact with the principal in terms of organizing and thinking through what she needed to do:

'...She met with me once a month to keep lines of communication open ...it was important for me to be able to explain what I was doing and what I needed...' (F7VS) .

Another speaks of the significance of the principal to her learning in an area of work that was new to the school:

'...The Principal at the time helped me think through how I would begin ...and I had an appointment with her every week so basically I had a debriefing with her every week...' (F1CS).

The importance of the role of school leadership with regard to trust and confidence building (see Ch. 2) in relation to admitting a weakness is highlighted by a respondent who comments that due to the attitude of the senior management in her school she has no difficulty in admitting that she was failing at something or in seeking advice if she felt she was doing it incorrectly.

Inhibiting APs' learning

While none of the respondents mentioned gender as a specific issue, the findings indicate a tension and a frustration on the part of 6 female APs with regard to how they perceive that their male principals relate to them and fail to recognize and enable their learning. The lack of communication and the inability of Senior Management to provide a listening ear and to acknowledge the practical learning that these APs garner on the floor of the school is emphasised by this respondent who suggests:

'...Communication is really, really important, but it has to come from the top Senior Management ...' (F8CS).

'...The big problem I would see with the senior management is they are not as involved as APs on the ground and they don't hear what is going on the ground all the time...' (Ibid).

She reflects on the knowledge that Senior Managers are lacking:

'...It is a knowledge, whereas the management at the top, they are not as practical, they come in at the end but you are dealing with it right up to that level, you know. And it is you that both parents and students come to first and they (Sen Mgt) are the last...' (Ibid).

There is a sense of being ignored:

'...I would feel I have a huge amount to offer ...' (Ibid).

and being put down and feeling lost and depressed when ideas are put to Senior Management, seemingly accepted but then not acted upon:

'...I would very often say "can I run with that?" and it will be "leave it with me (Sn Mgt) ." Then it doesn't happen then and you would maybe get a little bit tired...' (F9CS).

APs experience frustration at not being listened to. There is a perception that Senior management have *'their own agenda'*. ... *'And I would feel that quite frustrating at times'* (F2CS). These findings resonate with literature on the gender structuring of organisations (Ozga, 1993, Coleman, 1996) which suggests that traditional education management structures may be inappropriate for women and hostile to effective ways of managing people.

Lost Learning Opportunities

The theme of feeling 'lost' and 'losing out' is echoed by these respondents in relation to their learning. Referring to the lack of communication discussed above, one AP describes its impact on her, *'if it is not there you lose out'* (F8CS). She suggests that the lack of openness to new ideas and the lack of readiness to take on suggestions leaves her with a feeling of being *'lost'* and also that the school is losing out:

'...APs are in a pivotal position to initiate change in the school but if it is not getting through to the topYou are lost, you have lost this fantastic change that could have happened ...'(F8CS).

She reflects that the reality for her is that her learning is not recognised. She also has ideas about how things might be changed for the better in the school but she is frustrated at the lack of recognition for her learning and at not having a means to make her ideas heard or acted upon:

'...You know, you learn as well, you could go back and tell them, I mean I could see loads of things here that should have changed but never changed. And yet who do you go to? You could discuss it with your other Year Heads and they would agree with you but it would never be taken on board by Senior Management...'(F8CS).

Another respondent had similar experiences with regard to relating to the Principal in her school. She expresses the view that principals are not supportive of learning

'...How many Principals would recognise that they do have a role in actually encouraging other people on the staff...'(F9CS).

She also suggests that senior management do not model the behaviour required to bring about the learning environment required in schools *'unless you actually see the model of walking that talk, then that is not followed in the school'* (Ibid). Barth (1996) contends that the most important role of the Principal is that of lead learner: *'you can't lead where you won't go'* (p.29). Indeed the actual learning by Senior Management in her school is questioned by one respondent who suggests:

'...I would say that the Principal and Deputy Principal have never been on a managerial type course either...' (F4CC).

The above discussion highlights the issue of gender with regard to APs' learning and learning experiences. Coleman (2003) argued that in general *'gender does not seem to be considered an essential element of the discussion and classification of leadership theory in education'* (p.326). However, Hall (1996) suggested that *'an understanding of the impact of gender on life in schools and colleges is an essential component of our ways of knowing about educational leadership'* (p.322). In this study the findings suggest that a significant number (50%) of the female APs interviewed perceive a difficulty with Senior Management in the area of communication and also with regard to the recognition of their learning and their need to feel valued and empowered. Respondents' reflections highlight a perceived lack of a *'collaborative-participative'* management approach by their school principals which Gold (1994) argued is important for women leaders. These female APs have a strong sense of being marginalised and ignored. The findings suggest that the principals do not use their position of power to include *'the leadership and empowerment of others'* (Hall, 1996). This I believe highlights a requirement for principals' training and leadership preparation in the Irish context to encompass an awareness of gender and values-driven management and to emphasise the need to *'nurture and support staff and enhance their self-worth'* (Ozga, 1993).

Enabling APs' Professional Learning

The perceived role of the principal in enabling APs learning varies enormously between those interviewed. This could be partly attributed to the distinctly different tradition of the schools as discussed earlier. An AP in a voluntary secondary school suggests that it is not appropriate:

'...No principal is going to presume on your time and say look you go to that, that wouldn't be the pc thing to do... I think part of it might be that the principal might like to ask you to do it but he won't ask you, because it's an intrusion ...' (M2VS).

On a close examination of respondents' reflections, it is apparent that the general nature of principal support is quite limited. In many instances it is restricted to simply alerting respondents to what CPD events are available. It seems to fall short of actual agency in facilitating or promoting their attendance at significant events:

'...Yes, they are very supportive of courses, very, and we are made aware of every course that is available...' (F10CC).

'...They would put up the notifications in prominent places in the staff room and alert you to it...' (F1CS).

The impetus for sourcing and attending CPD was very much left to the AP:

'...I am sure if I mentioned and said there's a course ...can I go and do it, he'd pay for it and he'd release me to do it...' (F2CS).

The evidence suggests that in many instances APs' learning is inhibited by Senior Management. A culture of resistance exists among Senior Management with regard to recognising APs' wisdom garnered from experience, to listening to their ideas and to actively supporting their learning. If, as they reflect, APs are not consulted, their knowledge is ignored and their ideas buried, then their experience does not afford them opportunities for professional growth and learning. They feel lost, isolated and ignored. APs also perceive that Senior Managers are not themselves proactive in their own learning and that this has a negative knock-on effect on the learning culture of the school. In particular it manifests itself in the 'laissez-faire- approach to APs' CPD. Principals alert APs to notices but are not agentic in promoting it or ensuring that staff are facilitated to attend. This of course may be a cultural issue where as one respondent explained above it is not appropriate for a principal to presume to put upon an AP's time by suggesting that they should attend a CPD event particularly outside school time. It may also be that a lack of appropriate support in terms of teacher substitution militates against releasing staff during the school day. The release of staff is demanding in terms of time and organization both on staff going out and on management. It necessitates substitution rosters, work preparation for classes and follow up. In busy schools, it may be easier for all concerned for staff not to go.

Ball (1987) identifies the headteacher as the 'critical reality definer' (p.81) in the school. The principal has the power to influence school culture, relationships and organizational structures. The next section explores how this power and influence - the micro political aspect of school life - impacts on APs' learning experiences.

4. Micro-politics and APs' learning

Day (1999) draws attention to the need to take into account the 'ways in which values, beliefs, prejudices and behaviour are played out within the micropolitical processes of school life' (p.78). Blase (1991) highlights the centrality of 'influence' and 'power' stating that micropolitics is about power and how people use it to influence others and to protect themselves. Described by Hoyle (1986, p.87) as the 'dark side of organisational life', it is what people in all social settings think about and have strong feelings about, but what is so often unspoken and not easily observed (Blase, 1991). Cranston (2005) comments that what is of significance in a micropolitical sense is the perceived differences that individuals and groups may hold about the way power is being used, resulting in either a positive or a negative effect.

Ball's (1987) definition encompasses the pervasiveness of micro-political behaviour in the school:

'...Micro-politics is multifaceted, indexical and obscure ...it intervenes when least expected, it underpins the fleeting encounter, the innocent-sounding memo, the offhand comment, it is about relationships, not structures, knowledge rather than information, talk rather than paper.. It deals in short-term gains, expediency and pragmatism rather than long-term goals, principles and ideals...' (p.240)

The findings indicate that respondents are aware of how certain school practices and processes and consequently their learning and learning experiences are dictated by micro-political activity. A respondent comments:

'...Politics mitigates against learning so much of the time, maybe it's just in our school? ... It's how things operate around here, it's politics with a small 'p'..' (F2CS).

She describes the feeling of being 'wrong footed' by AP colleagues. She made a decision which AP colleagues seemingly supported but who then rounded on her at a management meeting:

'...I went into the next AP's meeting and I was devoured by everybody and not one person said it to me beforehand...' (ibid).

Consequently she perceived team meetings negatively as 'political pitches':

'...They weren't meetings, there was a whole lack of substance... it was all about jockeying for position..' (ibid).

The findings suggest that micro political activity with regard to APs learning is most evident in respondents' reflections with regard to team meetings, whether they are held or not, how they are structured, who attends and who is in the 'inner circle' of power and influence. Ball (1987) contends that meetings are but fleeting iceberg tips which mark the passing of business but reveal little of the ongoing processes of governance and control (p. 244). Gold et al. (2003), in their study of principled principals, argue that meetings can be seen as a visible manifestation of a school leaders' values system. Clear ideals about respecting, transforming, developing and including staff can be evidenced by the importance given to meetings in a school and the way they are run (p.132). If as Ball (1987) suggests 'schools are places organised around talk' (p.237), then APs' opportunities to meet and share experiences and to learn from each other are crucial to their professional growth. A respondent spoke of how she perceives 'discussion in the team' (F1CS) as crucial to learning. However the decision by the Principal in her school to discontinue meetings was made without consultation or reference to the needs of the APs involved:

'...We no longer have meetings... they went at the end of the first year ..the principal decided they were a waste of time.. they were too disruptive of the timetable...' (F1CS).

Another respondent who was discouraged from organising an in-house CPD for the AP team in her school felt that Senior Management are reluctant to allow APs to meet independently as they don't want them 'getting together in little cliques' (F2CS). Ball (1987) suggests that a great deal of apparent decision-making and policy-making in organizations is focused on official moments like meetings and committees. The use of information in an organization is a powerful weapon of control. Therefore, as the findings indicate, the practice in some schools of only including Year Heads (the pastoral team) in AP weekly team meetings results in respondents, who are not in a pastoral role, feeling isolated and outside the 'inner circle' of the middle management think-tank. It limits their opportunity to meet, share and learn with colleagues and also their ability to influence and contribute to the 'bigger picture' agenda in the school. One respondent reflected:

'...When you are outside the Year Head team doing another post ...I feel myself and others feel this as well that I am on the outside looking in ...' (M3CS).

His frustration at not being consulted, being excluded and being made to feel less important than other colleagues is evident as he reflects

'...You are an assistant principal and you should be part of middle management process whatever your post. It could be quite easy for an AP to become slightly deflated and feel neglectedit is very important to feel that you are part of the big picture...'
(*ibid*).

Another respondent in the same position echoes these feelings. Her sense of isolation, frustration and powerlessness is summed up in her comment:

'...But there should be a time where they make time for me as well...' (F9CS).

Hargreaves (1998) maintains that teachers' emotions are shaped in part by their experiences of power and powerlessness (p. 12). The evidence in this study suggests that the use of power and influence by senior management - school micro-politics - impacts negatively on APs' learning. It is most apparent in relation to team meetings and knowledge control. Deliberate use of power to cancel team meetings and the conscious exclusion of some APs from meetings and influential school policy formation groups is perceived and experienced as a way of silencing and disempowering them and limiting their learning opportunities.

5. Conclusion

The findings identify school culture as a significant enabler or inhibitor of APs' learning. Team, supportive colleagues, a trusting environment, school leadership and micro-politics emerge as key factors which impact on their professional learning. Although there are indications of a move towards collaborative structures and modes of learning for APs, the dominant culture as experienced by a majority of respondents in the Irish post-primary school sector is still the more traditional hierarchical model. This engenders professional isolation, stagnation and an inevitable individual and organisational professional loss in terms of learning and growth. There is also evidence of gender issues with regard to a management style which creates a culture where female APs in particular feel ignored and marginalised.

Wenger et al. (2002) comment that 'learning is a matter of belonging as well as an intellectual process, involving the heart as well as the head' (p.29). This implies that active learning in a school community involves building relationships, creating a sense of belonging, a spirit of enquiry and a professional confidence and identity. APs' learning experiences, as outlined above, do not reflect this. The findings suggest that the learning afforded to APs varies significantly across the system. It is dependent to some extent on whether school cultures enable or disable learning. APs' learning takes place in a culture where there is a general lack

of support and where risk-taking and ideas for change are questioned by colleagues and undermined or ignored by senior management. Some school cultures are also learning poor. There is little discussion or acknowledgement of learning or encouragement to progress and personal ambition and learning are at worst derided or at best unnoticed.

The findings highlight the importance of a positive professional self-image in enabling respondents' development of agency and learning. They outline the lack of consistency and the divergence in expectation across the system and between schools and also the complex dynamics of status and relationships as APs struggle to learn their role. Furthermore, some APs experience extreme frustration at their perceived ceiling on their learning. The role of Senior Management emerges as crucial to the overall learning culture in the school. Those who lead in this area inspire and motivate their APs. However, the evidence points to the existence of a culture of resistance among senior management with regard to supporting and acknowledging APs' learning. If, as APs reflect, they are not consulted, their knowledge is ignored and their ideas buried, then their experience does not afford them opportunities for professional growth and learning. Consequently a key finding is that the narrower the perception of the professional role then the narrower the learning opportunities.

The regular organisational structure for APs' collaborative learning is a structured team meeting. However, for the majority of the APs in this study, a middle management team structure exists in name but does not provide the support, the learning affordance or the learning stimulus that it should and that respondents need. Furthermore, some APs are excluded from attending. These have no natural access to the ear of senior management, to school policy formation or to voicing their concerns and ideas. This engenders anger and a sense of powerlessness. They are deprived the formal collegial support of colleagues and are left feeling dejected and isolated. Consequently, APs' emotions in relation to their learning emerges as a significant theme in the findings and discussion above. It is the consideration of this theme which is addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. The Emotional Dynamics of APs' Learning.

1. Introduction

The significance of emotions in Assistant Principals' learning is an unexpected outcome and also a key finding in this research study. This particular perspective on APs' learning was not the starting point of the study. It was not therefore explicit in the interview schedule and, while referred to, was not dominant in the literature review in Chapter 2.

The interview was the first time any of the respondents in this study had been afforded an opportunity to speak and have a 'voice' about their learning and learning experiences. As outlined in Chapter 1, they are dealing with significant changing times in Irish society and are challenged in doing so. Listening to respondents' reflections stirred memories of my own experiences. As discussed earlier (see Ch.3) due to my professional experience as an AP, my interpretation of their experiences will be underpinned by my own knowledge of and insights into their situation. Respondents were happy to talk about their learning and learning experiences and to see their particular issues getting attention *'it is great to see somebody researching it all'* (F9CS). Being given the time to reflect on and to explore their perceptions of their learning seemed to generate a range of emotional responses. One respondent who found it emotionally draining commented at the end of our conversation *'I'm really tired now'* (F2CS). Another, who was fired by the experience reflected that she would have lots more to say *'if I could do this (the interview) again in a weeks time'* (F9CS).

James and Vince (2001) argue that emotion is integral to the processes of teaching and learning and also to the management of those processes. Ackerman et al. (2004) contend that emotional learning both at an interpersonal and intrapersonal level is among the most pressing challenges facing teachers and school leaders today (p.313). Emotions and learning have been relatively untouched in relation to research on middle leaders generally and to research on APs, in the Irish context, in particular. Writing on middle leaders in the English context, Turner (2006) suggests that more work needs to be done on the affective dimension of their learning. Although Fineman (2000) characterises organizations as emotional arenas (p.1), McDowell and Bell (1997) argue that emotions have either been neglected or perceived in pejorative terms within an organisational context. Beatty (1999) suggests that we can no longer afford to treat the emotions as peripheral. In empirical research on the emotional dimension of Irish school leaders' role, I argue that the consistent exclusion of the emotions in

traditional educational administration research's distorts our theoretical understanding of human experience (O'Connor, 2004). Prominent writers in the emerging 'emotional development' field such as Beatty (2002), Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004) argue for a shift towards the affective, with a specific emphasis on immediate subjective experience. Such a shift allows for a deeper consideration of the inner emotional experience of leadership (Harris, 2004).

This chapter outlines the findings with regard to APs' emotional response to their learning and learning experiences. It is deliberately descriptive, aiming to illuminate what respondents revealed about their innermost feelings on this issue. It has three subsections: emotional beginnings, learning to work with difficult people and learning about oneself.

2. Emotional Beginnings

My findings highlight the emotional impact of problems and difficulties that changing role in a school generates for APs (Harris, 2004). Depending on their experiences at this crucial learning time, APs can be empowered and gain increased self-efficacy or become discouraged and over cautious in their development. As Billet (2002) argues, negative feelings particularly about oneself can form major barriers towards learning whereas positive feelings and emotions can greatly enhance the learning process (see Ch. 2). Respondents use words such as 'terrified' and 'bewildered' to describe how they felt when they were initially appointed. The fear of the unknown is real:

'...Well I think when you get any new job at the start you are bewildered.. how will I do this... ?' (F4CC).

APs' initial appointment involves learning to cope with feelings of vulnerability and being open to the judgement:

'...I was terrified by the fact that I had been so gung-ho at the interview about what I could do that when I was told I had been appointed I felt ...I am not ready for this...'(F1CS).

There is also a fear of being found wanting in terms of professional knowledge particularly as there is no training or induction for the role (see Ch 1).

'...I didn't know that first year what could or couldn't be achieved...'(M4CS).

Learning to Cope with a Knowledge Deficit

Eraut's (1994) topology on headteachers' management knowledge (see Ch. 2) serves as a useful heuristic for examining APs' learning. He argues the importance in successful management of what he terms process knowledge, knowledge of how to do things, or 'know-how' (p. 81). It is partly a matter of knowing all the things one has to do and making sensible plans for doing them and partly a matter of possessing and using practical routinised skills (ibid, p.81). In the current Irish education context, APs are catapulted into new positions with no lead in time and no induction or training (see Ch. 1). Consequently, there are significant gaps in terms of the knowledge and skills they require to do the tasks involved in the wide variety of individual AP roles. As secondary school teachers they are subject specialists and subject trained:

'...we really are subject trained ..we are not trained in other areas...' (F5CS).

This lack of knowledge and poor induction into the role is an experience which leads to steep and stressful learning. It involves APs feeling deskilled, disempowered and erodes their self-confidence. The emotional impact of being out of one's depth in relation to knowledge is described by a Year Head who found the learning challenging:

'...I kept thinking where's my mommy ... I don't really want to be a grown up after all..' (F2CS).

Another commented that her initial reaction was 'how am I going to deal with it?' (F4CC). Consequently, acquiring the knowledge needed to fulfil this new role is a stressful and lonely experience. The reality of it is summed up by a respondent who reflects:

'...You are sort of groping a bit in the dark until you find your feet and I think you could do without that...' (F8CS).

As a respondent reflected:

'...I was constantly terrified ...because I knew that I didn't' have the skills and the knowledge ...' (F1CS).

Taking over and managing a technical area, where specific knowledge is required, is described with horror:

'...my first year doing the timetable was a nightmare...' (M4CS).

A lack of proper handing-over procedures and induction processes means that the initial learning in the role is demanding. One respondent describes finishing a particular role in June

where she co-ordinated a particular curriculum programme for the school and work at which she felt skilled and competent. Due to school needs she was requested by Senior Management to take up a new role as Year Head to incoming first years in August. She was handed their files and left to get on with it. She did not know what she was supposed to do.

'...I did not have a clue what to do with that pile of paper...'
(F10CC).

Feeling deskilled she began to doubt herself:

'...Now at that particular time I wondered should I have known...'(*ibid*).

Her sense of inadequacy and frustration is evident in the comment:

'...I've been appointed as AP, I am Year Head and I haven't a clue what to do!...'(*ibid*).

Another respondent reflects on the learning challenge presented to her when the person she was replacing had not completed the work of timetabling student subject choices for the following term:

'...the person who I replaced had gone off on a career break, I was going in as a 4th year Year Head, She had never completed the student subject options in June and left me with that and I wasn't aware that it was left like that and nobody else knew either...'(F2CS).

There is frustration at finding herself in this position and at a colleague's apparent lack of professionalism:

'...In September, I couldn't believe I had this to do, I couldn't believe it hadn't been done...' (*ibid*)

She describes the sense of satisfaction at overcoming the challenge and in the learning that ensued:

'...I still remember it and I had a huge sense of achievement that I had got my head around it...!'(*Ibid*).

The emotional response to lack of know-how is further intensified by the '*emotional silence*' and '*reluctance to offer voice to actual feelings*' (Harris, 2004) with regard to APs' learning needs. The frustration of feeling 'silenced' and of not being able to articulate one's learning needs and not knowing where to go for support is reflected on by one respondent who comments:

'...Nobody ever says to you that you have more to learn.. this is a stress... you feel you can never say 'I don't know' .. or 'show me how to do that' ...because who can you say it to ...who do you address it to ?... ' (M9CS).

The findings suggest that APs are silenced 'due to fear of being ridiculed and a fear of appearing out of control and stupid' (Beatty and Brew, 2004, p. 338). One respondent commented on the need 'to feel comfortable.. saying I am not doing this well, is there another way of doing it?' (F9CS). Another spoke of how he lived with a foreboding sense of failure and a fear of maybe having to go to the principal and say 'I can't handle the situation' (M5CS). The lack of openness with regard to the need for new learning and more significantly the non-existence of a safe space in which one was able to say 'I don't know what to do' and to openly seek assistance is significant with regard to APs' learning. This emotional 'silence' negates questioning and seeking out new knowledge and limits APs' learning.

The changes in Irish society (see Ch. 1) have led to increased social issues among young adults attending post-primary schools. This social turbulence has impacted on the management of schools and particularly those APs working as Year Heads in a pastoral role, with specific responsibility for student care. They need to be knowledgeable about students' emotional and sexual concerns, about the legal issues pertaining to such problems, about the role and function of the different statutory agencies who specifically support schools in these areas. They also need to be emotionally strong in themselves to deal with distressing student and family situations. A Year Head respondent did not expect to encounter the amount of social and personal issues regarding student issues and found it stressful and upsetting:

'...There are so many personal issues come on the Year Head's plate. I was expecting some but not the amount that comes... I found that difficult.., the most difficult for me to realise that this actually was happening... ' (F10CC).

Another commented on the learning involved in distressing pastoral issues. Her lack of skills and 'know-how' concerned her:

'...How to deal with student difficulties... fights, sexual issues, depression, suicidal tendencies, I had never learned anything about this... ' (F6VS).

APs require a general knowledge base and specific technical knowledge and information to effectively carry out their role. As teaching professionals, confident in their subject area, the findings suggest that they experience a crucial knowledge deficit on appointment where they

do not know what to do. What is emerging from the data is the significant emotional challenge for APs in attempting to acquire this. The lack of in-school handing-over procedures and processes further exacerbates the situation. APs are left feeling deskilled and vulnerable. Furthermore, the apparent ‘emotional silence’ with regard to articulating one’s learning needs creates an added tension and limitation with regard to their learning.

Learning in a Shifting ‘Zone of Authority’

While lack of knowledge and skills are distressing particularly at the initial appointment stage, the findings also indicate the significant emotional learning for APs in managing a change in status and relationships with colleagues. Schmidt (2000), writing on the emotional experiences of department heads in Canada, argues that as educators’ responsibilities shift, so do their emotions, particularly those emotions for which they may not have been prepared or forewarned (p. 840). In this study, 8 out of the 21 respondents note that moving out of the classroom – their natural zone of authority - is a significant learning challenge. They are no longer working almost exclusively with students. Coming out of the classroom where ‘*you are in charge of your destiny*’ (M7VS) poses professional risks and threats. A respondent comments that ‘*teachers can be afraid of dealing with adults*’ (FICS). Furthermore, APs are out of their ‘safe’ zone where they have experienced success and professional recognition:

‘...Now suddenly you are out of the woodwork room where you have been safe and successful...’ (M7VS),

They are out of their natural zones of authority, their classroom and their subject teaching area, and find themselves in a new area which may leave them vulnerable to being perceived as incompetent and to criticism from colleagues. As one respondent comments: ‘*colleagues are suddenly no longer staff-room buddies*’ (ibid). He reflects that there is an emotional rift as he is no longer perceived as ‘*being on their side*’ (ibid).

The situation is further heightened by the need to appear knowledgeable before one’s colleagues in order to avoid criticism. Bullock et al. (1997), writing on the outcomes of an exploratory study on educational management learning, comment on the importance of ‘one’s standing in the eyes of colleagues’ (p.56) for those appointed to management posts within the school. Reflecting on the new-found exposure of being out of the classroom, a respondent commented:

'...It is ok going in and talking to 30 students about x, y z that you are expert in ..but now you are leaving yourself open for criticism...' (M3CS)

For the respondents in this study, changing role within the school presents a significant learning challenge. They have to deal with their sense of vulnerability at being out of the comfort zone of the classroom. They are also aware of their learning with regard to managing a new relationship with former colleagues. The shift in the professional relationship where one now has to relate to and negotiate with difficult colleagues at a different level involves significant emotional growth in terms of people skills and self-confidence. It is the emotional dimension of this aspect of APs' learning that is explored in the next section.

3. Learning to Work with 'Difficult' Adults

The nature of working relationships is a dominant theme throughout APs' reflections. Their learning involves dealing with interpersonal relations and dilemmas. A key challenge is acquiring 'people knowledge' (Eraut, 1994), the issue of dealing with colleagues, Senior Management and other adults: *'negotiating oneself around the intricacies of people'* (F2CS). The findings in this study echo Crawford (2004) who, when researching Primary Principals' reflections on the impact of emotions on their role as school leader, found that the 'chief foci for the headteachers' emotions were all people related' (p.23). When asked to reflect on a critical learning moment during the time in their role, *all* respondents referred to an incident involving some element of conflict with colleagues, parents or outside agencies as the most challenging learning experience. The incidents recalled by APs are in the category of what Ackerman et al. (2004) term as 'wounding'. In their study of 65 school leaders in the US, they describe a wound as ranging from a disappointment, a problem, a disorienting dilemma, a 'variety of toxic confrontations'. They argue that it is an important source for emotional and social learning which impacts on professional as well as personal growth and development (p.312). It can be felt as physical and emotional exhaustion from being 'too many things to too many people' (ibid, p.315). It involves emotional learning on intrapersonal and interpersonal issues. Respondents were invited to reflect on how they dealt with the difficult situation, explaining their response to it and also what they learned from it for the future.

Learning to Work with Colleagues

APs work in what can best be described as a 'pressure cooker' environment. They find themselves constantly under pressure to respond to others' needs, contextual crises and events. They become the psychological containers for other people's emotions. Similar to

what James and Vince (2001) found with regard to head teachers, the findings in this study suggest that APs

'...Carry invisible rucksacks on their backs into which various people around them deposit rocks, with these rocks or burdens being the weight of others' emotions, behaviour ...' (p.312).

The findings indicate that over one third, 8 of the 21 respondents, found the hostility and controversy among colleagues regarding their promotion very challenging and disempowering. The lack of acceptance and of support had the effect of creating self doubt, a sense of un-readiness and a 'set-back' in the learning process. One respondent comments that she felt inadequate and doubted her judgement due to the reaction of colleagues to her appointment:

'...Perhaps being made to feel by others, that you shouldn't have got it and therefore one questions one's own judgement. So I would have double checked everything and looking back on it, it became a habit and I did it for far too long...' (F2CS)

This impacted on her confidence and delayed her professional growth. She stayed dependent on other colleagues' approval for too long and failed to trust her own judgement regarding decisions.

Another emotionally laden area in learning to deal with colleagues is coping with their expectations of the AP in the role and their expectation of perfection. APs feel under pressure to perform. One respondent was challenged by staff when facilitating a staff workshop for the first time on a DES requirement:

'...There was a reaction initially from one member of staff and then there were probably two or three members of staff involved...' (F3VS)

They questioned:

'...Why I didn't know more, why I didn't have the answers to all of their queries...' (ibid)

She reflects on how:

'...Teachers as you know they want answers.. they want the expert...' (ibid).

APs are also under pressure to appear busy. An AP, who on appointment spent time researching his subject area (School Planning) which was new to the school, comments on how colleagues perceived that he wasn't busy enough:

'...They wanted a 'busy' person...I was asked, what do you do for your post?...' (M9CS).

This striving for perfection in the face of criticism from colleagues manifests itself also in pressure to always be in school. As one respondent explained her reluctance to leave school to attend CPD:

'...You couldn't be absent because if you were you would come back to chaos ...' (F8CS).

APs need to learn how to accept being 'good enough' rather than trying to be perfect.

Being in a position of authority where one has the '*ultimate responsibility for decisions*' (F8CS) is challenging and unsettling. One respondent commented that '*it is not a pleasant thing sitting in judgement on people*' (M2VS). The fact that other people depend on you to make a 'right' decision is stressful and challenges APs' value base:

'...We act in what we hope is in the best interest of students ..you just wonder what is best ...' (F5CS).

'...So many people look to you to make the right decisions for that particular time...' (F4CC).

There is a glimpse of guilt in the consideration and the concern that the best interests of all involved are being served by the decision taken. This echoes Harris (2004) who argues that teachers and leaders need to feel 'known', for their efforts, their intentions, for their 'heart in the right place' (p.398). This sense of being responsible for the feelings and sense of wellbeing of others is reflected in a comment by a respondent who spoke of the importance for him of listening to people, '*if you listen well and if they feel going away that you have given them a fair hearing ...that's all you can do*' (M4CS).

One of the greatest challenges and the most difficult areas for APs' emotional learning is handling disagreements with colleagues:

'...I think awkward teachers would probably be the most difficult thing in your job ...' (M6VS).

Being, as one respondent commented '*in middle management in every sense of the word*' (M5CS), and getting caught in the middle between colleagues and students or parents, particularly in the Year Head pastoral role, involves interpersonal and intrapersonal learning. Respondents comment:

'...There are occasions when the teachers are wrong and that can be difficult and when you start the job first it takes a lot to come down on the side of the student ...and in our role we can get caught like this...' (M3CS)

There is also the need for awareness and wisdom that despite the difficulties one is in a long-term relationship with one's colleagues:

'...I think the difficult colleagues are more difficult because you have to live with them the next day...' (M6VS)

This necessitates a degree of restraint in dealing with colleagues and intense emotional work in maintaining positive professional relationships.

The findings suggest that the shift in their relationship with colleagues is emotionally demanding and gives rise to significant interpersonal and intrapersonal learning for APs. The lack of acceptance and support experienced by some has the effect of creating self doubt, a sense of un-readiness and a set-back in the learning process. They find themselves constantly under pressure to respond to others' needs, contextual crises and events. They must also learn to believe in themselves and to trust their judgement with regard to decision making which may be divisive and contrary to the wishes of colleagues. Their learning requires intense emotions in dealing with and resolving conflict situations with staff while being ever mindful of the need to maintain positive relationships into the future.

Learning to Work with Senior Management

Dealing more closely with and having to negotiate with Senior Management was mentioned by 6 out of the 21 respondents as a significant learning challenge. APs need to be supported, listened to and acknowledged by Senior Management. One respondent reflects on the learning involved for him in working effectively with his superiors. He suggests that this a key but difficult learning area for APs.

'...You will have the confidence very quickly to deal with people under you ...the question is how to deal with people over you...' (M4CS).

It involves developing self-confidence, being assertive in articulating one's feelings and one's needs. He describes his frustration with Senior Management who in making (timetabling) requests are not always aware of 'the amount of work involved' (ibid). He reflects on how

'...The principal approached me to change the 5th year Irish allocation ...a large complex block (6 subjects/teachers) ...it took

20 hours to do over the weekend and then after the weekend I was told it didn't need to be changed at all! ... ' (ibid).

He learned:

'...To impress upon the principal the necessity of having the information accurate from the start... ' (ibid).

He also quickly learned the importance of asserting himself, making requests, being heard and getting action with regard to his professional needs:

'...How to make your requests ...how to be assertive ...how to deal with an issue that is not being addressed and is affecting your role? ... ' (ibid).

Where there is genuine trust and delegation by Senior Management the AP's experience can be overwhelmingly positive in terms of learning. Recalling a new school situation where the principal delegated responsibility and decision making and gave space to APs for learning, risk taking and professional growth, a respondent commented on his experience:

'... We were delighted with the scope to do the job, so basically we were fortunate by what was expected of us by the principal ... we were happy to take it all onwe were enthusiastic to have a position and we kind of felt privileged really... ' (M3CS).

Another AP reflects on her experience where there had been a change of Principal and a change in support. The organisation of regular meetings with the Principal, the opportunity to share and discuss problems with colleagues and to learn from that has made a significant difference to her work as an AP:

'...There is brilliant support this year and it makes such a difference, it really makes a difference...you are not isolated which I have experienced at times... ' (F11CC.)

She feels less isolated from other AP colleagues and has become more confident in her work:

'...Our role has been more defined ..we have learned from that, that has been a great help... ' (ibid).

The findings underpin those in Chapter 4 in highlighting the need for greater awareness by school Principals of their pivotal role in enabling APs' professional learning. The findings suggest that working closely and positively with one's senior colleagues is important but emotionally challenging APs. The data suggests that positive and negative feelings with regard to their learning result respectively from the encouragement and discouragement they

receive from their principals. In a situation where there is poor communication and understanding vis a vis an APs' needs and work challenges, they need to break out of the 'emotional silence' discussed earlier and learn to be assertive in articulating their needs.

Learning to Work with Parents

Recent societal and legislative developments (see Chapter 2) have enhanced parents' power as consumers of education and have also seen the rise of parental involvement with schools (Vincent, 1996). For APs who work in a pastoral capacity, particularly Year Heads, managing their relationship with difficult parents presents a significant learning challenge. In this study 6 of the 21 APs interviewed, of whom 10 were Year Heads, commented on the learning involved in this aspect of their work. A respondent described what she learned from a particularly distressing meeting with angry parents for which she felt '*totally unprepared*' (F11CC). She learned the importance of preparation and to be ready to deal with the unexpected: '*I learned to be prepared and to expect anything really, just to be ready*' (ibid). She also learned the importance of staying calm, listening and staying focused. Reflecting on the experience she comments that she learned:

'...To say very little and keep going back to your point, your focus about why the parents were here. Listen to them but keep going back to the reason for the meeting in the first place...' (ibid).

Another Year Head reflected on the difficulty she had with parents who challenged her word on the decisions or discussions of a meeting. She also learned early on the importance of good preparation and note taking and the importance of having a colleague present during a meeting. She comments that her experiences have:

'...Opened my eyes really as regards parents and the way they look at things. They hear the children's point of view. A lot of them are surprised when they hear what is going on and a lot of them are very glad to know it but some don't want to know it..' (F8CS).

An AP who dealt with school admissions suffered what he described as a vitriolic and personal attack by a mother, '*a disappointed parent*' (M6VS), whose son was refused a place in the school. Reflecting on his experience he comments that he learned to be patient and not to react to bullying or misplaced anger. He also learned the wisdom of sticking to agreed criteria and of being honest and open about processes and procedures.

The findings indicate that APs' work with parents is mostly in the area of conflict and conflict resolution, dealing with parents' misunderstandings, anger and disappointments. This is an intensely emotional arena in which to work. APs must learn to manage their emotional reactions to these scenarios. This involves listening, staying focussed and not overreacting to provocation. They learn the importance of minding themselves by being well prepared. They must also learn the importance of being seen to be fair, open and transparent in terms of processes and procedures. What is particularly interesting is that all of this learning is 'on the job' and with apparently little help or discussion from other professionals or colleagues. Blase (1991) reported that principal support for teachers with regard to parents was positively associated with reduced teacher vulnerability. Furthermore, Blase and Anderson (1995) argued that support for teachers caused parents to respond more positively to the school and its expectations. The findings in this study emphasise those of the research literature and highlight the importance of support for teachers working in this difficult domain particularly in the current evolving education context where parent-teacher interactions are likely to continue to grow.

4. Learning about Oneself

Learning and Personal Cost

The findings highlight that learning in an 'emotional arena' is not cost neutral (Harris 2004). It comes hard won and at a price (Ackerman et al. 2004). This resonated with my own personal experience (see Ch.1) when working as an AP. I found that the organizational 'silence' surrounding this aspect of APs learning experience can lead to one becoming disconnected and numb to one's own feelings for which one can pay a very high price both professionally, personally and emotionally. In this study three female respondents specifically commented that they had trouble learning to connect with themselves and their feelings. A Year Head who didn't feel supported commented:

'...I get very stressed ..I would go home and I wouldn't sleep...'
(F11CC).

Another spoke of her work ethic and her sense of responsibility of ensuring that a new school initiative for which she was responsible would be successful:

'...I was quite lost ...threw myself into it and worked as hard as I could ...made myself ill...nobody said stop! ...' (F1CS).

She reflected that she learned *'to mind myself better'*, to stop and rest and *'listen to my body'* (*ibid*). These respondents seemed not to be able to learn to disengage emotionally and to step back and take care of themselves. Two became ill or had to take time out. They had to eventually learn to re-organise and reconceptualise how they approached their work. One particular respondent who did not feel supported in her work commented:

'...I have stood back from it ...Because I ended up doing too much .. I probably reached burnout...I am now job sharing...' (F7VS).

What is emerging for these respondents is the significance of self-knowledge and self-efficacy. To know oneself and to be open to reflecting on and evaluating one's responses to people and situations is crucial to their learning as an AP. Failing to learn this can cost them dearly. The findings raise questions as to whether the emotional price that some APs pay for their learning is too high. They also highlight significant gender issues which are outside the scope of this particular small scale research study as to whether male and female Assistant Principals respond differently to the emotional demands of learning in the role. They signal that Hall's (1997) assertion that 'an understanding of the impact of gender on life in schools...is an essential component of our ways of knowing about educational leadership' (p.322) applies also to the study of Assistant Principals as middle leaders in schools.

5. Conclusion

The findings indicate that there are inextricable links between emotion and learning (Beatty and Brew, 2004) and the need to address the emotional dynamic of APs' learning as part of a comprehensive approach to preparing them for the challenges in today's schools. They support the thinking of Ackerman et al. (2004) who suggest that an initial job requirement for the twenty-first century school leader is to be:

'...A whole person in his or her leadership, aware of the attitudes that she/he holds, accepting his or her feelings and real in his/her relationships with others...' (P.325).

This I believe to be equally true for those in AP positions in Irish post-primary schools.

As evidenced above APs' learning is grounded in and shaped by emotion. Their learning experiences are emotional arenas par excellence (James and Vince, 2001). Emotions are issues that are difficult to gain access to and are perhaps considered soft and self-indulgent. However, to deny the relevance of emotions to APs' learning is to deny the realities of their professional learning and growth. APs experience a crisis of confidence on appointment due to a lack of a general knowledge base and specific technical knowledge and information to

effectively carry out their role. This is compounded by a dearth of in-school handing-over procedures and processes. As teaching professionals, confident in their subject area, the findings suggest that this knowledge deficit experience leaves APs feeling vulnerable and deskilled. Furthermore, the apparent 'emotional silence' with regard to articulating one's learning needs leaves them '*groping in the dark*' (F8CS) and creates an added tension and complication with regard to their learning. The existence of 'emotional silence' (Beatty, 2002) highlights the need to break the silence and to learn to be assertive and assured in articulating their learning needs. Schmidt (2000) argues that interactions and relationships that involve suppressed emotions generally remain uncomplicated, shallow and superficial. The consequence is that of little shared meaning or emotional understanding between people.

While the impact of a lack of technical competency generates strong emotions, the findings also suggest that emotions are significant in APs' interpersonal and intrapersonal learning (Ackerman et al. 2004). APs have to learn to deal with their sense of vulnerability at being out of the comfort zone of the classroom and the consequent shift in the professional relationship with colleagues, senior management and parents. Learning this involves personal growth in terms of people skills and self-confidence and grappling with their own and others' emotions (Beatty, 2002). A lack of acceptance, support and trust is a reality that has the effect of creating self doubt, a sense of un-readiness and a set-back in the learning process.

As the findings indicate, APs' emotional learning takes place on the job and is mostly in response to events, crises and experience (Turner, 2004). When professional roles are characterized by conflict, change and ambiguity, intense and often negative emotional reactions are the consequence (Schmidt, 2000). APs are constantly the recipients of powerful projections on the part of others in the form of hopes, expectations and fears. They suffer stress from fear of failure and fear of being judged and criticized. They learn to make moral decisions where there is a conflict of values with regard to the rights of teacher and student or parent. APs have to learn to believe in themselves and to trust their judgement with regard to decision making which may be divisive and contrary to the wishes of colleagues. In dealing with conflict situations, their learning requires an awareness of the importance of openness, transparency and patience which involves listening, staying focussed and not overreacting to provocation. To know oneself and to be open to reflecting on and evaluating one's responses to people and situations is crucial to learning as an AP. In this study this is particularly relevant in the case of 3 female respondents who suffered illness due to emotional strain in the

role. It raises questions with regard to how female APs cope in emotional arenas where the culture and the management style (see Ch.4) may be inimical to their ways of working and learning.

Having so far considered emerging issues which impact on APs' professional learning and learning experiences, the next chapter addresses APs' perceptions of their best ways of learning and barriers to their learning.

Chapter 6. Assistant Principals' Best Ways of Learning

1. Introduction

The analysis of the data so far has identified the significance of an enabling school culture and the importance of emotions in Assistant Principals' learning experiences. It suggests a current reality where in many instances teacher and school cultures are inimical to APs' learning. Given this reality, I now wish to examine the data with specific reference to how the majority of people I interviewed perceive that they best learn.

The literature search in Chapter 2 highlighted particular theories with regard to influences on, approaches to and ways of professional learning. It led me to seek answers to the questions of how Assistant Principals, as professional educators, see themselves as learners, how they believe their experiences impact on their learning, what impedes their learning in their role and how their learning needs can best be addressed. This chapter therefore, examines Assistant Principals' perceptions of their learning under the following emerging themes: Learning in the Workplace, Formal and Informal Learning and Barriers to Learning.

2. Learning in the Workplace

Boud and Garrick (1999) argue that learning at work has become one of the most exciting areas of development in the dual fields of management and education:

‘...Learning has moved from the periphery – from something which prepared people for employment- to the life blood which sustains them...’ (P.1).

Barnett (1999) takes this argument further when he suggests that, as we now live in an age of super complexity, learning in work takes on a new urgency, ‘work has to become learning and learning has to become work’ (p.29). The findings indicate that, once appointed, *none* of the respondents received any formal in-school support and all had ‘grown into their role’ (Glover et al., 1998, p.290). Consequently, it is not surprising that one respondent described the learning experience as ‘*going from nothing to everything*’ (F6VS) and that *all* 21 respondents agreed that they learn from experience in the workplace: ‘*you learn from the work that you do*’ (F5CS). This concurs with the literature on experiential learning which emphasises the centrality of doing and the significance of ‘active engagement’ (Wallace, 1996) with regard to learning as adults (see Ch. 2).

Learning by Doing

In this study a core theme emerging from respondents' reflections on their learning is that they learn from experience on the job:

'...The day to day practice is the learning ..learning experiences are constant and ongoing ...' (F3VS).

As the findings in Ch. 5 already indicate, this is particularly true in relation to learning that takes in response to events, crises and people issues. Respondents see day-to-day experience as critical to their professional learning and also to their personal development through the building of their self confidence:

'...You have to do it yourself ..before you can learn it ..it is no good someone telling you ... you have to get in there and experience it for yourself.. gaining confidence...' (F4CC).

Schön (1991) argues that practitioners learn in the workplace by noticing and framing problems of interest to them and then enquiring and experimenting with solutions. A respondent reflects this in commenting that she learns by:

'...Trying out various strategies, seeing do they work ..if they work you run with them ...if they don't work ..you have got to try and decide another strategy ...'(F3VS).

In this study *all* respondents agree that they make mistakes and try to learn from them:

'...There is a lot to be learnt by trial and error and hit and miss. I do think that a lot of the learning is on the ground...' (F2CS).

APs learn by mistakes or unsystematic processes of trial and error and their learning grows out of everyday encounters while living and working in a given context (Marswick and Watkins, 2001). However, as outlined in Ch. 4, school contexts for many of those interviewed in this research are not supportive of their learning. This raises a question with regard to the quality and effectiveness of APs' workplace learning. Do their workplace experiences enable them to embrace the notion of the extended activist learning professional (see Ch. 2) or do they adopt a restricted, reductionist approach (Barnett, 1997) - learning the ropes - in order to survive? I will return to this issue later in the chapter.

Learning Over Time

Townsend (1999) in her study of the learning of nineteen New Zealand principals described their learning over time as 'emergent', the living process of creating new learning by fusing learning from many experiences (p. 126). The findings of this study also indicate that being there over time was significant for APs' learning. By working in the role over a period of years they build on their learning, both personal and professional. Emergent learning is perceived as tacit: *'Sometimes you don't even know it is happening but it is how you deal with the next issue .. then you know you've learnt'* (F6VS). This echoes Eraut (1994) who acknowledges that much of the experiential knowledge about management is rarely reflected upon by managers and is therefore unknown' to them 'people do not know what they know' (p.15). This tacit nature of APs' learning is encapsulated by a respondent who comments at the end of her interview:

'...I didn't realize how much I had learned until I started talking...'
(F6VS).

Emergent learning was also demonstrated in terms of APs' perceptions of how they had developed as professionals over the years in the role. They saw themselves gaining in self-knowledge and self-confidence. One respondent who had grown to really enjoy all aspects of her role commented:

'...I love the feeling 4 years on ...I feel more confident, I learnt that I could work on my own, that it didn't matter that I didn't know everything at the beginning...' (F6VS).

Another commented on his self awareness regarding the stresses of the job:

'...I found out that I am good under pressure and that pressure doesn't really get to me ...that I can carry on my day- to -day work and compartmentalise and say there is nothing I can do about that now...' (M4CS).

Being able to stand up for themselves was seen as significant learning. A respondent who initially felt terribly put upon in the role spoke of *'learning an awful lot about how to tell people what can be done and what can't be done'* (ibid). His growth in confidence and self esteem is evident in his reflection:

'...Over the years I have probably convinced myself that I know I am always going to get the job done and that I work well'

doing my own thing ...I enjoy it now and I am far more relaxed in that situation ...' (ibid)

The youngest respondent commented on the difficulties of being young in the role and how it gets easier with time:

'...Projecting myself, getting up to speak ...assemblies, parent groups, staff ...it is hard going when you are young ...it is getting easier!...' (F6VS).

Learning on-the-job is an important and powerful feature of APs' learning. In the perceptions of these APs, learning appears to occur not just through the situational contexts of initiation, crises, problem-solving (see Ch. 4) but also through the complex process of being there over time. APs learn by trial and error and by persevering. Their learning is sometimes tacit and they are almost unaware of it.

However as discussed in Chapter 2, routine case-specific learning may not contribute a great deal to professional knowledge. Eraut (1994) argues it is easy for managers to become too reliant on experience without examining it critically. Avis (1995) writes that 'experience is never innocent, as the accumulation of messages that both empower and dis-empower learners, it must be critiqued' (p.182). Therefore, I believe that a key challenge for APs' is to critically reflect on what they know, feel, think and do (Murphy, 2002) – so that there is effective learning from experience.

The picture APs paint of their learning on the job suggests that over time they become more relaxed, more confident, the job gets easier and that they cope better as individuals. In sum, they learn to survive. As reflected upon above, their approach to learning appears restrictive and individualistic. It does not identify with some of the core principles - participation, collaboration, co-operation - which Sachs (2000) asserts reinforce a proactive and responsible approach to professionalism (see Ch. 2). This highlights a significant question with regard to APs' perceptions of and their approach to professional learning. This is further explored in the next section.

3. Formal Learning and Informal Learning

Taking the 'Formal' Route

When questioned about continuous and cumulative learning, *all* respondents spoke positively about its importance to them:

'...I have continued to learn right from the beginning ...and I have been aware of my learning...' (FICS).

'...I think learning is important...I don't think you can stop learning right through life ...' (F4CC).

However, there a discrepancy between respondents' espoused belief in the importance of continuous learning and their actual participation in formal learning events. Of the 21 APs interviewed, only 9 had participated in any form of self-initiated further studies. In fact, 4 of the respondents comment that they had only recently attended their *first ever* middle leaders professional development course even though they had all been APs for between 8 to 15 years: *'Well I think to be honest that this is the first year ever that I attended any kind of a course of management'* (F4CC). Reflecting on this, I wondered if APs' newly acquired interest in attending such programmes was due to a 'developing awareness among school principals, as a result of attending LDS workshops, of their responsibility with regard to staff learning' (Research Diary Entry, October 11th, 2006).

Marswick and Watkins (2001) describe formal learning as typically institutionally sponsored, classroom based and highly structured. Respondents who had participated in formal programmes did so deliberately with a view to addressing learning needs and enhancing their overall learning:

'...I was interested in being more involved in management /leadership ...I followed a course really for developing my own knowledge and my own skills ... partly because I needed to...' (FICS).

They spoke positively of the benefits. Participation in formal learning programmes assisted in reducing their sense of isolation. They learned that they were not alone in their experiences. One respondent spoke of getting comfort and solutions to issues by meeting and *'actually seeing other people in the same situation'* (F4CC):

'...When you get there and meet the people and you listen to interesting things, you feel this is great, this is what I should be doing...' (ibid)

Reflecting on her participation in a University Diploma in Educational Administration she commented on how it helped her learning:

'...It was learning all the time.. I enjoyed it..it helped with decision-making, it helped with thinking about education...'(ibid).

Respondents also reflected on the benefits that could accrue to the whole school from their participation in formal learning:

'...You learn the theory and you bring some of it back into the school ...particularly in terms of how to manage things..'(MACS).

They benefit from meeting and learning with others in the same situation as themselves. However as outlined above this form of learning is not a majority activity within the group of APs interviewed for this research. For the majority of respondents in this study, their professional learning is informal. Of particular note also is that four long serving APs had only recently participated in a programme on middle leaders learning. Does it indicate a general resistance to formal learning and a lack of commitment to life-long learning? - a core value of professionalism (Sachs, 2000) - as discussed in Chapter 2.

Informal Learning

Informal learning refers to activities such as networking, mentoring and coaching (see Ch. 2) initiated by people in work settings that result in the development of their professional knowledge and skills. Tuijnman (2002) suggests that informal learning in the workplace plays an increasing part of the provision of lifelong learning. It is an important way that individuals construct meaning from their experiences (Lohman, 2000). Generally it is a matter of responding to circumstance and need where professionals deal with the 'low-lying swamp of messy problems and persistent dilemmas of practice' (ibid, p.85). Therefore, it varies greatly as it relates to meeting individual needs situated in time and circumstances. Becher (1999) argues that for some professions and professionals, non-formal learning is much more important than formal:

'...Many of the respondents in my study seemed inclined to play down the value of formal course provision in comparison with the learning undertaken on their own initiative as part of the natural ebb and flow of their professional lives...'(ibid, p. 173).

Reflecting on her learning, a respondent in this study offered a similar view point:

'...10 years ago, I would have thought that anything you wanted to learn you'd get in university ...I think my experiences or my living has taught me otherwise ...'(F2CS).

The findings suggest that respondents favour the more informal and practical learning as opposed to the more formal theory-based approach. This emphasis on non-formal learning that can be applied to real life situations was echoed in respondents' comments:

'...I am all for theory but I do like to know how does this apply to me in the classroom, me on the corridor, me on the committee...'(M6VS).

'...I think that the theory on its own is fine but it needs to connect with real life experience...'(F5CS).

One respondent commented on a positive link between formal and informal learning. She noted that taking time to do formal study gave her time to reflect on her day-to-day experience:

'...I think formal learning gives the space to think about the informal...there is more time to reflect on the informal when doing the formal...'(F7VS).

Respondents reflected on the importance to their learning of informal networks 'access to peers' (M4CS) and connections with colleagues in other schools. One respondent, who was setting up a new project, found help from other schools already involved in this work:

'..I went to other schools in other sectors who were successfully doing this kind of work talked to them about how they got started and so on...'(F1CS).

It was suggested that APs would benefit from the type of networks which exist for senior managers, principals and deputy principals:

'..I think that is one of the great deficits for APs (learning). There is access for principals to a Principals' Association....where they meet likeminded people, APs rarely get to meet likeminded people..'(M4CS).

The importance of practical learning as opposed to theory is emphasized in respondents' reflections on their learning. As evidenced above, APs' informal learning can take place inside or outside their school community. They acknowledge the benefits of and the need for networks of peers and like-minded professionals.

The professional learning of the APs interviewed in this study is mostly dependent on workplace experience and informal learning opportunities. It is therefore significant that the broader range of informal ways of learning (see Ch. 2) such as mentoring, coaching, shadowing are not available to them. Consequently, opportunities for critical reflection and feedback on their learning, which are necessary elements of what Boud et al. (1985) refer to as deep learning, are limited or largely non-existent for them.

Positive Learning Experiences

Due to my professional role (see Ch.1) I am particularly interested in APs' reflections on their perceptions and experiences of continuing professional development and how these impact on their learning. The findings indicate that *all* respondents attach importance to learning-related CPD opportunities. Their evolving and expanding role demands that they become proficient in areas that are not part of their initial teacher training or in-service: '*areas like stress management, time management ...that you don't get normally ...it should be available*' (F5CS). This reflects the thinking of Whitty et al. (1998) who suggest that those undertaking management responsibilities are no longer considered adequately prepared for their role through conventional teacher education and classroom experience. Consequently there is a need to ensure that they are afforded opportunities to develop personally and professionally.

Respondents indicate a number of ways that best support their learning. A respondent, who got to attend a variety of conferences on school leadership and management comments that they gave him '*a professional confidence*' (M9CS). Another found that by attending CPD she was affirmed in that

'...They identified good practice and I could say we are doing a lot of that in this school.. ..it was affirming...'
(F3VS).

This issue of confidence building together with a sense of peer support, of camaraderie and not feeling isolated and alone emerged as a significant outcome from CPD activities:

'...I usually find it very useful in terms the peer support, meeting others with common complaints and common difficulties...' (M2VS).

Learning from 'conversations' (Brookfield, 1987) was emphasised by the comment:

'...At most in-services it's the coffee and it's at the lunch where you do a huge amount of learning unless it's a technical thing which you have to pick up...' (M2VS).

The satisfaction from participation in her first ever management and leadership workshop, after 12 years in post, was expressed by a Year Head

'...The first day I found incredible ..we were listening to other Year Heads who ...had the same kind of Year Head problems ...and administrator problems ... it was the first time I heard people talking about being in a managerial position in a school ...and it was the first time that people expressed problems about being in a managerial position ...' (F4CC).

She got strength from hearing that other colleagues had the same difficulties as she experienced.

The importance of having something helpful to take away, something productive and practical, an idea or a suggestion that one could work with back at school was threaded through respondents' reflections:

'...You would always feel that you would need to have something practical that you could take back and use. I always found that if you are left with a folder or something that was useful that you could say "when I go in on Monday I can use some of this or I can draw from it" that would be important...' (F8CS).

A respondent commented on a 2-day management and leadership training programme where there was homework or follow up work to be done in between the days and a clear expectation that the course was intended to prompt action and to facilitate change. This she found beneficial to her learning. She compares the impact of a 1-day programme where she reflected on the learning *'very often it goes into you head and then it's gone again'* and that of the 2-day event where she was given a task to complete for the second day:

'..when you are asked to do something ... it makes you thinkwhen you have follow up ..then you actually feel that you are learning..' (F4CC).

The effect of having a task to do and the need to think and to reflect on an aspect of one's practice was perceived as having being beneficial to her learning.

The positive experiences outlined above concur with the literature on leadership learning in Ch.2. APs respond positively to events which build on their confidence, affirm their practice and link their learning with workplace issues and dilemmas incorporating both professional and personal growth. It mirrors the research of Harris et al. (2001) who highlight the importance of 'linkage between 'the workshop and the workplace' (p.92) in successful middle leaders' learning in the English context.

However, the experiences cited are mostly ‘out of school’ events. It is as if APs perceive the best CPD as something which happens ‘out there’ and that is ‘done to them’ generally outside the school. They comment that:

‘...I suppose within the area of staff professional development there really isn’t that much out there...’ (F5CS)

‘...There should be more in-services for APs...’ (F8CS).

Their perceptions reflect the thinking of Gold and Evans (1998) who argue that ‘some teachers think they can only learn more about their work if they are sent on expensive courses’ (p.58). APs seem to perceive that the best professional learning is event-based, provided by an outside agency and not something which they should be personally energised about or can exercise control over on a daily basis. It suggests a lack of understanding and of responsibility and agency on their part with regard to their professional growth and development.

Courses that Work Well

Because of the variety and breadth of roles incorporated in the AP’s work in schools (see Ch. 1) it was generally agreed that ‘*it is very difficult to devise a training course focused on the job of assistant principal*’ (M2VS) and to ‘*cover things specific to particular posts*’ (M3CS). Respondents felt the need for ‘*a general programme in terms of leadership and management skills, and even in terms of conflict management*’ (M4CS). One respondent expressed the need for a programme to deal with people skills and managing across levels:

‘...What are the implications for your relations with other people on the staff ...what skills do you need to develop ...people skills. Dealing with people at different level...’ (F1CS)

She spoke of the benefit of programme flexibility where participants might be invited to talk about their needs and be facilitated to ‘*come up with what they need*’ (Ibid) rather than the programme being prescriptive and set in advance. This emphasis on *facilitation*, giving time to participants to reflect on and share their learning, as opposed to *presentation*, the ‘sit and get’ format (Bezzina, 2002) was echoed by other respondents. They felt that learning was increased by harnessing the wisdom of the group and using it to enhance the learning of all present:

‘...If you have 60 people in a room, you have got wisdom there... guide it, listen to it and see it on occasion. The best courses are

ones were where we were listening to one another and then pooling it in some way... ' (M6VS).

The importance of the course facilitator in affording time and in enabling this process was considered essential:

'...I do think there should be more time allowed for an exchange of ideas of the group, facilitated by the leaders that are there because they will know how to draw the information out... ' (F8CS).

This mirrors the methodology of the IPWEM EU SOCRATES Programme (see Ch. 1) where the emphasis throughout is on interactive learning: 'the dominance of the teacher is reduced, the importance of the learner is increased and learners are afforded an opportunity to feel more effective' (Warren and O'Connor, 1999, p.104). It is a process which invites participation, sharing, exploring, examining experiences, reflecting and planning. Based on Kolb's (1984) philosophy, facilitation as opposed to presentation delivery allows for reflection, sharing and support for APs to synthesise and take control of what they already know and to instigate changes in attitudes, beliefs and personal theories:

'...It offers the opportunity to find different ways of making sense of an experience and acknowledges that there can be different solutions – there is no right or wrong solution, there are just different solutions that fit different situations more clearly, depending on values and circumstances...'(Gold, 1996, p.9).

It is perceived by this cohort of APs as critical to their learning.

While respondents all spoke of their commitment to life-long learning, the findings suggest a gap between aspiration and intent. There is evidence of a general lack of personal and professional responsibility with regard to participating in formal learning. It appears overall that APs' learning is informal, accidental and unstructured in most instances. It is unique to each individual's circumstances and motivation. The emphasis on the benefits of informal practical learning and the acquisition of practical skills, as opposed to theory, emerges as significant for this group of adult learners. The collegial aspects of CPD - getting out of school, meeting like-minded colleagues, networking and sharing experiences - are highlighted as important to their learning.

The breadth and variety of their learning in varied roles militates against a 'catch-all' training programme to meet all needs. APs see facilitation and the sharing of the wisdom of the group as opposed to a presentation format as beneficial to their learning. However, there is an

underlying theme that APs have a restricted view of what constitutes professional learning and of their role and responsibility for ensuring that it happens. The findings give rise to questions as to why APs are not more proactive in their formal and informal professional learning? What stops them seeking out opportunities to learn? The next section examines APs' perceptions of barriers to their learning.

4. Perceived Barriers to APs' Learning

The literature on adult learning deals extensively with the issue of what constitutes barriers to learning (Merriam, 2001). I define barriers to learning as blocks which constitute 'limitations' to learning. The discussion of the findings in chapters 4 and 5 highlighted the limiting impact of cultural and emotional issues on APs' learning. In response to a specific question '*What would stop you learning?*' APs perceived limitations as personal - unique to each individual.

Little Opportunity to Reflect on Learning?

Echoing other research findings (see Ch. 2), 12 APs in this study cited a lack of time and pressure of work as a significant barrier to their learning in that '*you don't have enough time to reflect*' (M6VS). The pressures of the day-to-day teaching combined with the AP role ensure that, as one respondent described it, '*we are going around in a whiz*' and that it is easier therefore '*to do what you always do as opposed to changing and trying to acquire something different or learn something new*' (F2CS). This suggests that some APs work in contexts that are so challenging that there is no time or energy left for reflecting on their learning. It concurs also with Day (2004) who contends that learning in school is limited by the development of routines. He asserts that over-reliance on current practice is important for survival but is not conducive to learning and argues the importance of taking time to breathe (ibid, p.10).

As outlined in Chapter 1, APs get a reduction of 4 hours in their weekly teaching commitment in recognition of their extra duties. However, this allocation is not standard across all schools and is not always available in the 'voluntary' sector. Indeed, the OECD (1991) report suggested that the organisation of the school day in the Irish education system was generally unimaginative and inflexible and militated against teacher learning. It is not surprising therefore that the issue of time or the lack of it is implicit in the majority of respondents' reflections.

The busy-ness of the job and the energy it takes was also noted by a respondent who saw her low energy levels as a barrier to doing further studies '*my job is my priority*' .and she was not interested in doing professional learning out of school time '*something that would involve a lot of late night work*' or '*tiring stuff*' (F3VS). Respondents' teaching commitment also led to a reluctance to leave school to attend courses '*I would not go to some in-services because I would say 'oh my God that day I have a particular exam class so I am not going*' (F8CS). This contrasts, however, with the thinking of other respondents who see it as part of their professional commitment to ensure that time is made for their ongoing learning. One respondent who reflected on the importance of making time to do what is needed, suggested that the issue of time is less relevant if one is busy and happy at one what one does:

'...The barrier is just the workload that you have ...I know that you do bring home a lot of work ...when you have family as well there is an extra pressure ...but I think when you enjoy what you do, you make the time...' (F5CS).

Similarly another respondent reflected 'time' can be an excuse used to explain away lack of agency or commitment to learning:

'...Time is probably an excuse a lot of people use "oh I haven't got the time, or it takes too much time...' (M7VS) .

He goes on to explain:

'...If you want to be successful in something, you know in the beginning it is going to take an awful lot of time. I don't mind giving it the time if I can do it...' (ibid)

An antipathy or a lack of commitment to ongoing professional learning was demonstrated by 2 female respondents who suggested that they were not interested in professional learning, especially outside school time, as it would impact adversely on their quality of life:

'...My social life would stop me concentrating on further studies. ...I couldn't prioritise it over something more relaxing like going out, doing sudoku...' (F3VS).

'...Once I go outside the school that is me finished with learning, the formal way... at this stage in my life. definitely so...' (F10CC).

The issue of time needs to be addressed as a major structural issue that is currently inhibiting APs professional growth and learning in school. There is very little discretionary time during the school day and APs are often reluctant to leave school and give up teaching time for CPD events. However, that said, the findings also indicate a reluctance, as indicated by some respondents, to prioritise their professional learning and also give up personal 'after-school

time' for CPD events. This further underpins my theory, expressed above, that APs exhibit a lack of responsibility towards their professional learning and are not proactive with regard to their ongoing professional growth and development. It suggests that some are unaware of or choose to ignore their need to be 'learning professionals', seeking to continually improve their knowledge and practice (Sachs, 2000) as discussed in Chapter 2.

Family Commitments

The findings suggest that the integrity of family life impacts on the time and importance afforded particularly to formal learning by APs. Reflecting on her reasons for not engaging in further studies, a female respondent commented:

'...Children and family would have stopped me...' (F3VS).

Similarly, a male respondent, who has two children ages 8 and 9, commented:

'...The kids are of an age where they won't want to be knocking around too much with me maybe in two or three years time so I am going to put a bit of time into them now...' (M5CS).

Another reflected:

'...If I had been a single man, I would have done a Masters definitely. I think I would anyway. Having 2 young children at home put an end to that idea...I would rather have spent time with my children...' (M6VS).

These sentiments are echoed by another respondent who as his children matured got involved in further studies:

'...Well as my kids have got older I have more space in my head for what I can absorb...' (M2VS).

His opportunities and attitude to learning has also changed:

'...Where as I would have done some deep learning(a PhD) in the last number of years, 20 years ago I couldn't have done that, it is something that as I have changed, my learning abilities, my priorities have changed as well ...' (Ibid)

I would have expected the issue of small children and family commitments to have been mentioned mostly by female respondents as a reason for not engaging in formal professional learning. However, in this study it was mentioned by more males than females. I wondered if this could be interpreted as their way of defending their lack of interest in learning and making it acceptable to themselves? Or did the fact that they were speaking to a professional female, still involved in her own learning, have an impact on their thinking and answers? It is

also possible that younger men are genuinely changing and wanting a more work/life balance and are more likely to share child care than their older colleagues were.

Financial and Social Issues

Financial considerations and the fact that teachers take on further studies at their own expense were mentioned as a barrier to formal learning by a small number of respondents:

'...To do learning costs money and I mean when your kids are small there wouldn't be that much extra around, to do any course is expensive and it is still for a lot of younger teachers I think it would be one of the things that would stop people doing things...' (M3CS).

As one respondent who had completed her Masters commented:

'...That was at the expense of doing things with my children, in one sense, both financially and time wise...' (F9CS).

It is significant to this discussion to acknowledge that schools do not receive funding for individual teacher's formal professional learning. Teachers must fund themselves and may claim a portion of the costs back from the Department of Education and Science if they are not receiving an allowance for the qualification, as is the case for a Master and a Doctorate, in their salary. Therefore, to engage in formal learning requires not only the energy, motivation and commitment but also the financial ability to support the learning.

5. Conclusion

The findings indicate that learning on-the-job is an important and powerful feature of APs' learning. They learn by *doing* and by *being there* over time, by observing, by trial and error, by reflecting and persevering. Their learning is mostly informal, accidental, unstructured and unique to each individual's circumstances, motivation and agency.

A key finding is that despite long service and consequent familiarity with school processes and procedures, almost 50% of respondents in this study felt unprepared and lacked confidence for the work ahead. This is all the more challenging in the context of no formal support for appointees in terms of in-school induction or mentoring.

The collegial aspect of CPD - getting out of school, meeting like-minded colleagues, networking and sharing experiences - is highlighted as important. It ranges from conversations, to networking in different ways with outside schools. The emphasis on the benefits of practical learning and the acquisition of practical skills, as opposed to theory, is

significant. The breadth and variety of APs' learning in varied roles militates against a 'catch-all' training programme to meet all needs. They see facilitation and the sharing of the wisdom of the group as opposed to presentation as beneficial to their learning.

Another significant finding is a general lack of personal and professional responsibility with regard to their learning and a resistance particularly with regard to participating in out-of-school time or formal learning. Leaders need to be continuous learners. This requires a frame of mind and a set of behaviours that contribute to ongoing professional renewal (London, 2002). APs in this study in the main are not proactive in addressing their learning needs. There is also a tendency to think of their professional development as an activity that is 'severely limited by resourcing' (Gold and Evans, 1998, p.58) - time and money. The small number from this cohort who engage in formal learning are keenly aware of the benefits to them. However, while off-site courses are helpful and productive there is a need to focus on school-based professional learning and how this might be enhanced. This also has implications for school principals who have a responsibility to ensure that APs professional learning is encouraged in the school.

The findings therefore indicate a need to unfreeze current attitudes, expectations, structures and processes (Bredeson and Johannson, 2000) so that new ways of thinking about APs' learning can be considered and embraced in an attempt to address the apparent current professional learning deficit. This includes embracing CPD as a process that is organic, career-long and participant driven (Halton, 2004).

Chapter 7. Conclusion: Looking to the Future - taking the learning forward

1. Introduction

In the introduction to this study (see Ch. 1), I argued the importance of researching Assistant Principals' perceptions of their learning and their learning experiences as education professionals, an area hitherto unexplored in the Irish education research agenda. The purpose of this research study is to gain insights and understanding into how they, as middle leaders in Irish post-primary schools, perceive their learning experiences and learning needs. The study also explores how they are facilitated in their learning and examines potential barriers to their learning. The research outcomes are significant in that they make explicit issues previously not addressed with regard to education management in this education context.

The findings highlight that APs' professional learning is complex, emotionally charged, haphazard, time-poor and neglected both by themselves and the system. They indicate an urgent need to foster and embed in Irish post-primary schools a learning culture relevant to the professional knowledge and learning needs of this cohort of education professionals. The findings are challenging for Assistant Principals as professional learners, for their school communities as enablers and supporters of their learning and for those who are charged locally and nationally with overseeing and developing a learning agenda for middle leadership in schools.

This chapter sets out the outcomes to the study. It examines the implications of the findings with regard to Assistant Principals' professional learning and paints a possible way forward in terms of the direction and substance of professional learning provision for this group of school leaders. Finally it proposes recommendations for further research. It is divided into five sections: the current reality of Assistant Principals' learning, implications for their ongoing professional learning, recommendations for action, research recommendations and a personal reflection.

2. The Current Reality of Assistant Principals' Learning

An Individual Experience

A key finding is that each Assistant Principal's learning is unique to their school context and to their personal interest and agency. It is mostly unstructured, informal, accidental and built

on through experience gained over time. Due to a lack of induction, mentoring or relevant continuing professional development, APs lack a general knowledge base about middle leadership and the specific technical knowledge and information needed to effectively carry out the tasks assigned to them. This is further complicated by an absence of supportive in-school procedures and processes. APs have to learn to deal with their sense of vulnerability at being out of the comfort zone of the classroom and the attendant shift in their professional relationship with colleagues, senior management and parents. Their learning is dominated by a sense of individualism and isolation and has a significant emotional dimension. APs need to learn to be assertive and assured in articulating their learning needs. Consequently, self-knowledge and self-awareness are crucial to their learning (see Ch. 5).

While Assistant Principals are aware of their learning needs, in the main they are not proactive in addressing them. The findings suggest that there is evidence of a general lack of responsibility, commitment and agency with regard to organising their own ongoing professional learning. The Assistant Principals interviewed in this study also exhibit a restricted view of what constitutes professional development and a lack of awareness of professional learning as an ongoing life-long process. This is compounded by the absence of the nurturing and embedding of an enabling culture of professional learning in post-primary schools (see Ch. 4) and a dearth of continuing professional development provision. The findings indicate that the narrower the school's perception of the AP's professional role then the narrower the in-school learning opportunities and the potential for personal and professional growth. This highlights the significance of the impact of school culture, school leadership and inherent political and power issues on respondents' learning and learning experiences.

An Inhibiting School Culture

Despite the 1998 Education Act and the *Programme for Competitiveness at Work* (see Ch.1) where new in-school management structures were agreed across the sectors as part of a national wage agreement, the evidence in this study indicates that, ten years on, there continues to exist a lack of consistency and a divergence in expectation between the sectors and indeed between schools within sectors with regard to who and what is the role of an AP. Furthermore, the findings strongly suggest that how Assistant Principals are *located* in their school context has significant implications for their learning. Individual schools' historical, cultural and organisational contexts emerge as key factors in either enabling or limiting

Assistant Principals' learning and professional identity. While the majority of those interviewed in this study see themselves in leadership roles and as part of an in-school leadership teams, there is evidence among some respondents (see Ch. 4) of a continued interpretation of the role of Assistant Principal as that of an 'administrative add-on' to a full-time teaching position.

Contextual factors such as the leadership role of the principal, the middle leadership team, colleagues and the school culture emerge as key variables which may enhance or detract from Assistant Principals' learning at a professional, personal and emotional level. Although there are indications of a move towards collaborative school structures, the dominant culture as experienced by a majority of respondents in this study is still the more traditional hierarchical model. However, as might have been previously assumed (see Ch. 1), this is not specific or confined to any of the three sectors. Respondents from all school types indicate both positive and negative school learning cultures. The leadership role of the school principal in determining and enabling the role of the AP and in facilitating a culture of learning and support emerges as significant in all school sectors. As Stoll et al. (2003) argued: 'it is the leader's role as capacity builder that is fundamental to learning in a complex, changing world (p.112). There is also evidence of gender issues with regard to a management style which engenders a culture where female APs in particular feel ignored and marginalised and that their learning experiences may be more adversely affected in a closed autocratic management style (see Ch. 4). It suggests a need for leadership and gender issues to be addressed in Principals' professional learning initiatives.

An Emotional Response

Emotional responses, vis a vis their learning and learning experiences in the role of Assistant Principal, are an important variable in respondents' learning stories. Assistant Principals are promoted to positions where initially they lack the knowledge and know-how and personal efficacy to execute the task required. As indicated in Chapter 5, many of them work in a negative learning culture where risk-taking and ideas for change are questioned by colleagues and undermined or ignored by Senior Management. The findings suggest that this, coupled with the knowledge deficit, leaves Assistant Principals feeling deskilled and vulnerable. Furthermore, the apparent 'emotional silence' with regard to articulating one's learning needs creates an added tension and complication with regard to their learning, limiting their

professional growth. The findings suggest that this personal emotional cost is particularly significant for female APs.

Continuing Professional Development

While much has been achieved in Irish education in the last decade in terms of legislation, new structures and curricular reform (see Ch. 1), what is evident from these research findings is that the provision of relevant post-primary middle leader professional development has still to be addressed. However, the evidence suggests that for those respondents who experience good quality professional development, they see it as significant to their learning. Their positive learning experiences range from conversations over coffee, to networking in different ways with outside schools. This collegial aspect of continuing professional development - getting out of school, meeting like-minded colleagues, networking and sharing experiences - are highlighted as important. Facilitation and the sharing of the wisdom of the group are perceived as more beneficial and engaging than formal presentations. The issues of time and the inflexibility of the school day combined with their teaching commitment and management responsibilities is perceived by APs as inimical to their on-going personal and professional growth. This is also linked to the prevailing school culture where APs are not always encouraged or supported in attending professional development events.

In summary, the current reality of Assistant Principals' learning, as outlined, presents many challenges. As the evidence suggests, in general Assistant Principals are not prepared for or supported in the role. None of the respondents in this study have participated in a mentoring or cohesive development programme either inside or outside of their school. Piecemeal and unco-ordinated attempts, such as Assistant Principals finding their own means of development and support, are only stop-gap and do not address their learning needs. Nationally there are few opportunities for co-ordinated professional development for Assistant Principals focussed on learning about being an effective leader from the middle. Due to their workload and pressured school environment they are time and energy poor. They feel isolated, neglected and controlled by in-school power and political issues.

There is a need for immediate and appropriate action at individual, school and system level to engender an awakening and an awareness of the importance of new ways of thinking about Assistant Principals' learning. The most important implications of the research for their professional development are that learning opportunities need to be provided for Assistant

Principals to develop self-knowledge, understand the holistic and integrated nature of learning and develop personal awareness and skills to become strategic and flexible managers of their learning: that is to be able to evaluate and assess their knowledge and skills and their learning needs and to be proactive in meeting them - in sum to become professional learners.

3. Implications of the study outcomes for Assistant Principals' professional learning.

From the research evidence and their related conclusions, I have identified two key implications for Assistant Principals' professional learning: the importance of self-knowledge and the importance of an inter-related approach to addressing Assistant Principals' continuing professional development

The Importance of Self-Knowledge

The research literature on middle leaders, outlined in Ch. 2, reports mainly on small scale, free standing case studies or 'snapshot' surveys which refer mostly to middle leaders' role definition, performance, duties and responsibilities. Self knowledge of the self-as-person does not appear as a priority (see Ch. 2). Nor do the relational and contextual elements of self knowledge appear to be emphasized. This research study indicates that while technical competence in the role of AP is necessary, it is not sufficient (Day, 1994, Ho-ming NG, 2001). It may not be able to facilitate the cultivation of professional attitudes and values or result in the development of desirable behaviour. Meeting learning needs should not be just in relation to specific issues which arise from time to time but in relation to one's overall development as an adult learner.

The evidence in this study highlights the need for AP self-awareness and self-understanding (see Ch. 5). As the findings indicate Assistant Principals are constantly the recipients of powerful projections on the part of others in the form of hopes, expectations and fears. Therefore, to know oneself and to be open to reflecting on and evaluating one's responses to people and situations is crucial to learning as an AP. The individual AP, as a unique learner, may need to understand the uniqueness of *the self* in the learning context for critical professional growth to occur. Kenning (2002) argues that leaders need an 'intelligent gaze' to be able to look at themselves in the mirror of self awareness and reflect on who they are as people. By questioning basic personal and organisational assumptions and values, new ways of interpreting and negotiating intrapersonal and interpersonal events can emerge. A set of

'learning questions' which Assistant Principals need to ask or answer on a programme or on promotion should include: who am I, what do I believe in? And in the context of the learning needs of a management position: how do I fit this job?, where do I need to concentrate my professional learning?, How can others help me? And which others?

Hartle and Thomas (2003) suggest that through focusing on individual growth we can develop self-confidence in our leaders. Diggins (1997) refers to confidence as one of the competences which he contends is essential in relation to the leadership that is necessary for a learning organisation. Similarly, Senge et al. (2000) assert that personal and professional confidence is a critical attribute of success and comes from a deep understanding and acceptance of one's personal strengths and weaknesses.

The difficulty of managing crises and unexpected developments and managing people are key concerns of respondents. As middle leaders are promoted but still part of the staff, the need for an understanding of their role vis-a-vis staff, parents, students and the importance of boundaries and the need to develop a separateness and an assertiveness regarding this was highlighted. Wise and Bennett (2003) comment that it is likely that there will be conflicting expectations that role holders have to resolve in order to be able to carry out their work. While academic knowledge is necessary, a significant aspect of the role connects with individual professional needs and dealing with people and situations. These are key issues for Assistant Principals' professional learning. It is important for them to be aware of the critical learning needs of an individual nature which affect performance. As evidenced in the findings, areas of need may include assistance in handling the emotional impact of changing status – of moving from a climate of popularity to one of hostility, in admitting that they are experiencing problems and in understanding how their promotion has impacted on other staff and in finding ways to turn problem situations into growth promoting situations for colleagues as well as themselves.

In summary, the findings of this research concur with the literature i.e. Day (1999) and Kotter (1996) (see Ch. 2) in emphasising professional learning as a form of human development, to include social, professional and personal elements. This encompasses interacting with other teachers to construct socially agreed knowledge, professional development to change concepts and beliefs about practice and personal development involving constructing their own knowledge and attending to their feelings about change and feeling empowered (Wood and Thompson, 1980).

A Holistic Approach to Addressing Assistant Principals' Learning Needs

As outlined in Chapter 2 adults learn best when the goals and objectives are considered realistic and important to the learner and when the training is job-related and perceived as being useful. There is a need for continuing professional learning which targets a wide range of skills which is carefully tailored to the needs of participants and which involves exposure to real-life experiences and practical concerns.

It is also essential to balance the emphasis on 'practice' as a source of knowledge with the need for a theoretical framework against which practice can be evaluated. Barnett (1997) warns that reflection in the absence of theory appears to offer a limited space for critical thinking. Programmes need to give more attention to the ability to learn, to analyse and to understand connections of different kinds - to take a thinking-perspective and to facilitate a variety of media in order that this might occur. Essentially effective professional practitioners need to be able to construct and reconstruct the knowledge and skills they need and continually evolve their practice, an approach based on critical reflection and enquiry, linking professional development and school development (Martin and Robertson, 2002). A further challenge for the AP is to see knowledge and learning as a social process. Hyland (1996) emphasises the importance of professional practice as a social activity with issues which require collective rather than merely individual action (p. 177). Ultimately what is required is an AP professional development model which provides continuity and progression as a matter of life-long learning, emphasising team work, collaborative work across school communities, sharing learning with others as well as being learning-centred.

A Model for Professional Learning

From my personal experience and also as evidenced in the literature and the data above, there are key principles which need to be addressed when conceptualising a more adequate vision for lifelong learning in the Irish education context and which should underpin Assistant Principals' professional learning. These include:

- That professional learning is a journey not an event
- That there is a need to embrace both personal and professional growth
- That collaborative working cultures are best placed to assist in a shift in attitudes and beliefs
- That people can learn about themselves and their professional work at any time and in most places - inside and outside a school, with people and alone

- That professionals need to move outside themselves and their institutions to be exposed to broader thinking and to learn and grow
- Organisational ‘permission’ to develop and to work on developing
- That time to meet, to reflect, to discuss and to internalise new knowledge is essential if it is to influence practice (adapted from Bezzina, 2002).

The findings highlight the importance of professional development which offers a relevant and focused curriculum that would help Assistant Principals develop a better understanding of their professional role, the importance of external contacts and influences and the formation of professional networks as a means of capacity building and professional support. However, in the Irish context, any continuing professional development initiative for Assistant Principals will need to take cognisance of the breadth and variety of their varied roles in schools and the decidedly different cultural, historical contexts across the post-primary education sector.

Therefore, it is essential to start with where Assistant Principals are at with regard to their learning in their local school context and to take the learning from there. I believe that this should involve working initially with the middle leaders’ teams in individual schools and perhaps small clusters of similar types of schools. This would allow for reflecting on common issues as a way of broadening ideas, disseminating best practice and encouraging shared learning in a non-threatening environment. The notion of sharing experience and learning about what people are doing in different school contexts within a network might assist in taking away the pain and reducing the sense of isolation and insulation which, as this study reveals, currently exists across the sectors. It also concurs with Harris et al.’s (2001) idea of the importance of ‘external agency’ - the existence of external pressure and support as an important contributory factor in changing teachers’ practices and behaviours - and their assertion that changes in behaviour are not achievable in isolation (p.92).

There is general agreement in the research literature on the potential of both personal and group reflection on day-to-day practice. Harris et al. (2001) assert that in order to learn successfully, middle leaders need to construct and reflect proactively on their own learning. Assistant Principals need to take time to internalise new knowledge if it is to influence practice directly. This thinking reflects the research of Glover and Law (1996) who comment that ‘the initial focus of networks should be on similar professional and subject interests’ which offer opportunities to reflect on the differing ways in which we do things’ (p.161). There is also a need to focus on in-school learning opportunities - to promote the development of ‘learning rich’ school cultures. This has implications also for the training and development

of school principals who, as the research findings indicate, need to acknowledge and become proactive with regard to their professional responsibility with regard to engendering a positive learning culture in their schools.

Respondents in this study also commented that learning opportunities need to be attractive and worthwhile (Bezzina, 2002) and not just be perceived by participants as a case of more work for them. Respondents all confirmed that a key issue in the role is how to deal with people - students, parents and colleagues in a different way. They emphasised the need for training in relationships, communication, conflict management and people skills and the difficulty that they may experience in working with adults outside the classroom.

All of the above emerging issues emphasise also the need for an integrated approach which would enable Assistant Principals to hone their leadership skills, balance their teaching and leadership, work effectively in teams, cope with pressure and manage relationships professionally. This has implications for all professional learning providers, Universities, Education Centres, LDS - the national provider of school leadership development programmes, for school principals and school organization and also for national policy and development.

4. Recommendations for Action.

The findings indicate that Assistant Principals' learning requires a much more coherent and co-ordinated approach with collaboration and co-operation between schools, providers and policy makers. Currently, there is little focus on the learning needs of Assistant Principals and how they may be more properly prepared for and supported in the important job that they do in schools, especially when juxtaposed with the kind of strategies recently put in place for principals in Ireland.

My first recommendation is the need for ongoing **in-school support for the professional learning of Assistant Principals**. The data highlights the workplace as an important location for Assistant Principals' learning and the significance of the impact of school culture, school leadership and inherent political and power issues on their learning and learning experiences. This raises the question of how Assistant Principals' ongoing learning can best be supported within the school? The role of the Principal and that of the school culture are critical to this. The aim of all school leaders must be to understand the issues surrounding work-based learning with a view to implementing effective practices which facilitate and enable

professional learning. Principals need to investigate ways in which their schools can acknowledge Assistant Principals' learning needs through flexibility with regard to arranging team meetings and changes to timetables and internal support systems where possible. These might include: good communication systems, mechanisms to empower Assistant Principals by giving recognition to and tapping into their experience and wisdom and also including all Assistant Principals in team meetings and in whole-school decision-making.

The findings also indicate the primarily negative emotions involved in being appointed without appropriate support structures. They dictate an immediate need for the introduction of a programme of in-school induction and mentoring in all schools for those new to the AP position. This practice should be introduced immediately at an informal level in all schools. In order for it to be effective it also requires training for the mentors. At a more formal level, it could be designed by LDS and implemented in local schools with the support of the local Education Centre network. However, the findings highlight the apparent lack of ability of many of the principals whose staff participated in this study to effectively support the APs in their schools. Therefore there is also a need for the issues of awareness and responsibility towards developing the school as a positive learning culture to be addressed with principals in *their* professional learning development and appropriate supports put in place to assist them in becoming effective facilitators of learning in their schools.

My second recommendation is with regard to the **national provision of continuing professional development** for Assistant Principals. In acknowledging their pivotal work in schools, there is a need to provide for their long-term ongoing learning and support. This signals the need for a model of learning that is appropriate for APs, given their adult and professional status (see Ch. 2). It should encompass opportunities for reflective learning in context, for the co-construction of knowledge with like-minded peers, the combining of theory and best practice and should lead to a recognition of learning in the form of accreditation. Meeting this need provides a unique opportunity for an active dialogic link and a collaborative approach between schools, Universities, LDS and Education Centres in order to bring the different and essential elements together in a coherent, cohesive and unified way. There are a number of national and international initiatives which are worthy of consideration in this regard. The Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century (TL21) pilot project, a 2 year school–university initiative, which involved active engagement on teacher professional learning between schools and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth is an Irish model

which could be adopted and adapted to enable APs' learning. Elements of the Scottish model, The Chartered Teacher initiative, which formally recognises and rewards teachers who take on CPD (Connelly and McMahon, 2007) have merit and are worth exploring. The National College for School Leadership's model 'Leading from the Middle', a 10-month professional programme for middle leaders in the English education context, also offers insights into a professional learning approach which includes online and collaborative learning and in-school coaching.

Considering the numbers involved nationally and also the variety of school contexts, an Irish initiative might best be approached by clustering Assistant Principals according to geographical regions and locating the delivery of elements of a programme within the national Education Centre network. Since the commencement of this research, LDS have begun to pilot a range of approaches to developing middle leadership both at individual school level and with school clusters in Education Centres. While this work is still in its infancy it has the potential to be developed as a model outlined above by including University input and participant accreditation.

My third recommendation has four parts. It addresses some of the **structural and systemic issues** which emerge in this study as impacting negatively on Assistant Principals' learning and learning opportunities. The findings of this research concur with the conclusions of the OECD Report (2007) that the development of leadership structures within Irish schools, while system led, is not system wide and further work to develop such structures is necessary (p.4). First, there is a need for the Department of Education and Science (DES) to conduct a national review, as promised in 2000 (see Ch.1), of the current status of middle management structures across all post-primary schools and to engage in discussions with school management bodies, teacher unions, the newly established Teaching Council and other relevant agencies with a view to forging an agreement on a uniform approach to the role of the AP across all the post-primary school sectors. Secondly, there is a need to work to eliminate the current outdated promotion system still widely dominated, albeit implicitly, by seniority, with a view to counteracting the apparent professional 'stagnation' that exists in schools. Thirdly, the issue of time in school needs to be addressed. The discrepancy across schools where not all Assistant Principals are afforded a reduction in their teaching allocation for the duties attached to their role needs attention. Furthermore, the adherence to a long established trade union position that continuing professional development should only occur during school hours

needs to be addressed as a major structural issue that is currently inhibiting professional learning in the Irish context (Sugrue, 2002). While acknowledging that participation in any continuing professional development provision in the Irish context is currently voluntary, I believe that perhaps it is timely for the DES to grasp the nettle of the traditional autonomy of the Irish teacher and introduce policies, structures and supports which would ensure that personal and professional learning are obligatory particularly for those appointed to school leadership positions for which they are remunerated by the State. There is a role for the newly formed National Teaching Council in seeing that this becomes national policy.

5. Research Recommendations

At the outset I commented on the dearth of research into the area of Assistant Principals' learning in the Irish context. The findings of this small-scale study raise many questions with regard to Assistant Principals' learning and learning needs. They point to the need for more research into their learning and professional lives, if this layer of post-primary school leadership is to be adequately understood and supported. The evidence in the findings of the impact of culture, relationships, emotions and gender on Assistant Principals' learning contrasts strongly with much of the leadership and educational management research literature which tends to concentrate on what the job of an Assistant Principal should look like while underplaying Assistant Principals' learning needs, contextual factors and relationships.

1. The findings of this study indicate the importance of school context with regard to Assistant Principals' learning. There is a need for research investigating the interaction of individuals and their school communities, to establish whether current post-primary cultures, school leadership and organisational arrangements militate against Assistant Principals' learning and professional enhancement. This would provide useful resource material for Assistant Principals' professional development, helping them to analyse their own situations and their learning needs.
2. The taken-for-granted assumption that providers understand Assistant Principals' learning needs to be challenged. Research is needed on ways of identifying Assistant Principals' learning needs of the non-technical and affective kind, such as learning for self development, self management and effective leadership. This research study shows that this is critical to Assistant Principals' learning and is either ignored or underplayed in research to-date.

3. A study centred on beginning Assistant Principals could provide rich data. The evidence in this research suggests a major problem with initiation into the role. There is need for appropriate training based on a thorough analysis of this issue. A longitudinal study would also be beneficial to see how those who experience initial difficulties progress over time, if they experience success, and what learning or situational change is involved in this success. Observations of Assistant Principals in action are necessary to develop a fuller picture of the daily complexities of their lives.

4. Learning by trial and error was mentioned regularly by respondents in this study. Research into this common learning phenomenon to identify its causes, nature and scope could lead to better ways of identifying learning needs and values. It would be important to clarify whether most 'trial and error' learning is a necessary element of learning from experience because it is related to the risk-taking of innovation or is it simply a judgement made in hindsight about careless, unthinking behaviour.

5. Gender issues emerge in the analysis of the data particularly in relation to school culture and management style and also in terms of personal emotional cost for female APs. Furthermore, the issue of family commitments was cited by more male than female respondents as significant barriers to their learning. I believe that research on how gender influences Assistant Principals' actions, relationships and learning in the school would give important insights into how they can be best supported in their learning.

6. Considering that the '*most senior, most suitable*' criterion for promotion to an AP position still dominates in the post-primary sector, a study on how career stage and professional experience impact on Assistant Principals' learning would be beneficial in understanding Assistant Principals' readiness to embrace new learning.

7. Finally in the interests of succession building and securing an enlightened and 'learning' cohort of future school principals, there is an urgent need to research what appropriate structures, supports and resources need to be put in place by the collaborative efforts of the DES, The Universities, LDS, the Education Centre Network, the Teaching Council and other agencies in order to promote a dialogue for and a commitment to proactive and interactive professional learning by Assistant Principals in post-primary schools today.

6. A Last Word and the Dissemination of Findings

The challenges for me of being both a researcher, who previously worked as an Assistant Principal in the post-primary sector, and also as a professional now working at a senior level in the provision of teacher learning opportunities were discussed in Chapter three. Equally, there are challenges for me to address at the end of the study. As a researcher, I have raised issues pertaining to Assistant Principals' learning and learning experiences in the post-primary school sector. As a leader in the continuing professional development community of Education Centres, with access to those who influence national policy formation, I now have a responsibility to begin to address these issues or at least bring them to the attention of those immediately involved with post-primary schools and school leadership professional development.

The most immediate ethical first step is the dissemination of this research, as promised, in the form of a short summary of the principal findings, to the interview respondents. I will also provide an executive summary to the Education Centre Management Body who provided financial and temporal support to me over the past four years.

The findings have particular professional significance to national agencies such as the Universities, LDS and the SLSS who are involved in the continuous professional development of post-primary school leaders and teachers. The findings will also inform the work of the Education Centre, of which I am Director, with regard to the structure and content of the elective programmes it provides for this cohort of education professionals. I also intend to seek opportunities to disseminate my findings more widely by presenting at seminars and writing papers for appropriate journals.

I believe that the purposes of this research have been met. These were to understand better Assistant Principals' perceptions of their learning and their learning needs, to contribute to the qualitative knowledge base of how Assistant Principals in Irish post-primary schools learn and to identify implications for their professional learning. The study reveals a snapshot of Assistant Principals' perceptions of their learning and has disrupted and given voice to a prevailing silence on this topic. It has made overt issues, hitherto neglected, with regard to this area in Irish education management development.

While the sample is small, it involves a range of Assistant Principals roles and school experiences. Therefore, the findings do warrant further exploration as they may be found to pertain to a larger sample. They pose a range of challenges to our understanding of the complexity of Assistant Principals' learning and to professional development policy and provision for the Irish education system generally.

The findings and recommendations as outlined above are significant and perhaps daunting. However, I contend that the challenge for the Irish education community, to initiate and enable a meaningful discourse at local and national level on Assistant Principals' learning and professional growth with a view to developing an effective middle management tier and an enabling learning climate in schools, where Assistant Principals are passionately committed to their on-going learning and are continually renewing themselves, is one that cannot be ignored. Finally, it is important to remember that, as improved management and leadership leads to improved learning in schools (MacGilchrist, 1997), the ongoing professional learning of all those in school leadership positions is essential for the better education of our students.

Bibliography

- Ackerman, R.H. and Maslin-Ostrowski, P. (2004). 'The wounded leader and emotional learning in the schoolhouse'. *School Leadership and Management*, 24 (3), 311-328.
- Adey, K. (2000). 'Professional development priorities: the views of middle managers in secondary schools'. *Educational Management and Administration*, 28 (4), 419-431.
- Argyris, C. (1987). *Personality and Organisation*. Washington: Garland.
- Ashton, D. (2002). 'Skill formation: redirecting the agenda' in Reeve, F., Cartwright, M. and Edwards, R. (eds) *Organising Learning*. London, Routledge/Farmer
- Asofo, S. (1996). *An Enquiry into Shared Management in a Second Level School*. Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis: Trinity College, Dublin.
- Avis, J. (1995). 'The Validation of Learner Experience: A Conservative Practice'? *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 27 (2), 173-186.
- Ball, S.J. (1987). *The Micro-politics of the School*. London: Methuen.
- Ball, S.J., Bowe, R. and Gewirtz, S. (1995). 'Circuits of Schools – a sociological exploration of parental choice of school in social-class contexts'. *Sociological Review*, 43 (1), 52-78.
- Bandura, A. (ed.) (1997). *Self-efficacy in Changing Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Barnett, R. (1997). *Higher Education: A Critical Business*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Barnett, R. (1999). 'Learning to work and working to learn' in Boud, D. and Garrick, J. (eds.) *Understanding Learning at Work*. London: Routledge.
- Barth, R. (1996). 'Building a Community of Learners', *South Bay School Leadership Team Development Series: Seminar 10*. California: California School Leadership Centre.
- Baumgartner, L.M, (2001). 'An Update on Transformational Learning' in Merriam, S.B. (ed.) (2001). *The New Update on Adult Learning Theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Beatty, B. (1999). *Feeling Like a Leader: The Emotions of Leadership*, Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Educational Research Association, Montreal, April, 1999.
- Beatty, B. (2002). *Emotion Matters in Educational Leadership: Examining the Unexamined*. Doctoral Thesis, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education., Canada.
- Beatty, B, and Brew, C. (2004). 'Trusting relationships and emotional epistemologies: a foundational leadership issue'. *School Leadership and Management*, 24 (3), 329-356.
- Becher, T. (1999). *Professional Practices: Commitment and Capability in a Changing Environment*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

- Beijaard, D. (1995). 'Teachers' Prior Experiences and Actual Perceptions of Professional Identity'. *Teachers and Teaching, Theory and Practice*, 1 (2), 281-94.
- Bennett, N., Newton, W., Wise, C., Woods, P. and Economou, A. (2003). *The Role and Purpose of Middle Leaders in Schools*. Nottingham: NCSL.
- Bezzina, C. (2002). 'Rethinking Teachers' Professional Development in Malta: agenda for the twenty-first century'. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 28 (1), 57-78.
- Billet, S. (2002). 'Toward a workplace Pedagogy: Guidance, Participation and Engagement'. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 53 (1), 27-43.
- Blaikie, N. (1993). *Approaches to social enquiry*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Blackmore, J. (1996). 'Doing 'Emotional Labour' in the education market place: stories from the field of women in management'. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 17(3), 337-349.
- Blase, J. (1991). *The Politics of Life in Schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Blase, J. and Anderson, G. (1995). *The Micropolitics of Educational Leadership: From Control to Empowerment*. London: Cassell.
- Bolam, R. and McMahon, A. (2003). 'Recent Developments in CPD' in Day, C. and Sachs, J. (eds.), *International Handbook of Continuing Professional Development of Teachers*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Boland, T. (2002). Unpublished paper presented at the Irish Primary Principal's Network (IPPN) Conference, Galway, Ireland, February, 2002.
- Bottery, M. (1996). 'The Challenge to Professionals from the New Public Management: Implications for the Teaching Profession'. *Oxford Review of Education*, 22 (2), 179-197.
- Bottery, M. (2003). 'The Leadership of Learning Communities in a Culture of Unhappiness'. *School Leadership and Management*, 23 (2), 187-207.
- Boud, D., Keogh, R. and Walker, D. (1985). *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*. London: Kogan Page.
- Boud, D. and Griffin, V. (1987). *Appreciating Adults Learning: From the Learners' Perspective*. London: Kogan Page.
- Boud, D., Cohen, R. and Walker, D. (eds.). (1993). *Using Experience for Learning*. Buckinghamshire: Society for Research into Higher Education and Open University Press.
- Boud, D. and Garrick, J. (1999). *Understanding Learning at Work*. London: Routledge.
- Bredeson, P.V. and Johannson, O. (2000). 'The School Principal's Role in Teacher Professional Development'. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 26 (2), 385-401.

- Bredeson, P.V. (2003). *Designs for learning: a new architecture for professional development in schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Corwin Press.
- British Educational Research Association. (2004). *Revised ethical guidelines for educational research*. London: BERA.
- Brookfield, S.A. (1987). *Developing Critical Thinkers*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Brown, M., Rutherford, D., and Boyle, B. (2002). Leadership for School Improvement: The Role of the Head of Department in UK Secondary Schools, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 11 (2), 237-258.
- Bryman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Bullock, A. (1988). *Meeting Teachers' Management Needs*. Ely: Peter Francis.
- Bullock, K., James, C., and Jameson, I.(1997). 'The process of educational management learning' in Kydd, L., Crawford, M. and Riches, C. (1997). (eds.) *Professional Development for Educational Management*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bush, T. (2002). Authenticity in research – reliability, validity and triangulation in Briggs, A. and Coleman, M. (eds) (2007). *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Sage.
- Busher, H. and Harris, A. (1999). 'Leadership of School Subject Areas: Tensions and dimensions of managing in the middle'. *School Leadership and Management*, 19 (3), 305-317.
- Busher, H., and Harris, A. with Christine Wise (2000). *Subject Leadership and School Improvement*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Busher, H. (2005). 'Being a middle leader: exploring professional identities'. *School Leadership and Management*, 25 (2), 137- 153.
- Claxton, G., Atkinson, T., Osborn, M. and Wallace, M. (1996). (eds.) *Liberating the Learner, Lessons for Professional Development in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, L. and Mannion, L. (1994). *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, L. and Mannion, L. and Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge.
- Coleman, M. (1996). 'The Management Style of Female Headteachers'. *Educational Management and Administration*, 23 (2), 163-174.
- Coleman, M. and Briggs, A. (2002). (eds.) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

- Coleman, M. (2003). 'Gender and the Orthodoxies of Leadership'. *School Leadership and Management*, 23 (3), 325-339.
- Coolahan, J. (1981). *Irish Education: Its History and Structure*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- Coolahan, J. (1994). *Report on the National Education Convention*. Dublin: Convention Secretariat.
- Connelly, G. and McMahon, M. (2007). 'Chartered Teacher: accrediting professionalism for Scotland's teachers-a view from the inside'. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 33 (1), 91-105.
- Cranston, N.C. (2005). 'Enhancing the Effectiveness of Senior Management Teams in Schools'. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 33 (1), 79-91.
- Crawford, M. (2004). 'Leadership and Emotion in the Primary School – Reflections from Four Primary Headteachers'. *Education*, 3 (13), 20-25.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research, Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. London: Sage.
- Day, C. (1999). *Developing Teachers, The Challenges of Lifelong Learning*. London: Falmer.
- Day, C., Fernandez, A., Hauge, T., and Moller, J. (eds.) (2000). *The Life and work of Teachers: International Perspectives in Changing Times*. London: Falmer Press.
- Day, C. (2004). *A Passion for Teaching*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Deegan, J., Devine, D. and Lodge, A. (2004). *Primary Voices: Equality, Diversity and Childhood in Irish Primary Schools*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y.S (eds.) (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y.S (eds.) (1998). *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. London: Sage.
- Department of Education (1998). *Circulars 3/98, 4/98, 5/98*. Dublin: Department of Education.
- Diggins, P. B. (1990). 'Development of Educational Administration in Second-Level Schools in Ireland', McNamara, G. Williams, K. and Herron, D (eds.) *Achievement and Aspiration: Curricular Initiatives in Post-Primary Education in the 1980's*. Dublin: Drumcondra Teachers' Education Centre.
- Diggins, P.B. (1997). 'Reflections on Leadership Characteristics Necessary to Develop and sustain Learning School Communities'. *School Leadership and Management*. 17 (3), 413-425.

- Downie, R.S. (1990). 'Professions and Professionalism'. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 24 (2), 147-159.
- Earley, P. and Fletcher-Campbell, F. (1989). *The Time to Manage: Department and Faculty Heads at work*. London, NFER/Routledge.
- Earley, P. and Bubb, S. (2004). *Leading and Managing Continuing Professional Development*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Earley, P. and Weindling, D. (2004). *Understanding School Leadership*, London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Earley, P. (2005). 'Continuing Professional Development: The Learning Community' in Coleman, M and Earley, P. (eds.) *Leadership and Management in Education, Cultures, Change and Context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eraut, M. (1994). *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*. London: Falmer Press.
- Eraut, M. (2000). 'Non-formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work'. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70(1), 113-136.
- Eraut, M (2004). 'Informal learning in the workplace'. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 26 (2), 247 -273.
- Erickson, F. (1986). 'Qualitative methods in research on teaching', in Wittrock, M.C. (ed). *Handbook of Research in Teaching*. New York: Macmillan.
- Ezzy, D. (2002). *Qualitative Analysis: Practice and Innovation*. London: Routledge.
- Fenwick, T. (2000). 'Expanding Conceptions of Experiential Learning: A Review of Five Contemporary Perspectives on Cognition'. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50 (4), 243-272.
- Fineman, S. (2000). 'Emotional Arenas Revisited', in Fineman, S. (ed.) *Emotions in Organisations*. London: Sage.
- Flores, M.A.(2004). 'The impact of school culture and leadership on new teachers' learning in the workplace'. *Leadership in Education*, 7 (4), 297-318.
- Fosnot, C. (2005). *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives and Practice*. London: Teachers College Press.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London: Penguin.
- Fullan, M. (1993). *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform*. London: Falmer Press.
- Fullan M. (1995). 'The Limits and the Potential of Professional Development' in Guskey, T.R. and Huberman, M. (eds.) (1995). *Professional Development in Education, New Paradigms and Practices*. New York: Teachers College Press.

- Garrison, R. J. (1992). 'Critical thinking and self-directed learning in adult education: An analysis of responsibility and control issues'. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 42 (3), 136-148.
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S. and Bowe, R. (1995). *Markets, Choice and Equity in Education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Glatter, R. (1991). 'Developing educational leaders: an international perspective' in Ribbins, P., Glatter, R., Simkins, T. and Watson, L. (eds.). *Developing Educational Leaders - International Intervention Programme 1990*. Glasgow: Longman.
- Glatter, R. and Kydd, L. (2003). 'Best practice in educational leadership and management: can we identify it and learn from it'. *Educational Management and Administration*, 31(3), 231-243.
- Glover, D. and Law, S. (1996) *Managing Professional Development in Education: Issues in Policy and Practice*. Kogan Page, London.
- Glover, D., Gleeson, D., Gough, G. and Johnson, M. (1998). 'The Meaning of Management, The Development Needs of Middle Managers in Secondary Schools'. *Educational Management and Administration*, 26 (3), 279-292.
- Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R. and McKee, A. (2002). *The New Leaders, Transforming the Art of Leadership into the Science of Results*. London: Little Brown.
- Gold, A. (1996). "Women into Educational Management", Paper presented to the European Union Conference: *Gender Equality for 2000 and Beyond*, Dublin: Department of Education.
- Gold, A. (1998). *Head of Department: Principles in Practice*. London: Cassell.
- Gold, A. and Evans, J. (1998). *Reflecting on School Management*. London: Falmer Press.
- Gold, A., Evans, J., Earley, P., Halpin, D., and Collarbone, P. (2003). 'Principled Principals?, Values-Driven Leadership: Evidence from Ten Case Studies of 'Outstanding' School Leaders'. *Educational Management and Administration*, 31 (2), 127-138.
- Government of Ireland, (1995). *White Paper on Education: Charting Our Education Future*. Dublin: Government Stationery Office.
- Grace, G. (1995). *School Leadership: Beyond Education Management, An Essay in Policy Scholarship*. London: Falmer Press.
- Granville, G. (2005). *An Emergent Approach to Teacher Professional Development*, Final Evaluation Report on the Experience and Impact of the Second Level Support Service (SLSS), Dublin: SLSS.
- Greenfield, W. (1999). *Moral Leadership in Schools: Fact or Fancy?* Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
- Gronn, P. (2000). 'Distributed properties: a new architecture for leadership'. *Educational Management and Administration*, 28(3), pp. 317-338.

- Guba, E. and Lincoln, Y. (1994). 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research' in Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Hague, P. (1993). *Interviewing*, London: Kogan Page.
- Hall, V. (1996). *Dancing on the Ceiling: a study of women managers in education*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Hall, V. (1996). 'When the going gets tough: Learning through a taught doctorate programme' in Claxton, G., Atkinson, T., Osborn, M. and Wallace, M. (1996). (eds.) *Liberating the Learner, Lessons for Professional Development in Education*. London: Routledge.
- Hall, V. (1997). 'Dusting off the phoenix'. *Educational Management and Administration*, 25 (3), 309-324.
- Hallinger, P. and Snidvongs, K. (2005). *Adding value to school leadership and management: a review of trends in the development of managers in the education and business sectors*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
- Halton, M. (2004). 'Opening a door to the learning society through teacher professional development: an examination of the policy and provision of professional development opportunities for second-level teachers in the Republic of Ireland'. *Irish Educational Studies*, 23 (2), 65-82.
- Hammersley-Fletcher, L. (2002). Becoming a Subject Leader: What's in a name? Subject Leadership in English primary schools, *School Leadership and Management*, 22 (4), 407-420.
- Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, (2nd edn). London: Routledge.
- Hansman, C. (2001). Context-Based Adult Learning in Merriam, S.B. (ed.) (2001). *The New Update on Adult Learning Theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hargreaves, A. (1993). 'Individualism and individuality: reinterpreting the teacher culture'. *The International Journal of Educational Research*, 19 (3), 227-246.
- Hargreaves, D. H. (1994). 'The new Professionalism: the synthesis of professional and institutional development'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 10 (4), 423-38.
- Hargreaves, A. (1998). 'The emotional politics of teaching and teacher development: with implications for educational leadership'. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1 (4), 315-336.
- Harris, A. Busher, H. and Wise, C. (2001). 'Effective Training for Subject Leaders'. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 27(1), 83-94.
- Harris, A., Day, C., Hopkins, D., Hadfield, M., Hargreaves, A., and Chapman, C. (2003). *Effective Leadership for School Improvement*. London: Routledge Falmer.

- Harris, B. (2004). 'Leading by heart'. *School Leadership and Management*, 24 (4), 391-404.
- Harrison, R., Reeve, F., Hanson, A, and Clarke, J. (eds.) (2002). *Supporting Lifelong Learning, Volume 1, Perspectives on Learning*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Hartle, F. and Thomas, K. (2003). *Growing Tomorrow's School: The Challenge*. Nottingham: NCSL. Available from www.ncsl.org.uk.
- Hendry, G. D, (1996). 'Constructivism and educational practice'. *Australian Journal of Education*, 40 (1), 19-45.
- Hogan, P. and Williams, K. (eds.) (1997). *The Future of Religion in Irish Education*. Veritas, Dublin.
- Ho-ming, NG. (2001). 'A Model on Continuous Professional Development of School Leaders'. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, CCEAM, 29 (2), 73-87.
- Hoyle, E. (1986). *The politics of school management*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Hoyle, E. (1994). 'Professionalism, Professionalism and Control in Teaching'. *London Education Review*, 3 (2), 13-19.
- Hoyle, E. and John, P.D. (1995). *Professional Knowledge and Professional Practice*. London: Cassell.
- Huber, S.G. (2003). *Preparing School Leaders for the 21st Century*. London: Routledge.
- Hyland, T. (1996). 'Professionalism, Ethics and Work-Based Learning'. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 44 (2), 168-180.
- James, C. and Vince, R. (2001). 'Developing the Leadership Capability of Headteachers'. *Educational Management and Administration*, 29 (3), 307-317.
- Kenning, S. (2002). *The Intelligent Gaze*. (NCSL research associate report), Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
- Knowles, M.S. (1989). *The Making of an Adult Educator*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kolb, D.A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as a source of learning and development*. New York: Prentice-Hall.
- Kotter, J.P. (1996). *Leading Change*. Boston: Harvard business School Press.
- Kvale, S. (1996) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: Sage Publications.
- Kydd, L., Crawford, M. and Riches, C. (1997). (eds.) *Professional development for educational management*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

- Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- LeCompte, M. D. and Goetz, J.P. (1982). 'Problems of Reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research'. *Review of Educational Research*, 52(1), 31-60.
- Leonard D, and Haugh, K. (1997). 'The learning career: Teacher development and the school'. *Irish Educational Studies*, 16 (1), 85-98.
- Lohman, M.C. (2000). 'Environmental Inhibitors to Informal Learning in the Workplace: A Case Study of Public School Teachers'. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 50 (2), 83-101.
- London, M. (2002). *Leadership Development: paths to self-insight and professional growth*. New Jersey: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.
- Lynch, K. and Lodge, A. (2002). *Equality and Power in Schools, Redistribution, recognition and representation*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- McDonagh, A. (1998). **Revised In-School Management Structures: A study of Large Primary Schools**. Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis, Trinity Collage, Dublin.
- McDowell, J. O. and Bell, E. D. (1997). *Emotional Intelligence and Educational Leadership at East Carolina University*. Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the National Council for Professors of Educational Administration, East Carolina University, August, 1997.
- McGeady, A. (1999). *An Interim Review of Middle Management in an Irish Secondary School*. Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis, Trinity Collage, Dublin.
- MacGilchrist, B., Myers, K., and Reed, J. (1997). *The Intelligent School*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd.
- McLaughlin, M, W. (1993). 'What matters most in teachers' workplace context?' in Little, J.W. and McLaughlin, M.W. (eds.) *Teachers' Work: Individuals, Colleagues and Contexts*. New York: Teachers College Press, pp.73-103.
- McMahon, A. (1996). 'Learning to become a headteacher: The role of the mentor' in Claxton, G., Atkinson, T., Osborn, M. and Wallace, M. (eds). *Liberating the Learner, Lessons for Professional Development in Education*. London: Routledge
- Malhotra, N. K. and Birks, D. F. (2003). *Marketing Research, An Applied Approach*. London: Pearson Education Company.
- Marsick, V.J. and Watkins , K.E. (1990). *Informal and incidental learning in the workplace*. London: Routledge.
- Marsick, V.J. and Watkins, K.E. (2001). 'Informal and Incidental Learning' in Merriam, S.B. (ed.) (2001). *The New Update on Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Martin, J. and Robertson, J. (2002). *New beginnings – The design of an induction programme for First Time Principals in New Zealand*. A paper presented to the first

invitational international leadership conference of the National College for School Leadership, October 16-18, 2002, Nottingham, England.

Mason, J. (2004). *Qualitative Researching*. (2nd ed). London: Sage.

Maxwell, J.A. (1992). 'Understanding and validity in qualitative research'. *Harvard Educational Review*, 62, 279-300.

Merriam, S.B. (ed.). (2001). *The New Update on Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mezirow, J. (1994a). 'Understanding Transformation Theory'. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 44 (4), 222-232.

Mezirow, J. (1994b). 'Response to Mark Tennant and Michael Newman'. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 44, 243-44.

Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: California.

Mitchell, D.E. and Tucker, S. (1992). 'Leadership as a way of thinking'. *Educational Leadership*, 49 (5), 30-35.

Morrison, M. (2002). 'What do we mean by educational research' in Coleman, M. and Briggs, A. (eds.) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Murphy, R. (2002). *Facilitating effective professional development and change in subject leaders*, <http://www.ncsl.org.uk/media/419/6B/facilitating-effective-professional-development.pdf>.

Naughton, P. (1994). *Middle Management Structures in the Voluntary Secondary School*. Unpublished Thesis: Trinity College, Dublin.

OECD (1991). *Reviews of National Policies for Education: Ireland*. Paris: OECD.

OECD (2002). *Teacher education and the teaching career in an era of lifelong learning*. Paris: OECD.

OECD (2007). *Improving School Leadership: Background Report – Ireland*. OECD: March, 2007.

Ortiz, S. M. (2001). 'How Interviewing Became Therapy for Wives of Professional Athletes: Learning from a Serendipitous Experience'. *Qualitative Enquiry*, 7 (2), 192-220.

Ozga, J. (1993). *Women in Educational Management*. Buckinghamshire: Open University Press.

O'Connor, S. (1968). 'Post Primary Education: Now and in the future'. *Studies*, Autumn, 1968.

O'Connor, E. (2002). *Where to? School Leadership in a Post-Modern Irish Society?* A paper presented to The International Conference on Catholic Education Leadership, Sydney, August 4th – 7th, 2002.

O'Connor, E. (2003). *School Leadership Professionalism: An Exploration of the Changes impacting on the Professionalism of the Post-Primary School Principal in the Irish Context.* unpublished essay, London: University of London.

O'Connor, E. (2004). 'Leadership and Emotions: An exploratory study into the emotional dimension of the role of the post-primary school principal in Ireland'. *Educate*, 4 (1), 46-59.

O'Connor, E. (2005). *A Road Worth Taking: An inquiry into the relationship between the Drumcondra Teacher Education Centre and its post-primary school sector with particular focus on continuing professional development provision for middle leaders in the changing Irish education context.* Unpublished Institution Focused Study, London: University of London.

Polanyi, M. (1967). *The Tacit Dimension*, New York: Doubleday.

Ribbins, P. (2007). 'Interviews in educational research: conversations with a purpose' in Briggs, A. and Coleman, M. (eds) (2007). *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Sage.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research*. 2nd Ed., Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Sachs, J. (2000). 'The activist professional'. *Journal of Educational Change*, 1(1), 77-95.

Sachs, J. (2001). 'Teacher Professional Identity: competing discourses, competing outcomes'. *Journal of Education Policy*, 16 (2), 149-161.

Schein, E. (1985). *Organisational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schon, D. (1991). *The reflective turn: Case studies in and on educational practice*. New York: Teachers' College Press, Columbia University.

Schön, D. (1996). *The Reflective Practitioner, How Professionals Think in Action*. London: Arena.

Schmidt, M. (2000). 'Role theory, emotions, and identity in the department headship of secondary schooling'. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16 (8), 827 – 842.

Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N., Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J., Kleiner, A. (2000). *Schools That Learn*. New York: Doubleday.

Siskin, L. (1993). *Hermaphroditic roles: Teacher leadership in secondary schools*. Paper presented to the International Study Association on Teacher Thinking, Gothenburg, Sweden.

Stoll, L. and Fink, D. (1996). *Changing Our Schools*. Buckingham: Open University Press.:

- Stoll, L. Fink, D. and Earl, L. (2003). *It's About Learning (and it's about time), What's in it for schools?* London: Routledge Falmer.
- Sugrue, C. (2002). 'Irish Teachers' Experiences of Professional Learning: implications for policy and practice'. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 28 (2), 311-338.
- Sugrue, C. and UI Thuama, C. (1997). 'Lifelong Learning for Teachers in Ireland: Policy, Provision and Vision'. *British Journal of In-service Education*, 23 (1), 213-226.
- Teaching and Learning for the 21st Century (2006). *Newsletter*, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, No.4,
- Townsend, F. M. (1999). *The Principal as Learner: Perceptions, Beliefs and Experiences of Nineteen New Zealand Principals*. Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of Waikato, New Zealand.
- Tuijnman, A. (2002). 'Themes and questions for a research agenda on lifelong learning' in Edwards, R., Miller, N., Small, N. and Tait, A. (eds.) *Supporting lifelong learning: making policy work*. London, Open University Press.
- Turner, C. (2000). 'Learning about Leading a Subject Department in Secondary Schools: Some Empirical Evidence'. *School Leadership and Management*, 20 (3), 299-313.
- Turner, C. (2003). 'A Critical Review of Research on Subject Leaders in Secondary Schools'. *School Leadership and Management*, 23 (2), 209-227.
- Turner C. (2006). 'Subject Leaders in Secondary Schools and Informal Learning: Towards a Conceptual Framework'. *School Leadership and Management*, 26 (5), 419-435.
- Vincent, C. (1996). *Parents and Teachers: Power and Participation*. London: Falmer Press.
- Walizer, M.H. and Weiner, P.L. (1978). *Research Methods and Analysis, Searching for Relationships*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Wallace, M. (1996). 'When is experiential learning not experiential learning' in Claxton, G., Atkinson, T., Osborn, M. and Wallace, M. (1996). *Liberating the Learner, Lessons for Professional Development in Education*. London: Routledge
- Walker, A. and Dimmock, C. (2006). 'Preparing Leaders, Preparing Learners: the Hong Kong Experience'. *School Leadership and Management*, 26 (2), 125- 147.
- Warren, L. and O'Connor, E. (1999). *Stepping out of the Shadows: Women in Educational Management in Ireland*. Dublin: Oak Tree Press.
- Waters, M. (1998). 'Personal Development for Teachers'. *Professional Development Today*, 1 (2), 29-38.
- Watling, R. (2002). 'The analysis of qualitative data' in Coleman, M. and Briggs, A. R. (eds). *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

- Wenger, E., McDermott, R., Snyder, W.M. (2002). *Cultivating Communities of Practice*. Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.
- West-Burnham, J. and O'Sullivan, F. (1998). *Leadership and Professional Development in Schools, How to Promote Techniques for Effective Professional Learning*. London: Pearson Education.
- West-Burnham, J. (2000). 'Teams' in Moon, B., Butcher, J, and Bird, E. (eds.). *Leading Professional Development in Education*. The Open University, London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Weindling, D. (2004). *Innovation in Headteacher Induction*. Nottingham: National College for School Leadership.
- Whitty, G., Power, S. and Halpin, D. (1998). *Devolution and Choice in Education, The School, The State and The Market*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Whitty, G. (2000). 'Teacher Professionalism in New Times'. *Journal of In-Service Education*, 26 (2), 281-295.
- Williams, A. (2003). 'Informal Learning in the Workplace: A Case Study of New Teachers'. *Educational Studies*, 29 (2), 207-219.
- Wise, C. (2000). *The monitoring role of the academic middle manager in secondary schools*. Paper presented at the British Educational Management and Administration Society (BEMAS) Research Conference, Cambridge.
- Wise, C. and Bennett, N. (2003). *The future role of middle leaders in secondary schools, a survey of middle leaders in secondary schools in England*. Nottingham: NCSL.
- Wolcott, H.F. (1990). *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Wood, F.H. and Thompson, S.R. (1980). 'Guidelines for better staff development'. *Educational Leadership*, 37 (5), 374 -378.
- Wragg, T. (2002). 'Interviewing', in Coleman, M. and Briggs, A. R. (eds.) *Research Methods in Educational Leadership and Management*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Yin, R. (1994). 'Designing single and multiple case studies', in Bennett, N., Glatter, R. and Lecacic, R. (eds.) *Improving Educational Management Through Research and Consultancy*. London: Paul Chapman.

Legislative Acts

Main legislative acts passed since 1989 which apply to schools

1. Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 1989
2. Industrial Relations Act, 1990
3. Children Act 1991, 2001
4. Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1993, 1997
5. Employment Act (Protection of Young Persons), 1996
6. Organisation of Working Time Act, 1997
7. Employment Equality Act 1998, 2004
8. Education Act ,1998
9. Education Welfare Act, 2000
10. Equal Status Act, 2000
11. Protection of Employees (Part-time Work) Act, 2001
12. Teaching Council Act, 2001
13. Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002
14. Unfair Dismissals Act 1977, 1993
15. Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act, 2004

Source: JMB Survey: The Workload of the Principal 2005.

Interview Schedule

Section 1 - Reflecting on Professional learning

1. When you were first appointed to Assistant Principal, did you feel ready? How did you know what to do?

What had prepared you ...previous experience...colleagues?

What did you believe you had to learn? ... where were the gaps?

2. What did you find hardest to learn in your new role?

Who/What helped you? ...how did they do this?

How might you have been helped better?

3. Can you recall a specific flash point/critical moment of learning for you in your role as Assistant Principal (i.e. an experience/event that highlighted something you needed to learn ... a point of great learning or illumination)?

What did you learn? How successfully? How do you know this?

Who helped you? How?

4. Has your role changed over the years? As it changes/develops ...how do you identify your learning needs?

Who/what helps you do this? Who should assist you in this?

5. How important for you is it that you continue to learn?

How do you ensure that this happens?

How has being in this job helped you to learn?

6. How do you learn best as an adult? What works for you?

What kinds of things do you enjoy learning most?

What stops you learning?

Has your understanding of how you learn changed over time?

... how? ...why?

Section 2 - Perceptions of CPD

1. In the last 2 years can you recall an event/course/programme/professional development experience that has made an impact on your learning as an assistant principal? *How?*

In terms of what you need to learn in the role of Assistant Principal,

*How do you meet these needs?
Courses, 3rd level programmes? Peers?*

2. What kinds of professional development events do you feel would best support you in your current role?

*Professional reading?, Meeting with colleagues in school?,
Out of school (clusters)?, Professional coaching?, Mentoring?, 3rd level?*

3. Looking back ... What training/supports were provided to support your learning when you were first appointed? What training/supports would you have liked to have been given?
4. What advice about professional learning, if any, would you *NOW* give to a newly appointed Assistant Principal?
5. If you were to set up a professional development programme for *beginning* assistant principals, what would it include?

structures, supports, topics, knowledge or skills?

Section 3 - Closing

- a. What are your thoughts generally about learning with regard to being an assistant principal?
- b. How does learning assistant principalship fit into the notion of lifelong learning?
- c. What, if anything, have you not been able to learn well *or* at all?
Why?
- d. Is there anything else you wish to add?

Letter of Invitation

May 22nd 2006.

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to invite you to have a conversation with me about your learning and learning experiences in your role as an Assistant Principal. I am currently undertaking research on adult learning with a particular focus on Assistant Principals in secondary schools, as part fulfilment of a Doctorate degree in The Institute of Education, London University and as part of my role as Director of an Education Centre.

The purpose of the research is to explore:

- How Assistant Principals learn
- What their learning experiences and learning needs are
- How the Education Centre can assist them in their learning.

Your help with this research will be beneficial in informing current knowledge and thinking in this area and furthermore in underpinning the planning re future provision of professional development activities for Assistant Principals both at Education Centre and National levels.

The interview will last no more than thirty minutes. With your permission a tape-recorder will be used during the interview to help accurately reflect you views and will be turned off if you request it. In the interests of anonymity and confidentiality, please be assured that neither you nor your school will be identifiable or identified in the research. You will be given a copy of the main findings of the study.

I will be conducting a series of interviews among a range of APs in a variety of schools in the Dublin area during the month of May and early June. If you are happy to speak with me please complete the enclosed form and return it to me in the franked addressed envelope provided. I will visit you at your school, have you visit the Centre or arrange a telephone interview if this is your preference, at a time that is convenient for you.

Thank you for your help and co-operation.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Eileen O'Connor
Researcher

Interview Acceptance Form

I am happy to participate in the research project as outlined. I am available for interview on:

(please indicate more than one time if possible)

1. DAY/DATE: TIME:

Or

2. DAY/DATE: TIME:

Or

3. DAY/DATE: TIME:

Preferred Location: *(please circle)*

1. School 2. Drumcondra Education Centre 3. Phone interview

Signed:

Assistant Principal

School: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Mobile: _____

Appendix 5

Respondent's Profile

Male Female

Stage of career - Age: 20 – 35 36 – 50 51 - 65
(please circle as appropriate)

School sector: _____

School type: _____

Assistant Principal - Post definition/Role

No. of years as Assistant Principal: _____

Post-graduate studies (if any?): _____
