

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

Developing the Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this thesis was to investigate issues associated with the gender imbalance in Principal positions in Victorian government secondary schools.. It attempted to identify factors that have militated against women gaining Principal positions and to explain why relatively few women become Principals. Chapters 2 and 3 have suggested a line of inquiry centering on structural discrimination, although other issues play various roles as well.

As noted at the end of the last chapter, there is value in not only looking at the generalized frame of reference that speaks to this issue, but also looking at a particular context in which this issue can be examined in detail. The former has been explored in the last two chapters. The next three chapters are concerned with the latter, and the interplay between the two.

Qualitative Method

The study reported in this and the next two chapters was concerned with the factors that facilitated or inhibited the career paths, from their perspectives, of four female Principals at Gilmore College for Girls in Melbourne. Why these women were chosen will be detailed at a later point in this study. As the emphasis of this research was on gaining meaning from the respondents, qualitative research methods based on an interpretive framework were

employed as they involve the direct examination of the empirical social world (Blumer, 1969). Punch (1998) argues that these methods afford the best way of accessing the insiders' perspective.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) define the term Qualitative Research as:

Any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about person's lives, stories, behavior, but also about organizational functioning, social movements, or interactional relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 18).

Qualitative methods were used in this study because, although the statistics collated in Table 1 provided evidence that there has been a variation in the number of women in Principal positions in Victorian government secondary schools, their numbers at no time are near equal with those of men, nor anywhere near 50% of the total work force. However these statistics could give no explanation as to why such an obvious imbalance still existed. There was still a need to uncover and understand what lies behind this issue. Poiner and Wills (1991) concur in their support for the need for qualitative data in monitoring action and collecting information:

Numbers don't tell you why... Why does make a difference, especially if you are looking for lasting change (Poiner & Wills, 1991, p.54).

According to Piantanida and Garman (1999) and Wainwright (1997) qualitative findings are more in-depth since they make use of open-ended questions, the results provide more detail on behaviour, attitudes and motivation.

Although this type of research does not generalize immediately to a wider population, by interviewing four women Principals concerning factors that have been identified in the literature, and have impeded women's progression to the position of Principal in secondary schools, the analysis of the interviews may add some depth to these issues that are pertinent to the wider school sector in Victoria.

Case Study

The case study approach was used in this thesis. According to Robson (1993) a case study is a well established strategy where the focus is on the description and interpretation of the culture and social structure of a social group. This study was representative of a case study approach because it concentrated on a school and in particular women Principals.

The school was Gilmore College for Girls in Melbourne. The reason for selecting this school was that it was a girls' school, and all Principals have been women since its foundation. This is the only instance in Victoria where throughout a school's history, all Principals have been women. Hence it was hoped that the issues that women have to face in becoming a Principal, and the change in these over a period of years, might have been evident at this site. In some ways taking such an individual school such as this negates any application of insights gained to the wider school sector. However the special

circumstances may also lead to insights that may be very difficult to gain at any other sight. Thus the issue of applicability, as always in case study methodology, is a vexed one for this study. More details of the College pertinent to this argument are provided in the next chapter.

The case study approach was also chosen because it provides flexibility and focuses on explanation. Burns (1994) maintains that:

Flexibility is a vital trait, as few case studies ever proceed exactly as planned. Inevitably changes are made as new evidence comes to light and the focus can even change. Unexpected situations are new opportunities not threats (Burns, 1994, p. 322).

The case study, like any other method, has limitations. One of the limitations is subjective bias (Burns, 1994). The greatest concern is the role of human subjectivity when selecting evidence to support or refute, or when choosing a particular explanation for the evidence found. It is easy for the case study investigator to allow equivocal evidence or personal views to influence the direction of the findings and the conclusion. The bias can also enter into the conduct the study, as well as in the designing of instruments such as questionnaires and sets of interview questions to an unknown degree. An attempt was made in this study to let the data interact with ideas drawn from the literature. As well supervisors were relied on to read, and reread, drafts of the analyses with access to original transcripts for comment on interpretations made by the researcher.

Another limitation about the case study approach is the potential for time and information overload. Case studies are seen as time-consuming and can produce for the investigator a massive deluge of information which is impossible to adequately analyse. This increases the tendency to selectivity and bias (Burns, 1994). In this study this was countered to some degree by judiciously choosing a small number of women to interview, although interviewing in depth.

The possible data gathering processes available for case study ranges from interviewing, observation, analysing records and survey questionnaires. In this study the interview was the main data gathering process. The purpose of the interview in this study was to seek to understand the personal perspectives of each respondent to those factors facilitating and inhibiting women becoming Principals in Victoria's government secondary schools. The researcher was confident that individual interviews would allow the rich data that was sought, to be gained.

Interview Process

According to Punch (1998, p 174), the interview is a useful means of "accessing people's perspectives, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality," because leads can be followed, in-depth probes made and elaboration sought. Support for this point of view is provided by Edson (1988, p. 4) who stated that interviews offered "information about respondents' personal points of view and experiences which are the voices often missing from other studies."

Davies (1993) has argued that the use of interviews gives an explanation as to how and why, whereas statistics do not. She argued:

By looking at statistical information you are left guessing and predicting whereas a simultaneous use of qualitative data can be very illuminating... [it] gives a much stronger sense of how and why, it provides some explanation behind the statistics (Davies, 1993, p. 3).

In contemplating how to conduct the interview, there are a number of issues that need to be thought through. Van Manen (1990) contends that the interviewer needs to be familiar with the question:

Before embarking on a busy interview schedule one needs to be oriented to one's question or notion in such a strong manner that one does not get easily carried away with interviews that go everywhere and nowhere (Van Manen, 1990, p. 67).

Grosf and Sardy (1985, p. 156-161) discuss a variety of criteria for establishing the validity of instrumentation. In this study some basis of validity was established during the formative stages of the construction of the interview questions. Experienced researchers and colleagues at Australian Catholic University offered advice in devising the interview questions that were based on themes found within the relevant body of literature. The questions used in the interviews are discussed in detail in the next section.

Hence the primary reason the qualitative approach was selected for the study was to be able to use the interview process and to go beyond just a description of women's experience. The intention of the interview was to elicit from respondents information as to how each became a Principal, the obstacles that they have overcome, and the areas that require continuing work to be done by the profession. Also it was to compare the differences between their attitudes, knowledge or behaviour, which may lead to ideas that can assist women wanting to aspire to Principal positions in Victoria's government secondary schools.

The four female Principals of Gilmore College for Girls who held Principal positions at the school from 1968 to the present were invited to participate in the interview process. All Principals prior to these four had died. Together they represent about 30 years during which immense changes in the education system took place. A letter was sent to these Principals describing the project, and a copy of the questions was included. The interviewees were provided with questions in advance so that they could exert a degree of control over the interview process by deciding which areas had priority for them, and so go beyond the questions being asked if they saw this as appropriate. The letter was followed by a telephone request for an appointment time, and the interview was carried out at a convenient time for interviewee and researcher. Appendices A, B, C and D include the transcript of interviews, letter to the Principals, the consent form, and the interview questions.

The interviews were conducted over the period of a month at venues most convenient for the respondents. Two of the interviewees chose to be interviewed at their homes, one at her

work place because she was the present Principal of the school, and one at Australian Catholic University because it was more convenient for her. There were no indications that the different venues for the interviewees adversely impacted on any of the interviews. Of the four women interviewed only one of them was currently working as a Principal. The other three had retired. Each interview lasted an hour. For each interview this seemed to be ample time. All the interviews were tape recorded. All respondents were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any stage without having to explain their reasons.

The Development of the Interview Questions

The interview was structured around sixteen questions. An analysis of the literature did not provide a single explanation for women's under-representation in Principal positions. However, there were a number of factors perceived as being potential barriers to women attaining this promotional position. Many of the factors appear to be interrelated, although attitudes towards the home and family and the inherent obligations involved, was considered as a significant and central factor. Equal pay, the lack of a common roll, and superannuation were also issues that seemed to be preventing women from becoming Principals. It was expected that each Principal's responses would reflect to some extent their personal and professional reactions to what was happening to women in the wider society at the time they were Principals. The starter questions and the reasons for asking each question follow. Clearly these main questions were followed up at times to illicit further explanation.

1. *Where did you go to school?*

Question one was an icebreaker to get the conversation rolling. The idea behind starting at each Principal's own education was that it would reveal basic facts about type of schools they attended, which may have implications in how to interpret other answers they gave.

2. *How did your schooling help you choose your career in teaching?*

This question was used to get an indication of how much their schooling influenced their later career choices. For example, if the interviewees attended a girls' school they might have been influenced by the role models of women in authority to whom they were exposed.

3. *Were there other influences that determined your choice of career?*

This question attempts to ascertain any non-school factors such as those identified in the literature review, like the choice of teaching fulfilling gender expectations, which the respondents believed to be influential in forming their career choice. Follow up questions probed whether in particular the studentship scheme' was an important influence enabling any of these women to enter secondary teaching. In the 1950s through to the 1970s the state Government ran a scheme where university students were paid an allowance and had all university fees paid, if they committed themselves to teaching following their graduation from university studies. According to the Teachers' Federation of Victoria (1986) these studentships were a significant influence which enabled girls in particular to become secondary teachers by entering university. The studentship provided an opportunity by overcoming the

obstacles of financial hardship, and parents' resistance to the idea of further study for girls.

4. *Were there people advising you not to go into teaching as a career?*

This question may bring out the guidance and encouragement or lack of it provided to girls considering taking up teaching as a career. It may also highlight changing community attitudes towards women and work through that period of time. We can relate this question to the literature review where a study was taken place by Sampson (1991) showing that many Australians see women's primary role as child bearer and carer. Also Morton and Morton (2000) indicates that once a child is born, the mothers career suffers.

5. *What factors encouraged you to aspire to become a Principal?*

This may bring out such factors such as promotion, pay, status, power and freedom, all issues touched on in the literature review which suggest why men aspire to be Principals, but seem not to be so important for women. Indeed the literature gave few reasons as to why women did aspire to be Principals.

6. *For how long were you a Principal at the school?*

The reason for this question was there may be some teachers who became a Principal, and then decided they did not want to do that job any more. They may have wanted to go back to teaching or move on to something else. This question can relate to the literature review through Blackmore's (1999) idea that she did not want

to take up administration, because it was going to take her away from her son and away from the sort of work she got job satisfaction from.

7. *What factors encouraged you to stay as a Principal?*

This question was used to give an idea of what made these female Principals stay in this position. It tried to bring out what the interviewees saw as being the rewards of being a Principal.

8. *Were there factors that made it easy for you to become a Principal?*

A number of women in upper management positions in business, government, and service industries would suggest that a woman attaining a leadership position is, in itself, a major achievement. This question was used to find out if these women received direct encouragement from men or women in positions of authority to aspire to being a Principal. Was the decision to seek promotion the result of a gentle push from supportive colleagues, or partners, or of actually being asked to do so by the Board of Inspectors?

9. *What factors made it difficult for you to become a Principal?*

It has been noted that the selection process can be a factor that makes it difficult for women to become a Principal. In recent years the methods of assessment for promotion to all levels have changed. The 1990s saw the replacement of the seniority based promotion system with the merit system. This notion builds from the literature review with studies conducted by Blackmore (1995). Blackmore (1995) indicates that the merit system favours white middle class males. The Teachers'

Federation of Victoria (1986) argued that years of teaching experience placed some women at a disadvantage if they left the teaching service to have children. This question will seek to clarify whether the four Principals felt these particular impacts and how they reacted to them. It also gives an opportunity to hear whether there were other factors that may not have been identified in the literature.

10. Were there difficulties in balancing a number of roles?

The question was designed to address the issue of balancing roles, for example, family and employment. The role of Principal does require long hours to attend to administrative duties, school management, parent/school liaison, regional and state meetings and conferences. For example, a number of meetings are often scheduled outside of the 9:00am to 4:00pm time span of weekdays, which approximates to a normal teaching day. Women may find it difficult to find care providers who are willing to provide the service for the long length of time each day and during evenings if required if in fact they have children. Studies conducted by D'Arcy (1994), Dunlap and Schmuck (1995), Edson (1995), Eggins (1997) and Limerick (1991) show that women do not apply for promotional positions due to family commitments and domestic responsibilities.

Finally, this question was asked to see if there were any breaks in these women's careers due to child rearing. If a large number of female teachers married and had children it might be expected that such breaks have an adverse effect on the pursuit of careers. Eggins (1997) supports this argument. He believes men have normal career paths without breaks or distractions and that women teachers may leave the

service to have children. Therefore this may become a significant obstacle for some women teachers wanting to become Principals.

11. *What did you enjoy most about being a Principal?*

12. *What did you enjoy least about being a Principal?*

With questions 11 and 12, the respondents were asked to identify negative and positive factors related to their role as Principal. The interviewees, by revealing the positive and negative aspects of being a Principal, would make the researcher aware that there may be changes needed in the role of Principal.

13. *Is it easier for a woman to become a Principal today than when you became a Principal at Gilmore School for Girls?*

This question investigated whether the respondents believed it was easier for a women to become a Principal in Victorian government secondary schools in the past or today. For example, in the literature review the legislation affecting women teachers in Victorian government secondary schools was examined. It shows that women teachers have faced discrimination because of past policies, such as equal pay, no confinement leave, superannuation and the common roll (Towns, 1982; Kelly, 1986; Federated Teachers' Union of Victoria, 1991). This question was used to invite the interviewees to consider some of the issues that were influential for them.

14. *Do you believe that women in your profession hit a glass ceiling?*

The term glass ceiling was defined in the study. How it had affected women in their profession was explored. It was relevant and important to ask this question of these women Principals because it seems the glass ceiling still affects all professions (see Stevens, 2000).

15. *Have you been influenced by any feminist writers?*

16. *If so, which writers influenced you and why?*

Question 15 was asked because feminist issues are not only important in education but they are also important in society. Feminism is a worldview rather than something that is only happening in schools. Feminism has played a large role in women's lives with its demands for increased female entry into paid workforce, higher education and women's increased participation in public life. There was also the whole movement towards affirmative action and anti-discrimination legislation that was going on at this time and noted in the literature review. By asking these questions we may get an indication of whether these four women see themselves see themselves as feminist, and if so, to what degree.

Analysis

All interviews were tape recorded and all respondents were given the opportunity to refuse to be recorded. In fact the four women had no objections. The researcher conducted all four interviews. No one else was present at any of the interviews. During the interviews, the

researcher made field notes for later reference. Following the interview, tapes were listened to but not transcribed fully. Key issues, concerns or particular events were identified and noted, along with the narrative that had described them. Notations made during the interview also assisted with the transcription and identification of particular incidents that illustrated the specific issues investigated during the interview. Themes were then determined from the clusters of issues that began to emerge from the interview. Themes common to most or all of the interviews were also noted. The researcher after looping through this process either partially or fully a number of times was also able to have the themes validated, debated, reshaped and affirmed as an account that makes sense of the women Principals' lives and experiences.

Summary

This chapter described the conceptual framework for the study, the context in which the study took place, and development of the interview questions with the related reasons for asking each question. The chapter also indicated the method of analysis of the data. The next chapter will discuss the data obtained and its analysis.

Chapter Five

The Case Study

Introduction

This chapter presents a case study of Principalships over the last 30 years within one inner western suburban secondary school of Melbourne, Victoria. It has been constructed from interview data obtained from four women Principals who worked at the school, other data from field notes, and notes taken in reading various historical documents to do with the school. This chapter begins with sketching out the historical context of the school, after which the four Principals who were interviewed are introduced. A set of themes is then elaborated which reflects the career aspirations of the four Principals, and the factors which supported or acted against their aspirations for a Principalship.

The Context for the Case Study

The college selected for this study was Gilmore College for Girls, located at 298 Barkly Street Footscray. Footscray is an inner western suburb of metropolitan Melbourne. The western suburbs of Melbourne have always been home to working class people in the main. On October 18th 1917, a deputation sponsored by Footscray Council urged the then Minister of Public Institution, the Hon. H.S.W Lawson, to establish a Domestic Arts School at Footscray. Dr Leach, the District Inspector of schools, was asked to report on the matter and in his 1921 report he recommended the establishment of the school and stated that there

were 250 girls available and ready to attend. The new school building was founded in March 1925 and was completed on the 4th of June 1925 at a cost of 15,034 pounds. The then Minister responsible for education, Sir Alexander Peacock, officially opened Footscray Domestic Arts School later that same year. At the opening the Director of Education Mr Frank Tate, told the people how fortunate they were to have this new type of school, which as well as teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic, also taught cookery, needlework and aimed to educate girls for efficient and happy womanhood (Blake, 1973; Footscray Girls High School, 1985; Gallo, 1995).

The *Footscray Advertiser* on June 1925, pointed out that the girls at Footscray Domestic Arts School learned cooking in a practical manner. They learned to provide for a certain number of people, as the school provided meals on a daily basis for the public. The girls also learned how to set the table, how to wait on it, and how to clean up. In the domestic arts school there was a suite of living rooms in which the headmistress and one teacher lived. The cleaning of these rooms was left to those girls who were participating in the subject of House Cleaning (Footscray Advertiser, 1925, p.5).

Gallo (1995) interviewed a number of past students to document experiences of their time at the school. Dorothy Mckenzie, a student at the school in 1926 and 1927, mentioned how much she enjoyed going into the school flat. Mckenzie stated:

There was a flat at the school which I loved to get into. We used to have to make the Head Mistress' bed in the morning. She had already made it, but

we had to undo it and do it again and I'm proud to say that I got 10 out of 10 for that (Gallo, 1995, p. 7).

In the late 1920s Footscray Domestic Arts school began to be regarded more as a secondary school. Both parents and staff were concerned to improve the course options available to the girls, and there were attempts to make the school more like a secondary school and less like a cookery centre. By the 1930s the school offered a professional course of four years duration leading to the Intermediate Certificate (year 10), including handwork and domestic subjects, and a three or four year course providing general subjects as well as domestic arts (Victorian Public Records Series 3916, Unit 60).

At the end of 1930 eighty girls obtained the Merit Certificate (year 8), and twenty-five the Certificate of Proficiency (year 9) in home arts and crafts. For the first time in the history of the school, girls were presented for the Commercial Examination of the Technical School Certificate. By 1938 the enrolment of the school had increased to 391. There was also an increase in the number of girls remaining to complete the third year of the course (in today's terms, year 9). Fourteen girls returned for a fourth year and seven had entered for the forthcoming intermediate examination of the University of Melbourne (that is, year 10) (City of Footscray, Annual Report 1937-38).

As the courses offered at the domestic arts school were extended, the educational emphasis changed slowly, and this was reflected in the change of the name of the school. In a letter in 1938 the Advisory Council of the school asked the Education Department to change the sign outside the school to read Footscray Girls' Secondary School. It was believed the

original name had adversely affected the enrolment in past years and that many girls who should be attending the school were travelling daily to other schools some distance from Footscray. The Department agreed to change the sign in the next contract for general repairs (Victorian Public Record Series 3916, Unit 60), and in 1939 Footscray Domestic Arts School was redesignated as Footscray Girls' Secondary School (Victorian Public Record Series 3916, Unit 75).

Also in 1939 the school tried to arrange classes in languages and higher mathematics (City of Footscray Annual Report 1937-38). In the late 1950s when Miss E.L. Tippett became the headmistress she was successful in her application to the Department for permission to introduce a full high school course for girls with good academic ability (that is teach through to year 11). Nevertheless, classes in languages were not offered at the school until Miss M. Facey became headmistress in 1962. The school then started to provide advanced courses including French and Mathematics as well as the original arts course (Blake, 1973).

In the early 1970s the school name was changed again to Footscray Girls' High School, because the school had now gained high school status. During this period Miss Noela Eury was the Principal. At this time the science block was built and it provided facilities for teaching chemistry, physics and biology. By mid 1970 the Higher School Certificate was introduced with fourteen enrolments in the first year.

By 1985 the enrolment was 742 students with 62 teaching staff and 28 full and part time general staff. The curriculum of the school reflected the determined commitment of staff and School Council to provide educational opportunities equal to others offered in

comparable schools. Gallo (1995) highlighted an interview with a past student about the science course. Susan Sayed attended the school in 1978 stated:

Myself and the two others were the first students to do all science course at the school. We were the first ones to do Chemistry, Physics and Biology at Year 11 and Year 12 so it was fairly new. Basically it was the science areas that I was involved with. In Year 11 there were quite a few Physics and Chemistry students. They were fairly new but by Year 12 we were the first school to have Physics and Chemistry. Science and Chemistry were in demand. Physics was also pretty constant (Gallo, 1995, p. 67).

At this period languages such as German, Italian, Mandarin, Spanish and Vietnamese were offered. Sonia Nikolovski, a past student attending in year 1985 to 1990, spoke about her German class:

What I found amusing at school was my German classes. Mr Menke would come in with his piano accordion and would teach us German beer songs. We would sing as loud as possible, pretending we had tankards of beer in our hands. Those classes were entertaining (Gallo, 1995, p. 77).

At the start of 1990 Footscray Girls' High School underwent a further name change to Footscray Girls' Secondary College. The Education Department had changed the names of all the high schools in the state to secondary colleges. This particular school had not been under any pressure to become co-educational or to merge with other schools, because there

had been high enrolment rate and a great demand by the parents for girls' high school. This was unusual given the number of secondary schools that had to do one or the other, or which were simply closed during the early 1990s.

In 1991 Footscray Girls' Secondary College, like every other school in the state, had changed from offering the Higher School Certificate to a new course, the Victorian Certificate of Education. This was the new year eleven and twelve course of study. The new course at the school had studies ranging from the arts, Australian Studies, History, Human Development, Technology Studies, Languages other than English, Mathematics, Science and Social Education.

Ms Victoria Baxter was appointed as Principal in 1994. The school name was changed to Gilmore College for Girls, after Dame Mary Gilmore. The new name was to reflect the role of the school as a provider of education for girls from a wider geographic area. The school also expanded, with a new state-of-the-art science block, and access to computers and the school's internet/CD-ROM networked in many rooms.

Thus over time, the school was slowly transformed from a domestic arts school to a girls' secondary college with a curriculum similar to most other secondary colleges in Victoria. However for all its life, the school remained a girls' school.

The Principals

This school has been chosen as the site of this case study because of the interesting sequence of Principals that have lead the school from its inception. They have all been women. The only exception to this was for some eight months in the mid 1980s when a male held the position as acting Principal. This has not always been the case for girls' schools in Victoria. For example, a male has often led the large and famous Methodist Ladies' College, Melbourne (private school).

The first Head Mistress of the school was Mary Agnes Keiller. Miss Keiller held office from 1925 until 1937. Miss Curtin acted as Head Mistress for 1938-1939 and Miss Dora Taylor was in charge during the war years. Miss Morrison took over for the years 1946-1948. Miss D.A Mackay held office of Head Mistress from 1949-1953, then Miss Olive Smith from 1954-1955, followed by Miss Cronin from 1956-1958. Miss E.L Tippet succeeded Miss Cronin in 1959 and remained Head until her retirement in 1961. Miss M. Facey became Head Mistress in 1962. Miss Noela Eury followed Miss Facey in 1970. Ms Irene Wescott was Principal from 1978-1984 and Mr Brian Magree followed her as acting Principal from September 1984-April 1985 when Miss Barbara Hall was chosen to be the new Principal. Miss Hall retired from the school in 1993. Mrs Val McDonald was acting Principal at this time and she led the school until the appointment in July 1994 of Ms Victoria Baxter (Gallo, 1995). Within this interesting context of a school having such a string of female Principals, it may be that there was a culture that developed within the school that can give insight into how women Principals saw and developed their leadership

role. This may not be so obvious in other schools; most if not all would normally be lead by a male, with occasionally a female being given the Principalship.

Four female Principals of Gilmore College for Girls were invited to participate in the interview process. The interviews were used to investigate how women achieve Principal positions and the barriers confronting women in Victorian government secondary colleges to becoming Principals. This data may give insight into why there is an under-representation of women as Principals.

The following female Principals who lead the school from 1970 to the present were interviewed: Miss Noela Eury (1970-1977), Mrs Irene Wescott (1978-1984), Mrs Barbara Hall (1985-1993) and Ms Victoria Baxter (1994-2000). The following paragraph give some background to each Principal:

- Miss Noela Eury attended Waringabil High School located north west of Ballarat, a co-educational non-metropolitan school. In those days the expectation was that to enter teaching, nursing, or be a shop assistant were suitable jobs for girls, especially in rural areas. Noela was fortunate to have parents that were supportive of her and could afford to send her on to university to become a teacher. She held the Acting Principal position at Gilmore College for Girls in 1970, and in 1972 was confirmed in this position. She stayed as Principal until 1977. She was single and never married.

- Ms Irene Wescott attended North Footscray Primary School, where she was inspired by Miss Roberstson when in Grade 3. Her secondary schooling was at Williamstown High School and then MacRobertson Girls' High School. MacRobertson High was an academic school, with competitive entrance examination. She had a positive experience in attending MacRobertson Girls' High School, a girls' school, with role models of women in authority to which she was exposed and was aware. Irene was set on a path to become a teacher through the strong influence of her family. Irene won a teaching studentship. She taught at about a dozen schools, including kindergarten, primary, and secondary, and had been Principal at two. Irene was first a teacher at Gilmore College for Girls, and then the Principal from 1978 to 1984. When she first taught at Gilmore College for Girls there were no men teachers on the staff. She has three children and her husband passed away in 1973.
- Miss Barbara Hall went through the government school system. She, also attended MacRobertson Girls' High School. At the time the government was offering secondary studentships to people who wanted to go to university, but that meant you ended up teaching. Barbara won a studentship. She was happy to teach. She was determined to be an independent person. She did not want to be financially disadvantaged the way she saw most women of the era. Barbara was Principal at the school from 1985 to 1993. She is single and never married.

- Ms Victoria Baxter attended primary and secondary school in the country. The last five years of her schooling was at Mornington High School. It was Victoria's parents' expectation that she would be able to support her self, and they saw teaching as an assured career. Victoria was qualified as a technical teacher. She was appointed Principal to Gilmore College in 1994 and was still Principal when the study was carried out in 1999. She was married but separated.

The study was restricted to only these four women Principals because the Principals before Noela Eury have all passed away. It may have been better if we had more women Principals from Gilmore College for Girls to interview, however there were benefits from interviewing these four women Principals whose tenures in the position spanned continuously 30 years.

The rest of this chapter develops themes that emerged from the interviews held with these four women Principals. The first set of five themes was supportive of the women's aspirations, but the second set of six paints some of the disincentives.

Themes that Supported Women's Aspirations for Principalship

As noted in the previous chapter, each of the four women was interviewed using 16 lead questions. Field notes were compiled during the interviews. Partial transcription of the interview tapes were undertaken. The field notes and transcriptions were then analysed to reveal a set of 5 useful themes that were supportive of these women's aspirations in being a

Principal: broad experience, ambition and self-confidence, personal career planning, no marriage and family, and industrial relations. These five themes gave insight into understanding these four women's aspirations in wanting to become Principals, and how they perceived this leadership role, once they had attained it. Occasionally other data available from document sources such as old school magazines will also be used to illustrate points. These five themes will now be used to structure a discussion of the data.

Broad Experience

One of the first themes that arose from the interview data, which supported women's aspirations for Principalship, was that of the broad professional experiences that most of the interviewees had. These women Principals had teaching experience in a number of schools, spread across school type (primary / secondary and mixed gender / single gender). They each taught across subject areas, and had a determination to progress in their career. This would suggest that in terms of experience, these Principals had a good preparation for Principalship. Irene Wescott speaks of her teaching experiences in the school magazine:

I've taught at about a dozen schools, and been Principal at two (Footscray Girls' High School, 1982, p. 5).

Victoria Baxter also taught at different schools before becoming a Principal:

I had the opportunity to go around and work at a whole lot of different technical schools.¹

Noela Eury also taught a number subjects at different schools:

I taught everything and anything. I taught home economics once, just from my knowledge of cooking and we had a good time.

All the women interviewed for this study were also very “career determined”. They seemed to share a willingness to try different things and to move from one position to another. Barbara Hall did not mention the schools that she taught at, but we can see that she was career determined because she continued her studies:

When I was about to be appointed a Principal that I decided I would do another degree and I chose to do theology.

The women moved readily and regularly between schools and within schools. It suggests that they were more confident in applying for Principalship as a result of this. For example Victoria Baxter said:

¹ Unattributed quotes are all quotes from the interview with that particular principal

So many teachers get into being frightened to move because they are used to one culture and one environment...I actually started developing flexibility and a knowledge that I can fit in any where and I can grow and learn to read and fit into different cultures.

Noela Eury indicated something of this idea. She commented that when she was a Deputy Principal at Noble Park High School, she was asked to move to another school and become a Principal and she accepted:

The fact that I was asked to yes... At the time I was Deputy Principal at Noble Park High School.

Irene Wescott was the senior teacher at St Albans High School and Head Mistress. She also moved from her position to become Acting Principal at Point Gelibrand:

They wanted somebody to be Acting Principal down here at Point Gelibrand. I was the senior teacher at St Albans High School and Head Mistress. They wanted someone just to go for a year to be there.

In the end, Irene stayed for seven years.

These women interviewed were determined and had broad experiences. They taught at a number of schools, and they had already risen through the ranks. They had taught a range of subjects and year levels. From the women interviewed two were asked to apply for the

Principal position. The literature reviewed suggested that women are scared of applying, however the data from the interviews shows that not all women are like that.

Ambition and Self-Confidence

The aspiration or ambition to pursue an administrative career was a strong motivating factor for most women interviewed. Closely allied to this was self-confidence in their ability to assume successful leadership positions. Irene Wescott had aspirations and self-confidence in herself, which made it easier to become a Principal:

Part of it was the fact that you had a few (Principals) that were males and didn't seem to be doing the job too well and you thought to yourself why am I taking orders around here when I could do that just as well.

Barbara Hall stated factors such as ambition, examples from other people, and her skills as making it easier for her to become a Principal:

Because I went to MacRobertson Girls High School I always had women Principals and I just grew up assuming that women did what they wanted to do and could do what they wanted to do. That was the first thing I guess. The other thing was I had gone up through the degree of seniority and I guess I must have developed certain skills. Also I was keen to do it. Ambition, skill and example from other people too.

Victoria Baxter also believes that self-confidence is important in life. This is seen in the message given by her in the school magazine in 1995:

This year has been one characterised by many changes and achievements... implementing an integrated student personal professional development program aimed at empowering students to grow in self-confidence, self-reliance and personal achievement (Footscray Girls' Secondary College, 1995, p. 1).

Noela Eury was the only Principal interviewed that did not show a lot of a aspiration and ambition to become a Principal:

I suppose I just did not want to become a Principal. I just wanted to tag along as a Deputy Principal.

Again when we look at the literature, writers such as Schmuck (1981), Sampson (1987), Ozga (1993), Dunlap and Schmuck (1995) and Cubillo (1999) argue that lack of self-confidence and ambition is an important factor in explaining why few women seek senior positions. Looking at the interview data, the women Principals interviewed had self-confidence and ambition in themselves even though they were silent about it, therefore it was easier for them to aspire to Principal positions.

Personal Career Planning

Stockard and Johnson (1981) argued that men often planned their move into administration several years before it occurred, while women may not think about being in top positions until the opportunity arose. Stockard and Johnson's view is supported to some extent by the interview data from the Principals. It is not seen as a major theme that supports women's aspirations for Principalship. However it could help some women to aspire to Principal positions.

Of all the women Principals interviewed only one of them planned her move to Principalship. Barbara Hall planned her move, and she accomplished it:

When I was quite young in teaching, I just worked out a plan where my career would go and I decided that by a certain age I would reach a certain level of seniority and then I would go up in steps through the degrees of seniority and by a certain age I would become a Principal. That was what I worked out.

The other interviewee were quite silent on this issue.

No Marriage and Family

The literature is replete with accounts of the disabling impact of marriage and family on women's career aspirations (Langrish,1981; Sampson, 1991). This study further confirms

this situation. In analysing the interviews that were conducted it was found that to be married with a husband and children, first it made it more difficult to attain the position of Principal, and second it was hard to cope with that position once attained. Managing home life and work life may be the most obvious areas of stress for the married women. Women may need to find suitable child care, or a very supportive partner, needing time to deliver and collect children from crèches or schools, and needing to take children to meetings so that they could participate in teaching related activities. Many women may also need to take time off work to devote time to a growing family, with some later managing to return to teaching. The four women interviewed in the study were either separated, not married or widowed. Only one of the women Principals, who was a widow had children, but they were attending university at the time of her Principalship.

Barbara Hall was one who did not marry and hence escaped this pressure:

So I didn't marry and I didn't have the problem of having to rear my own children.

Irene Wescott too was in this situation by the time she became Principal:

I didn't have a husband and I didn't feel then I was staying late or doing things or going to meetings.

Irene Wescott had been married, but after her husband's death she became more determined to be a Principal. If her husband had lived she would have been happy with staying as a teacher. Irene's case shows that marriage can be an impediment to becoming a Principal:

We started building at Anglesea and we were going to retire there and I would have just gone on teaching but when Perce died I thought well let's have a try at something else. It was just a few weeks after he died they wanted somebody to be Acting Principal down here at Point Gelibrand. I was the senior teacher at St Albans High School and Head Mistress. They wanted someone just to go for a year, it was a good challenge and took your mind off grieving.

Victoria Baxter also noted a similar situation:

I am not married. I am separated from my husband. Balancing life roles, I never had children.

Noela Eury did not comment...

...did not make a verbal response to this question.

Another interesting thing that was highlighted from the interviews, had been noted in the Footscray Girls' High School (1985). That is, all the female Principals of the school from its beginning were not married at the time of Principalship. Significantly they were addressed as Miss. Hence one could suppose that this was a culture that had grown up in

the school from its early days, with its curriculum focussing on domestic arts. In this situation it might have been assumed natural for an unattached women to be the Principal. Once established there were few factors to create change within this school. Hence this culture could be one that made it easier for women to attain the Principal position, and indeed cope with the position.

Industrial Relations

The four women interviewed also spoke about the role of professional associations in helping them to achieve their goals. It was through their unions that political and industrial campaigns for equal pay and equal opportunity have been waged, firstly within the union structures, and then with the education ministry and successive governments.

Barbara Hall noted that:

the way the unions fought for equality was also thanks to Joan Kirner. I think the women get a fair go if they want to take up these sort of positions.

Interestingly Joan Kirner during the 1970s and 1980s was a local politician (Williamstown) and known for the support of women in the work place. She had been a teacher and unionist. During the 1980s she became Minister for Education in the State Government, and finally State Premier. Barbara was not the only women teacher to see Joan Kirner as something of a role model.

Equal opportunity policies have eliminated some of the direct barriers to women's equality and access to higher status and salaries. As noted in the literature review, these included the requirement that women had to resign from the teaching force upon marriage, and married women not being able to join the superannuation fund. They would also lose their accrued seniority and return to the service as temporary teachers if they broke their teaching career to have children. It was not until 1956 that the Teaching Service Act granted the right to apply for permanency to married women. Married women were then able to retain seniority, classified position and rights as a qualified teacher.

The years 1971 and 1972 finally saw the introduction of equal pay and formal equal promotion opportunities regardless of sex. In 1975 married women were able to join the State Superannuation Fund. Irene Wescott recalls how in the past women who were not married received four fifths of the wage and once you got married, you had to resign and not join the superannuation fund:

For three years I taught at Dandenong High School before I was married. I traveled out from Footscray. You only got four fifths of the wage. In 1948 I think the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association started because the chappy at Dandenong High was one of the first people in the movement. He became head of University High School later on. Women weren't even allowed to join the Victorian Secondary Teachers Association. It was male secondary teachers so there was no one there fighting any argument about your equal pay. So as soon I married I was full-time Class 5 at Dandenong High School. Once the notice went in that I was getting married in February

I was gone. That's when I came back to the girls' school as a "temporary teacher".

Similarly Irene Wescott speaks about the superannuation scheme:

When we started secondary teaching in 1974 after the degree, diploma of education and things. We were on super just like the men. When you resigned you wouldn't believe it you wouldn't even get the full amount you paid in yourself. It came back in the 1950s. In 1962 I went to Footscray Girls' High School. You were told you can't have superannuation because you are a married women.

Late 1960s early 70s it was agreed women could go into the superannuation fund and what they did for us was work out a fund and an adjustment for the three years we taught so we could get a percentage and then would get into the full superannuation. That was government law.

In their discussion of points such as these, these four women recognised the gains that had been made for women during their time as teachers. They saw these gains as positive and it kept them in the teaching workforce, and helped drive their ambition.

Themes that were Disincentives for Accepting Principalships

From the analysis of the data, six themes emerged as disincentives to women aiming to be a Principal. These were: the increased workload associated with being a Principal, the selection process used for selecting Principals, commitment to teaching rather than administration, professional competition and the absence of female support, loss of close relationships, and the “glass-ceiling.”

Increased Workload

The workload of Principals was one area that all women interviewees mentioned. This was extremely significant from 1985 onwards when the government increased the administration workload of Principals with a change to school-based management (Department of Education, 1997). Not only was the Principal’s workload increasing, but the role of the Principal was being re-defined as a small business management position, concentrating on sponsorship and accounting, as well as learning. Many women who were committed classroom teachers did not wish to take on these other roles. The diversity of the role is seen in a report of a student of the school who interviewed the Principal Miss Irene Wescott on the work she actually did:

Oh, I do many things. I see parents when they come, and tend to students, both good and bad. I spend a lot of time reading articles and answering mail, taking phone calls and talking to teachers. I have to go to meetings and interviews. I get the chance to interview tertiary students who have passed

their exams and want to be teachers. Actually, what I do depends a lot on the time of year; there could be reports to sign, the timetable to worry about, and students to see before they leave the school to find work or further study. There are so many different things that I write notes to remind myself what I am doing (Footscray Girls High School, 1982, no page number).

In the interview conducted for this study, Irene Wescott also mentioned the workload:

All the paperwork, letters and the staff. You feel some days I would say to the office secretary, Laz (Masey) I just have to get around this at lunchtime. Because you feel staff and kids never saw you. The staff might come into the office but you would have so much of this. The paperwork, which meant that some days you feel you could scarcely move out of the office. Even though you arrived at 7.30 am.

Noela Eury also echoed the heavy workload problem when she commented:

The night before I left the school I did a list of the things that needed to be done and worked on that very next morning. I would arrive at the school early in the morning at 7.00 am and did the paperwork.

The other interviewees were also concerned about the workload and how it was a disincentive. Barbara Hall for example noted:

From 1985 onwards, the government shelved more of the paperwork to the Principal instead of the public servants. These were both political parties, the Labor Government and the Liberal Government. It was for two reasons: to save the cost of employing public servants and to narrow the interface between political parties and decision making. The Principals were not trained in business administration to work as clerks.

Stress because of the heavy workload was also a possible disincentive to becoming a Principal as Victoria Baxter said:

Yes, at times I suppose a fair demand. But it was more the stress load.

All the women interviewed had to balance their commitment to classroom teaching and intimate contact with students, and to distancing themselves in order to exercise wider power over the way educational values and the school directions can or should be shaped.

The Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association (1960) pointed out that the workload of Principals was also a negative factor in the 1960s. A Ministerial Review of Schooling in Western Australia (1994) and Hatton (1995) highlighted the demands placed on Principals and the increased workload because of the devolution of responsibility to schools. They argued that the pressure on Principals, particularly teaching Principals, were sufficient to accelerate the turnover of Principals. School Principals were regarded as central to the quality of education provided in the school. But they were required to be not just good teachers, but needed to be quality managers and leaders as well. Principals were having to

compromise their commitment to both teaching and administration. All of the four interviewees would agree with this, as the above quotes show. But they also would say, as Barbara Hall noted explicitly (see quote above), that they had little or no education in being quality managers of administrative units, such as the school office.

Selection Process for Principal Position

Two of the women interviewed mentioned that the selection process had changed and had made it more difficult for women to be selected as Principals. They referred to the removal of seniority as a means of promotion, to one of a merit system which gave a school council the major role in the selection of Principals. Barbara Hall noted:

The only difficulty I suppose, might have been a difficulty, was at the point when it was time for me to become a Principal. They decided that you would not be appointed on the grounds of skills and seniority. You would have to be appointed by interview by the school council and decided whether or not they wanted you as a Principal.

Irene Wescott also commented:

They have the panel. I should think it depends on who is on the panel. Just when I was finishing they were introducing this thing where the school council chooses the Principal. I was on a couple of those panels. A matter of fact, it was Footscray High School and we had to write an assessment what

we thought about that and I thought that might be hard for women. If you had a panel in which your school chose, you had two parents that were male and someone from the region and you had a male Principal. I think that was hard. In our time it wasn't just seniority you got the job. You had a feeling that you were going up the ladder and you had assessments.

The local selection was designed to increase community participation in decision making affecting local schools. It was part of the government's commitment to its policy of devolution of authority and greater responsibility of school communities. According to the State Board of Education (1986), school council involvement in the selection process for school Principal appointments had been a tradition confined to the Technical Division. It was in the latter half of 1984 that it had been extended to secondary schools with all new Principals and deputy Principal appointments being based on this process. However, the State Board of Education (1986) stated that school council involvement had not immediately increased opportunities for women:

On the basis of the first rounds of local selection for Principal class appointments in 1985, it was concluded that 'The introduction of the process of school council involvement does not appear to have increased opportunities for women nor improved their rate of success in gaining appointments (State Board of Education, 1986, p. 9)

One would not expect Noela Eury to comment on this matter since the process was changed after she retired. The comments from Barbara Hall and Irene Wescott suggest for the period

during the mid 1980s that, as the State Board itself noted, this process was new and did not help women at all. The literature also shows that the selection process has been seen by many writers such as Taylor (1992), Blackmore and Kenway (1993), Villa (1999), Power (2002) and Neidhart and Carlin (2003) as a significant barrier for women seeking Principalship.

Commitment to Teaching

This is a factor that is attributable to women themselves. According to the Equal Opportunity in Schools Report to the Premier (1977) women teachers preferred classroom teaching rather than administration, and did not want to leave it. The desire to teach children, and the admission that they felt that they were already exercising reasonable influence on the decision making process within the school, motivated them to remain classroom teachers. A 10-year longitudinal study by Edson (1995) of 142 women applying to become Principals confirmed that in particular female teachers who were mothers preferred classroom teaching hours. They suggested that the workload was easier to manage when teaching, compared to the hours and workload involved in a move toward a promotional position. The women Principals interviewed claimed that women desire to remain in the classroom because it gives them satisfaction, and this in turn becomes a reason for them not seeking promotion. Noela and Irene felt that one of the negative side effects of being a Principal was the fewer interactions with the students, because you taught a limited number of classes. Noela put it this way:

That would be the one thing I would like least about being a Principal. The fact that you no longer taught most classes. That's what I suppose was the basic thing not wanting to be a Principal. I like to teach. I enjoyed teaching. I did not like the thought of not ever teaching.

Irene Wescott also recalled one of the things she did not like while being a Principal was the fewer interaction she had with students:

As a teacher you get far more interaction with the students than you do when you are a Principal.

Victoria Baxter also enjoys teaching:

I actually feel the passion of teaching.

From the interviews we can see that these women are still committed to teaching, and that their role in administration interferes, and in some cases prevents totally, their involvement in what they most love about being a teacher.

Competition and the Absence of Female Support

In the literature Ehrich (1996) argues that the lack of women in leadership positions is due, at least in part to the lack of mentors. Having access to mentors is a helpful and powerful career strategy. The women Principals interviewed support this notion, but also argue that

there is lack of support given to women by other women who are in leadership positions. An influence which Victoria Baxter identified as encouraging and shaping her career path to the Principal position was the support and encouragement of men rather than women. She said:

Mostly they were my mentors and all of them were men. It really amuses me and I am going to be totally horrifically now that we talk about women in leadership and how women encourage other women. I did not find it so.

There is a ... leadership program where women mentor other women to get them into leadership positions. I have been very heavily involved in lots of mentoring and other associate programs to allow people to shadow you. This person [name said] said you should support women in leadership. She was on one of my selection panels and she took an instant dislike to me as a person. She took a professional dislike to me and this person, who is supposed to be a great supporter of women, appointed a two dimensional cardboard cut out of a bloke to this position and I knew, without being prideful or totally egocentric I know my faults and there are huge number of them. I knew I was better than this guy was and I thought this is just hilarious. Here I am in this program and all the accolades that are awarded to this particular person. She didn't support women. She was very lemon lipped about me.

The issue then of mentoring is not simple. Clearly a more sophisticated approach is needed than that found in the literature.

Loss of Close Relationships

Some of the interviewees saw the loss of close relationships with former peers when taking on the role of the Principal as a disincentive. They saw the role of Principal taking them away from colleagues. Evidence that can be shown to support this is with a quote from Victoria Baxter:

It's a most dreadful lonely job and yet I will not permit it to be lonely. I refuse to follow the advice huge number of people who say you can never be friends with the staff because you will be placed in a position where you have to make decisions which will go against or compromise that friendship. It may influence your decision. You cannot actually make it outside the context of the friendship. I say no that is not right here are my friends and this is my job. When I have to do my job I do it with integrity and I do it with the best intentions for the school. If the friendship can't stand that and the friendship dies not the integrity.

Power's (2002) work supports the above quote and reveals that once a person of either gender becomes Principal, there is an end to at least some close relationships with friends in the private or public sector. She states that one Principal remarked that whether you are a male or a female, you are in your professional role constantly. You are seen as the Principal

and you are not seen as a human being. They are torn between being able to relax in a social gathering and being able to put on the serious demeanor.

Interestingly however none of the other three women choose to comment on this issue. However given the literature perspective it is hard to believe this is not a matter that all four Principals did not have to deal with at some level.

The “Glass-Ceiling”

Some of the women interviewed for the study agreed that women in this profession do hit a ‘glass ceiling’. Victoria Baxter suggested that women hit a glass ceiling in terms of taking breaks to have children:

I do. I think the glass ceiling is often created by the fact that they are the only ones that could have children. I think it is very much of a mind set and a paradigm in their own creation or societies created for them. If they could move outside the paradigm and expand their thinking.

...In teaching I think a part from the fact that women tend to develop the attitude. They are going to be the second breadwinner first thing, and then they are going to have children. That interrupts their professional growth. That’s fine. I don’t have problem with that because we have several women in the school who have had families and are now seeking professional advancement. But I do think the family leave and being taken away for a while does have a negative affect on the opportunities.

Noela Eury believed there was a glass ceiling in any occupation:

I think everybody does because there is no higher to go really or not much higher for most people to go than being a Principal. You can well in my days you could, get into the inspectorial board and women got there just as much as men. I think there is a glass ceiling wherever you get to and you are there.

Barbara Hall does not believe that women in teaching hit a glass ceiling:

Well I don't see how they can because the way the unions fought for equality, also thanks to Joan Kirner. I think women have a fair go. If they want to take up these sort of positions, provided they are willing to do it and they have the skills to do it, I think they get the opportunity to do it.

Irene Wescott was not sure whether women in teaching did hit a glass ceiling:

Not familiar now. A lot of the time I came through. You need to look at the percentage of people that were in teaching and the sort of things they were teaching and the sort of things they were doing. Even with my daughter she was able to get seven years maternity leave while she had her family leave. Clearly these four women had a mixture of opinion. However some clearly recognised the glass ceiling effect. Those that did not seemed to comment in

such a way that suggested that since they had made it to this level, then surely all women can. The latter suggestion does perhaps not take account of all factors.

Summary

An analysis of the data has indicated that the under-representation of women in Principal positions is an outcome of a number of factors. The factors from the literature review clearly are relevant. Most of these reappear in the case studies. However the factors referred to in this thesis do not appear to be the universal set of factors relevant to the situation. One theme that emerges is that the breadth of the professional experiences of all the interviewees including teaching at a number of schools seem to have prepared them well for the work of a Principal. The aspiration and self-confidence emerged as a very strong motivating factor for the women interviewed. They clearly had self-confidence in themselves to assume successful leadership positions. Personal career planning was an important theme that was brought up by one of the women interviewed. Literature from Stockard and Johnson (1981) supports this. Most women do not plan their move to Principalship. Another theme that arose in the interview data was marriage and family. The women interviewed were not inhibited by marriage or family commitments because they were single, divorced or widowed. However, they did mention it as an important factor in why so many women do not apply for Principal positions. The women interviewed also spoke about the change brought about in industrial relations and the role that professional associations had played in this process. They saw themselves as benefiting from these changes, and this had certainly helped them achieve their goals.

The interview data also revealed a number of disincentives that they had overcome when contemplating becoming Principal. The first one was the increased workload for Principals. Because the role has increased in administration work required from Principal, this has acted as a disincentive for both women and men, however these women seemed to think it was more of a disincentive for women. The issue of the selection process used to appoint to Principal positions appeared to be a major issue for the women interviewed. They found it intimidating and hence a disincentive. The desire to stay in the classroom was mentioned by all the women interviewed and brought about the conflict of commitment to teaching, as opposed to moving to a Principal position. The lack of support given to women by women in leadership positions was a powerful disincentive for one of the women interviewed. The women also saw the Principal role taking them away from colleagues. The literature pointed out that the role of Principal was a lonely job for both men and women.

In summary, a number of the themes identified in the literature that both hinder and help women move into the role of Principal have also been identified in the interview data. The next chapter will discuss these issues in relationship to the initial literature reviewed. In other words, as the methodology outlined in Chapter 4 suggests, the reflections made in this chapter will be folded back into the earlier analysis.

Chapter Six

An Interpretation of the Case Study

Introduction

The findings of this study contain ideas which might increase the number of women applying for Principal positions, as well as how the Principal positions can be made more attractive to women aspirants. It is hoped that some of the recommendations at the conclusion of this chapter may provide useful insights into the nature of some of some key issues related to women Principal succession, and some guidance on creative solutions to these issues.

The research group comprised of four women Principals at Gilmore Girls' College, a secondary college in Melbourne's western suburbs. The information collected from the women Principals reflects the situation with respect to women as Principals only at this school. However their experiences as teachers were gained from a number of schools before they became Principals, and hence there is some justification for feeling some issues may be the same in other schools, at least in Victoria. Their experiences also echo themes already found in the literature, so a tentative claim for a broader application could be held. However, any application of these results to different situations by others should take careful account of the context of this study.

It would seem that Victoria's education system is now not characterized by the intentional disadvantaging of women seeking Principal positions, because government legislation now prohibits any blatant acts of discrimination. However, the legislation has not brought about an increase in the number of women in Principal positions (Workforce Studies, Human Resource Division, Department of Education, Employment and Training, 2001). It is clear that the number of women applying for Principal positions is not as high as it could be. There is evidence to indicate that an increasing number of experienced women, and men too, are choosing not to apply for Principal positions. To consider this key issue further this chapter is structured around three research questions:

1. What are the most significant factors which discourage women from applying for Principal positions?
2. What factors have supported women's aspirations for Principalship?
3. What recommendations flow from this research?

Having reviewed some of the relevant literature in an earlier chapter, and having given an analysis of the four interviews carried out with women Principals who occupied this position during the last thirty years, this chapter will take a more interpretative stance looking forward to what could be possible solutions using the above three questions.

What are the most significant factors which discourage women from applying for Principal positions?

The Changes needed to be a Principal

In the literature writers such as Carlin, d' Arbon, Dorman, Duignan and Neidhart (2003) and data from the interviews, report that the new role that teachers have to take on as Principal was identified as the most significant disincentive.

The key issues seem to be:

- less contact with students and staff,
- more administration work, and
- having to compromise commitment to both teaching and administration.

Both the literature and the data from the interviews confirmed that the Principal's role has expanded beyond educational leadership. Although there has always been an element of administration in the role, now the role of the Principal requires much more time and energy for administrative and political functions, and this leaves virtually no time for teaching and little time for fostering positive relationships with students, staff and families.

The data from the interviews indicated that most of the Principals were of the view that adding a lot of administration work to this position was a reason why so many women reject a Principal position. The role of Principal was being re-defined as a small business management position, concentrating on sponsorship and accounting. As society changes it has also led to increasing expectations for the Principal. Hill (1999) argues:

The last fifteen years have been times of great change in which more and more has been expected of Principals (Hill, 1999, p.1).

A student in 1982 interviewed Miss Wescott about her role as a Principal at the school and came to the following conclusion:

Well, I nearly died when Miss Wescott started to tell me what work she does. All I thought she did was sit in her chair and tell us naughty kids off!
(Footscray Girls' High School, 1982, p.5).

Those teachers who have devoted a substantial proportion of their professional life to having the skills and insights that make a good teacher, may not wish to see themselves beginning again as a business manager. Both the interviews and literature suggest this is how many women teachers now see the role of the Principal, and not surprisingly they reject it as a possible role for them.

Principal Selection Problems

The issue of Principal selection problems emerged as a consistent and significant issue. It included matters such as:

- the selection process for Principals changing from the seniority to the merit system, with the merit system giving the school council the role to select the Principal,
- a concern about the fairness of the merit selection process, and
- a concern as to whether selection panel members had the knowledge and qualifications to make appropriate recommendations.

The selection process as a problem was mentioned in the literature by Neidhart and Carlin (2003) as well as embedded in the data from the interviews. Two of the women interviewed explicitly expressed their concerns with the selection process. They suggested that the moving from seniority as the means of promotion to the merit system, and giving the school council the critical role in the selection of Principals in this new system, made it more difficult for women to be selected as Principals. It seemed to the Principals interviewed that often a majority of a school council would be influenced by general societal expectations of women, which are at variance with what Principals are now expected to do.

Loss of Close Relationships

This disincentive came out only from the interview data, and interestingly was not found in the literature. The Principals interviewed saw the loss of close relationships with former peers and less contact with students when taking the role of the Principal as a decided disincentive for taking on the role. Two comments made by Victoria, one of the Principals illustrated the point of professional distance:

It's a most dreadful lonely job

You can never be friends with the staff because you will be placed in a position where you have to make decisions which will go against or compromise that friendship.

Women teachers also desire to remain in the classroom and have more contact with the students. It gives them satisfaction and this is a reason for them not seeking promotion.

Typical comments included:

I like to teach. I enjoyed teaching. I did not like the thought of not ever teaching.

As a teacher you get far more interaction with the students.

This issue has not arisen in the literature because, although it is a powerful issue, it is suspected that most women prefer to be silent about it since it is in effect a direct rejection of seeking promotion, the process assumed to be the norm for teachers.

Absence of Female Support

The absence of female support also is an important disincentive. A crucial element of this included:

- lack of support given to women by other women who were in leadership positions.

The findings by Ehrich (1996) reveal that one of the solutions proposed by research in recent years in response to the problems of not only women's lack of traditional mentoring experiences, but also male sexism and sex-role stereotyping, is the argument that women should be mentors for other women. Her findings also suggest that this is not panacea to the problem, because according to statistics women educational administrators are a minority group both senior and middle management in education. Therefore they could not be responsible for all the mentoring experiences required by women educators. But the situation appears more complicated than this. When we look at the data from the interviews we find out that there is lack of support given to women by other women who were already in leadership positions. One Principal commented that:

She was on one of my selection panels and she took an instant dislike to me as a person. She didn't support women.

Indeed this Principal received support and mentoring from men.

Edson (1988) states that the women who do succeed in administration often do so without the same support and confidence men give each other in leadership areas. This is an issue that needs far more explanation.

What factors have supported women's aspirations for Principalship?

The findings from the interview data show that to be able to become a Principal requires more than just willing applicants. The data that showed the pathway to the Principal position provided some interesting insights. Four factors were identified in the research as supporting women's aspirations for Principal positions.

Broad Experience

Data from the interviews indicated that most of the interviewees had teaching experience in a number of schools, and this was gained across school type. They were also very career determined. As well there were no gaps in their professional profile that would discourage them from applying for the Principal position. This would suggest that these Principals had a good preparation for a Principal position.

Ambition and Self-confidence

The respondents in the interviews all had high aspirations and self-confidence. They prepared themselves for leadership positions in education, although only one did so in an overt manner from a young age. They could be described as a group who do not conform to the sex role stereotypes. In response to the interviews they showed ambition and assertiveness. These themes are also reflected in the literature, but are normally applied to men. Schmuck, (1981), Sampson (1987) and Cubillo (1999), commented that few women seek leadership because they lack self-confidence and self-esteem. Hence again the general and particular data from this study indicates that ambition and self-confidence are important if women are to succeed as Principals. The following two key issues should be considered as factors supporting women who wish to be Principals:

- Women should never perceive themselves as being disadvantaged on account of their sex, and
- Women should not lack confidence in their ability to assume successful leadership roles.

No Marriage and Family

The complexities and tensions of the role of Principal, together with the workload and the need to be present at meetings outside school hours intrude into personal and family time and space. Therefore many women do not want to apply for Principal positions. The

literature mentions that many women are placing home commitments before their career, and this is a factor leading to the under-representation of women as the Principal. Marriage and children are assumed automatically still in our society to be part of the female role. In the light of the literature, this female commitment to the domestic sphere of life could be interpreted as evidence of the existence of two strong pressures acting on women. The first and most pervasive is the Australian society expects the female's role of wife and mother to take precedence over any other. Hence for many women the maintenance of a family and paid employment involves a continual balancing of societal expectations and any personal preference of the woman. The Principals interviewed did admit that having a family and being a Principal would be a major constraint on women, however they did not have that problem. They were either single, separated or widowed, and had few domestic responsibilities. The changing pattern of family relationships in the future with fewer children, earlier completion of child-rearing, marriage as an option rather than a necessity, and the willingness of some men to assume more duties in the home, do appear to give promise for the future with regards this factor.

Personal Career Planning

Career planning is a set of deliberate decisions taken by an individual to enhance their career, including gaining breadth of experience, professional development and qualifications. Three of the respondents stated that their rise to the position of Principal had been an unplanned progression. The common experience was that they had undertaken administrative duties while remaining as classroom teachers, and it was only then that they began to think about applying for promotional positions. The fourth Principal admitted to

having made a plan early in her career. However, despite the majority not planning their own career, they perceived that women generally needed to plan. The following key points are suggested:

- Women need to plan more carefully than men, and
- Career planning should involve gaining broad experience, professional development and qualifications.

Recommendations

The findings from this study may help professional associations, such as teachers' unions, or through official groups administering education such as government, to reflect further on the factors that may encourage more women to become Principals. The following recommendations are offered. Clearly each of them could become the focus for more research.

1. The modern role of the Principal appears to be a major issue, particularly for females. Several suggestions are offered for the restructuring of the role:

- The introduction of a co-principals structure in schools. This will both increase leadership capability as well as distribute and lessen the workload for Principals. Duignan and Marks (2003) argue that leadership

should not be the property of any one individual. It should grow out of a shared vision.

- The appointment of senior level Administrative Directors to the leadership team, who would be qualified to work on matters related to facilities and property management, safety issues and occupational health, administrative issues that have only relatively recently been added to the portfolio of Principals. This was noted in the literature and by some of the Principals who were interviewed as being a useful strategy.

2. The selection and appointment procedures for the Principal position need improvement. A number of comments from the interviews and echoed in the literature suggested that members on selection panels should go through appropriate training, and procedures should be developed that enable constructive feedback to be given to unsuccessful applicants.
3. The research indicated that there is a need for female support for women Principals. Those women who have successfully fulfilled administrative positions should be made visible and even accessible so that they might give encouragement and actively help other women. They need to encourage and support female teachers who display leadership qualities. Women should be encouraged to take risks. If failure does occur they need to learn not to personalize it.

4. Part of this research has shown that women for a variety of reasons do not gain experience in leadership and management skills, at least not to the extent of many of their male counterparts. May be there should be courses, particularly in leadership skills, provided for women who opt for them, so that they might acquire basic skills in personnel management and organizational procedures, as well as a sense of confidence in their own abilities.
5. Some policy areas have been tackled by government over the years. But the major policy area of childcare still requires intensive activity. The lack of childcare facilities to allow women to return to work from family leave are still hindering the increase of experience and self-esteem needed to gain promotion.
6. Existing Principals should be actively engaged as mentors to staff within their school. Both male and female teachers of ability should be encouraged to apply for positions of extra responsibility in the schools thereby developing the necessary skills for further promotion. This would also serve to developing the necessary skills for further promotion.

Conclusion

This study set out to understand and investigate issues associated with the gender imbalance in Principal positions in Victoria's government secondary schools. This was

done by first a review of legislation changes that have been implemented, and then by reviewing a relevant body of literature. Based on themes that emerged from this analysis, a case study of Principals from a secondary college for girls was carried out using a series of interviews. Through these interviews it was possible to identify some of the factors that have supported these women's aspirations for Principal positions. From an analysis of this data, it also became apparent what some of the significant factors were that gave these women pause before applying for a Principal position.

This research study provides a rich body of relevant knowledge and perceptions about becoming a Principal. The study has established that the number of women applying for Principal positions is not as high as it is for men. The findings do not provide a single explanation for women's under-representation in the position of Principal. There is, however, general agreement in the literature as to the factors perceived as being potential barriers to women attaining this promotional position. The main reasons seem to be the demands and complexity of the role, and its impact on personal and family life. It is important that education authorities explore ways of restructuring the role of the Principal and senior leadership team, in order to more effectively distribute the tasks and responsibilities of the role, to make it attractive and manageable for women.

Another obstacle for women in becoming a Principal is their lack of support when contemplating such a move, but also when they attain such a position. It was noted in reviewing the literature that professional mentorship programs can be helpful to women. Such mentorships will not solve all of the problems women face when they strive to break

the glass ceiling, but it is likely that such a process will help a considerable number of women educators. It is one important factor that should not be overlooked.

In essence this study has shown that even though many changes over the last one hundred years have gradually improved the status of women in the teaching profession, at least in Victoria, not enough women are reaching the level of Principal in secondary schools. Just how many is enough is, at this stage, an open question. But as has been shown, the clear imbalance in the numbers of men and women Principals in Victoria's secondary schools indicates more women Principals are needed in the system. This remains a difficult problem for the system as a whole, and one that needs more attention from both government and the profession. This study has shown that attention needs to be given to both incentives and disincentives, importantly as they are perceived by women; bolstering the former and negating the latter in any on going process that has a time span of at least a decade.

In retrospect, judging this study again on its completion, it may well have been better, if time had been available, to interview Principals from more than one school. However there are always pluses. It was good that I used Glimore College for Girls in this research, because it was a place where clearly Principals were women, and there has grown there for more than 75 years a culture where women could succeed. This research has revealed that the road to success for women is one with many obstacles relating to gender issues. However there is a certain sense of hope that success can be achieved provided it is viewed as a long – term goal. “The winds are still hard, not easy”.