

**THE ROLE OF A SCHOOL PRINCIPAL**

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## Abstract

The main focus of this study was to interview 4 principals to gather their perceptions about the role of principals in schools. A principal was selected from each school configuration: elementary, middle, high, and K-12. A common set of open-ended questions was developed and each principal was then interviewed. Transcripts were prepared and are attached to this study. Those transcripts were coded using themes set up by Peterson (1999): shape the vision and mission, provide instructional leadership and nurture it in others, manage and administer complex organizational processes, shape the school culture and climate, build and maintain positive relations with parents and community, lead and support school improvement and change. The findings of this study confirm that the major responsibilities outlined by Peterson (1999) are indeed a realistic division of the responsibilities that are embedded in the role of principal. The process of completing this study has left me with a great respect for the all-encompassing role of the principal.

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## Chapter 1.

### Introduction

What is the role of a School Principal? This project targeted that question and attempted to use an insider's approach to find the answers. The perceptions of actual school principals were gathered and compared to some of the current literature.

The role of school principal is continually evolving to include the ever-changing expectations of the education system in Alberta. Since 1994 when school divisions were restructured to save costs, new directives such as the introduction of site-based management to our schools have had an effect on the roles of the principals. The duties and responsibilities of the principal are changing and, I believe, continually expanding.

Leithwood (1992) describes this change as a move from “instructional leadership” toward a much broader form of “transformational leadership” which actually encompasses the former. He describes instructional leadership as relying on top-down decision making. “This is the power to control --- to control the selection of new employees, the allocation of resources, and the focus for professional development” (Leithwood, 1992, p. 8). In contrast, transformational leadership is consensual, “a form of power manifested through other people, not over other people” (Leithwood, 1992, p. 9). Principals need to find a balance between the two forms of leadership. They continue to bear the responsibility for all that happens in their schools yet they need to share the power of decision-making with other stakeholders in order to encourage others' participation in school improvement and change.

#### Research Question

How do principals define their roles in schools?

### Background

This project began in search of a question. What was it that I really wanted to know about education? That which interested me the most had to do with my career move into the administration of a school. I began a vice principalship in September 2001. Before that I spent eight years as a classroom teacher. Since the next obvious career move would be to actually take over as the principal of a school, I was forced to ask myself: Did I want to become a school principal? That question could not be answered unless I knew what a principal was and what a principal did. I had to find out what the duties and responsibilities of a principal in my school division were.

Over the past few years, I could see the job of principal had been changing in Alberta. Discussions with colleagues and principals in my school division persuaded me the duties and responsibilities of the principal were increasing. Apparently, one of the key changes was a move toward site-based decision-making in the schools. Was the job getting more difficult? Was I ready for, or did I even want to meet the challenge? I needed more information. An interest in this project was also expressed by a number of my colleagues because they, too, are approaching the same crossroads in their careers. Soon, many of them will have to decide whether or not to enter the administrative realm of public schooling.

### Methodology

Defining the methodology for the research question caused some difficulty. In this case, there were far too many variables to control. What responsibilities and duties would the role of principal encompass? Would the hours spent at school correlate with the amount of responsibility a principal had? Did this include all the meetings that had to be attended and, if not, what type of meetings would qualify? What about attending an extra-

curricular function? To some principals, this is work, while to others, they do it because they want to. This leads to examining all the expectations the school board and the superintendent might have of principals. What were the parameters of the job? I concluded the best way to find out was to ask principals themselves. The open-ended nature of such a study directs that a qualitative rather than a quantitative research method be used.

Creswell (1998) explores five traditions that envelop qualitative research: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (p. 7). I chose to employ a case study method and use an interview strategy to collect data. Creswell describes case study research, in which “one works with a smaller unit such as a program, an event, an activity, or individuals” (1998, p. 66). A case study method allows for respondents to provide their own insights, elaborations and opinions.

Neuman (1997) discusses the advantages and disadvantages of different types of interviews, including mail and self-administered questionnaires, telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews. While mail surveys have the possibility to reach many respondents, they can fall victim to a low response rate. As well, responses can be incomplete or have need of clarification, which is not always possible if anonymity of respondents is assured. Telephone interviews reach fewer people because of the time and expense that accompanies them but, with callbacks, they can have much higher response rates as compared to mail surveys.

I employed the face-to-face interview method as the main research technique. Face-to-face interviews allow respondents to discuss their ideas completely and give them the opportunity to clarify anything that they choose. As well, they can introduce new issues

to the interview. This type of interview allowed me to use the interview probes described by Runte (1998) to elicit clarification on any issue that surfaced.

Another advantage of the face-to-face interview method is that by tape recording each session, I had ample time after the interview to find and make sense of any items that came up. During the interview, I was free to concentrate on what was being said as opposed to making notes on what was said. There was less chance of missing what could have been an important point.

A face-to-face interview allowed me to point the direction to the interviewee but did not curtail new ideas from entering the session. While I wanted it to be clear that the role of the principal was the topic, I did not want to influence the respondent's ideas.

### Limitations

Neuman (1997) discusses interviewer bias as a weakness of the face-to-face interview method. He states, "the appearance, tone of voice, question wording, and so forth of the interviewer may affect the respondent" (p. 253). By simply being aware of this possible bias, I attempted to combat its intrusiveness by sticking to the predetermined questions (Creswell, 1998) and limiting my input to simple probes for clarification (Neuman, 1997).

Another criterion for the choice of interviewee was willingness. Principals had to be willing to fit the interview into their schedules. The fact that I chose principals based on geography, convenience and school configuration negated any possibility for a totally random sample. That leaves open the possibility that these findings may not be transferable to other jurisdictions in Alberta. Other possible limitations also arose. Why did the principals agree to be a part of the study? Was there any kind of hidden agenda?



Since I cannot answer these concerns, future studies will have to either confirm or deny my findings.

### Confidentiality

A final concern dealing with the methodology of this study was confidentiality. Would people in the position of principal reveal concerns, truths, or problems if they knew their superiors might read their statements? The position of principal has become a very political one. There are many different stakeholders in the schools and I believe principals are the unifying cogs in the wheel. They must coordinate and answer to all other stakeholders. They might understandably be guarded in any conversations that could include one or more of those groups.

The identities of the participants were protected. As a matter of professionalism under the Alberta Teachers' Association's guidelines, nothing was published without first showing the participants a copy of their particular interviews. They were given an opportunity to voice any concerns they had as well as direct the exclusion of any materials arising out of their interviews. I abided by their decisions.

### Data Coding

Once the interviews had been completed and transcribed, the data was analyzed and coded into themes. Within the literature, many authors (Begley and Slater, 2000; Cash, 1997; Clark, 1999; Michailides and Payne, 1998; and Terry, 1999) divided the role of principal into many different themes. For this study, six major responsibilities, taken from Peterson (1999), were used to code the data. These responsibilities were concise, and they appeared to encompass the divisions made by other authors. They included: "(1) shape the vision and mission; (2) provide instructional leadership and nurture it in others;

(3) manage and administer complex organizational processes; (4) shape the school culture and climate; (5) build and maintain positive relations with community and parents; and (6) lead and support school improvement and change” (p. 1).

The analysis is arranged according to Peterson’s (1999) six responsibilities. Comments from the interview transcripts were reviewed and coded accordingly. Quotes from the respondents are embedded throughout the analysis “because they consume little space and provide specific concrete evidence, in the informant’s words, to support a theme” (Creswell, 1998, p. 171).

The following description of the interviewees is limited to the information that each divulged during the course of their particular interview. Each of the respondents comes from a different school configuration.

Principal One (P1) is a male who currently administers a high school. He has five years of experience as a principal and one year of experience as a vice principal.

Principal Two (P2) is a male who has been a principal for three and one half years. His school consists of middle school grades. Prior to becoming a principal, he was the vice principal of a K-8 school for 10 years.

Principal Three (P3) is a female who has been a principal for nine years. Both of the schools for which she has been responsible have been of a K-6 configuration.

Principal Four (P4) is a male who has been the principal in a K-12 school for four years. In total, he has been a principal for approximately twelve years.

## Chapter 2.

### Literature Review

What does it take to be a good leader in a school? A short summary of the varied literature on this topic might be that the principal is everything to everyone. There is, however, no real consensus among academics “on what constitutes ideal school leadership and how it should be defined” (Begley and Slater, 2000, p. 2).

In Alberta, a restructuring of the education system was begun in the early 1990s. In effect, it caused the Alberta Department of Education (later called the Ministry of Learning) to examine the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in the education process (Crawford, 1995). Among the roles examined was the role of principal. Crawford uses the metaphor of a web to describe how the stakeholders--the students, teachers, administrators, parents and the community--are all connected together. She then places the principal at the centre. According to Crawford, the principal is the one who creates the environment, unifying all the strands so that teaching and learning can take place. She believes that for a teaching and learning environment to be successful, the building of connections and relationships is a key.

Sergiovanni (2000) discusses the fact that schools face political realities and therefore need special leaders. Schools “belong to parents and children, interact with the needs of local businesses, churches, and other community groups, and have a unique relationship with state governments. These ‘stakeholders’ don’t always agree, and it takes a high level of political skill for school leaders to bring about the necessary consensus and commitment to make schools work well for everyone” (p. 165).

In school systems throughout North America, there has been devolution of responsibility in the past two decades. School based management has “radically increased emphasis on budgetary considerations and less attention to providing leadership about curriculum and instruction. Decentralization greatly increases the time demands on school leaders” (Leithwood, 2001, p. 6).

Michailides and Payne (1998), two third-year principals from Edmonton, Alberta discuss ten “commandments” that they feel principals should follow in order to be successful leaders in the new millennium. These commandments include “be goal-directed, light others’ ways, have high expectations, foster empowerment, provide authentic educational experiences, be team members, value school community differences, encourage others’ participation, take necessary risks, and focus on the classroom” (ERIC Database # EJ575248).

Hawkins (2000) completed a study in Calgary, Alberta looking at the vice-principalships as a training position for becoming a principal. He asked a group of practicing principals what the five most important roles for the principal were. Some of the common responsibilities and duties that emerged were being a liaison between education stakeholders, public relations, staff evaluation, communicating with parents, professional development, and large amounts of paperwork (p. 21).

To further understand the role of a principal one needs to look at the traits of current effective principals. Townsend (1996) found that effective principals set educational goals and then achieve them. They are reflective and engage in self-evaluation. Effective principals are members of a team and find ways to celebrate their own successes and successes of others. Effective principals are seen as such by their

teachers. They put more energy into things that can be done as opposed to things they cannot do. Finally, Townsend contends that effective principals know when to take a stand on something and when not to. Townsend goes on to discuss further insights from his research. Professional evaluation of principals and teachers is a problem because it is usually either ineffective or non-existent. Principals are becoming more concerned with the budget, which separates them even further from their roles as educational leaders. Successful schools have a plan and improvements are more likely to occur when the focus is on teaching and learning. Trust and mutual respect are characteristics of a successful school.

In an interview with Lockwood (1996), Philip Hallinger, who is a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership in Peabody College, Vanderbilt University, USA and a professor in the Center for Leadership Research and Development at Chiang Mai University, Thailand, describes the evolution of the principal's role since the 1950s when they were seen simply as managers. In the 1960s and 1970s partly in response to federal curriculum changes, principals became change agents. During the 1980s, the school effectiveness and classroom effectiveness research expanded the role of principal to instructional leaders (Gurr, 1996; Lockwood, 1996). This may have helped create unrealistic expectations of principals, leaving them primarily responsible for affecting student achievement.

Lashway (2000) further discusses this concern in his paper on school accountability. He focuses on the principal and how accountability has evolved to include student achievement. Lashway describes two kinds of leadership: directive and facilitative. Directive leadership appears effective at first but eventually stalls, partly

because the diversity of students is not examined. Facilitative leadership can create the conditions necessary for students to succeed. Lashway contends principals must find “the right balance between teacher autonomy and central autonomy” (p. 3). Principals must model and live up to core values. They are also the key people who respond to community concerns while helping to tell the school’s story.

The 1990s saw the birth of transformational leadership in schools. This “restructuring involves two kinds of changes: 1. first order changes: improving the technical, instructional activities of the school, and 2. second order changes like building a shared vision, improving communication, and developing collaborative decision-making processes” (Sherry, 1996, p. 1). Principals are expected to focus on second order changes in order to help staff take some ownership in the implementing of improvements. “Restructuring initiatives are primarily about second-order changes; they require leadership with similar focus” (Leithwood, 1992, p. 9).

Gurr (2000) looks at the responsibilities of the principal and divides them into “four broad leadership roles: learning and teaching, symbolic and cultural awareness, future orientation, and accountability” (p. 2). He discusses the model of transformational leadership and how its focus included the shaping of the culture of the school (1996, 2000). Gurr (2000) includes some thoughts on moral leadership and the need to decide what is worth doing. He also discusses the differences between genders and leadership styles concluding that in general, women lead in a more democratic fashion, which seems to be the focus of future leadership directions.

Jeanie Cash, the 1997 National Distinguished Principal for California, defines “two critical factors in creating a successful learning organization: 1) increasing student

achievement, and 2) shaping the culture” (Cash, 1997, p. 1). She contends that leaders must model themselves as good learners and teachers. She writes about the different traits that are common in good leaders. They include optimism, hope, creativity, passion, vision, love of fun, and the ability to delegate authority and, thereby, lead a balanced life.

Fullan (1989) in a discussion about education and change states, “to affect change, principals must change themselves” (p. 29). He acknowledges that many principals are facing negative odds but they are the ones who must begin to change. They should:

- Avoid “if only” statements, externalizing the blame and other forms of wishful thinking.
- Start small, think big. Don’t overplan or overmanage.
- Focus on something concrete and important, like curriculum and instruction.
- Focus on something fundamental, like the professional culture of the school.
- Practice fearlessness and other forms of risk-taking.
- Empower subordinates.
- Build a vision in relation to both goals and change processes.
- Decide what you are not going to do.
- Build alliances.
- Know when to be cautious (Fullan, 1989, p. 29).

Principals must continue to learn in order to grow professionally and they need to model that learning so that it spreads throughout their schools. Barth (1990) provides the analogy:

Consider the common instructions given by flight attendants to airline passengers: “For those of you traveling with small children, in the event of an oxygen failure, first place the oxygen mask on your own face and then ---and only then --- place the mask on your child’s face.” The fact of the matter is, of course, that the adult must be alive in order to help the child. In schools we spend a great deal of time placing oxygen masks on other people’s faces while we ourselves are suffocating. Principals, preoccupied with expected outcomes, desperately want teachers to breathe in new ideas, yet do not themselves engage in visible, serious learning. (p. 42)

Barth (1990) goes on to say that “the more crucial role of the principal is as head learner, engaging in the most important enterprise of the schoolhouse ---experiencing, displaying, modeling, and celebrating what it is hoped and expected that teachers and pupils will do” (p. 46). Barth paraphrases Ralph Waldo Emerson, observing that “What you do speaks so loudly that no one can hear what you say” (p. 72).

In a more recent publication, Barth (2001) continues to expand the notion of a community of learners. The principal, as the head learner, must lead by continuing to learn. Barth cites a bumper sticker that he has on his car: “You can’t lead where you won’t go” (p.27).

Dufour and Eaker (1998) describe effective schools as professional learning communities in which principals play key roles to create and maintain conditions that allow learning to occur (p. 184). They explain that principals of professional learning communities:



- lead through shared vision and values rather than through rules and procedures. (p. 184)
- involve faculty members in the school's decision-making processes and empower individuals to act. (p.185)
- provide staff with the information, training, and parameters they need to make good decisions. (p. 186)
- establish credibility by modeling behavior that is congruent with the vision and values of their school. (p.193)
- are results-oriented. (p. 194)

Fullan (2001) in discussing leading in a culture of change, suggests “The litmus test of all leadership is whether it mobilizes people’s commitment to putting their energy into actions designed to improve things” (p. 9). Fullan contends that relationships between members of a professional learning community dictate the success (or lack of it) for that community. He believes “The role of the leader is to ensure that the organization develops relationships that help produce desirable results” (2001, p. 68).

Richardson (1999) interviewed two principals of schools who in 1998 were recognized as winners of the second annual U.S. Department of Education Model Professional Development Awards. Both used the term “we” instead of “I” when describing the changes made in their schools. They saw themselves as facilitators developing an organization in which everyone is learning, growing and developing. They made their staff meetings deal with teaching and learning issues. All business-like messages were delivered by e-mail. Modeling what they expected fostered professional growth in themselves and others. Their leadership emerged particularly when dealing

with resistance to democratically decided upon goals and protecting the decisions that had been made. For both principals that sometimes meant the weeding out of staff who were not team players.

In 1995 at a Summer Conference in Washington, 88 principals and assistant principals met to discuss their changing roles (“The Changing Role of the Principal,” 1995). They described their role as being collaborators and facilitators, trying to do their jobs with fewer resources and less authority than 10 years prior. They were expected to maintain stability while at the same time questioning the status quo to improve teaching and learning. They found themselves as counselors to kids with problems that didn’t exist years ago. The principals agreed that the diverseness of societal expectations was growing. Students and parents were expecting more from schools while at the same time decreasing their personal responsibility. Because of legislation allowing choice of schools, principals found themselves advertising for students and thinking of customer satisfaction. Finally, the principals mentioned a “perceived loss of esteem in the eyes of the public” (p. 4).

Clark (1999) describes the principal “as an instructional leader, a building manager, an agent of change, a personnel administrator, and a disciplinarian” (p. 1). Other duties include hiring, supervising, evaluating, mentoring, and administering the budget. Clark states, “effective schools have effective principals” (p. 2).

Effective principals delegate power throughout the school organization (“School-Based Management,” 1996). They promote school-wide staff development. Effective principals focus on information sharing within and outside their schools. They reward people for their efforts. According to the article “School-Based Management” (1996),

“The principal role is evolving from direct instructional leadership to a broader role of orchestrating decision making, often through teams of teachers, and interacting with a wider range of individuals, including community members and other stakeholders” (p. 5).

“Principals tend to influence learning indirectly, most obviously through their impact on teachers and instruction” (Leithwood and Duke, 1997, p. 3).

Terry (1999) agrees that principals are instructional leaders and team builders but also includes the notion of principals being visionary risk-takers. He describes five new roles: historian, cheerleader, lightning rod, environmental scanner, and anthropologist. Principals must take responsibility for what happens in their schools but in order to succeed, principals must be empowered by their districts to become authentic leaders. “The issue is not whether the central office or administration agrees with a school’s decisions, but whether the school accepts responsibility for them” (p. 4). Finally, they must take time for reflection and also for themselves. “Being healthy, both physically and emotionally, is a prerequisite for effective school administration” (p. 4).

An overall Canadian leadership profile, originally developed in 1993, has been revised to include new social trends affecting school leadership (Begley and Slater, 2000). Five key dimensions are identified. They “include: The Principal as Visionary, the Principal as Problem Solver, the Principal as Program Leader and Learning Facilitator, The Principal as School – Community Facilitator, and the Principal as Manager” (p. 3).

Peterson (1999), a Professor of Educational Administration at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, summarizes some of his work on school leadership with slightly different themes. He breaks the principal leadership into six key areas. Peterson suggests that effective principals: “(1) shape the vision and mission; (2) provide instructional

leadership and nurture it in others; (3) manage and administer complex organizational processes; (4) shape the school culture and climate; (5) build and maintain positive relations with community and parents; and (6) lead and support school improvement and change” (p. 1).

## Chapter 3.

### Analysis of Data

The following information was gathered from face-to-face interviews with four principals. They were asked a series of open-ended questions and their responses were then coded according to the themes set out by Peterson (1999). None of the questions dealt directly with the six themes yet, when discussing their individual roles as principals, most of interviewees touched on each of the categories. In the following data analysis, when I have used a direct quote from any of the transcripts, it is followed by an identification code: P1, P2, P3, or P4. The actual quote can be found within the transcripts, which are attached as appendixes at the end of this study.

#### Shape Vision and Mission

This is the first of Peterson's (1999) six categories and looks at the principal's role in developing a vision and mission for his or her individual school. Having a solid understanding of one's personal philosophy of education and how it should look in a school was directly addressed in three of the interviews. "You need to go into it with ... a strong sense of values that you would like to see put in place, a strong sense of where you want to go, of what you would like to have" (P1). "You should have a pretty clear concept of what it is you want to do even though the concept may change through time based on experience" (P4). "You develop your own personal style and signature that you want to attach to school change, your personal belief system about what education should look like, what child development should be and should look like" (P2).

According to Principal Two, the principal is the one who usually sets into motion and guides the direction that a school pursues in its quest to educate our youth. He said,

“There’s an opportunity for anyone who has a role of a principal to define what to use as a focus.” Two of the interviewees discussed the democratic processes they used in guiding their staffs through the process of creating a vision.

You have the role in terms of helping people develop a vision and mission, setting goals, helping them see ways and providing ways for them to plan how they’re going to meet those goals and measure whether or not they’ve done that (P3).

You’ve got to figure out and accept where everybody else is, and you have to take the common threads and the underlying principles that you all agree on, visit them, talk more about the things that are common (P2).

Principal One suggests that it is the principal who “has to maintain focus on what is significant.” Someone has to continually align and realign the direction in which the school is going to ensure that the vision stays true and on course. “You can very quickly and I think pretty easily lose your way if you don’t” (P1).

#### Provide Instructional Leadership and Nurture It In Others

Each of the principals saw the instructional leadership component as a key aspect of their position. “The delivery of the program ... includes not only being aware of what is to be taught, but trying to encourage people to look for new and different and better ways of teaching” (P1). “I think that it’s important to have a good solid foundation of working in a classroom in a variety of grade levels, a variety of curriculum areas, a variety of schools if possible under a variety of administrations” (P2). “I took the School Act very seriously ... and I read the number one rule and that was the principal shall provide instructional leadership” (P3). “A principal should be a person that spends his or

her time truly in the educational leadership function which would require spending a lot of time in classes, providing a lot of formative support to teachers” (P4).

The principals differed on whether a principal should have a continuing teaching load within the school’s timetable. While their responses were different, the reasoning behind the answers probably had similar motivation: to create and maintain a strong learning environment. It is likely that the different opinions may have had something to do with the grade configuration of their individual schools.

The two who answered more affirmatively were from schools comprising elementary or middle school grades. One of them said, “If I’m not trying out those things that we’re learning as a school staff ... I feel like I don’t know what teachers are going through and I feel I don’t have credibility” (P3). The other said, “Principals should be in classrooms, have regular contact with kids. That contact can be in a supportive role, it can be in a mentoring role, it can be a team teaching role, it could be a host of things that actually make good pedagogical sense” (P2). The other two had at least a part of their schools made up of high school grades and felt it was necessary not to be tied to a fixed timetable. “You have to have the pulse of the school. You can’t do that as effectively if you’re in a classroom or in your office only” (P1). However, this principal also stated “I think that you have to stay in the classroom to some degree to retain that edge and understanding of what a teacher’s life is all about, too.” The final interviewee was considering his effectiveness as an instructional leader when he mentioned his teaching load. He talked about “those kinds of tasks that you’re supposed to do that you cannot do when you’re carrying a teaching load” (P4).

### Manage and Administer Complex Organizational Processes

All four principals spent much of their interviews commenting on things that fall within this theme, probably because they feel that their management workloads have increased considerably in the past few years. “I could stay Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and come one day on the weekend and I still would be struggling to keep up with the amounts of information there was to process and send places” (P3).

Talking to people who have been in it for ten years or more ... the workload has increased. More reporting, more responsibility for the budgeting, all those types of things, more answerable to parents, you spend more time with them and on committees (P1).

“There is becoming an unrealistic expectation on the part of both Central Office and the public relative to what a principal should do” (P4). “I feel there has been a lot of down loading jobs, that there are very high expectations for what administrators need to do” (P3).

All principals felt that creating a budget for their individual schools and allocating adequate resources to all areas were primary duties.

One of the things that we could wrestle with is the whole issue of budgeting and resource management within the school and trying to take the limited amount of money and stretching it over what seems to be an unlimited amount of needs in order to keep a viable program going on all fronts (P1).

“You have the responsibility to have a budget that works and [to see] that your whole account book works” (P2). You have to “ensure that teachers have access to the resources



that they need” (P4). It becomes difficult “when you just realize that we just simply do not have the resources or the time to meet all the demands” (P3).

Personnel management also falls under the principal’s responsibility. You have “to deal with many diverse personalities right from the kids and their parents through to the teachers as well and try to make sure that everybody is doing the things that they’re supposed to do” (P1). “Specific duties have to do with the responsibility for [ascertaining that teachers can] actually stand in front of kids and instruct” (P2). Principals are responsible for completing the various employment evaluations including teacher evaluations and cannot allocate that duty to one of the vice-principals. “It says here in the policy only principals can do teacher evaluations” (P3).

The school board has a policy manual in place to deal with many of its expectations for particular circumstances. As a principal “you need to make sure that what you’re doing is being done according to a set of guidelines” (P1). Individual schools also have policies in place, which need to be continually revisited as to whether they are effective and current. You have to see “how things line up together or if they line up together” (P3).

Three principals saw themselves as the problem solvers of the school. “Crisis management interferes with what would be the normal order and your ability to organize and plan for things, operate smoothly and effectively” (P2). What principals “deal with mostly is problems, whether it’s student behaviour or whether it’s how to fix the schedule” (P3).

But that’s part of why we do what we do. We like this. As much as we get kind of frustrated, you accomplish a lot, you multi-task yourself on every single day.

You're doing a number of things all at the same time. And the only reason that you do that kind of stuff is because you like it or you better get out (P2).

The duties that fit under the management theme are extensive and these principals are finding it more and more difficult to keep up with the pace.

My primary job, I see, is one of making sure that the whole school is operating, that I manage to create a situation where the teaching force in the school have what they need to do the job properly and, in all honesty, I find that that consumes almost my whole time (P1).

Principals have to make choices because of their limited time.

You have all of the power to decide what's in the frame of reference and what you can affect and you have the power to say to the time stealers and the things that aren't that important, I'm not going to do it (P2).

According to one principal, the workload keeps getting greater because of the devolution of responsibility and "the problem is nobody has ever taken anything away" (P4).

#### Shape The School Culture and Climate

None of the interviewees directly addressed this theme. Two of them wove it into their discussions while the other two just touched on it. From Peterson's (1999) description of this theme, the principal's day-to-day behaviour is what positively or negatively affects the school culture and climate. Since it is the principal who leads the school, what he or she models will set the pace for the behaviour of others in the school.

Walk around the school, you'll notice right away that your presence in the school has a significant impact on what's going on and if you're not visible for awhile, that has an impact as well. You're kind of the walking embodiment of what that

school stands for. You need to be out there as a reminder, a constant presence of this in the school (P1).

Three of the principals commented about interpersonal communications with other members of the school community. “You need to be able to interact positively and successfully with everybody that you’re going to come in contact with” (P3). “I think you’re judged for your ability to communicate with the folks you work with and perhaps the students and those relationships for me personally are the critical focus of what I like about the job” (P2).

When you can walk around and talk to the kids and know that you are having an impact and setting a tone for a larger entity to move ahead and allowing teachers and kids to do good things and parents are happy with what’s going on as well and things are moving smoothly, it’s a nice place (P1).

Just as teachers try to create a good learning environment in their classroom, the principal does the same for the school. “The fact of the matter is you do have an opportunity to make things really good” (P1).

It is the principal’s mission “to keep people upbeat about what’s going on and looking at the positive things instead of focusing on the many, many negatives that could crop up as well” (P1). “I think that you need to surround yourself with people who are positive and hard working and competent and that will help” (P3). “It’s a motivational part, it’s greasing the wheels so that everything works properly so that kids get the best out of it, get the most out of it” (P4).

### Build and Maintain Positive Relations With Parents and Community

The four principals in this study each recognized that there are many stakeholders involved when it comes to the education of students. They include parents and other members of our communities. All have a voice and some influence in the educational process. All these voices, inside and outside the school, can be a support and can positively have an effect on what happens at the school.

As a principal you need support from every level that exists. You need it from the government, you need it from the parents, you need it from teachers. Being a principal is like being a, I'll say, a central cog in the system of cogs. One doesn't work; you're not going to turn very well. So it has to mesh, it all has to work together (P4).

Much as we hate to admit, I really think that a big part of our job is political in terms of, not being politicians but we need to be able to do what politicians do in a lot of cases. Which is keep people happy, to present a certain face to the public which makes it sound less than ideal and I don't want it to be a negative thing, but it is .... The ability to deal with people I think is really important because you have to deal with so many people and so many different emotional states (P1).

For each of the principals in this study a major part of their role is, "the public relations function that tries to get out to the community the changing things that have happened in education" (P2).

Two of the four principals thought there was greater scrutiny for what is occurring in the schools, and that, in some ways, it was not fair scrutiny. "There are very high

expectations for what administrators need to do. I think there are very high expectations of parents, too” (P3).

Public surveys are rotten. We got killed last time, I thought we made great strides with the school but we got nailed anyway. Because the people who send in the surveys are usually the people who have got an axe to grind (P1).

One principal complained that “There’s a sense that as educators, we are not particularly competent” (P3). This principal noted she had trouble combating an overall negativity because when she speaks to parents individually, the parents “talk about our school having capable teachers and our staff being competent and their children as learning but somehow that never gets out to the big picture” (P3). The other principal observed that “The biggest challenge right now is trying to maintain that positive perspective when you’re constantly battling a negative perception that’s out there and some of it has been fostered and generated by your own government” (P1).

Principal Two felt that the principalship also includes a consultative role that could place unreasonable demands on a principal’s time. He said:

I believe that even more parents today feel like they want to engage you in a discussion about their child and I think that that takes a great deal of time ....

There’s an expectation on the part of parents that you should have lots of time for them (P2).

### Lead and Support School Improvement and Change

This theme is closely aligned with the one on instructional leadership. Many times in the decoding process, I found it difficult to decide which statements to place under which theme. I made the assumption that school improvement was aligned with

professional development. According to three of the respondents, it is the principal who creates the environment in which professional development opportunities are not only available but where participation is highly encouraged. “You need to support teachers as they try to improve their practice. Having site-based, on-going, job-embedded professional development would really be important” (P3). “One of our big roles is to make it easy for people to develop professionally if that’s what they want to do whether that’s giving them articles to read or providing the means for them to do it” (P1). “With sharing of best practices within all the schools ... I think the job becomes more manageable” (P2).

Principal One stated his belief that principals need to have the support of all the stakeholders to initiate change. He explained:

If the teachers decide that they’re not going to empower you to make some changes, it could be a pretty uncomfortable situation and certainly I would say that I’ve never had a better situation than what I have right now in terms of being empowered by the teachers in the school, the kids in the school, the majority of the parents and community (P1).

## Chapter 4.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine how principals defined their roles in schools. A review of the literature showed no real consensus on an exact description of the many different aspects of the role of principal. While there appeared to be agreement on the fact that the role of principal was quite diverse, an agreed-upon profile of the position was not to be found. Because of these variances from province to province, state to state, and school division to school division, I decided to research the issue locally to see what the role of principal was for this region in the province of Alberta.

Four principals participated in the face-to-face interviews. Principal One was from a high school, Principal Two was from a middle school, Principal Three was from an elementary school, and Principal Four was from a K-12 school. A common set of interview questions was used in each interview and each of the questions was designed to be open ended so as not to create a finite response. The interviewees were encouraged to include anything they felt related to the question. As the interviewer, my only guidance to them was to try to keep their comments on the general topic of the role of principal.

Three of the interviews continued for almost an hour while one only lasted about 25 minutes. Each of the principals appeared willing to participate and tried to answer the questions as completely as possible. A copy of each transcript is attached at the end of this study. In order to maintain confidentiality, anytime one of the principals referred to their school by name, it was blanked out in the transcripts with the use of a series of pound signs (#####). The interview with Principal Two (P2) was unfortunately hampered by technical difficulties during taping and, at times, the sound quality was poor. In an

effort to maintain the integrity of the study, no interpretation of the affected areas was attempted. The transcript simply shows a series of question marks in all places where this occurred (?????).

Once the interviews were transcribed, the cassette tapes were erased. Each of the participants was given an opportunity to review his or her own transcript and an opportunity to request the omission of any or all of the material. None of them felt that any omissions were necessary.

The transcripts were then analyzed and coded into the six themes that were laid out by Peterson (1999). Other authors (Begley and Slater, 2000; Cash, 1997; Clark, 1999; Michailides and Payne, 1998; and Terry, 1999) had compiled different sets of themes to describe the role of the principal and, looking back at the data, it would have been reasonable to use any of those sets of themes.

Although the interview questions were not created to directly address each of the themes, the interviewees did, at least indirectly, comment on each one of Peterson's (1999) six key leadership areas. It did appear, however, that the themes were not seen to have equivalent values. The management role was dominant to the extent that it overshadowed the other roles. All principals discussed the ever-increasing amounts of paperwork and reports that had to be filed. In their perceptions, fiscal realities took precedence over educational matters. There were many instances when the principals stated they just did not have the time or resources to do all the things that, ideally, should be done.

I found Peterson's (1999) six key leadership areas provided a comprehensive way to look at what a principal's role should be. This study revealed to me what an educator



should strive for in the role of a principal. Not all aspects can always be readily visible or accessible, but none should be forgotten. The participants in this study all agreed that the role of school principal requires an extraordinary commitment, and all noted that the principal, ultimately, is held accountable for everything that happens in a school. As one principal said:

I don't think you can look at education as a job, if you're going to become a principal. I think it's more a calling almost, it's something bigger than you because the demands that are going to be put on principals are significant (P1).

Administration is a skill that is both learned and, quite possibly, innate. Regarding the abilities that principals must possess, all principals commented on the public and professional expectations of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of principals.

I'm not sure that administration is so much a science as it is an art. I guess there are components of both but you can't just learn the science part and become an administrator because you can be wonderful at doing the processes and wonderful at implementing the rules and regulations, but if you don't have the art part of it, then it becomes a very sterile and harsh environment to work in (P4).

The principals agreed that there are many challenges and frustrations that may at times seem overwhelming. They all warned that an administrator needs to be prepared for that.

One principal noted:

Today, [principals] should have a thick skin. They should be confident enough that what they're doing is reward enough to them and they don't rely on anyone outside to provide the "*raison d'etre*" for being an administrator (P4).

## Summary

The results of this study are consistent with Peterson's (1999) themes, but show some distinctions between the reality, in Central Alberta, and the ideal situations Peterson has described. It is very difficult to propose a common profile for the role of principal in the many different schools that exist, based on these results. However, by going through the literature and completing this study, I am now much more aware of the enormous responsibilities that reside with this position, the differences created by context, and the extent to which the role of the principal has changed in recent years.

## Suggestions for Future Studies

This study was conducted with a small sample of principals from schools with various configurations of grade levels. This could be one reason why it was difficult to find a common set of role descriptors among the participants. A direction to take in a future study would be to make a comparison of principals from schools with similar configurations. Perhaps a more common role would be more easily discernible if principals of like schools were compared.

Another direction to follow would be to focus on different school divisions. A random sample of principals from selected divisions might provide responses that would offer clearer confirmation or rejection of roles and profiles as they are currently presented in the literature.

## Conclusions

The findings of this study have led me to the following conclusions:

1. It is clear that principals must create and maintain an environment that encourages continued professional development for teachers and also for

themselves in order to ensure the success of their schools. Principals must be allowed the time to continue their own professional growth if that is to continue throughout their school communities.

2. School divisions must be very selective in their search for principals, since it is the principal that plays a big part in the success of the school and, ultimately, the school division.
3. Principals should undergo a very broad training process in order to be ready for the diversity of the positions that they enter. Their knowledge should include not only academic preparation and teaching experience, but a well-tuned ability to deal with people. So much of what principals can do is helped or hindered by the types of relationships that they build between themselves and all the other stakeholders involved in the educational process.
4. One of the most rewarding aspects of the job is the fact that it is continually evolving. As in life, the only constant is change. The job cannot become stagnant if principals continue to search for ways to improve the educational process.
5. One of the least rewarding aspects of the job is the expansion of information processing. There is always a new report to file or a new form to fill out. If not kept in check, this aspect of the job can seriously encroach upon the two main goals that principals should have: learning and teaching.

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## Appendix A

## Interview Transcription – Principal One (P1)

Interviewer: Okay, I guess we can begin, before we start into the questions, I'd just like to go over the consent form again and do it on tape to make sure that everything is clear. Basically you've agreed to be part of a face-to-face interview based on the role of principal and I'm going to ask you some questions, which you will then answer. The information that is taken on this tape, what will be done with it basically is after the tape has been transcribed it will be destroyed or erased and you will then be given an opportunity to review the transcript and omit any section you choose or at any point in time, if you so choose, you will be allowed to withdraw from the study without prejudice of any kind and I understand you are willing?

P1: Yes, you bet!

Interviewer: To begin then, we have that consent form, so we're just going to talk, very open-ended questions and I'd just like you to, wherever it happens to lead you and we'll just see where we end up. The first question would be, "Do you enjoy your work as a principal?"

P1: I would say that probably 80% of the time would be enjoyable time for the most part. The types of things that tend to detract from that are when you are into heavy discipline situations where you are not doing anything positive, or what seems to be positive and you're spending a lot of time making sure that cases are built to sometimes get kids out of school rather than keep them in school and while in the long run you may say that that is for the better situation of all the kids involved or the greater number of kids, you still take that as a bit of a loss. There are times when you seem to spend a lot of



time doing paperwork as well and you wonder what purpose it may be serving in the overall scheme of things. You could be doing other things like being out interacting with the kids, doing some positive things with them rather than filling out reports that, I would think that x number of thousands of schools in Alberta, they couldn't read them all. You wonder what happens to it. Other than that, the times, the crunch times maybe when there's more to do than hours in the day to do it, those sometimes are not as enjoyable. But that all is offset when you can walk around and talk to the kids and know that you are having an impact and setting a tone for a larger entity to move ahead and allowing teachers and kids to do good things and parents are happy with what's going on as well and things are moving smoothly, it's a nice place.

Interviewer: How long have you been in the position of principal?

P1: This would be my, I've done five full years as principal, one year as a vice principal. A couple of years before that as a councilor where I had some minor administrative duties. This is the sixth year as a principal.

Interviewer: What are some of the responsibilities and duties your position includes and I know there're numerous so feel free.

P1: Okay. Well there is a whole pile and not in any particular order of significance, certainly one of the things that we could wrestle with is the whole issue of budgeting and resource management within the school and trying to take the limited amount of money and stretching it over what seems to be an unlimited amount of needs in order to keep a viable program going on all fronts. That includes not only trying to get new programs going but maintaining old ones. So certainly the budgeting aspect is important. Personnel management would be another one, having to deal with many

diverse personalities right from the kids and their parents through to the teachers as well and trying to make sure that everybody is doing the things that they're supposed to do, that you're giving them proper opportunities to grow as people, that you are at times taking them to task and saying that maybe what you're doing needs to be reconsidered a little bit. Encouraging a positive kind of approach to, to that personnel side of things.

There's the whole academic curriculum responsibility, the delivery of the program that's important you know that includes not only be aware of what is to be taught, but trying to encourage people to look for new and different and better ways of teaching, through the unit book and you've probably read the same line where the little factory model is to find the right answer and then keep it going whereas now you are trying to find the right answer and then make it better and improve upon it. There is always a bit of a cheerleader role, at times, I guess often times I've looked at the principalship almost as being a couple of inverted triangles where at times you are leading out front at the top of the pinnacle and everybody's following behind you and that's I suppose due to the type of thing but other times you are at the bottom, well you are still at the pinnacle but the triangle rises above you and you're a supportive role for everybody as well, trying to make sure that the conditions exist for them to do the things that they have to and want to do as well. There is that. I think the principal also has to act as a point of contact for teachers who quite often, their experience is in a classroom in a limited number of subjects at high school, so you have to act as a point of contact for those people for a broader picture of what's going on in the school and education and the community.

Teaching being what it is these days too, I think, we are big components in the professional development end of things. I think that's one of our big roles is to make it

easy for people to develop professionally if that's what they want to do whether that's giving them articles to read or providing the means for them to do it. There are other management issues of course beyond the budgeting. How am I doing for time? Am I getting too long winded?

Interviewer: No, you carry right on!

P1: There are other management issues that revolve around just making sure processes are in place and they are suitable and adequate for record keeping. In our own school, for instance, we just spent the last year and one half getting our record keeping under control which has resulted in last year earning approximately seven hundred credits more than what we had been able to budget for and over the preceding years leading up to that point we estimate that we have lost between three and four hundred credits a year just through poor records management which is a huge amount of money. So those types of things, discipline, in case you have to go to some kind of board hearing. You've got to have all your discipline in shape now. Being a point of contact, you're setting the teams in place for contacting parents, making sure the field trip stuff is all ... it's all the policy manual stuff too. What else? I could probably come up with some more things if I sat and thought about it awhile but those would cover the broadest areas. You need to be aware of the curriculum. You have to make sure things are happening there. A good teacher tries to create a good environment, that whole environment-managing thing, creating positive, safe environment. I suppose in a lot of ways you are a councilor, a supporter, you're the ear for people who have to talk sometimes and unload some things. So a bit of a psychologist sometimes as well. Just trying to keep people upbeat about what's going

on and looking at the positive things instead of focusing on the many, many negatives that could crop up as well. All right. I think that's about it for now, on that one.

Interviewer: Feel free to bring up something else as this goes on.

P1: Yes, I would think that some of the other questions will bring out some other things.

Interviewer: Should someone entering administration have any special training, skills or qualities?

P1: Right now one of the big things I think is probably to have a real good empathy and understanding of people. Much as we may hate to admit, I really think that a big part of our job is political in the terms of, not being politicians but we need to be able to do what politicians do in a lot of cases. Which is to keep people happy, to present a certain face to the public which makes it sound less than ideal and I don't want it to be a negative thing, but it is, we do need to be aware of that for sure. The ability to deal with people I think is really important because you have to deal with so many people and so many different emotional states, some many different types of personalities coming at you that if you're not able to do that you pretty quickly find yourself into some trouble. I think you have to be probably somebody who is willing to be a student of education and be willing to try and remain current about what's going on in the field, up to date about things. You know, I guess in lots of ways that's probably one of my biggest shortcomings, I not a real big policy guy. It's probably something that a person should be aware of especially nowadays in this kind of environment we've got, you need to make sure that what you're doing is being done according to a set of guidelines as well, so a person probably should look at that type of thing. You really need to care very deeply. I

don't think you can look at education as a job, if you're going to become a principal. I think it's more a calling almost, it's something bigger than you because the demands that are going to be put on principals are significant. The other thing I think you need to go into it with is a very strong sense of values that you would like to see put in place, a strong sense of where you want to go, of what you would like to have, and so anybody who's going to enter really should have thought about these things because you are just asked to make too many compromises and you have to make so many compromises to, just to get through a day. You've got to, not to compromise but decisions you have, you have to have touch stone you can go back to and say all right, how does this line up or how do the things I believe in impact on this decision and try to remain true to them, because you can very quickly and I think pretty easily lose your way if you don't. There are so many competing sets of demands and sometimes I guess you just have to be able to make a decision that you're not happy with because there is no good decision hopefully be able to pack it away at the end of the day which doesn't mean you become callous about it but it could be a twenty-four hour a day job if you want it to be and you can't afford to get your whole life pushed out of shape, you lose perspective on what you're really doing and there are many, many issues that you're confronted with that have the potential to do that.

Interviewer: Special training?

P1: Special training, well, certainly the, what you get in university programs I don't think prepares you for it, but it's kind of like for preparation for teaching or preparation for swimming or something like that, people can tell you how to do it but there's really only one way to do it, and that's to dive in there and do it. I wouldn't say

that there's no value to the training programs but the more important thing is that as you're working your way through the program that you're thinking about what your philosophy is going to be, what your position is going to be. One of the guiding principles, based on everything that you've seen, what is going to guide your decision making, your actions, and that's where the real value lies and I don't know that's as easy to do unless you've actually done the job for awhile and you can then appreciate that, and then maybe go back and take your training.

Interviewer: Courses?

P1: You know, what's turned out to be one of the most useful ones for me, personally, and it is one that I had thought was the biggest waste of time when I was taking my training was the whole, just an add on to one of the courses, was reflective journalism. And I didn't do it the first three years or so but I have started doing a reflective journal now and it's really a useful tool to just sit and ponder what you're doing and why you're doing it, how do we know what we're doing and how we're doing. Can you answer the question why you're doing it this way and does that line up again with the things that you believe in, that needs to be central? I guess you know, the ability to think reflectively is probably one of the more important skills that a principal can have because you're going to make mistakes, for sure, and you have to have the ability to look at that and say okay, I blew that there but I can probably change it and then improve upon it so the next time I'm confronted by a situation like that, well maybe I'll make this decision, instead I'll follow this procedure, and to look at it honestly and not be afraid of the fact that you are going to make mistakes and you look at that. I sat down one morning and decided to kind of count up how many decisions and things I had to do and it was a

phenomenal number of decisions that I made in just a few minutes and I just stopped counting. But you're called on to make many, many snap decisions and you don't have time to sit down and very carefully work through a decision making model, so at times it is necessary to go back and say okay, how did this work? Am I happy with what happened here? And sometimes you're not happy. But to honestly do that is worthwhile or to seek it if you don't think you're able to be objective enough about it, to seek input from others and to take it for what it's worth even though it is sometimes painful to hear what they've got to say.

Interviewer: Has the workload increased over the last few years?

P1: Oh boy! You know, I think I got into it just about the time that you had the increase so I haven't personally noticed a lot of, a lot more work, but talking to people who have been in it for ten years or more, according to them the work load has increased. More reporting, more responsibility for the budgeting, all of those types of things, more answerable to parents, you spend more time with them and on committees and all the rest of it. It's a double-edged sword. It's nice to have more control over things at a local level but it does bring more work as well. I would hate to think it could increase even more from where it is right now. I know that talking to people, the average work week to be around fifty-five hours a week which is fairly significant and that would certainly be in the ballpark from my own experience. You know that the nature of the work is such that it is constantly demanding. The brain is such a type of organ that the type of work that you're involved in is a lot more tiring apparently than a laborer because your whole brain lights up to do the type of job that the principal has to do or vice principal and that takes a huge amount of energy apparently to run it, so you go home and you're just exhausted

and I would never have thought that sitting behind a desk all day could do that to a person but I can honestly say of any job I've ever done, I've never gone home as tired as when I go home as principal. So I'd hate to see it increase anymore because I don't know if I can handle it, if it was more of what we're doing right now.

Interviewer: Budgeting? Special training?

P1: None, other than what I picked up through other jobs that I did prior to getting into education. They all had budget applications to it so I had some experience with it but certainly not having as many different factors involved. Certainly as a high school principal, one of the irritating things is not knowing until January or maybe a little bit earlier in December what your starting balance was of the preceding year. It's certainly not knowing how many credits you're going to wind up with. Are they going to deny you some credits that you've applied for? How does that work? Again, people who haven't been doing their paperwork or haven't been keeping the right type of records, are you going to have those credits denied for you as well? Those are all frustrations. The other thing to it, it's not just a case of taking the money and dividing it up equally. What you have to do again, it goes back to what I was saying before, trying to have a consistent philosophy that is values based and focused, does the budget that you put in place actually support what you say you're trying to do in the school? If you happen to say that reading is one of the big things that you want to develop in your students, does your budget actually reflect that statement? If it doesn't then your whole thrust can sometimes become pretty empty and it gets undercut and I think that we've got a pretty good example of that happening sometimes in education. I remember a time when governments will say this is it but I don't get no money to do it so you're asking us to do



more with the same amount of money. So it comes back to the balance of making sure you've got that vision and you're lining it all up in a consistent fashion.

Interviewer: Do you still maintain a teaching role within the school?

P1: As needed, personally I try to teach; I think I've tried every year. Invariably because of the assignments that I've had, it seems that it hasn't worked because of the demands of that particular job I guess, such that the teaching gets pushed to the side. My primary job, I see, is one that making sure that the whole school is operating, that I manage to create a situation where the teaching force in the school have what they need to do the job properly and in all honesty, I find that that consumes almost my whole time and if I take on a teaching assignment then something has to give because there is no more in the well from where I sit right now. So what it is, I'm not as visible perhaps in the hallways because I go and teach my class, then come back and I have to do that paperwork sometime, so I sit in the office for the rest of the day and do the paperwork. I never get out and walk the halls, getting in teachers' classrooms. We need to do that type of stuff. Walk around the school, you'll notice right away that your presence in the school has a significant impact on what's going on and if you're not visible for awhile, that has an impact as well and you're kind of the walking embodiment of what that school stands for. You need to be out there as a reminder, a constant presence of this is the school. You're not running around, you're not wearing hats, you're not smoking. You are working hard, you are polite, you are positive, all those types of things. You are a constant reminder, seeing what's going on, you have to have the pulse of the school. You can't do, get that as effectively if you're in a classroom or in your office only. So, you know, much as I like teaching, it has not played a big part since I've become a principal.

I've taught short-term stints, every year pretty much, a couple of months here and there, to work some things out and that's about it.

Interviewer: Does it help you keep in touch?

P1: From that perspective it does, it helps you to keep in touch with a small group of kids but I've found it to be just as effective, probably more effective to be out attending the games, getting into classrooms and seeing what the kids are doing in the classrooms and talking to them about what they are doing. That way I cover more ground; come into contact with more kids. So that's how I've chosen to compensate for that I don't get that real deep contact with a small number of kids. I get a bit of a shallower contact but much more broadly spread and that's why I know the kids pretty well. And that's been pretty effective for me I think.

Interviewer: I just want to know a little more on the teaching. Should the principal have to teach somewhat?

P1: You know, I think, I think yes. But I don't necessarily think it should happen while you are a principal. I think perhaps every three or four or five years a principal should be back in the classroom. Just so you don't lose touch with what it's really all about and that certainly is a danger, you can forget the things that are of issue to a teacher, like how many times the dog gone P.A. cuts in when you're trying to teach your class. While we sit in the office and say "well, it's just one more little thing", if you have to do attendance or call home or something, and it doesn't seem like a big thing sitting in the office but when you have, are dealing with thirty kids and have had a bad day so now you have to call home on seven kids at night and mark a stack of essays, that one more little thing can become a big thing. And I think it's important for us to keep in contact

with that, while we have to go out and evaluate teachers we should still know what it means to be a good teacher and I think that you have to stay in the classroom to some degree to retain that edge and understanding of what a teacher's life is all about too. So from that perspective, yes I think it would be good. I don't know that, I don't know how good a job, I know certainly I don't do as good a job as a teacher when I'm a principal as well at the same time and to me I find that is incredibly frustrating and I'm dissatisfied by the whole process on a daily basis because I know what I used to be able to do when I was a full time teacher, but I can't even come close to measuring up to that standard. When half the time my mind isn't even fully on what I'm teaching in the classroom, that's not fair to the kids, and another quarter of the time I'm not in the classroom at all because I'm at a convention or a meeting or some significant issue has come up or my prep time is not what is ought to be or my marking because I get home at the end of the and think, "gees, I'm so tired, I can't do it" or somebody phones and you just aren't caught up or you rush into the class just the last second because you've been on the phone with an angry parent right up until thirty seconds before you've got to go into the class and you hang up on a parent basically who then is further mad because they're, they haven't been dealt with, only as far as they're concerned, and your class knows it, you're not on top of your game. I mean those days are not the rule, but they happen often enough that they have always left me feeling dissatisfied. It's a bad job; it's not fair to the kids. So if I could set it up so somebody else could do a proper job, that works for me. And when I decide that I need to go back into the classroom I'm going to try and find a half a year off somewhere, that I could do that. And just get right back in touch with it, because that's important too, that's what we're really all about is educating these kids, and you

need to be in, have that interface sometimes with them to make sure that you're still in touch with what's happening.

Interviewer: Do you the necessary support and empowerment to complete the tasks that are assigned?

P1: Very dependent on the people who are above you, but I would say that at this point in time, I'm getting good support and, which is nice. It has not always been the case, but now I would say I am and as a principal as well, it's not only the people who are kind of hierarchically above you but also those people you have to share the building with. If the teachers decide that they're not going to empower you to make some changes, it could be a pretty uncomfortable situation and certainly I would say that I've never had a better situation than what I have right now in terms of being empowered by the teachers in the school, the kids in the school, the majority of the parents and community saying "yeah, we would like to see some change. We like what's going on, let's keep her going," and be willing to put something in to make that happen. So that's nice and you know, quite often people think that empowerment only comes from the people who are saying, can we give you this job? And that's not the case, as you and I both know, if the teachers decide they're not going along with what you want to do, all the empowerment in the world from the Board isn't going to help you or from Central Office. So it's an interesting line to walk and my own natural inclination is to be a bit of a benevolent dictator, I hope, rather than a collaborative person but I guess you could learn after awhile to try and involve people as much as they're comfortable with. Probably at times you just need to make a decision too, and certainly as principal there are times when you sit back and go, "these are the types of decisions that I don't want anybody else making

because it would put them in a compromising or awkward situations as well. So there are tough calls like when we've had to cut staff, and I'll always talk it over with the vice principal and things like that, or sometimes hiring, but ultimately I would reserve the right to make a decision and not involve anybody else so if there is a backlash, that it falls to me to answer it, which is one of the responsibilities that I have, just being answerable for what goes on in the school and not try and push that to other people if it's a sticky one. Same thing with the discipline, you know I ask the vice principals to do a lot of it but when it gets to a really sticky point where you could be challenged on it, then I can truly to ask them to allow me to be the name that goes on the paper that says this is what's going to happen. Quite often those things wind up in my lap anyway so you may as well cut through the chase and get right at it.

Interviewer: Are there any challenges that get in the way of running an effective school and how can one overcome them?

P1: Big question! As many variables as there are, I think they all present potential challenge to the running of an effective school and you never know what it is that is going to rise up and bite you. For instance, the biggest issue we have, we made a pile of changes at the start of this year. The single biggest issue that really irritated kids was that we chose to assign lockers this year instead of allowing them to buddy up with their friends and stuff like that. That would not have probably make the list of what I'd thought would be the most significant issues, but then again it just shows that maybe I've lost contact with what it's like to be a kid. That is important who's in the locker right next to you, but I didn't think about it at that time so things like that come up. Certainly mind set is probably the biggest challenge. The reason I say that is because there are always

challenges. You don't have enough money; you don't have enough time, not enough resources. Teachers are, there are a couple of weak teachers over there. You can sit and say, "well I can't because I just don't have the money for it." I think the bigger challenge is to say, "okay here's where I want to be and here's what I've got to get there with. Is there anyway I can make that happen or how can that possibly be made to happen?" Then develop a positive mind set is probably the, then maintain the positive mind set when it seems like all you're doing is getting slammed every time you turn around. Public surveys are rotten. We got killed last time, I thought we made great strides with the school but we got nailed anyway. Because the people who send in the surveys are usually the people who have got an axe to grind and the exam results are not where they ought to be. Maybe they're improving a little bit but they're still not even close to where they ought to be and there's still not enough money to make the change you want to make but that's what we've got so we may as well not brood on that. Let's see what we can do to move ahead from there. And convincing everyone else that that is the only attitude we can take because we'll never get it to where we want to be, in terms of we'll always want more money or whatever. So the biggest challenge right now is trying to maintain that positive perspective when you're constantly battling a negative perception that's out there and some of it has been fostered and generated by your own government. That to me is frustrating. I don't care, you don't want to pay me anymore, that's fine, but don't run down the job I'm doing and say I'm not doing a good enough job to warrant anymore. Instead, it's said outright and that's kind of an implicit argument, you only work this much because, don't run down the job of public education out there.

Interviewer: You've had a little time to talk. Are there any other responsibilities or duties that may now come up?

P1: You know, nowadays you are dealing with kids, and I'm speaking primarily from a high school perspective, we really have an opportunity to make a huge impact or to not have any impact I suppose, and there is nothing profound there but when you take a look at what kids' lives are now, where the supportive structure has changed so much and the kids used to get a lot of messages from families which had two parents which stayed at home, extended families tended to be fairly close by, lived in communities which tended to share the same thoughts and values and what not, and probably go to church or something like that. But a lot of those things have been chipped away at so that now kids really feel like they're adrift lots of times and just not anchored or a part of anything significant. One of the things that we need to do is to try and achieve a good moral balance. In public education you tend to stay away from value stuff or trying to be all things to all people and interpreted to just teach the facts and the skills because it's safer than to step on anybody's toes. I think we need to do more. Kids need to feel like they are a part of something and one of the ways we can do that is by getting out there and going, we have to make a real effort to become a part of our students' lives out there in a significant way and just balance that scale between the purely kind of academic skills based stuff and the interpersonal stuff. Kids are not getting as much real good interaction because they are spending more time on their own now, without guidance or watching T.V. or on video games or on chat lines where they are not talking to people face to face. You just need to be out there and like it or not, teachers and principals still have a pretty good impact I think on kids at maybe a subconscious level. So that's an important

consideration I think too. You fill the role of social worker; you wear so many hats over the course of the day. We discipline, while you're disciplining you're probably finding out yourself there's as much counseling as anything else. The idea of discipline is to teach somebody to be able to manage their own behaviour, not to just take a hammer and whack them on the head and say you're fixed. The whole roof of discipline is something quite different, and to do that you've got to peel away a number of different layers sometimes to see where these kids are coming from and why on that day, and you know, self-control, I didn't mention that earlier that's probably a big one. Instead of just mad, I mean, you know what, I'm not going to deal with this one right now, I don't have to make a decision here, I'm going to sleep on this tonight and talk about it tomorrow morning when I've had a chance to think about it a little bit more, and for some people that's probably a hard thing to do, is to say I don't know the answer right off the top of my head here but I think we need to do that sometimes. That's probably it for now.

Interviewer: Ok, anything you'd like to add just on the topic of the role of principal?

P1: Well, you know I know there have been a lot of people who've questioned it. There was site based management and this whole idea of collaborative environments, more involvement of parents and things. You wonder where the responsibility lies but I think the role of the principal may be more important now than ever before because somebody has to maintain a focus on what is significant and I think as a principal that's one of the, as I said earlier, you need to have a vision or an idea of what is important, what is significant to keep people tracked on to the, there are so many people who are willing to go off on a tangent. There are a lot of different tangents to go off on but if you



do that you're forever going back and forth and never going anywhere. You know often times I asked myself why would somebody want to do it now. The classroom is still not a bad place to be, why would somebody want to become a principal right now? You know the ego thing could wear out pretty quick when you realize that there's a lot of other stuff on the go, but the fact of the matter is you do have an opportunity to make things really good. It's nice, it's equally nice to have a teacher come into your office and say "boy, things are just going so great" as it is to have a kid come in and say, "now things are really going great" and to know that everybody's able to do what they're supposed to be doing and is happy doing it. It's a good thing but it is taxing.

Interviewer: As a final summation question, do you recommend the job of school principal to others?

P1: I think personally, for me it's been a good thing, it's been a broadening experience for sure, to think about education and kids and learning and all of that in a whole different fashion and it's been a good thing, overall. There are drawbacks, the stress level is unbelievable at times. I think that unless you're extremely vigilant, it can take a huge toll on your health. I think that at times, well it's good, it certainly forces you at times to confront your most fundamental beliefs and say do these still hold true, because sometimes you're presented with scenarios that just challenge all of that, and all the things you think are right or define a world are challenged. Again the whole reflective idea and taking the time to think these things through and deal with them. It's given me a much better understanding of education. Will I stay in it for a lifetime? I would doubt it. I don't think I can keep up the pace for a whole lot more years and were I to move into division office somewhere or the classroom, I don't know either, but either way I know

would go, even if it was on with education, I'd have to rethink about interactions of leading people and managing multiple tasks and agendas and all the rest of it. I learned a pile of skills that I wouldn't have otherwise, for sure. I think for somebody who's willing to be open and grow, it's probably a good thing. Overall. It's been a good couple of weeks though. If you caught me some other time, I might have a different answer to that. There are days when you just wonder why you do it because no matter what you do, it goes wrong and sometimes the right decision done for the right reasons turn out all wrong and you just wonder how that happened, but it does periodically happen. So that's it.

Interviewer: I believe that's all my questions so I'd like to thank you for participating in this study. Like I said before, you will be given an opportunity to view the transcript and make whatever changes or eliminations you wish to make.

P1: Okay, it will be interesting to see my words.

## Appendix B

## Interview Transcription – Principal Two (P2)

Interviewer: We're here today just to do another interview in regards to the role of school principal. I just wanted to go over once again what you had consented to. Basically you're consenting to answer questions through an interview on the role of school principal. All this will then be transcribed, because I'm taping this conversation. All this is going to be transcribed. You will then be given an opportunity to see the transcribed copy and make any omissions or a total omission if you choose and as I'd stated, it would be done without prejudice so if you really feel that it is something you need to do, that would be more than fine. So, you do agree?

P2: I agree!

Interviewer: Okay, I'm going to ask you a series of questions. They are all very open-ended questions. What I would like you to do is simply talk. If it leads you off in a different direction, that's fine. I'm not looking for a specific direction. I'm simply want you to go and I want to see where it takes you, and I may from time to time...

P2: Redirect me?

Interviewer: Or maybe fish for more about a certain thing, not a redirection as much as fishing for more, and whenever you really stop talking I'll ask another question.

P2: Okay!

Interviewer: So to begin. Do you enjoy your work as a principal?

P2: I love my job. Everyday I get up. I just love coming to work, one of the most challenging jobs that I think few people are blessed to have the opportunity to do.

Interviewer: How long have you been in the position of principal?

P2: I've been at ##### for three and one half years. Previous to that I was the vice principal at a K to 8 school for ten years and previous to that I worked at 7 to 12 school as a guidance councilor and that's my background.

Interviewer: What are some of the responsibilities and duties your position includes?

P2: I think basically the school act sets out the responsibilities of the principal. He is to do to everything that occurs in the building. I take that to mean only the direct responsibilities regarding resource allocation, people allocation, maintaining pupil teacher ratio at an acceptable level, budget allocation, maintaining policy and direction where people work. A lot of common sense kind of things that make sense to the public. I think the public relations function that tries to get out to the community the changing things that have happened in education. I think working with and trusting people, working with really good overall positive ??????. I think it's all encompassing and I think that it can be overwhelming, it is overwhelming without a doubt but I think maybe you can find a balance that's right for you and the balance for me is becoming ?????? and that's one of the interesting ... the interesting challenge I think about principals is you develop your own personal style and signature that you want to attach to school change, your personal belief system about what education should look like, what child development should be and should look like. I think it's not strictly that works for all, ethical, those are things that have to be part of the decision seeking. I think you're judged for your ability to communicate with the folks you work with and perhaps the students and those relationships for me personally are the critical focus of what I like about the job. Let's proceed from here a different way and I think that's one of the strengths of communication. The fact that there's an opportunity for anyone who has a role of a

principal to define what to use as a focus because people are so different that each principalship is different and what I like is it helps with the contact with society as a whole. You have the opportunity to read different books ?????

Interviewer: Feel free to ramble. Any specific duties that we should include here?

P2: The specific duties have to do with the responsibility for allocation of teacher stability, to actually stand in front of kids and instruct. I think what I like about the role of the principal in the province of Alberta is that first you are an educator not part of management yet, as it occurs in B.C. or Saskatchewan. I think that that allows you to take the decision to allocate your resources based on teaching, not on passing things, a number of years ago, perhaps technology. I think that you are able to allocate those resources based on providing the best educational opportunity for kids and you can focus on teachers who can do that, you have the flexibility. Whereas, I'm not sure that that happens in other provinces. I think the specific, it's a double edged sword because although with the advent of site-based decision making in Alberta, even though your first priority is to program such that you have an optimum number of teachers in the smallest classes possible to instruct in, you have the responsibility to have a budget that works and that your whole account book works. I think that it's... it would basically be my position that your first job is to program, your second job is to budget. So those responsibilities I think for some folks that are on a different perspective. I think teachers by in large are conservative, small "c" conservative, it being when given a task about managing, they make sure it's done appropriately and if given a budget it's thought of as a good thing to give money out appropriately and so it's a difficult thing to actually go into a deficit situation. ????? for many of us it's not difficult. Other specific responsibilities ????? I

think there's much more of a public relations conflict management role that is ?????, it seems to be more and more concrete. I believe that even more parents today feel like they want to engage you in a discussion about their child and I think that that takes a great deal of time and just as it's important to take that time to manage conflict with the kids so that they can actually learn from their experiences. There's an expectation on the part of parents that you should have lots of time for them to go over those things and I find that that is not as productive a use of time, hence, if you are going to focus on people the paper just keeps growing.

Interviewer: Should someone entering administration have any special training or skills or qualities?

P2: I believe they should. First I think is curriculum experience and teaching experience. I think that it's important to have a good solid foundation of working in a classroom in a variety of grade levels, a variety of curriculum areas, a variety of schools if possible under a variety of administrations if possible because much of what takes place I think is situational in nature and you make decisions not based upon things that have happened before so you can follow a precedent but based on new circumstances, new situations, decisions that you must make are dependent on the specifics of those situations. I think there's a, it's important to round out that experience with foundational educational course work as you mature. I think that schooling, course work, educational foundational courses, educational psych courses, educational administrative courses take on new meaning if you decide to do them after you have taught for awhile, they begin to make more sense. I think you can bring more depth to your own personal decisions about who you are, and what you think, and what you believe and what you choose to mold as

an administrator. If you take the time to consider through extra educational courses and admin courses you consider your education ??????. So I think that background experience is critical, certainly educational course work, life experiences, you have your own children, you have your own family, if you are older and you have lots of experiences dealing with the conflicts with parents in the classrooms that disagree with you, with kids with different learning abilities and learning styles, and special education and a host of different that classroom teachers come in contact with. The better background you have, the more maturity you have, the more different situations you have been in, I think the more successful you can be.

Interviewer: Has the workload of the principal increased over the last few years?

P2: I think the workload is something that you have to kind of come to grips with. You have to pick and choose those things that are important and I think the part of the workload that's increased is deciding what is not worth your time and what is definitely worth your time. There seems to be more and more information, even in the last decade we have different modes of communication that require and demand you attention. It used to be somebody met you face to face or called you on the phone. There were two modes of communication and that's what you dealt with, or a letter. And now we have fax machines and e-mails and call waiting and call display and all of those things are time consumers so I think that people expect that with all of that technology you should have the ability to have more communication and what you really end up having is more time commitments. The job has changed in that I think it's harder to get to the essence of what your core purpose is, what it is you are supposed to do. You should reflect on that on a daily and weekly basis so that you focus and plan better important time that you want to

manage during the day or the time will be managed by all of this stuff. So, I believe the workload has changed; the expectations have changed by way of curriculum implementation ????? and the expectation in terms of paperwork. On the upside though, I think that there are some trends in working in schools where there is a lot more shared leadership. I think with practices and with sharing of best practices that are happening within all of the schools. The more we get some of the good ideas that people are using, I think the job becomes more manageable and I think certain conferences where teachers are working with other teachers and that's encouraged, where administrators are working with other administrators and that's encouraged. I think we get better able to reach those expectations. I don't know if there are, if I could identify how the workload has changed so dramatically ????? but I think the expectations of the personal contacts has changed ?????.

Interviewer: Do you still maintain a teaching role within the school?

P2: Last year I didn't, this year I'm doing it more so probably 20% of the time. In so doing I've decided that I won't do some of the other things that I should really try to do. You can't do all of the extras. So that was a conscious decision, which one based on the desire to be more in touch with kids this year personally ????? it's a professional growth, a goal. I think I'm blessed with a group of people ????? so the teaching load has changed this year. I think that depending on the other workload you must make the decision that is, a decision as an administrator to do the teaching for a specific purpose, not because it's the best way to make the budget work. I don't think that you should allow yourself to be the guy who fills in the timetable when the holes don't match. You have to kind of stand back as administration and say, look the way that things are changing, probably if I



take a year and don't teach, it's not going to hurt in a general rule. So many folks, I think, are really reluctant to do that. I think that's because we like things accounted for.

Interviewer: Should administrators teach?

P2: They should be conscious. They should be in classrooms, have regular contact with kids. That contact can be in a supportive role, it can be in a mentoring role, it can be a team teaching role, it could be a host of things that actually make good pedagogical sense. It can be in a monitoring of student sense. There is a lot of things that can be done, but when you lock yourself into a timetable, you I believe bring a disservice to kids if you take on a core teaching role because you get called out of the building a lot, as so one of the things I believe about administrators is they shouldn't teach a core subject area where they are needed in the class from day to day to support kids and to provide the consistency in instruction. So if you're going to teach and be in a timetable, I think that you should be in a non-core area if you're an administrator. I guess I would prefer to be able to do something like we did last year. I had a couple of teachers that said if we had somebody to cover our classrooms during option block we could offer a special ed tutoring program to equip these kids. Well with the flexibility you could then go and do that. An administrator could walk in and do that and that worked out really well. I think there are so many good things that happen in staff development that if you're not part of the timetable that as an administrator we say to folks, you know I'd really like to come and teach this unit and work with you cause I like what you do and I need you to teach me. I think that's a staff development, a relationship building exercise between an administrator and a teacher that works out really well. I think that kids get the benefit of two teachers in the classroom. I think that there's all of those relationship building things

that come from that kind of contact, that I don't think there is as positive if you lock yourself into a timetable to teach things.

Interviewer: Do you get the necessary support and empowerment to complete the tasks that are assigned?

P2: I believe so. I think that all of these demands that we perceive happen but you have tremendous amount of flexibility, you just have to decide to stand up and say, no, I don't want to do that, or no, I can't do that instead of believing that you can't show conflict. That could work on an admin team where the principal/vice principal combinations can say we have to be open and honest and say the reasons. I think at the division level if I feel that if I speak to my liaison folks and say, you know, I can't do this. I think that that's changed over the last few years, but I think that's more in line with the support that used to be provided to teachers where you accept where they're at and trust the person and then build the relationships and generally, folks do want to do a good job. I think the same follows true for administrators, if it's really more than you can tackle just stand up and have the courage to say it to the superintendent and he'll tell you what to do and I'm guessing you'll do it but I think there is a pile of it where you say, I can and I can't. So I think it's easy to say I will but it's a lot smarter to say I can't.

Interviewer: Are there any challenges that get in the way of running an effective school and how does one overcome them?

P2: The million-dollar question! The challenges that get in the way on a day to day basis, the stuff that you have to deal with immediately when you're in the middle of planning for what you would like to do at a staff meeting for example or when you're on your way to want to go in and do some work with teachers or kids and then there's a

parent that needs your attention for an issue or there's a community something that's happening. I guess the crisis management interferes with what would be the normal order and your ability to organize and plan for things, operate smoothly and effectively. But that's part of why we do what we do. We like this. As much as we get kind of frustrated, you accomplish a lot, you multi-task yourself on every single day. You're doing a number of things all at the same time. And the only reason that you do that kind of stuff, cause you like it or you better get out. And when it comes right down to it you have a number of things that get in the way but you end up being, I guess the key to be able to resolve some of those things. You have all of the power to decide what's in the frame of reference and what you can affect and you have the power to say to the time stealers and the things that aren't that important, I'm not going to do it. The hard part is the criticism that you get because you are accountable and responsible for all the things that happen. The buck stops right here and there have to be exceptions that you're going to, in business I think you make 70% good decisions, 80% good decisions, you're doing a really fine job. In education you have the tendency to think you should be 95 or better and if you're good in education you're usually probably pretty sensitive and if you're sensitive you take every error to heart, probably too much and you're your worst critic. So I think if you get past that concept the challenges that you have are manageable. The way you deal with ?????.

Interviewer: Which returns us back to qualities and someone who is cut out?

P2: Yes. Qualities, I think you have to be intuitive. You've got to be with people personally. You've got to try to figure out not just where you want to go. You've got to figure out and accept where everybody else is, and you have to take the common threads

and the underlying principles that you all agree on, visit them, talk more about the things that are common than be frustrated by them. So the characteristics I believe are the people skills thing, the ability to listen to people. I think that in the interest and understanding of common stands and the ability to step out on the edge and say this is what I think, it's okay to disagree. I'm not going to hold it against you. You don't learn much when people you agree with, we'll have our discussions and that's okay. If you disagree with what I'm saying, please tell it to my face not at the coffee shop downtown. So the characteristics are people centered. I think there's also got to be that balance where you are task and goal oriented and can manage a number of things happening at the same time and I think you get better at that with time and I think that there are times when all of your weaknesses will be pretty plain and pretty prevalent and what you need to do is surround yourself with those folks that kind of balance those areas. You want folks that if you're a big picture kind of, airy, fairy guy, you need somebody who grounds you, who is detail oriented, bringing you back to focus. And like wise if you're the opposite. You have to be able to, I believe be really honest with yourself and know where your strengths are, where your weaknesses are and then try to compliment areas you can see as your strengths with folks that can be supportive ?????.

Interviewer: I think I'm going to just ask you the last question. Do you recommend the job of school principal to others?

P2: I do! I think it's the best job on the planet. I think that if not you then who? If you don't have folks who are good, solid teachers, who love kids, who are committed to public education, who don't advocate for kids, teachers, for parents, you're going to get folks who are inadequate and I guess I want to see folks that are first and foremost in the

jobs in administration because I believe they are the most successful, they understand, they make decisions that are child centered, instruction based, curriculum relevant. I guess when I walked into the staff room last year and I said, who wants my job and no hands went up. Because the perception is that it's all crap, and it's not. The perception is that it's unmanageable and it's not. The perception is that it's distant from kids and it's a problem, and centered and focal and it can be, but I think if you took the perspective that it's just another mountain, once you've got one you can certainly look at the next one because it's just another mountain. The problems and the issues that are new, are few, and are manageable ?????.

## Appendix C

## Interview Transcription – Principal Three (P3)

Interviewer: Okay, we're going to begin another interview now. As I explained to you before, you're going to have an opportunity to see the transcript, we are going to tape this interview, I will then transcribe it, the tape will be erased, gone, and you will have an opportunity to see the transcript prior to me doing anything with it and at that point you can say I'd like that out or that out or I'd like to take it all out and I won't have any problem with that, it you choose that that's what's necessary. As we do these questions, they're very, very open ended and all I want you to do is talk, where it takes you and there is no wrong direction, there is no right answer, no wrong answer. I just want you to feel free to speak what you need to speak in order to talk to the role of the principal in school. All right, the first question is very simple, very straightforward. Do you enjoy your work as a principal?

P3: Some days more than others. I think that it's been a long time since I first became a principal. It started in 1992 so I've had a series of years to look back and there are some ways that I enjoy it a lot more than I did because I think I'm much clearer about what I need to do and I'm more effective in what I do and there are other ways where I feel like it has become less enjoyable because site-based management, the role of school councils, the cutbacks in education, all of those things have made tighter and tighter constraints in terms of resources that schools have available. There is staffing, there are textbooks, all of those things have become more challenging to try to meet the needs for special ed and it stops being fun sometimes when you just realize that we just simply do not have the resources or the time to meet all demands. It isn't as much fun as it used to

be when you maybe had a bit better support from the government. So do I enjoy it? Yeah, I think I enjoy it because I think I have come to realize that I like incredibly challenging, never the same two days in a row. Should I say anything more about that one?

Interviewer: Second question. How long have you been in the position of principal? You've already answered that, is there anything more we need to elaborate?

P3: No. I think that whether it would make a difference or not, both times I've been in a K-6 school. The first school that I was in had a student population of about 150 students and I had no vice principal. And coming to this school where the population was pretty close to double when I first came here and I had a vice principal so that, although there were more students, I also had a new partner and I found that that was really helpful in terms of how you could do your job, how you had someone there as a definite sounding board for you, someone who shared the load, someone who you could delegate to if you wanted to or needed to or else you could look and say, I'm going to do this and you do this and we'll meet together and we'll put it all together and then we'll have done the job. So I think I've found that part easier. The challenge of course as you know in my personal case is that it's been new each year. I'm really looking forward to somebody who sticks around with me for at least two years in a row.

Interviewer: Now a big one.

P3: Yeah, I think that those were gentle openers.

Interviewer: What are some of the responsibilities and duties your position includes?

P3: Well, I took the School Act very seriously when I became a principal and I read the number one rule and that was the principal shall provide instructional leadership and I feel that of all the things that I might do in the school that would be a very key issue and

so I think that means that you need to be seen as a teacher who uses effective strategies. You need to support teachers as they try to improve their practice. Having sight based on going job embedded professional development would be really important. Making sure that you get the resources the teachers need, that you're focused on effective instruction, that you're monitoring planning, all of those things I think the instructional leadership to me would be the role that I see coming first and I think that if someone said you need to get your budget ready or you need to do this for instructional leadership in the school, I would leave the budget and I would focus on instructional leadership that day unless there was a deadline and we wouldn't get any money if I didn't put it in. So I would see that. The second thing that I would see is that it's your job as a leader generally as you would be in any organization and so you have a role in terms of helping people develop a vision and mission, setting goals, helping them see ways and providing ways for them to plan how they're going to meet those goals and measure whether or not they've done that and then get right back into feedback and say okay, we had those goals, we think we've accomplished them this far, okay what do we do next, and that whole goal setting including the vision and having that would be important. Another thing is seeing how things line up together or if they line up together. So sometimes you find that you have a policy but you are not following it or you have practices but they don't make sense to what you know is the right way and so kind of seeing how the whole system fits together and whether or not it fits the right way and that for me is an area of weakness because I either get immersed in all the details and I can all the, here are my ducks, and I never bother to figure out where the flock was actually flying or which flock. So, alignment for me has been an area I think of needed growth. I think the management of a school is



important. If you mess up on that you certainly can have an unhappy school and by management I mean you get the budget organized, you function properly, have you gotten timetables and schedules, do you have supervisors out there who need to be there. When people go to the Art Room, it happened in September, they opened the door and there is no red construction paper and we know we're going to need that by Christmas. Turned out it was behind the pink paper but for a moment, I thought, oh my, we messed up here big time in an elementary school. So I think those details are important and that's a place where I've found if you have good staff around you, you do a lot less managing than you might ever do if you didn't have those people with you. What else can I say? I'm sure I've missed something.

Interviewer: We can come back to that.

P3: Yeah! I would, you know, something else pops into my head?

Interviewer: This next question will probably help that out. Should someone entering administration have any special training, skills or qualities?

P3: Yes!

Interviewer: Please elaborate.

P3: It would be nice if I what popped into my head, what I would like to see would be the same way that I think about teachers and when I say teachers, maybe because I call it my four "c's." They need to have classroom management, they need to knowledge about curriculum, they need to have compassion, three "c's" and an "h," sorry! Then they need to be hard workers. And so I'm sure that if there is something that if I thought about it I could say, here's the 3 such and such and the 2 whatever that an administrator would need. So I would think that right away what pops into my head is that you need incredible

people skills. You need to be able to interact positively and successfully with everybody that you're going to come in contact with and you know obviously first you want to have good rapport with students. You need to have a rapport with the staff. You need to be able to do the right kind of communication with parents. You need to have good relationships with Central Office and any other people that might be outside in your community. You have more of that in a city school or in a town school than we do here in #####, our community is the hall down the block and this is not a bustling metropolis here that we need to relate to. It's more dispersed in terms of where people live and it tends to focus on the community being the school. So I think you need to have your people skills. I wonder what else? Oh, problem solving, that's what it was. I think you need to be a problem solver and I've had experiences with people who went into administration and they feel frustrated by the fact that what they deal with mostly is problems, whether it's student behaviour or whether it's how to fix the schedule or I don't know how to teach this, my kids aren't learning, do we have problems providing these programs for kids who maybe don't have any money, you know, those kinds of things. I would say that if you like to be a problem solver, you like when people come to you and they say this is a problem and it may even begin in a complaining way but your idea would be, I'd like to work with you on this and solve the problem. I think being a good listener is vitally important. I think that's probably why I'm finding this interview awkward because you're sitting there and it's not a conversation we're having. It's more of a monologue. So being a good listener and then hearing where people are coming from, understanding and at times, sometimes saying, you know I'm sorry but this is still the way it has to be. You know I've listened but it's not going to be fixed because what

you're asking is not something that I can do. I think listening and then working on solutions together. I think that people would need to bring in those kinds of skills. I also really firmly believe that it should be people who are committed to classroom instruction and that they have been exemplary teachers. They wish to continue teaching when they have opportunities to. If you're not seen as being very good that way I think that your staff can think less highly of you as you don't have those. That becomes a problem for many because being a really good teacher; you maybe don't want to leave teaching. You have to be able to see that if you get to that bigger place, you can do more for more kids then you could if you kept in your own classroom and just focused on those kids. So people skills, problem solving, great instructional leader, and then I think that somehow you need to understand some leadership things, and that might be where the training would come in. So if you understand what it's like to be able to build a team with people and set goals and work through and see if you've accomplished them. Celebrate your successes, revamp and go through and build again and I don't know if you get that in teaching in a way that you could just transfer it into administration. I think that there's probably a separate leadership body, how you work in a school community to build that kind of leadership role and I think that young administrators or beginning administrators would really benefit from that kind of leadership training. I didn't have that opportunity, I sort of fell into administration having had what was a very strong and formal leadership role, but I found myself struggling as a vice principal in a school of 500 kids with absolutely no theoretical or experiential background in administration and it became a joke with my principal that, right, what do we need to do here so that you can function as the newly appointed vice principal part-way through the year and we talked about we

would develop administrative theory as it needed to be developed and so the first thing we decided was we needed to figure out communication and so we had an admin theory at that school for admin communication and it was in an elementary school the fastest communication is that there is a dog in the school yard. Theory number two was the second fastest is that somebody said the “f” word, the “s” word, the whatever word it might be. So then you would hear about somebody said a swear word. Then step three was that somebody had done something else, maybe did whatever, and that we joked about how communication worked compared to how we would like to work it as administrators and there’s some things you need to know and there’s some things you don’t want to know and theory and practice didn’t really match. So I think it would have really benefited me if I’d had some more leadership courses that I think Division is offering now to try to bring young administrators on board with some skills, and education was very different when I first went into administration. So, what else would I say? Right now, I don’t see anything but you’ll let me come back to that again. When I see the transcript, I say, oh my gosh, they won’t know how to fill in the budget. I never said anything about the budget. Do I think the budget is important? I think a lot depends on whom you’re going to be working with, if you would need it ahead of time or if it would be on the job, and I also think a lot depends on, in a role where you’re the principal of a small school you need to be able to do all those things. In a big school you have the option of selecting those things that you have an interest and skill in so that you can have some division of labour. At this school right now the vice principal said he would like to learn how to do that, that there is, no burning reason to know what’s happening right now with the budget. He’s content to say, here’s some things from the

staff, what about this and he's content for me to say well there's this in the budget. What do you think about doing this and not have that intimate knowledge of the 16 pages or whatever it is of our budget document. Get to that later. So you know I think that part of what I would say is what people see they're interested in, if they can acquire on the job experience and training, that that's probably the most effective way. Someone would say to you that what they do in Ontario, here's the admin pre-course before you become an administrator you must take you know, two summers of learning how to be a principal before you actually become one. For me, that wouldn't work. I'm much more of a hands on learner. I've got to be doing the job rather than just getting everything to do with it.

Next question?

Interviewer: Has the workload increased over the few years?

P3: Do you teach math?

Interviewer: Sometimes.

P3: I think the word I want is exponentially. Is that the word I want?

Interviewer: Probably would work.

P3: And the work load has increased to a point where I've been very fortunate in my life that the work would have gotten heavy at a time when my children are gone from home and so I literally could stay here every night until 9 or 10 o'clock at night because I don't have a compelling reason to be at home to feed children and bath them and tuck them in bed or do homework with them or whatever. I'm in a position where I could spend every night here and all weekend and I wouldn't have people at home that would have need of me to be there. But that is such an unhealthy way for your life to be. Even I don't do that when I don't have to be home. When I first became a principal in '92 I

found that I could very comfortably stay one night a week until about 8 o'clock and I could get totally on top of things with any of the admin tasks that I might have to do, with any of the reports, the paperwork, all of those things and, I'll say, Monday night and I could stay there and everything would be just tickety boo for the rest of the week. Then I found by about the fourth year that I needed to spend two nights a week at the school in order to keep on top, so I'll stay later on Monday and Wednesday, or later on Monday and Tuesday. I found when I came to ##### that I could stay four nights a week. I could stay Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and come one day on the weekend and I still would be struggling to keep up with the amounts of information there was to process and send places or to deal with the things that were happening with staff. So I find that it didn't just increase like one, two. It is now one, two, four, eight, sixteen and that I had an experience, I think it's three years ago where Statistics Canada said they drew my name out of a hat and they were doing a labour survey and a person came to interview me, I think it was once a month for six months where it was in the last week in the month, talk about the hours that you worked and talk about the kinds of tasks that you have been doing and the first time the person came I think was in March and I said, well you know, I told you all these numbers because its report card time so I'm reading all the report cards and signing them all for the students and you know, I have to build my budget for next year and that's the reason why my job is so busy. Then the person came in April and I said well, I'm now doing all the goal setting for next year and I'm doing this and this, but it's just this one month. Each of the months that they came to interview me, every month had that in it. There was never a time when I said, yeah, I worked a 40 hour week, I went home and I kicked back and watched T.V. and ate popcorn. The person

who was interviewing me had come from another country she was just astonished, flabbergasted that people had work days like that as principals of schools and that it never changed from month to month, it was heavy like that. So, I found the workload so hectic, I actually spoke at the admin association last, in September 2000 and said, I've had concerns. Right now I'm finding with all the school startup and all the school reports that have to be in at the end of September, even me who is willing to work 16 and 17 hours a day and have good health and a high energy level and not a lot of family obligations, even I'm saying this is more than I am willing to do. I can't do this day after day. I appreciated that they changed all those reports to come in at the end of October so that you could do your school startup, catch a breath and then submit all your reports the next month. That's made September a little better for me but, look (P3 points at the desk); this was clean on Sunday at 8 o'clock. I've got piles and piles of paper. I don't where they're coming from. I wish people would stop sending them to me and it's increased to a level I think that when you asked me, "do I enjoy it?" there are times when I don't enjoy it because I sense even with my experience and I think I'm pretty hard working and committed, even I feel that this is an overwhelming, impossible task sometimes but why do you even want to try to manage it. You need to go out and get a real job, that is doable, rather than so demanding at a level where it's not just demanding, it comes with the hours but the kind of problem solving that you have to do and the kinds of planning that you're doing. I think they're all really higher-level things, they're not just fill in this little chart. It's figure out what needs to be on the chart and go and gather all the data and then fill in the thing. For a young person starting out, good luck!

Interviewer: Do you still maintain a teaching role within the school?

P3: I do and that has been a choice of mine for the kind of school I've been at. Again because the admin workload has increased so much, I've found that more difficult than I did say nine years ago. When I first became a principal, I actually taught more than half time and I found for a good part of the time, I could manage that quite nicely. I taught a Grade 4 class, we developed some really good routines, the kids worked independently if there was an emergency that I had to go to. Now I find that even again with the requirements that there are for teachers in terms of the planning and assessment and so on, it's more difficult to be a teacher as well as it is to be an administrator. So my teaching role is about 0.25 Fte in a variety of things mostly at the Grade 5/6 level and some Special Ed. and the Special Ed part is the easy part because it involves less preparation of lessons and virtually no marking and so you can be involved. It's conferencing, that's what you're going to be doing anyway; it just happens you're working with children. When the classroom instruction, core subjects in the grade six classroom where you have achievement tests, then you really have to be in the class, you're not wasting a minute, you're covering the curriculum as it needs to be taught and I carry home 40 – 45 papers in Social Studies to mark so I have a heavier teaching assignment than I might like but I also know that our AISI project is on school improvement through increased motivation and active learning. If I'm not trying out those things that we're learning about as a school staff for AISI, I feel like I don't know what teachers are going through and I feel like I don't have credibility and I say well let's do this because I know I've tried that with 43 Grade sixes and I know it worked or it didn't work and so I like to have that teaching component and it also gets you the teacher relationship with kids which is something that I have enjoyed for more than twenty-five



years and it's different than being the principal when you're the teacher. You develop a slightly different relationship and I like that different kind of a relationship. So yeah, I have a teaching role.

Interviewer: Should a principal have a teaching role?

P3: Obviously, based on what I've chosen, I'd say yes. However, I think that we need to find ways to accommodate for that and I think that, yes, you have credibility with your staff, yes you have better relationships with kids, you have a better understanding of what's happening, you get to improve your own skills as an educator, but maintaining, I can't imagine what high school people would do who have diploma exams to prepare for. I think that would be horrendously difficult in a semester system where you have; does it come out to be 90 days, 89 days, 87 days? Everyday you know you need to be working like crazy to get through it. What do you do as you have many, many admin tasks that would not always come on days that you would like them to come or at the times you'd like them to come. So I think having a teaching role to me is important to be an effective administrator but having a teaching role to me adds enormous burden and responsibility sometimes on administrators that I think again is, like talk about with what the work load has become. If it's doable, it's possible, do sane people actually try this or is it only the insane or about to be insane who think, oh yeah, I love that, I'll teach that course? I am troubled by that because I think that what we have here in Alberta is superior to places like B.C. and Ontario where administrators are not part of the same professional association. I think that that draws you away from the kind of collegial relationship I like in a building but I'm not sure that that's reasonable and I have no idea in a big school or in a high school how you would manage that. So, should they?

Interviewer: Do you get the necessary support and empowerment to complete the tasks that are assigned?

P3: From who?

Interviewer: You call it.

P3: I think I'll work from what I would say would be the top although in many ways I think it is the bottom. I don't think that the government of Alberta supports public education to the level that it should. I don't think it has provided sufficient funds to staff both teachers and support staff in schools. I don't think there is sufficient money for the resources that schools need to buy. An example would be, I think it's called ever greening of computers or technology. This is going to be a massive problem for schools to try to keep up with that. I don't think we have the support to get the staff at the levels we need, I don't think we have support for the resource in our schools. I think a lot of our schools have fallen into terrible shape in terms of their maintenance in many parts of the province. So I don't think that that support is there from the provincial level. That troubles me because I think that a strong public education system in a democracy is vital. It needs to be something that is perceived by the public in addition of being effective to educate citizens to take their place in a democratic society and obviously it's a democratic society that has lots of free enterprise and all of those things, but I still think that educated citizens with a solid ability to read and write and to think is vitally important. I don't think our government has done that and I think that there has been a severe erosion from the organization. The second thing that I would say in terms of Alberta Learning, and I think Alberta Learning sometimes has not been able to deliver the kind of support because they were also subjected to the kinds of cuts and undermining

of public education, so they didn't have the people to do the kinds of things that they might have been able to do. I think that some of the things they do in curriculum are very good, I think some of the things take too long or they don't go in a direction that really is effective. In an elementary school you can have curriculum changing every year for teachers. That's crazy in terms of what people can cope with. I think they tried to slow that pace down. I think they've tried to bring more people on board who could deliver services and provide direction and be there to answer questions when there are questions about provincial achievement tests. Who should be exempted or what do I do if the test didn't come? You know, those kinds of things. So I think Alberta Learning haven't been able to provide the kind of support that they should for schools. I think a Central Office job must be a very difficult job because in the regionalization we have created vast areas of schools where we have our Central Office staff now, to get around in ##### have to drive for hours and if they were to look at their days, I'm sure lots of times in what could be their working hours, they spend as much as 40 or 50% of the time on the road traveling and much as they might think of using cell phones, I'm not sure that's very safe and you end up having working hours being traveling hours and that's hard to say you're delivering the kinds of programs and services you want to, to staff and to students because you ended up traveling. I think those big divisions, although they make more economies of scale in terms of the number of trustees or the number of superintendents, they miss the idea of how do people get around and it's not only when teachers need to go places for meetings or principals need to go places or vice principals but it's how does Central Office serve their division when it's this massive and it's several hours from one end to the other. I think they took lots of cuts too. I think that there has been enormous

scrambling trying to figure out and to get everybody up to speed in terms of how does the system work in terms of getting the most for grants and running the finances and what's an appropriate reserve. How do you make the budget templates that every administrator in the school board can use while they're in, everybody having to become an accountant in order to do that? I think we've struggled with downloading from Central Office on to school staff. Okay, we don't have time to do teacher evaluations so principals will do teacher evaluations and then principals will say, well could we have our vice principals? No, it says here in the policy only principals can do teacher evaluations so I think there has been downloading all the way through without any resources to necessarily support it. In terms of a school division I'm in now, I think there has been some wonderful things that have been done that give me support. I feel like when you have a problem you can call and somebody will respond. They will listen and they will do their best to do what's right for kids and they'll help you find ways to do that. I think that they really honour that as the professional learning organization and I sense that there's a strong support for the things that we have done here in professional development and that I've seen that supported with the thousand dollars of personal PD, those kinds of things and I think that just the people that we have in Central Office have been very good and supportive. I'm very lucky to have a staff that I have support from at the school level. Somehow or other, the previous principal passed on to his staff the idea that the principal is deserving of respect and support and that's your job to do it and they all said, yes sir, and when I came here they just transferred that over to me on the basis of my position. So when things come up I have a staff that just says, I'll do that, I'll help, I can bring that, I'll look after that, and they have been quite incredible that way. They have a strong issue in how they

pull together and pitch in and I know they do that for each other because I see that happen all the time from teacher to teacher, from teacher assistant to teacher. There's a culture here of we help each other but there is frustration again here because of the lack of staff and the lack of resources. We only can do that within a very tight budget and so it means, we talked about we have an old intercom; it was pieced together 20 years ago. It can't do a lot of the things that we would like an intercom to do in 2001 let alone in 2005. We can barely hear our O'Canada tape that are obliged every day to play by Board policy so it would be wonderful if we could get a new intercom. We can pay for that out of our own budget. It will cost about twenty thousand dollars. As a staff we think, yes if we got that, number one, we would be able to hear voices clearly and get to play things on the intercom without a problem. We would have handset phones in every classroom. Teachers could then talk privately, get messages privately from the office. This ends up being, Mrs. So and So, you have a phone call from your Doctor calling you with your results of your pregnancy test. So it would be great to have it. They could also make calls at recess or preps to their parents without having to run around and find one of our common phones that are throughout the school. We would love to have that intercom system. As a staff, we look at that and say, how could we possibly take up to twenty thousand dollars of instructional money and put it on an intercom. We don't think kids are going to see twenty thousand dollars worth of, school is better and I learn better because of that intercom, and yet, it's a daily frustration for us. The things that they can't do for us and until it breaks completely, maintenance will not replace it and I can understand how maintenance has to have priorities too. They can't afford to say, gee, if you got a really old intercom, we'll get you a new one and so I think as a staff we find

that frustrating but are we all in this together? I guess that's kind of how we get through it. Was there any other part to that question that I missed?

Interviewer: We can move on.

P3: Okay.

Interviewer: Are there any challenges that get in the way of running an effective school and how can one overcome them?

P3: I feel that I've addressed that partly by saying I feel that there has been a lot of down loading jobs, that there are very high expectations for what administrators need to do. I think there are very high expectations of parents too. So, what can be done to overcome any of these challenges? I think a person needs to have an incredible sense of humour. I think that you need to surround yourself by people who are positive and hard working and competent and that will help. I think we need to find ways to build partnerships with anybody that you can who might be able to help things happen in your school and that would include parents and other people in your community. That would include other agencies that might be able to help. For example, we just now have a mental health worker who is coming into our school. He's going to be able to do lots with our severe behaviour problem kids in terms of building behaviour plans. What can be done to help? I think that again for me the big picture is that public education is profoundly under funded in so many different areas and until that is addressed, I don't know how we're going to fix it because I don't think, I think we've gone past the work harder and then don't work harder, work smarter. I think that we can't go beyond where we are now until we see the resources and the support. The other thing I see is that, and I see it happening with parents with teachers and I see it happen in the press. There is a

sense that somehow that those that can do and those that can't teach, that there's a sense that as educators, we are not particularly competent and I don't know how you would address that because I know when I speak to parents individually, I know that they sent back our satisfaction survey, they talk about our school as having capable teachers and our staff as being competent and their children as learning but somehow that never gets out to the big picture, well yeah, in my school things are okay but all those other schools, they're not good schools. They're bad schools, their kids are badly behaved and they're not learning and they have teachers who should be fired and they have teacher assistants who aren't doing their job and I don't know how we get through that perception. I think you've addressed that from, in terms of your own school but it was a long process that somehow rumours get started and it takes years to dispel them. You have to keep working away at it I guess. A sense of humour can be important, hard work is important, good people are important and I'd love it if someone suddenly recognized the value of supporting public education, what that would actually give us as a society. When Lyle Oberg said that he wanted every kid grade two or three to be able to read, I thought, what a noble goal. Is he prepared to actually fund that or is he just going to say, it is now, not only do your kids have to make 85% for the standard in Grade Three, they now have to make 100% and there is nothing here that we are going to do differently to help you get there. You're still going to have classes of 26 or 27 based on the funding we give you and you're going to have, in the case of our school, an early literacy initiative that buys us either 0.2 Fte of a teacher or maybe 3 hours a day of a teacher assistant and that's supposed to get one hundred kids able to read and write by Grade Three? So, you know I feel like I think if you're going to want to do that, you're going to have to put some more

resources there. I really hope we are going to be able to draw good young people to our profession. That to me is another obstacle. How are we ever going to replenish our profession if people look like I do at the end of the day? People are going to say, well I don't think I want to do that. How many of the teachers have children growing up saying they want to be teachers? Neither of my children will be teachers. They have both said loud and clear, we would not do that! We've seen how hard you work and how hard it is. We don't want a job like that. So where are we going to get great, dedicated, young people to come into the profession. I think that's another obstacle. We need to find a way to attract them and to keep them.

Interviewer: That kind of leads into the last question. Do you recommend the job of school principal to others?

P3: Absolutely! Because I think that without a doubt, and I've had a wonderful career where I have had opportunities every two or three years to do something different and exciting and challenging, and so I've had a chance to be a classroom teacher, I've had a chance to be a resource room teacher, I've had a chance to be in a division office as a director of student service looking after early childhood education, special education, professional development, all sorts of really interesting initiatives. I've had a chance to work at Alberta Learning and work as a consultant or a manager in their office consulting with schools about their programs and evaluating and doing all those things and I've had a chance to be a school principal and without a doubt, the most demanding, challenging job has been being a principal. I never know what is going to happen. I never know if I'm going to have the skills to deal with it. There is no doubt in my mind that if you want a challenging job, you want this job. Anyone who thinks they're interested should



definitely try it because when you do something well, it's incredibly satisfying. When you survive some days, it's incredibly satisfying and the part that I like, having been a Central Office, having been at Alberta Learning, having been in a school, having been in a classroom is that you really get to make a difference where many, many decisions are taken and when many directions happen. When they talk about how you change a school, they don't talk about Central Offices, they have a support role. When they talk about changing schools, they don't talk about Alberta Learning, they have a role. But when they talk about changing schools, they talk about it happens in the school building and as the principal of the school, you have a chance to see that happen, to sometimes help it happen, and occasionally to actually be the person who initiates the change. That part is incredibly satisfying, tremendously challenging.

Interviewer: Thank you!

## Appendix D

## Interview Transcription – Principal Four (P4)

Interviewer: Okay, I'm here today doing another interview with another principal.

Now remember we discussed all the parts of the study. I will be transcribing our tape and then once the transcription is done you will have an opportunity to make any changes or omissions that you choose or withdraw from the entire study, no prejudice, and no problem if that is what you choose you need to do. So you will be given an opportunity to look over this transcript prior to me doing anything with it. Once that's done, I will do all my work and give you an opportunity to look at that as well and everything will be published then. This way if somebody else who may be able to use something from the transcript will be allowed to use it as opposed to me wiping it all out. So that hopefully will be a part of this discussion, a part of my project.

P4: Okay!

Interviewer: Okay. We are going to begin with a very simple question and all I want, they are totally open ended questions and all I would like you to do is go wherever they take you and I may ask every once in a while, can you elaborate on something, but pretty much I'm going to let you go where this takes you and when you start to slow down a little bit I'll throw another question out. To begin, do you enjoy your work as principal?

P4: Yes!

Interviewer: Can you elaborate upon why?

P4: Why would one enjoy being a principal? I guess one of the major reasons is because you have an opportunity for input that affects a good number of people in a positive way. Obviously, when you become a principal you apply for the position

because you believe you have something to offer over and above what is already there. It's not just a management function but it's a motivational part, it's greasing the wheels so that everything works properly so that the kids get the best out of it, get the most out of it. That's essentially it.

Interviewer: Moving along. How long have you been in the position of principal?

P4: In this principalship, only? In this one, this is my fourth year. In total it would be, oh gosh, I can't count that high, eleven years, twelve years, something like that.

Interviewer: Now we're going to get into one of the bigger questions and just go where it takes you. What are some of the responsibilities and duties your position includes?

P4: Everything that has to do with the school. That includes major responsibilities, ensuring that teachers have access to the resources that they need, making sure that they have access to the curricula that they need, ensuring that students are properly placed according to achievement, according to grade level, according to ability, trying to ensure that you have a requisite number of programs that will meet the varied needs of the students, ensuring that you have support staff who are going to do all of the managerial functions that enable a school to operate, communicating with Central Office, acting as a go between, between Central Office and the teachers, managing the fiscal as well as the educational portion of the school, implementing such things as discipline, PD, running the canteen, making sure the canteen runs well and is not a source of problem, making sure that everything functions as it should, period!

Interviewer: Should someone entering administration have any special training, skills or qualities?

P4: Yes. Today they should have a thick skin, that they should be confident enough that what they're doing is reward enough to them and they don't rely on anyone outside of that sphere to provide the "raison d'être" for being an administrator. You should have a pretty clear concept of what it is you want to do even though the concept may change through time based on experience. As you get more experience your concept changes. You should have good people skills. You should be able to deal on a rational basis with a range of people. You should be a good listener. You should be a creative thinker. You should be an educated person that has a range of background that enables you to understand and develop plans. Yeah, you should be a person who has a significant amount of empathy for other people especially students and parents. You should, I guess should be a Social Studies major if you really want to go into it. You should be a person who understands and cares about people, period!

Interviewer: Any skills?

P4: You should be able to write clearly and legibly. You should be able to use computers at least in a basic sense. You should be able to understand spreadsheets and how they work, how to alter them. Those are the basis skills I guess; know how to work a copier, telephone. Should be a critical thinker if you want to think of that as a skill. Yeah, that's it essentially.

Interviewer: Special training?

P4: Special training? Some of the best special training that you could have is experience in the field in which you wish to become a manager, i.e. in this case a principal. You should have a varied background within the educational community. Being a teacher, you should have taught at a variety of levels, you should have taught a

variety of courses, you should have been in it for a while so that you've had a chance to deal with and understand the system. Then I guess, special training, if there are special administrative skills that you can learn or special administrative procedures that you could learn. I'm not sure that administration is so much a science as it is an art and I guess that's where, there are components of both but you can't just learn the science part and become an administrator because you can be wonderful at doing the processes and wonderful at implementing the rules and regulations, but if you don't have the art part of it, then it becomes a very sterile and harsh environment to work in.

Interviewer: Has the workload increased over the last few years?

P4: YES?

Interviewer: Some explanation?

P4: It's incredible. The workload has become stupid because what's happened is that devolves their responsibility downward the people in Central Office, because they have a limited capacity, also devolve responsibility downward so that pretty soon when you look at my desk you can't see its top because of all the devolved work. The problem is nobody has ever taken anything away. They never take it away, they just keep adding to it until pretty soon, we'll be like the Titanic going down and all you can do is rearrange the deck chairs. I honestly believe that if they don't do something about the workload of the principalship, before long only the disabled and the incompetent will fill the positions because they won't know any better.

Interviewer: Do you still maintain a teaching role within the school?

P4: Yes.

Interviewer: Is it necessary?

P4: It is in this school. In a general theory, it should not be. In general theory, a principal should be a person that spends his or her time truly in the educational leadership function which would require spending a lot of time in classes, providing a lot of formative support to teachers, those kinds of tasks that you're supposed to do that you cannot do when you're carrying a teaching load and yet as strange as it is, when they come out to do an evaluation of you as an administrator they don't look at whether or not you're carrying a teaching load. They don't look at your teaching. All they do is go through the list of lists, the things that you should be doing as an administrator. I've often heard that administrators should teach in order to keep in touch with the kids. Well, I think that can be directly a function of the size of the administrative team, the size of the school, the amount of time that that leaves and the number of people to whom you can hive off responsibilities that have been hived off onto you. In a normal everyday situation I would say probably, although desirable to have some teaching, you can't do it and carry a workload.

Interviewer: Do you get the necessary support and empowerment to complete the tasks that are assigned?

P4: I would say, generally speaking, yes. In a general sense, sure. It varies, some things are very strictly defined and I feel that sometimes you don't have the resources to do what you're being asked to do, but generally speaking, yeah, I think there is a reasonable support at the jurisdictional level.

Interviewer: Any other levels you need support from?

P4: Oh, heavens yes. As a principal you need support from every level that exists. You need it from the government, you need it from the parents, you need it from

teachers. Being a principal is like being a, I'll say the central cog in the system of cogs. One doesn't work, you're not going to turn very well. So it has to mesh, it all has to work together.

Interviewer: But do you get the support from these other levels?

P4: Again, generally speaking, probably yes. Individual instances, yes and no.

Interviewer: This will end rather quickly now. Do you recommend the job of school principal to others? Should people be taking it on?

P4: There was a time I would have unhesitatingly said yes. I would say now you better really think about it before you do it. You better really try to come to grips with what it is before you leap in. I would give a qualified yes, qualified, big qualifications but yes.

Interviewer: Are there any other responsibilities or things along the lines of questions that we've been asking that we haven't talked about that should be talked about in a study of this nature?

P4: The only thing that I would say that probably I haven't voiced is that there is becoming an unrealistic expectation on the part of both Central Office and the public relative to what a principal should do. The list is becoming horrendously long, extremely detailed and there simply is not the time to do it all or the resources to do it and it gets tougher and tougher and the expectations don't change. So what you end up doing, instead of doing the quality job, you do the quantity job. You do a surface dig rather than digging a deep hole. You do one spade full and then move on to the next task and eventually that will catch up to the whole system.

Interviewer: Thank you very much?

## Appendix E

## Interview Questions

1. Do you enjoy your work as a principal?
2. How long have you been in the position of principal?
3. What are some of the responsibilities and duties your position includes?
4. Should someone entering administration have any special training, skills, or qualities?
5. Has the workload increased over the last few years?
6. Do you still maintain a teaching role within the school?
7. Do you get the necessary support and empowerment to complete the tasks that are assigned?
8. Are there any challenges that get in the way of running an effective school and how can one overcome them?
9. Do you recommend the job of school principal to others?



Appendix F  
Information Letter

Dear Sir/Madam:

I am conducting a study of the role of the school principal. The data collection section of this research involves the interviewing of current school principals. Your part in this project will be to participate in a face-to-face interview, which will be recorded on a cassette tape and then transcribed to written format.

Please note that all information will be handled in a professional manner. The cassette tape will be erased once the transcribing is complete. You will be given an opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and omit any sections you choose. Principal's names and school names will not be used. You also have the right to withdraw from the study without prejudice at any time.

If you choose to do so, please indicate your willingness to participate by signing the consent form in the space provided.

I very much appreciate your assistance in this study. If you have any questions please feel free to call me at 403 314-5402 or e-mail me at [h-dbrandt@telusplanet.net](mailto:h-dbrandt@telusplanet.net). Also feel free to contact the supervisor of my study, Dr. David Townsend, 403 329-2731/ [david.townsend@uleth.ca](mailto:david.townsend@uleth.ca). You may also contact the chair of the Faculty of Education Human Subject Research Committee if you wish additional information. The chairperson of the committee is Dr. Keith Roscoe, 403 329-2446/ [keith.roscoe@uleth.ca](mailto:keith.roscoe@uleth.ca).

Sincerely,

Dieter E. Brandt  
Vice Principal  
River Glen School  
403 314-5402/ [h-dbrandt@telusplanet.net](mailto:h-dbrandt@telusplanet.net)

## Appendix G

## Consent Letter

Name of Research Project: The Role of the School Principal

Name of Investigator: Dieter E. Brandt

Dear Sir/Madam:

You are being asked to participate in a study of the role of the school principal. The data collection section of this research involves the interviewing of current school principals. Your part in this project will be to participate in a face-to-face interview, which will be recorded on a cassette tape and then transcribed to written format.

Please note that all information will be handled in a professional manner. The cassette tape will be erased once the transcribing is complete. You will be given an opportunity to review the transcript of your interview and omit any sections you choose. Principal's names and school names will not be used. You also have the right to withdraw from the study without prejudice at any time.

If you choose to do so, please indicate your willingness to participate by signing this consent form in the space provided.

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_